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Mother, what art thou?

A study of the depiction of Mother figures in recent Australian and New Zealand fiction for teenagers.

by

Jane Siddall Cert. Child Care. BA (Hons).

A Thesis Submitted to Fulfil the Requirements for the Award of
Doctor of Philosophy (English)
at the Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Sciences
Edith Cowan University.

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USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

TO MOTHER
Who was more or less like ALL
mothers, but she was mine, and
so-She excelled.
Dedication in *The Book of Repulsive Women*
By Djuna Barnes

~ For my mother ~

Shona Lawrie Siddall

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of the representations of mothers and mother figures as found in five contemporary (published between 1984 and 1999) novels for teenagers. The focus is on western constructions of motherhood, as both normalising and universalising discourses. Utilising a variety of critical approaches this thesis examines the socio-cultural issues present in the novels in conjunction with western models of maternity. This study argues the category of mother is interdependent upon the category of child. As children's literature often focuses on the development of the child, the mother figures are often read as the "unconscious" of the texts. I examine the extent to which the mother figures are given a "subject-in-processness" (Lucas, 1998, p.39) subjectivity.

The texts considered are *The Changeover* (First published in 1984) by Margaret Mahy; *Greylands* (1997) by Isobelle Carmody; *Speaking to Miranda* (First published in 1990) by Caroline Macdonald; *Touching earth lightly* (1996) by Margo Lanagan and *Closed, Stranger* (1999) by Kate De Goldi. In part, the selection of the texts has been based upon the various and multifaceted relationships between the mothers and the children. I use the Mahy text as a means to establish selected mother and, to a lesser degree, child characteristics. Some comparisons are made with this sole text of the 1980s, in order to ascertain if there has been an evolution in the articulation of mother figures in the 1990s. This study does not adopt a survey approach nor does it claim that the five novels present all the categories of "mother". Rather

it addresses categories such as, mother as nurturer, as sexual being and, importantly, the dichotomy of the "good"/"bad" mother. Within western discourses of maternity, this latter category is still used as a model by which to label women who mother. This study considers the stability of this binary within the novels.

This thesis relies upon close reading of the primary texts. The emphasis is on critical approaches that draw attention to contexts, with particular emphasis on the socio-cultural issues present in each particular novel. My readings suggest that there is the possibility for engagement with the texts' social content/comment, in conjunction with the representations of western models of maternity. I draw from a variety of motherhood discourses and theoretical approaches, including amongst others, the work of Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, Judith Herman, Martha Fineman, Rose Lucas, and Robyn McCallum.

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- and Chance (yeah for Chance!)

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Our culture defines a mother as a woman who bears a child out of her body and/or raises a child or children, a woman who alone performs for those children the social function of mothering – nurturing, healing, teaching, serving.

Judith Arcana – *Our Mothers' Daughters* (p.5).

Introduction: So what is a mother?

This dissertation is, fundamentally, an examination of mothers as presented in five contemporary Australian and New Zealand children's/teenage novels. Discussion of the concept of maternity/motherhood entails the presence of a child or children, and thus the title of "mother" is bestowed upon the woman concerned. This study addresses both maternal spaces and child spaces – when, where and how they intersect. On the whole, the texts in this study reflect white middle-class cultural concerns surrounding maternal practices. Most of the mothers represented enjoy economic security, and as predominantly white women they represent the majority culture. One mother is a Maori woman. Some comment will be made on how she is situated as a mother within dominant cultural discourses. As a consequence of the cultural bias, many of the concerns of this thesis reflect those found in contemporary white, western constructions of motherhood. Thus this dissertation focuses on "universalising" theories and "normative" models of maternity.

The five texts under consideration are (in chapter order): *The Changeover* (First published in 1984) by Margaret Mahy; *Greylands* (1997) by Isobelle Carmody; *Speaking to Miranda* (First published in 1990) by Caroline Macdonald;

Touching earth lightly (1996) by Margo Lanagan and *Closed, Stranger* (1999) by Kate De Goldi.

Regarding notions of universalising and normative models of maternity I draw from a range of sources. In a chapter from *The Neutered Mother, The Sexual Family and Other Twentieth Century Tragedies*, titled "The Sexual Family", Martha Fineman (1995, p.145) argues:

> In this chapter I want to elaborate on some of the core assumptions inherent in our current social and cultural narratives about the family as an institution. These assumptions have tremendous significance in the political and legal definition of the family and, hence, for the fate of mothers. The legal story is that the family has a "natural" form based on the sexual affiliation of a man and a woman. The assumption that there is a sexual-natural family is complexly and intricately implicated in discourses other than law, of course. The natural family populates professional and religious texts and defines what is to be considered ideal and sacred. The pervasiveness of the sexual-family-as-natural imagery qualifies it as "metanarrative" – a narrative transcending disciplines and crossing social divisions to define and direct discourses. The shared assumption is that the appropriate family is founded on the heterosexual couple—a reproductive, biological pairing that is designated as divinely ordained in religion, crucial in social policy, and a normative imperative in ideology.

Fineman's comments regarding the family are relevant to this thesis as attention is drawn to the "naturalisation" of the [white] (hetero)sexual family. The implication is that the "natural" family is the nuclear family. Within this family structured gendered roles are usually enacted, with the mother being the cornerstone of the family unit.

There are a variety of mother figures present in the texts under consideration and a variety of family structures. *The Changeover* contains mothers who are single by choice; the father in *Greylands* becomes a sole parent when his wife dies suddenly; *Speaking to Miranda* contains a motherless daughter who lives with her adoptive father; and *Touching earth lightly* and *Closed, Stranger* contain mothers who lose their children to adoption.

A further issue raised in this thesis is the way in which mother figures are presented within the confines of a normalised family structure, and what differences are to be found in the mothers who step outside the stereotypical norm. Patriarchal society prescribes motherhood as the normative role for women and further demarcates this role into a binary of "good" or "bad" mothers. Rose Lucas (1998, pp.38-39) suggests that the "good mother" is an oppressive ideal. She states (ibid):

> —the only possible kind of acceptable mother and one who is crucially differentiated from Winnicott's apparently more flexible image of the 'good enough' mother—has specifically dominated post-war western culture's images of secular maternity within literature and culture. Although it may sometimes appear that this image celebrates the power of the maternal, it is crucial to note the ways in which it also yokes the woman who mothers with impossible pressures, working to eradicate her complex subject-in-processness by absorbing it into a hegemonic and reified category of 'Mother'. Such a Mother is required to be totally selfless in her devotion to her children and, as the emotional and domestic pivot of a family characterised by a patriarchally determined division of labour, carries the primary responsibility for the well-being of the family.

The term "subject-in-process" is attributed to Julia Kristeva. Broadly speaking, the subject-in-process is always negotiating subjectivity, in part through recognising the other within – the split self. As such, subjectivity is not autonomous and unified; rather it is fluid and its boundaries are permeable. (See Kristeva, 1980, 1984 & 1995).

For Kristeva subjectivity is formed within language acquisition and use. She suggests there are two modalities of signification, the semiotic and the symbolic. The subject is produced through an interaction between these two modalities. The semiotic consists of the pre-oedipal; it is constituted by a 'pre-language' which is related to bodily drives, rhythms, tones and movement in signifying practices. (Kristeva, 1980, p.53). Babble and laughter are located in the semiotic. (Kristeva, 1984, p.46). (Laughter as a semiotic function will be looked at in chapter two.) Elizabeth Grosz (1989, p.44) states, "Kristeva

ascribes the semiotic to a space, a locus rather than to a subject because the semiotic precedes the acquisition of a stable subjectivity or identity." The semiotic is also associated with the maternal body because it is this body which is the first source of drives, rhythms and movements. Kristeva (1980, p.284) argues that there may be a return to these infantile impulses in adults.

The symbolic is the domain of *positions* and *propositions.* (Kristeva, 1984, p.53). The symbolic is associated with grammar and the structure of language. Kristeva (1980, p.135) argues that signification is "an undecidable process between sense and nonsense, between *language* and *rhythm.*" She states that, similar to signification the subject is in a state of flux between stability and instability. Kristeva suggests that an example of the subject-in-process can be found in the work of Antonin Artaud. Kristeva (in Rice and Waugh, eds. 1992, pp.128-129) asserts:

> Anyone who reads Artaud's texts will realize that all identities are unstable: the identity of linguistic signs, the identity of meaning and, as a result the identity of the speaker. And in order to take account of this de-stabilization of meaning and of the subject I thought the term subject-in-process would be appropriate. 'Process' in the sense of process but also in the sense of a legal proceeding where the subject is committed to trial, because our identities in life are constantly called into question, brought to trial, over-ruled.

Accordingly identity is not unified, the subject is fluid and in a state of flux. The subject-in-process can, theoretically, have multiple sources of identification because subjectivity is an open system.

Kristeva's subject-in-process is appropriated by Rose Lucas in order to locate it specifically in conservative western discourses of motherhood. Lucas (1998, p.39) discusses oppressive models of maternity in relation to how they subjugate the mother's subjectivity, and thus her agency. It is this particular renovation of the term "subject-in-process" which is significant within this

study. I refer frequently to the Lucas quote, above, in order to ascertain the degree to which the mother figures are granted a subjectivity that does not yoke them with impossible pressures to conform to a patriarchal ideal, which disallows the mother multiple sources and senses of identification. The model of Motherhood discussed by Lucas places many demands upon the woman who mothers – not least being a feeling of failure if she cannot live up to the prescribed model. Even Winnicott's "good enough" mother model is problematic. Although he does not place the mother in a rigid binary, the mother is still viewed as the primary nurturer and motherhood is seen as "natural". Constructions of maternity are thus situated in dominant cultural discourses that position the woman in relation to her roles as wife and mother.

This study is concerned with the constructions of maternity that are presented by the five writers. I am interested in whether the authors promulgate a "hegemonic and reified category of 'Mother'". As mentioned there are a variety of mother figures present in the texts. What I examine is whether they are merely fixed variations on a (patriarchal) theme or if they are presented as subjects-in-process within the category of mother.

The model of the "bad" mother is equally as (or arguably more) problematic as the "good" mother model. When a mother fails to meet the demands required of her to be a "good" mother she may slip into the category of "bad" mother. Taking her cue from Adrienne Rich's text *Of Woman Born*, where Rich suggests there are two aspects of motherhood – as experience and as an institution, Delys Bird (1989, p.41) argues:

> Mother as flesh and motherhood as concept suggest too the contradictory meanings inherent in the figure of the mother in western cultural history, incorporating the typologies of the bad, destructive mother and the good, nurturing mother.

> These types of motherhood — irreproachable or negligent — continue to dominate the representation of the mother in our society, and the limiting either/or dichotomy itself operates to repress motherhood in a way that is analogous to the repression of the feminine within a patriarchal social structure that labels it an unchanging mystery.

Thus, according to Bird, concepts of maternity are located within a patriarchal society and culture that limits the potential for mothers and representations of motherhood to move beyond the dominant ideological structures that surround them. The demarcation of "good"/"bad" mothering is one such structure. Bird also comments on the repression of the feminine. This is a central theme in Luce Irigaray's work on sexual difference, and is relevant in relation to the maternal. Irigaray's ideas are considered further in this introduction. In part this thesis will examine the extent to which the influences of socially and culturally constructed ideologies of motherhood are evident within the texts. I will consider the texts' levels of complicity with and subversion of both the idealised and the "deficient" forms of mothering.

According to Martha Gimenez (in Trebilcot, ed. 1983, p.288):

> Deviations from the established expectations (eg. homosexuality, childlessness, single status etc) are punishable by a variety of social, economic and psychological sanctions.

There are no examples of homosexual mothers in the texts under consideration but there are examples of single mothers (*The Changeover, Speaking to Miranda, Touching earth lightly* and *Closed, Stranger*), and two examples of childlessness. One is found in *Touching earth lightly* and the (married) woman, Maxine Hayward, adopts a child. The narrative does not examine this woman as a "deviant" because of her childlessness; she is presented as the "good" mother in juxtaposition to the (teenage) "bad" birth mother. The other woman is the wealthy, married, upper middle-class Liz Westgarth in *Closed, Stranger* who also adopts a child. Her reasons for adopting lie in relation to both social and psychological pressures.

Psychologically Liz perceived herself as flawed due to her inability to bear children. This also affected her socially, as Joyce Trebilcot (in Trebilcot, ed. 1983, p.1) suggests, "women who do not have children are defined as defective." As married women both Maxine and Liz could "rightfully" adopt children. For Liz Westgarth the adoption allows her to enter into the socially acceptable and normative role of "mother". She no longer views herself as flawed as she has a child to call "*her* son". This claiming of the boy-child becomes problematic when his birth mother (Vicky) seeks him out. She, like Magda in *Speaking to Miranda* and Janey in *Touching earth lightly* is a teenage mother. Similar to Janey, her child is adopted by a (more suitable) married couple.

Teresa Arendell (1999, p.9) argues that there are "deviancy discourses" surrounding motherhood. She states:

> The standard of mothering presupposed in the dominant ideology – the mother absorbed in nurturing activities and situated within the biological nuclear family – contributes to a variety of deviancy discourses, targeted, albeit differently, at mothers who, for whatever reasons, do not conform to the script of full-time motherhood. Single mothers, welfare mothers, minority mothers, and immigrant mothers, overlapping but not mutually exclusive categories, are commonly subjects of deviancy discourses of mothering.

There are few mothers in the texts under consideration who conform to the script of full-time motherhood. In this way, they can be read as implicitly contesting universalising and normative models of maternity. Furthermore, the working and/or single mothers in the novels are subject to scrutiny as deviants from the norm.

When researching and writing this thesis I was mindful of Heather Scutter's writing on mothers and motherhood, as presented in recent Australian fiction for adolescents. Scutter (1999, p.202) states:

> The changes in writing about motherhood, mothering and the body of the mother in the fiction of the 1980s have occurred within social and political contexts which have to some extent liberated women and girls from the mandates of the domestic sphere, and opened up the public world of work and the taboo world of sexuality. But change invariably meets resistance and opposition, and it is useful to watch for signs of reactionary valorisation of the nuclear family, enclosing the mother within its private bounds, and to be alert to omissions and absences, the 'lies, secrets and silences' which are another way of keeping mum.

Scutter's work concentrates on the decades of the 1980s and 1990s and she draws attention to social and political contexts of those decades. Scutter (1999, p.9) states, "By politics I mean the configurations of values and the balances of power represented in both texts and contexts." For the purposes of this study my definition of politics is in keeping with Scutter's, with an emphasis on the power relations and value-laden codes surrounding maternity, and the "normalised" family. My analysis is in part to do with how the presentation of mothers *may* have developed or evolved since the 1980s. I say *may* as Scutter (ibid, p.201) states, "As far as mothers and mothering go, the more things change, the more they stay the same..." Hence I investigate if there is actually some evolution in the way mothers are presented in the 1990s. The use of the term evolution is based on the idea of a movement, or a shift towards a distinguishable difference. That is, this study looks at whether the mothers are presented as socially progressive, particularly when measured by recent developments in more gender-equitable parenting roles and economic autonomy for women.

Rozsika Parker argues that dominant cultural phantasies of mothering disallow mothers the opportunity to develop as full subjects. She states (1995, pp.21-22):

> But the feminine ideal in relation to motherhood has remained curiously static... the representation of ideal motherhood is still almost exclusively made up of self abnegation, unstinting love, intuitive knowledge of nurturance and unalloyed pleasure in children. (Ellipsis added)

Parker's mention of the static nature of how motherhood is perceived, is relevant in relation to whether there are more socially progressive depictions of mothers in the literature under examination. If the feminine ideal is relatively unchanged, it would seem that evolutionary representations are near impossible. Scutter (1999, p.203) asserts, "children's fiction has remained in a reactionary philosophical and moral cast for most of its history..." This thesis examines the degree to which deeply entrenched (patriarchal) cultural imperatives surrounding maternity are present in the texts.

This thesis does not attempt a survey approach – and nor is it claimed that the chosen texts contain representations of all the categories of "mother". Rather, some of the categories of analysis found in this thesis are – mother as nurturer, as sexual being, as "good"/"bad" mother, and as socialiser of children. The last category suggests that the mother is a determiner of the next generation. The categories are examined in relation to how the mother figures are "identified" in social and cultural discourses.

I take as my starting point Mahy's 1984 novel *The Changeover*, as a means of establishing selected mother/child characteristics. The chapters are grouped according to thematic similarities within the texts. Although there are thirteen years between the publication of *The Changeover* and *Greylands* these texts are examined consecutively as they contain elements of the fantastic and this is partially evidenced by the mirror motif in both novels. Child abuse is also present in both novels. In *The Changeover* the abuse (both physical and psychological) whilst not sanctioned, can be accounted for – by the reader – in making allowances for prevailing attitudes in the early 1980s. In addition, the physical abuse suffered by Sorenson Carlisle is rationalised by him as due to

the particular circumstances (loss of employment and increased alcohol consumption) of his foster father. Although published in 1997 the abuse in *Greylands* is related retrospectively, thus it is not addressed as a concern of either the 1980s or the 1990s. Richard Rossiter (2001, p.137) argues that in *Greylands* "The self is not an autonomous 'given'..." Rather the self is an amalgam of the liberal humanist subject and the fragmented postmodern subject. This notion of self is also applicable to *The Changeover*. Both these novels play with notions of fixed identity. *Speaking to Miranda* is examined in relation to theories of identity and subjectivity, some of which have been touched upon in earlier chapters. *Speaking to Miranda* is the novel which contains Mum Manuatu, the Maori matriarch. The text is also located geographically in both Australia and New Zealand. The author was a New Zealand born woman, who at the time of writing the novel was living in Australia. Hence this middle text is one that brings together the two geographical locations of the thesis and, to a small degree, provides another cultural voice. The topic of abuse is also present in *Touching earth lightly*. It differs from that found in the other two texts, as it is child sexual abuse, and is, ostensibly, presented as a result of the protagonist's working-class background. *Touching earth lightly* and *Closed, Stranger* have as thematic concerns issues of teenage pregnancy, teenage death and incest. The particular concerns are addressed in relation to the construction and articulation of the mother figures in the novels. In all the novels notions of communication and reconciliation are significant.

This thesis relies upon close reading of the primary texts. The emphasis is on critical approaches that draw attention to contexts, with particular emphasis on the socio-cultural issues present in each particular novel. My readings

suggest that there is the possibility for engagement with the texts' social content/comment, in conjunction with the representations of western models of maternity. As such, I discuss the characters as though they are representing real people, and their particular circumstances are considered within socio/historical/political contexts. In part, the selection of the texts has been based upon the various and multifaceted relationships between the mothers and the children. What is significant are notions of dependence, nurturance, social and cultural constructs of maternity and representations of the mothers' subjectivities. With such issues in mind I consider thematic concerns such as teenage pregnancy, suicide, incest and child abuse (amongst others) to ascertain how/if mothers are implicated in regard to specific issues. Furthermore, I consider the stability of "good"/"bad" mother model/binary. I examine the extent to which the binary is collapsed, interrogated or tacitly perpetuated.

The five novels have been selected as they provide a range of mother/child relationships, a range of mother figures (dead and alive) and a mix of male and female children. I focus predominantly on texts published in the 1990s with some comparisons being made with the sole text of the 1980s. In part, the rationale for this comes from the comments made by Joan Gibbons (1994, p.11):

> Margaret Mahy has been recognised as leader in the field of writers on family relationships. She has been one of the writers (along with such highly regarded writers as Robert Westall, Jan Mark and Anne Fine) who have promoted understanding of the modern family and its many variations by their often stark, often humorous treatment of its exigencies.

Following from this Gibbons states (ibid), "Feminist critics have seen her as being a leader among writers who have broken from tradition in their treatment of females and children." Mahy is perceived as both a leader in the

field of writers on family relations and a leader among writers who offer a non-traditional treatment of women and girls. *The Changeover* is included as an exemplary text in order to demonstrate how mothers and mother figures can be represented in children's literature. The novel provides a selection of family structures and a diverse array of mothers and mother figures. As such, Mahy is an ideal comparative model from which to examine how much the contemporary construction of the mother and discourses of maternity may have changed in the 1990s. Although it may indeed be an "exceptional" text, it can still function as a measure of what other writers might aspire to.

In order to examine the ways in which maternity and mother spaces and child spaces are constructed in the novels I draw on a variety of motherhood discourses and theoretical approaches. Luce Irigaray's extended work on mothers and daughters and maternal subjectivities has been particularly valuable to this study, and her thoughts and philosophies permeate this thesis. Irigaray's work on the maternal-feminine is utilised to address the ways in which feminine desire has been subsumed by the maternal function, within paternalistic discourse – "female sexuality has always been conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters." (Irigaray, 1985a, p.23). These parameters encompass defined social roles. One of which is the categorisation of maternity outlined previously by Bird and Lucas – the mother who is "good" or "bad" according to dominant ideological definitions. Irigaray extends these ideas by arguing (ibid, p.27), "maternity fills the gaps in a repressed female sexuality." Thus Irigaray privileges the capacity to give birth, but she argues against the structures which define and limit the ways in which maternity and maternal functions operate in society. She states (ibid, pp.27-28) "'mother' and 'father' dominate the interactions of the couple, but as social roles." Patriarchal

inscription of these social roles disallows, or at the very least discourages, female/feminine models of desire. Irigaray (1981, 1985a, 1993 & 1993b)) argues that if the mother is cut off from her social and sexual definition as a woman she becomes the mother who gives too much of her self (a type of "good" mother) or a mother who gives too little of herself (a type of "bad" mother). For Irigaray these types are not clearly demarcated; the "good" mother may become the "bad" mother if she suffocates her child by giving too much. For Irigaray what is important is a restructuring of the ways in which woman is articulated; then, and only then, will the role of "mother" be recognised outside of patriarchal constructions. Elizabeth Grosz (1989, p.125) states:

> She announces a new relation in which the identities of mother and daughter defy the binary polarisations and oppositions patriarchy demands and the separation between one woman and another.

Irigaray wants our culture to be rid of dividing rivalries between women, the "good/"bad" mother divide is just one of the polarising divides she suggests we do way with (Irigaray, 1993b, p.20).

Irigaray's theorising of sexual difference challenges the very system of representation that is *blind* to the other. Thus her work concentrates on reconfiguring the ways in which the "female" may be discussed. According to Irigaray the refusal to accept and celebrate sexual difference leads to women's sexual roles being restricted to those that serve male desire. In such discourse the feminine is thus a *form* of absence that is shaped within and by the masculine. Irigaray argues for a reconfiguring of the phallogocentric economy, particularly to remove the "women-as-commodities status." (See "Women on the Market" and "Commodities among Themselves", 1985a, pp.170-197). An aspect of commodification is that of woman as (re)*producer* of the social order.

Woman as mother is expected to "maintain the social order without intervention so as to change it." (Irigaray, 1985a, p.185). Hence both female and male subjects perpetuate the dominant paternal-masculine discourse. Irigaray suggests strategies for change through challenging the predominance of masculine models. She asserts that the western male privileging of sight (the gaze) impacts upon the devalorisation of the maternal-feminine.

Irigaray states that the predominance of the visual and the commodifying of sexuality conveys a masculine-paternal world-view in which, "The seer does not open his eyes to the world or the other in a contemplation that seeks and respects their different horizons." (Irigaray, 1993a, p.181). The emphasis is on the lack of recognition of difference in patriarchal discourse. Irigaray argues for alternative perspectives in which both sexes are respected. This is not to suggest a substitution of a female economy for a male one; rather it is a call for a new discourse that *privileges* difference. Within such discourse the maternal function is redefined in "a culture of the female." (Irigaray, 1996, p.47). The complex mother-child relationship would be articulated so as to privilege all sensual elements. A question I ask is how feminine/female desire is articulated within the discourses of motherhood found in the novels? That is, are the mother figures in Scutter's (1999, p.202) words, liberated from the "taboo world of sexuality", and is female desire subsumed by the maternal function or is it not present at all?

The notion of the visual as a way to perceive the world and one's place in it, is significant in relation to *The Changeover* and *Greylands,* in particular, as both Mahy and Carmody use the mirror motif as a means of accessing maternal subjectivities. I examine the extent to which the "tool of the visual" – the

mirror – is utilised to challenge phallocentric notions of feminine and maternal economies. In *Touching earth lightly* Janey Knott (who is subjected to sexual abuse and is a teenage relinquishing mother at eighteen-years-old) has a relationship with her son that is initially based on all the sensual elements but becomes one of sight only – by proxy. Janey is sent photographs of her son. These photos help to reinforce the young woman's non-mother role. She is seeing the child that she birthed, but always at a distance, and always without movement. His image is captured and frozen in time, which emphasises the lack of time Janey has spent, or will spend, with her son. Janey is denied any on-going maternal relationship with Eddie. Vicky in *Closed, Stranger* is also denied an on-going maternal relationship with her son. However, she meets him again when he is eighteen and they engage in a sexual/sensual relationship which transgresses the (usual) boundaries between mother and son.

The issues that arise in each particular text are addressed in dialogue with the constructions and representations of the mothers and mother figures. By adopting a more eclectic approach I have been able to attend to the texts' particular thematic issues from a variety of positions, which include socio-cultural theories and philosophies of motherhood. The outcome, I argue, is a dissertation on the western/social/cultural/political construction of the mother. I bring into play conservative and patriarchal models of motherhood to examine the extent to which the texts maintain these, or not, in the latter part of the twentieth century. The very category of "mother" is an important consideration in this study. As Judith Arcana (1984, p.5) remarks, "Our culture defines a mother as a woman who bears a child...and/or raises a child or children..." Accordingly the category of mother is inseparable from, even

defined by the category of child. These categories are interdependent; as a consequence I examine the child/teenage spaces in order to identify the ways in which mother/child spaces interact.

The perception of what constitutes "the child" and notions of childhood are problematic within children's literature discourse. According to Kimberley Reynolds (1994, pp. 6-29) there have been two significant dichotomous views of childhood that "have helped to raise the social status of childhood." Construction of the "child" in the early nineteenth century was located in the Puritan-derived Calvinistic notion that the child was born with the mark of Original Sin. Reynolds states (p.6), "It was, therefore, every adult's duty (and particularly every parent's) to ensue that children recognised the error of their sinful ways, repented, and turned to God." By the late nineteenth century the Romantic notion of the child that is innocent and pure and worthy of respect held sway. In the beginning of the twentieth century, childhood became a distinct stage of development and was seen to have its own needs and requirements (p.27). The concept of the "child" having its own requirements is important as it gave rise to a significant increase in the number of books written and marketed for children. Within these texts narrative focus predominantly rests with the development of the child protagonists. Reynolds (p.34) further argues:

> As this century progressed, childhood was prolonged to include adolescence (and with it the new youth culture); gradually the Victorian ideal was eroded.

What was not eroded, however, was the desire to create texts for specific age groups, texts that catered to and for the reader. Myrna Machet (1990, p.299) argues:

> Children's books encouraged the reader to become acquainted with their communities and to find their place in society. Growth was measured by

> the child's growing understanding of and concern for other people. In many modern books the protagonist is preoccupied with the self – his [sic] problems, emotions, reactions and needs occupy the centre of the literature.

Thus the "child" is the narratorial focus of most children's texts. This would presuppose a privileging of child space over adult space. This thesis will focus more specifically on the interaction between child and adult spaces. Prolonged adolescence has meant that there are many texts for older readers, which deal (both directly and indirectly) with grim social realities. The protagonists are often portrayed as maturing within such narratives – becoming more "adult". Thus the category of "child" is further problematised. Although this study does not focus specifically on constructions of the child and childhood, as the "child" is explicitly connected with the "mother", it is worthwhile examining (briefly) how the "child" is now defined.

Margot Hillel (2001, pp.1-2) states:

> A study of the laws relating to children and young people both in New Zealand and Australia reveals there is considerable confusion about definitions of 'child', allowing for a kind of phasing-in of rights and responsibilities. In neither country, however, is even a 16 year-old regarded as fully adult. They therefore fall within a broad umbrella definition of 'child' and within the scope of discussions of representations of children within literature for young people.

The United Nations Convention on The Rights of The Child, states, "For the purposes of the present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier." The realm of sexual consent is one that varies slightly in the states and territories of Australia. The age of consent for heterosexual sex ranges from sixteen to eighteen years. In New Zealand the age of consent is sixteen years. Thus sex with a child under sixteen years is considered an offence by law. Teenage sex is an issue that arises in all texts (except *Greylands*) and an outcome of sex – teenage pregnancy is present in

Speaking to Miranda, Touching earth lightly and *Closed, Stranger.* Incest is also a concern in this study as the issue arises in two texts, *Touching earth lightly* and *Closed, Stranger.* The "child" characters in this study range in age from newborn to eighteen years plus. Consequently the oldest "child" characters are, technically, not children at all. However the texts they inhabit are within the realm of what is known as children's literature. It is now generally acknowledged that both Australian and New Zealand children's literature is marketed to encompass a broad age range. The category of "Young Adult" is evidence of this. As the novels are written with a teenage audience in mind the foci are (on the whole) on the young protagonists. Thus the constructions of maternity are not always overtly present – at times they may be read as the "unconscious" of the texts, which leads to a consideration of what is not said or examined in relation to the maternal figures. The gaps and silences are significant to how the "mother" is articulated in these texts.

Chapter one is concerned with *The Changeover.* Through the variety of mother figures Mahy's text provides examples of the mother as nurturer, as sexual being, as socialiser of children, as single by choice, as non-maternal and as breadwinner. My focus is on the ways in which Mahy constructs the mother figures and the ways in which she presents them as subjects-in-process, through the relationships that they have with other characters. In this chapter I establish how the category of "mother" has been stereotypically prescribed as the normative role for women in patriarchal society. I examine the extent to which Mahy problematises this category. As the category of "mother" is interdependent with the category of "child" I consider how the categories impact upon one another. This is done predominantly through an examination of the relationship between the female protagonist and her mother.

Laura Chant the fourteen-year-old protagonist is presented as a daughter and as a mother figure. I argue that the latter manifests in two ways – in her caring for her younger brother and her taking on the guise of a triple goddess figure, which is associated with the practice of Witchcraft. Through her enactment of these roles, and through the inclusion of a range of mother figures, maternal subjectivities are explored. In direct relation to the protagonist and her mother, the categories of mother and daughter are examined. In *The Changeover* Mahy critiques stereotypical gender biases and problematises the notion of the stable subject. I argue that she presents both humanist and postmodern notions of self. As Witchcraft plays an especially significant role in the text I examine how it is utilised in relation to the maternal figures. Mahy does not present the stereotypical "Earth Mother" Witch type. Her array of Witches is various and multifaceted. For these reasons *The Changeover* provides an effective foundation on which to address the issues of maternal and child subjectivities and spaces. The mirror motif is significant to my reading of *The Changeover*. I argue that the mirror acts as a site of emancipation for Laura. As such, Mahy challenges the stereotypical usage of the mirror as a site of incarceration, but does use the mirror to explore female subjectivity. I draw on the intertextual references to the tale of *Snow White*, and some secondary sources, as a means to establish how the mirror motif has been employed to indicate female rivalry, and to show how Mahy undermines such usage. Laura has a "relationship" with the mirror that allows her to access other selves; her identification of self is fluid rather than fixed. It is this fluidity that allows her a subject-in-process subjectivity, which, in turn, enables her to enact the (maternal) role of (destructive) crone in order to destroy the figure of paternal evil – Carmody Braque. Constructions of maternal figures in *The Changeover* are such that there is some slippage

between the dichotomies of "good" and "bad". For example, Laura as destroyer displays none of the stereotypical nurturing qualities associated with Witchcraft, but she does in her act of destruction enact a "good" mother who risks her own life to save the life of a child. As mentioned child abuse is present in this text, hence notions of mother-as-protector are considered. Complex (maternal) characterisations are present throughout the narrative, thus providing a fertile basis for exploration into maternal subjectivities. In this chapter I draw on contemporary theories and models of motherhood, the family, and Witchcraft utilising (amongst others) the works of Luce Irigaray, Jessica Benjamin, Rose Lucas, Martha Fineman and Barbara Walker.

Chapter two on *Greylands* looks at the oxymoronic position of the (dead) mother as an absent presence. Unlike *The Changeover* there are essentially only two mother figures in *Greylands.* One, who occupies very little narrative space, is a "bad" mother, and the other (dead one) is an ambivalent mother figure. Her "story" is recreated by her son Jack, and is revealed to him through his many visits to the greylands of the title. The mother is "present" as both an adult and a child. The family structures in the text are those of Fineman's "normal" nuclear family. Yet cracks are apparent within these structures. The mother was abused in her family, and her untimely death (a result of the abuse) leaves her children motherless. My focus is on the mother's inability to form a stable sense of self due to the abuse she suffered as child. Her inability to construct a subject position that is not riddled with insecurity impacts upon how she mothers her own children. She has bouts of depression and at times drifts into a realm of madness. Jack does not know that she is ill but his young sister Ellen does. As a consequence I argue she is able to enter into an intersubjective relationship with her mother, which, to some degree, eludes

Jack. He must go through a mirror in order to discover the "secrets" of his mother's tragic life. As in *The Changeover* the mirror motif plays an important role in the narrative. For Jack the mirror is a site of emancipation but for his mother it is a site of incarceration. I utilise the work of Luce Irigaray and Lindsey Tucker in relation to the mirror and female subjectivity. I draw on a range of secondary sources, including (amongst others) Sigmund Freud, Karen Horney, Catherine Clément, Barbara Walker and Rosemary Jackson.

Chapter three on *Speaking to Miranda* focuses on the eighteen-year-old protagonist's search for her mother's identity. As in the previous novel the mother is dead, and is, like the mother in *Greylands*, an absent presence. Unlike the children in *Greylands* the protagonist has no recollection of her mother. Her adoptive father metes out snippets of information but this does little to quench her desire to "know" her mother. The "sexual-family-as-natural" is undermined within this text, as there are few examples of the nuclear family structure. Issues of teenage motherhood are present; hence the boundaries between maternal space and child/teenage space are not clearly demarcated. I examine the extent to which the teenage mother is presented as "deviant". Issues of identity and subjectivity are paramount in this text and I focus on how the protagonist comes to "know" herself, by (re)tracing her mother's past. Naming becomes a significant feature in the quest for understanding who the mother was and who the daughter is; there is a sense of a connection to a maternal genealogy in claiming one's mother-given name. The protagonist, Ruby, has an internal double – the Miranda of the title. Robyn McCallum has done extensive work on *Speaking to Miranda* and she argues that the novel can be read as realist fiction, where "the double is often a way of exploring the social construction of subjectivity, rather than a

psychological or moral aberration." (McCallum, in Bradford, ed. 1996, pp. 18-19). I argue that this novel can be read in the way that McCallum advocates and in light of Freud's theories of the uncanny. I claim that the character of Miranda is an aspect of the protagonist's baby half-sister, who died on the night the protagonist was conceived. The sub-text that I argue for is found by reading carefully the words given to Mum Manuatu – the dead mother's Maori mother-in-law. Her character suggests that "hocus-pocus" is at play in relation to the voice of the internal double. The reading I propose suggests that the figure of Miranda can be read as a pseudo or virtual mother figure in the psyche of the protagonist. I utilise the work of (amongst others) Robyn McCallum, Sigmund Freud, Rosemary Jackson and Luce Irigaray to address issues of identity, the complexity of the double, and motherhood.

Chapter four on *Touching earth lightly* addresses the issue of incest and abuse that surrounds the (teenage) character of Janey Knott. I investigate how her dysfunctional family life impacts upon her capacity to mother, and how this influences her decision to have her baby adopted. The family structures in the text are examples of Fineman's "sexual-family-as-natural", but the two protagonists and their families are diametrically opposed. Issues of class are significant; Janey's lower-class family are the site of all that is undesirable, especially when compared with Chloe Hunter's idealised middle-class family. Chloe's mother (Joy) is presented as a "good" mother who manages to work, have a social life and be a wife and mother – she is given a "subject-in-processness" (Lucas, 1998, p.39) subjectivity. Janey's mother is barely accorded a subject status. Janey as a "deviant", single, teenage mother relinquishes her baby for adoption to a more "suitable" married couple. Janey is given an excess of sexual desire and, ostensibly, the narrative claims that

being "over-sexed keeps her happy". However this excess of sexuality (in part) contributes to her untimely death. I address Janey's sexuality and the incest on two levels. I argue that the narrative suggests that her life is fated due to her circumstances. I also argue for a sub-text that her life could have been altered with adult intervention into her circumstances. The work of (amongst others) Luce Irigaray, Judith Herman, Teresa Arendell, Jocelynne Scutt, Joanna Harris and Hélène Cixous is utilised in this chapter.

Chapter five on *Closed, Stranger* addresses the adoption system that operated in New Zealand until the early 1980s. This adoption practice placed non-biologically related children with adoptive parents; the birth and adopting parents remained unknown to one another and the identities of the biological parents were unknown to the child. This system was an attempt to reproduce a pseudo "sexual-family-as-natural" family structure. The adoptive child became as if "born to" its adoptive parents. As in the previous chapter, the child of the single mother is given to a more "deserving" and "suitable" married couple. This chapter focuses on the impact of the closed, stranger adoption system on the adopted child (Westie), his birth mother (Vicky Crawford) and the adoptive parents (Liz and Dave Westgarth) – Liz in particular. As mentioned previously Liz adopted a child because she viewed herself as flawed due to her inability to have children. For Liz the adoption allowed her to enter into the socially normative role of mother. This role is however challenged when Vicky returns to see Westie. Not only do the son and the birth mother enter into a sexual relationship, but also Westie disallows Liz to call him "my son". My reading of the novel argues that the sexual relationship could be accounted for by a theory known as "Genetic Sexual Attraction" (Greenberg, 1997, p.98). It is a term used to describe the erotic feelings experienced after a

reunion of relatives who were separated soon after birth. The tensions implied by the term "mother" are explored in the narrative, as both Liz and Vicky claim the term in relation to Westie. As in *The Changeover* there are a number of mother figures in this novel. They represent various configurations of the category of "mother" and these will be examined in relation to normative models of maternity. The work of (amongst others) Patricia Farrar, Rod Holm, Denys Delany, Rose Lucas and Martha Fineman will be utilised in this chapter.

The mirror should assist and not reduce my incarnation.

Luce Irigaray – *Divine Women* (p.7).

Chapter One: *The Changeover* by Margaret Mahy.

In this chapter, I will examine how Margaret Mahy presents the categories of mother and daughter. These categories are interdependent as "Our culture defines a mother as a woman who bears a child...and/or raises a child or children" (Arcana, 1984, p.5). In *The Changeover* Mahy presents an evolving relationship between the mother and the teenage daughter. Both are presented as subjects-in-process, thus challenging limited depictions of maternity. Stereotypically, within patriarchal society, motherhood is prescribed as the normative role for women. Traditionally motherhood is synonymous with care and nurture. Judy Tronto (in Hirschmann & Stefano, eds.1996, p.143) states:

> Caring involves thoughtfulness, deliberation, and good judgement. It requires self-knowledge, adequate resources, and knowledge of the situation in which one cares. It requires that immediate needs be balanced with long-term needs, that those who care think through their priorities and resolve conflicting demands for care.

Maternal practice therefore requires a certain intellectual standard and a physical and emotional commitment on the part of the mother, which, ideally, serves to nourish and also to socialise the child – with a focus on the present and on the long-term well being of the child. Stereotypically the category of "mother" is also laden with social and cultural baggage that demarcates the "good" mother from the "bad". Dichotomies based on a "good"/"bad" model, or models that make womanhood synonymous with motherhood do little to challenge conventional perceptions of the "mother". Such arguments

constitute a dominant ideology of motherhood. This ideology has, however, been challenged by feminist scholars. Teresa Arendell (1999, p.1) states:

> The study of mothers and mothering expanded dramatically over the course of the past decade. Today's multidisciplinary considerations of mothering speak to issues of mothers' activities and experiences, whereas earlier work often attended to the quality of mothering and its supposed effects on a child. Feminist scholarship, especially, opened up conceptualization and research on mothering and motherhood and on women's lives and family, more generally, and pushed for a study of identities and experiences.

One aim of this study is to ascertain the degree to which mothers are presented as subjects-in-process, whose identities and experiences are acknowledged apart from the role of mother. Diana Beere (1998, p.16) suggests that in literature for Australian children "motherhood" has been represented in limited and conventional terms. Part of my investigation in this chapter and throughout the thesis is to evaluate the extent to which stereotypical representations are challenged.

The category of "mother" cannot be isolated from that of the category of "child". A woman cannot be a mother without either having given birth to and/or reared a child or children. The category of "child", however, can be more problematic; a baby is obviously a child but an older teenager may be viewed as a child, a young adult or some limbo category between the two. As Margot Hillel (2001, pp.1-2) acknowledges in Australia and New Zealand there is confusion about definitions of the "child", which allows for a phasing-in of rights and responsibilities. For the purposes of this study, "child" will be defined by the guidelines set out by The United Nations, where "a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years..." This rather arbitrary age range covers a vast range of abilities and developmental factors. These will be taken into account when addressing the particular "children" within the texts.

In *The Changeover* the fourteen-year-old protagonist, Laura Chant, is presented as a daughter figure and a mother figure as well as a triple goddess figure. The other mother figures are Laura's mother Kate – who also has a three-year-old son Jonathon (Jacko); Winter Carlisle – mother of Miryam; Miryam Carlisle – mother of Sorensen (Sorry); Sorry's foster mother; Mrs Fangboner – Jacko's carer; and Julia – the Chant children's father's second wife – who is pregnant with her first child. This chapter will predominantly address Laura's relationship with her mother and the Carlisle family, as a means of establishing the boundaries of her identity and the intersections with the category of "mother". The Carlisles are a family of Witches and it is through her association with this family that Laura goes through a changeover to become a Witch. It is as a Witch that Laura is able to take on the guise of a triple goddess figure and save the life of her young brother. His life-giving energy is devoured by a lemure – a wicked spirit of the dead that stays "alive" by devouring the life force of others (p.82), in the form of a male named Carmody Braque. In order to address the mother/child dyads and other interpersonal relationships in the text I draw on contemporary theories and models of motherhood and the family, utilising (amongst others) the work of Luce Irigaray, Jessica Benjamin and Rose Lucas.

The Changeover has the subtitle, *A Supernatural Romance.* The use of such a subtitle signals the intertextuality present in the narrative. Many genres and allusions to other texts are at play in this text. It is not simply a supernatural tale or a romance novel. Anna Lawrence-Pietroni (1996, pp.34-35) suggests:

> The subtitle "A Supernatural Romance" illustrates the problem of categorizing this book: it turns on the cultural ambiguity of the "romance" tag, signifying both the literary genre of which the Arthurian quest, with its connotations of nobility and tradition, is only a part, and the less-esteemed genre of the sentimental love story, seen more as formula than as an art

> form. The qualifying "supernatural" suggests yet another location for the novel.

The use of the word "supernatural" implies the inclusion of that which is considered non-ordinary, and may happen outside of the domain of linear time. This notion can be linked to the more cyclic time that is often associated with females. Lawrence-Pietroni (1996, p.36) argues:

> The cyclical "maternal time" of motherhood and reproduction asserts itself time and time again throughout the text in a redemptive collapsing of linear time....
>
> *The Changeover* does not deny the linear understanding of time marked by an event-based progression, but rather places it in the context of a different understanding of time.

This different understanding of time is crucial to comprehending the many complexities of the text. An example of the cyclical maternal time that Lawrence-Pietroni refers to can be found in Laura's relationship with Jacko, (p.16):

> Sometimes it seemed to her that Jacko was not her brother but in some way her own baby, a baby she would have one day, both born and unborn at the same time.

It is pertinent that Jacko seems to be, and yet is not, Laura's baby. On one level it points to the active mothering role that Laura fulfils in Kate's absences and it also implies a psychic attachment, an interconnectedness, which surrounds the character of Laura throughout the narrative. It also indicates the dual nature of Laura's changeover. The onset of her menstrual cycle is paralleled with her changeover to become a Witch. The onset of her menstrual cycle signals her physical/biological *potential* to become a mother.

The complexities of the narrative lie not only in relation to concepts of time, in relation to mothers and mother/child spaces but also in relation to how to read the novel. As well as the supernatural, romance and quest genres, folk, fairy tale and other intertextual allusions punctuate the narrative, producing a

textual density and complexity typical of the postmodern. Dual or multiple usages of motifs are present throughout the narrative and this is indicative of the way in which Mahy works both with and against generic conventions. My reading of *The Changeover* is acutely mindful of Mahy's use of opposites as a means to explore the nature of opposition and to expose the limitations of simple binary positions. I see this novel as offering the reader a multiplicity of reading positions that are not solely based on dichotomies. Signification is very often ambiguous due to the multi-layered structure of the novel.

Mahy indicates Laura's ambiguous nature early in the text through her use of the mirror (p.2):

> The mirror had been placed in the steamiest part of the bathroom, and showed her a blurred ghost. However, its vagueness suited her, for she was uncertain about her reflection and often preferred it misty rather than distinct.

Here Laura's reflection represents a conscious sense of a double self or even multiple selves. She is aware of a self that is her and is also not quite her. Laura's reaction to her blurred reflection and her vagueness can readily be attributed to her, understandable, ambivalence about her imminent maturation. Who she is now and who she will become is indeed shadowy and vague, shrouded in mist. What Laura does not realise is that she is going to enter the mist and emerge a changed being. Her body is not the only part of her that is evolving. Mahy does not separate the mind and the body of the Witches and, as a consequence, Laura's physical/sexual maturation merges with her changeover to become a Witch.

In the context of the novel as a whole, the ghost allusion sets up the notion of death - the soul or spirit of the dead is often referred to as a ghost. *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (p.790) states that a ghost is both the soul or spirit,

and breath. Thus it is connected with both life and death. Barbara Walker (1988a, p.305) states:

> Breath has been nearly synonymous with "soul" or "spirit" for an enormously long time. The concept dates back to a matriarchal theory that woman not only forms her child out of her own uterine blood, but also *animates* (provides a mother-soul) for her child's *material* (mother-given) body with her own breath.

In the above quote, breath is related to the giving of life. In *The Changeover* it is connected with both life and death. The deaths that occur are both literal (one) and symbolic (many) and it is this double-ness that is contained in the term "ghost". Laura is actively involved in both the literal and symbolic deaths. Laura becomes life-giver to Jacko; she symbolically (re)animates him and gives him back his "life-breath", and she becomes death-dealer to Carmody Braque. However, in order to take on the roles of birth-giver and death-dealer she must surrender some of her past. This relinquishment is connected to Laura as a daughter-figure. What she must relinquish is the *exclusive* relationship that she has with her mother – a relationship that disallows others to permeate its sphere. Laura is content in her relationship with Kate (and Jacko) and until prompted she sees no reason to change this. Another area that Laura needs to let go of is the pain of separation from her father. The notion of relinquishment in order to receive is a common motif in folk and fairy tales, as is the mirror motif.

The mirror motif is particularly significant in *The Changeover*, the use of the mirror in this novel bears comparison with the use of the mirror in the *Snow White* tale. It is arguable that *Snow White* is as significant intertextually as *Sleeping Beauty* – a tale which is more commonly associated with *The Changeover*. Adam Berkin concentrates on Mahy's deployment of the *Sleeping Beauty* tale. Berkin (1990, p.245) states:

> By using the framework of "Sleeping Beauty" with her otherwise contemporary and realistically depicted novel, Mahy draws attention to the narrow-minded and anachronistic stereotypes of the weak, innocent female and the heroic, strong, and powerful male that this particular fairy tale and fairy tales in general perpetuate.

Throughout the novel, Mahy challenges many stereotypical representations and reworks a number of tales into her narrative. Some allusions are more subtle than others. Whilst the mirror motif is common in literature and *The Changeover* is certainly open to a number of "mirror readings", it is the suggestion of treachery in the mirror motifs of both texts that is of interest here. The word "treachery" is associated with trickery or cheating (*The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, p. 2237). The stepmother/Queen figure in *Snow White* tries to trick and deceive Snow White and there is much evidence of trickery and deception in *The Changeover.* This is most apparent in the figure of the evil Carmody Braque and is also present in the teenage characters, Laura and Sorry. Trickery and deception underlie the action between Laura and Carmody Braque, and the mirror motif is present in relation to Laura. The mirror in *The Changeover* is both a device that signals trickery and deceit as well as a metaphor for emancipation. The mirror does not fix Laura as an object of the male gaze within phallocratic discourse. The mirror acts a means by which Laura can explore multiple (including maternal) subjectivities. By doing so her understanding of her mother is broadened to encompass the notion of a sexually desiring adult woman.

The mirror in *Snow White* is related to the mother/daughter dyad. Snow White's mother wishes for a daughter. According to the Grimm Brothers' version (1986, p.248), when this is achieved she dies, leaving her daughter temporarily motherless. When the King remarries, it is to the most beautiful woman in the land. The Queen's exalted position is secure while the girl-child

is young. However, she sees her position as threatened as the child matures. The stepmother/Queen does not want a beautiful rival. In *The Changeover* the *Snow White* intertextuality is indicated in two ways – the mirror and the use of "the voice" (p.3):

> "It's going to happen," said a voice.
>
> "What's going to happen?" Laura asked before she realized that the voice had spoken inside her, not outside in the room.

Even though the voice of warning is inside Laura's head it is reminiscent of the voice that the Queen hears in the mirror in *Snow White* when she asks who is the fairest in the land. The mirror replies:

> You, my queen, are fair; it is true
> But Little Snow-White is still
> A thousand times fairer than you. (Grimm, 1986, p.251)

This is the voice of a messenger and it comes from a realm that is shifted slightly apart from "everyday reality". In Laura it is the voice of her unconscious - an intrapersonal voice. In *The Changeover* it is not a voice that leads to any sort of hierarchical relationship of power between women. My reading of the *Snow White* tale suggests that it is based on a conflict between the females. The plot-driven issues in *Snow White* are a result of the sexual tensions that arise because the young woman is more beautiful and, as such, potentially more desirable than the older woman. There is no indication of maternal love or pleasure in the fact that the child is growing and changing. Thus the pre-text is not faithfully reproduced, it is subverted. Mahy's narrative challenges the fairy tale formula as the relationship between Laura and Kate evolves positively as they change. Laura, as a sexually maturing teenager, is not viewed as a threat by her mother. Mahy has constructed Kate as a mother with her own needs and desires, which are not necessarily bound up with those of her children. There is a nexus between Kate and the children; and in the case of mother and daughter this bond allows them an intersubjective

relationship where they come to view each other as individuals, with separate needs, rather than as rivals within a patriarchal system.

When speaking of mother/daughter relationships in children's literature Roberta Seelinger Trites (1997, p.103) suggests:

> Mother/daughter relationships take two predominant forms in children's and adolescent novels: those traditional narratives that allow for the daughter to achieve independence from her mother in the classically Oedipal manner that Nancy Friday describes in *My Mother/My Self*, and those less traditional and less Freudian ones that allow the daughter to mature without necessarily breaking from her mother.

The Changeover is placed in the latter category. Laura is able to grow and transform without severing the important relationship she has with her mother. Laura and Kate can continue to develop an interpersonal relationship because of the changes they go through and the people they become. Even though Laura becomes a mother figure and gains two other mother figures, in Miryam and Winter, her relationship with Kate is not displaced - it is improved. In part, this improvement is related to Laura's ability to "go through the mirror" after her changeover.

The fact that Laura gains two extra mother figures raises questions about the family as an institution. Martha Fineman (1996, p.145) argues, "The legal story is that the family has a 'natural' form based on the sexual affiliation of a man and a woman." Fineman calls this the "sexual-natural family". This type of family consists of a couple who are the biological parents of the children – a blood related nuclear family. Mahy's text offers alternatives to this type of institutionalised family structure. The paternal/masculine is challenged by the lack of positive father figures – Mahy's maternal works within a female economy, "a culture of the female" (Irigaray, 1996, p.47) – the family structures are not based upon a paternal/maternal dichotomy.

Laura's changeover is worked in a maternal/feminine environment. It is after her changeover that Laura is able to see her mother as a woman in her own right. In conjunction with this Laura is able to articulate her own needs and desires. The latter point being something neither Snow White nor Sleeping Beauty could achieve. Their destinies were in the hands of patriarchy. As Hélène Cixous (1996, p.66) states, "Beauties slept in their woods, waiting for princes to come and wake them up. In their beds, their glass coffins, in their childhood forests like dead women." Arguably the romance mode is perpetuated within this type of fairy tale narrative. The "holy grail" being the saviour prince. Mahy does not perpetuate this unironic form of the romance. She refers to fairy tales to establish the ways in which Laura does not conform to the stereotypes.

My reading of *Snow White* suggests that the voice in the mirror is associated with the gaze. What is important to the stepmother/Queen is who is judged to be "the fairest of them all." The vying for the superior position is contested via the mirror. It is a battle of age versus youth and the beautiful, young woman is the winner. In this (beauty) scenario it has to be a battle between females. In *Snow White* the motivation for the stepmother/Queen is based on rivalry, but some critics suggest that the over-arching discourse is that of patriarchy. This is the position argued by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1984, p.38) when they state that the voice within the mirror is the voice of patriarchy, and that within the patriarchal (hierarchical) system it is the male who decides who is "fairest of all". Rose Lucas suggests that within phallocratic discourse it is difficult for the two women to be anything but at odds with each other. She states (1998, pp.39-40):

> For instance, within the tropes of phallocentrism, Snow White and her Wicked Step-mother figure will remain forever at daggers drawn, locked in

> a to-the-death battle for the singular role of Queen, the woman who is coded as fairest within the dispensation of the masculine gaze.

Within phallocratic models of the family, the father is placed in the dominant position and the role of the mother is subordinated to that of the father. The mother/daughter nexus is ruptured due to the daughter's requirement to renounce her connection with the maternal body. Lucas (1998, p.38) states:

> Envy and bitter rivalry between women, and particularly between mother and daughter for the apparently subjectivity-awarding attentions of the male subject, has persistently stifled and distorted a potential genealogy of maternal thought, stultifying the possibility of the experience of an embodied femininity—a femininity which is sexual *and* maternalised, irrespective of biological reproductive status.

Through the construction of the relationship between Laura and Kate (and the fact that the father does not live with them) Mahy avoids perpetuating the narrative of the phallocratic family. She subverts the *Snow White* tale as she presents a positive female/female relationship between mother and daughter. In *Snow White* the Queen becomes a treacherous and destructive figure when the mirror informs her that she is no longer "the fairest." This sets her on a path of revenge that leads to her own destruction. The mother figure in *Snow White* does not conform to Tronto's (1996, p.143) model of maternity where motherhood is synonymous with care and nurture. She becomes the ultimate "bad" mother and is destroyed because she fails to fulfil the script. Kate as mother is presented as both sexual and maternal. She is not competing with her daughter; rather she evolves as a subject, as does Laura.

Mahy utilises the idea of revenge but she challenges the notion of female/female rivalry by having Laura pitted against Carmody Braque. The sex/beauty agenda has given way to struggles that are played out between a female teenage virgin and an ancient and depraved male. They enter into a battle where conflicts of power and also trickery play significant roles. Mahy also links treachery with Laura's mirror image (p.3):

> Laura picked up her hair brush, looking into the mirror in her room, the best one in the house because the light from a window fell directly onto it. She stared at herself intently.
>
> I don't look so childish, she thought, turning her attention from the warning, hoping it might go away. But her reflection was treacherous. Looking at it, she became more than uneasy; she became frightened.

It is not surprising that Laura is frightened; the secure world that she inhabits with her mother and brother is being severely challenged. She is aware of this but she is unaware of why and how this is being done. At this early stage of the novel she does not know that it is she who must fully actualise that treachery in order to save her brother's life. As well as meaning to trick or cheat, treachery is also a betrayal of trust (*The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, p.2237). Carmody Braque betrays Jacko's trust when he stamps the child's outstretched hand with his virulent mark. The politics of "inviting in" are evoked here. In *Snow White* the stepmother/Queen can only do Snow White's hair and lace her stays because the girl has allowed ("invited") her to do so. Thus the older woman is enacting a caring maternal/feminine role in order to trick and deceive the daughter. In a similar way Braque (as a paternal/masculine figure) can only stamp Jacko's hand because the child extends it to him. The consequence of this action leads to the "to-the-death-battle" between Braque and Laura.

Carmody Braque is a slippery figure – he has no actual identity of his own (p.20), "Indeed his whole face was somehow shrunken back around his smile so that he looked like a grinning puppet." Perhaps he is an example of the quintessential postmodern subject – marginal, fragmented and unstable. Those from whom he drains life determine his identity. He acts like a mirror or a refracting surface; that is, he takes on the physical attributes of the person he is consuming and they in turn take on his ageing persona. He is all surface

and has no substantive qualities. When Jacko is in hospital he is described as (p.126), "looking like a shrunken doll", echoing Braque's shrunken face. Thus the categories of child and adult impact upon each other, so as to blur the distinctions between the two. Nevertheless, Braque as an adult does have a position of power. Part of his potency lies in the mystery surrounding the illness of his victims. No one can *explain* what is happening. Language becomes a useless tool. Even when Laura attempts to tell Kate that she knows what is wrong with Jacko she realises Kate will be sceptical (p.76), "'You're blaming this on the junk man and his stamp?' she asked disbelievingly." Laura is indeed blaming it on the "junk man" but her voice falls on unreceptive ears. Here the mother holds the power and she can dismiss the daughter's words as there is no (adult) logic behind them. Laura realises that it is she who is obliged to meet this evil force on its own terms. Josephine Raburn (1992, p.35) associates Braque with death:

> Carmody Braque smells of peppermint, the sacred herb of Hades used in early times to mask the smell of death. Peppermint smells good; putrefaction smells bad. A Greek myth explains how the beautiful nymph Minthe was transformed into this plant by Pluto's jealous wife. A peppermint smell pervades the air on the day that Jacko becomes ill and remains with him until he recovers. The goddess Hecate is the keeper of the key of Hades, where peppermint grows and where Carmody Braque most certainly belongs.

Raburn reads Winter as a representative Hecate figure. I also read Laura as this aspect of the triple goddess because she enacts the role of death-dealer to destroy Braque. She becomes a death-crone like the wicked stepmother/Queen in *Snow White*.

The theme of descent is significant in Laura's ability to take on the force of Carmody Braque. Laura must go "through the mirror" and descend into her own psychic underworld so that she can emerge as a transformed character. Laura's "relationship" with the mirror is such that she avoids being an object

of male desire, as the visual element is not defined by the male. Laura uses the mirror as a means to access other realities, which are not prescribed by patriarchal culture. The mirror motif is commonly found in myths and folk and fairy tales. Raburn (1992, p.29) suggests:

> Mirrors serve as literary devices to polarize the real and the ideal world. Traditionally, they are metaphors for narcissistic self-absorption and are a central theme of descent...
>
> The early appearance of the mirror is an early clue that sublimation is about to occur.

Mahy, working against this convention, presents Laura as a character that does not suffer from "narcissistic self-absorption". The nature of Jacko's illness and her role in saving him disallows such solipsism. Laura develops a maternal-saviour role. Her transformation allows her to become a "good" mother who saves the child at all costs. Her role of a caring maternal figure does not however extend to Carmody Braque. When she confronts him it is as a devouring crone figure who will do all she can to destroy the paternal evil. The notion of descent is, however, present in the novel and Laura's descent is to her own psychic underworld. She enters a place that only she can create. It is embellished with ancient symbols and signs of Witchcraft and magic, and characters and scenes from folk and fairy tales to guide her on her journey to become a (p.137) "woman of the moon". When she emerges from her psychic journey she is reborn. Her rebirth is her sublimation; that is she goes through a change that transforms her into a potent and powerful Witch. She can access an elevated state of mind in order to work magic and instigate change.

The mirror in literature, especially when female characters are associated with it, is frequently used as a site of incarceration. Lindsey Tucker (1994, p.6) states:

> The mirror is another, and far more complex, spatial construct that a number of women writers appear attracted to, mainly because it is a space

> in which concerns regarding the female subject, the double, and the gaze can be critiqued and subverted. Given women's longstanding cultural associations with the mirror and the privileging of the visual in Western culture, this interest in what has come to represent another form of entrapment is not surprising.

Although Sorry has a photo of Laura pinned to a poster of a "sexy woman" Laura is not presented as the object of the male gaze. She confronts Sorry about the juxtaposition of these images and he removes the sexual connotation by removing the poster (p.206). She refuses to be objectified within the parameters of male-defined sexuality. Mahy works against the supposition that the mirror represents another form of entrapment, as the mirror acts as the means by which Laura goes through a transformative process. The idea of transformation associated with the mirror goes against the notion that women, within patriarchy, are fixed as objects in relation to the male gaze. Tucker (1994, p.7) suggests:

> Mirrors represent the ways in which women become fixed as objects of the male gaze and reflections of male desire. Thus, as metaphors for containment and fixity, mirrors provide important spaces in which to question the nature and condition of female subjectivity.

Although Mahy does not use the mirror as a metaphor for containment and fixity, she does use it to explore female subjectivity. Laura's role as mother to Jacko develops and changes. In *The Changeover* the mirror is the means by which Laura takes on another identity; it does not fix her as an object of the gaze. In this respect the nature and condition of female subjectivity is questioned through Mahy's use of the mirror. Laura goes "through the mirror" to become a Witch and the consequence of this is the possibility of simultaneous identities. Mahy works counter to stereotypical assumptions, whereby the female is located in a feminine economy that is prescribed by the male.

Laura becomes an archetypal triple goddess figure whose attributes range from maiden to mother to crone in infinite forms. Barbara Walker (1988, p.21) explains:

> This many-named Goddess was the first Holy Trinity. Her three major aspects have been designated Virgin, Mother, and Crone; or, alternatively Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer. This same trinitarian pattern can be traced in all the Goddess figures of India, Arabia, Egypt, the Middle East, Aegean and Mediterranean cultures, and among the Celtic and Teutonic peoples of northern Europe.

Laura's ability to adopt these roles as necessary suggests that the category of "mother" is fluid; Laura can represent a range of maternal identities. In doing so her role of daughter impacts upon that of mother. Laura is able to save her brother when she becomes a Witch and enacts the many forms of the triple goddess. Kate, as biological mother, is unable to save her son. Thus the biological mother is not presented as a solely omnipotent force, responsible for shaping her children's lives. In this text the daughter, technically still a child, takes on the role of surrogate mother and saves her brother. However, the narrative is complex and Laura is sister, daughter and mother figure when she saves Jacko. Thus implying that the role of mother is not just a singular, prescribed role; it encompasses a number of facets and is played out in a variety of ways.

The issue of maternal presence is significant in the narrative. Laura takes on a maternal role in looking after Jacko when he is well, and of saving him when he is sick. Consequently, for Laura, the role of daughter is not always clearly separated or distinguished from the role of mother. Laura slips into the role of mother when either Kate or Jacko require this from her. Not only does Jacko have more than one mother figure – Kate, Laura and Mrs Fangboner (his carer) but Laura, too, is surrounded by a number of other mother figures that play significant roles in her development. Tucker (1994, p.6) when speaking of

female mobility and the role of plot space in female writing, suggests that maternal presence can be an obstacle in female quest narratives:

> Thus, when women do construct a female quest narrative, that is, when a female character can be constituted as a mover within plot space, she, like the male protagonist, appears to be confronted with female-as-obstacle, namely the maternal presence, a presence that, as both her and not-her, gives women writers their special interest in that space. Nancy Chodorow and others have shown how problematic the maternal presence is for the daughter, especially in the area of mergence and separation.

Mahy contravenes the convention that places females as obstacles in the plot space of quest narratives. The one character who is obviously rendered immobile is Jacko. The obstacle to his mobility comes from another male – Carmody Braque. Maternal presence is not problematic for the daughter who manages to go through growth and change processes with the aid of mother figures, rather than being hindered by them. Laura taking on the role of saviour further highlights this, and further reinforces the argument that Mahy's maternal works (largely) within a female economy and not a maternal/paternal dichotomy.

It is the threat of death that surrounds Jacko which serves as a thematic link between the two families in the text. After Laura recognises Sorry as a Witch she seeks his assistance to save Jacko. It is significant that both the families are grouped in threes, with no father figure present in either household. Raburn (1992, p.29) states:

> The number three often appears as a feminine motif, and Mahy uses it lavishly. Laura's little brother, Jacko, is three years old. The family's social status was lowered three years before the story begins, when divorce made the family poor. Laura is interested in a boy at school named Sorensen (Sorry) Carlisle. The wealth of his three-member family contrasts sharply with the poverty of her family of three.

The mother/daughter relationship in the Carlisle household is significant in regard to genealogy. Sorry's mother and grandmother as Witches had expected

that Miryam's child would be a daughter to complete the female trinity of maiden, mother and crone. Miryam explains (pp.90-91):

> "We work best as a trio, you see," she explained, "as the three female aspects."
>
> "I was the old woman," Winter said.
>
> "And I was to be the mother and my daughter the maiden." Miryam sat back again. "I thought that if I had a child it would certainly be a daughter. We have had daughters for fifty years — never a son in all that time. All the time I was expecting my baby, I spoke to it as if it were a daughter — promising her the valley — but as you know, I had a son."

The initial shock of having a boy child is devastating for Miryam and she rejects her baby (p.91): "I am not a motherly woman and, when I thought of my son I felt quite trapped." Miryam's claim that she is "not a motherly woman" is another example of how Mahy undermines stereotypical representations. Witches are often associated with nature, nurture and a "natural" maternal instinct. Miryam is not shown to possess these qualities. She is a non-maternal educated middle-class woman whose supernatural powers are not easily discernible (p.69):

> Sorry's nature, when she first saw him, had been almost flamboyant in its declaration, but his mother and grandmother were softer and more secret. The faces of the witches looked out through their own faces as if through masks of grey lace.

Due to Miryam's lack of maternal instinct Sorry, from the age of one month, is fostered to the nuclear family that also, eventually, rejects him. He stays there until he suffers violent abuse at the age of fifteen.

When considering the family structures in the novel what is discernible is the destabilising of the phallocratic model mentioned by Lucas. The nuclear family is undermined within the narrative. Martha Fineman maintains that the nuclear family is an institution that recreates patriarchy and links motherhood with marital status. She argues (1995, pp.147-148):

> The nuclear family is "natural" – it is assumed. The dominance of the idealized sexual family in social and legal thought has restricted real reform and doomed us to recreate patriarchy.
>
> As a result and in spite of the real and perceived ideological shifts in what is socially and legally considered to be an acceptable family formation, single motherhood can comfortably continue to be considered deviant. It is deviant simply because it represents the rejection of the primacy of the sexual connection as the core organizing familial concept. In fact, the threat in its practice is implicit in the language we use to discuss the status. The very label "single mother" separates some practices of motherhood from the institution of "Mother" by reference to the mother's marital situation. Mother, as constructed and defined in the discourses about "single" mothers, is modified by her relationship (formal and legal) to the father—she is single. By contrast, the institution of motherhood when practiced in its "normal" form is not analogously modified. No one speaks of a "married mother"—the primary connection of husband and wife is assumed in the unadorned designation of "Mother."

In *The Changeover* there is little evidence that the "natural" nuclear family provides a sound or solid base from which to raise children. Kate is divorced from her children's father; Miryam planned not to know the identity of Sorensen's father and Sorry's foster-family fails him. It is also pertinent to consider that neither Kate nor Miryam are called "single mothers", thus Mahy avoids labelling these women according to their (non) marital status. Consequently Kate and Miryam are not presented as deviants.

Miryam's reasons for having Sorensen fostered are related to his sex and her lack of "natural" maternal instinct. Had the child been a girl, (the maiden figure of the female trinity) Miryam would have kept her and willingly assumed the role of "single" mother. Instead, her son is sent to live with a predominantly male family – father, mother and brothers – for Sorry they are a pseudo-sexual-natural family. Winter (p.92) describes the family to Laura, "It was almost like a story-book home...a wonderful, motherly mother, all the cake tins filled with home baking, kind father, such a dependable man, and four brothers..." Yet, this kind father and "motherly" mother eventually fail Sorry. Within this "natural" family structure, Sorry encounters violent abuse

from his surrogate father (p.115), "he gave m-me the m-most terrific hiding he'd ever g-given me. I mean he was a really b-big man and he b-beat me up." Not only does he beat the boy but he also locks in him a cupboard. Sorry's Witch nature, his capacity to perform magic, gives him the ability to escape from the cupboard. What is pertinent here is the fact that the violence perpetrated on the boy is child abuse, and no one, not even his "motherly" foster-mother, intervenes. Boss (cited in Dwyer and Strang, 1989, p.2) states:

> There are many legal and operational variations in the definition of child abuse, which makes it currently impossible to provide reliable, consistent national data on incidence. However, all definitions refer to the physical or psychological damage caused to the child by the abusive behaviour of others, or the failure to protect a child from such damage. Most commonly, the categories of abuse cover physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect.

What is relevant is the reference to "abusive behaviour from others or the failure to protect a child". At fifteen Sorry is still legally a child, a child who was not protected. He carries the psychological and emotional scars of these events but he does not blame his foster parents. He displays a maturity beyond his years in his comprehension of their circumstances. In *The Changeover* the abuse the boy suffers, whilst not condoned, is somewhat glossed over. That is, the novel is a product of its time (the early eighties) as the narrative position on child abuse indicates that it is forgiven and, to an extent, ignored. In the 1989 *Violence Against Children* Report cited above, Duncan Chappell argues that "Violent behaviour of this kind has only relatively recently been seriously dealt with, although children have been the object of violence and exploitation for centuries." In the early 1980s child abuse was not seen as a major social, cultural and feminist concern. It was a marginal issue that was just beginning to be addressed. By the 1990s child abuse and, significantly, child sexual abuse was seen as a major concern. Chapters Two and Four of this thesis, on Isobelle Carmody's *Greylands* and

Margo Lanagan's *Touching earth lightly,* also contain instances of abuse. In *Greylands* the abuse is related retrospectively and is not addressed as a concern of the 1980s or the 1990s. *Touching earth lightly* addresses the impact of sexual abuse. This latter novel offers a different narratorial position to that of *The Changeover.* The abuse in Lanagan's text is located within a family, who although a "sexual-natural" family, are presented as entirely "other" and dysfunctional. The notion of blame can be attributed to this family. Mahy is more reticent to so resolutely lay the blame.

Towards the end of the narrative Sorry explains to Laura why he reads the romance novels that she much maligns (p.206):

> "My other mother," he said. "I missed her for ages. I still miss her. Many times I've wished I could see her again, but there you are – she loved babies, not grown-up, shaving men, and besides it all got so terrible. There's no way she can ever think of me except as something that didn't work out and filled her life with trouble. So I used to read romances just to – to keep in touch with her, I suppose. And they're quite interesting in their way. I know they're awful, but they're so popular there must be something in them that women find irresistible. Something like catnip. If I could work out what it was, and isolate it, I'd be irresistible too."

Sorry's foster-mother is the woman who "mothered" him for the first fifteen years of his life, but she is also the woman who allowed him to be brutally beaten and locked in a cupboard. The reasons behind this are not examined in the narrative. Perhaps the love she provided for him as a young child outweighs (in his mind) her lack of intervention. It is conceivable that she felt powerless against her physically large and increasingly drunken husband (p.114). Fear for her own safety could partially explain, although not condone her lack of intervention. Nevertheless Sorry's foster mother's lack of intervention causes her fall from grace, from what Bird (1989, p.41) would argue is "a good nurturing mother to a bad destructive mother". The category of "good" mother is a construct of patriarchal society that puts enormous pressure on the mother to conform to particular behaviours, related to care

and nurture. As Tronto (1996, p.143) argues, "caring involves thoughtfulness, deliberation and good judgement." When considering the rights of the child the notion of "good judgement" becomes paramount. It was the foster-father, however, who did not display "good judgement" when he beat the boy entrusted to his care. He becomes a "bad" father, but as the script for fathers is not so restrictively prescribed, his behaviour (whilst appalling) is justified by Sorry when he states (pp.116-117), "'I think life got like to be a war for him... Tim managed really well in a certain setting, but being out of work put one part of his mind into a state of constant despair...'" Thus his lack of employment serves to, partially at least, account for his actions. The foster mother has no such excuse. Ironically her slippage to that of "bad" mother came about because of the actions of her husband. He beat the boy and she failed to stop him. In this instance the power of the patriarch is intact.

Taking up Raburn's point that three is often a feminine motif, it is fitting that Sorry returns to his "maternal origins" when he is fifteen, a multiple of three. When he returns to his mother and grandmother, he fully realises that he is indeed a Witch – although his adoption of this "Witch nature" is not unequivocal. He returns to his mother's and grandmother's home a battered and dispirited boy looking for love and guidance. He hopes to find it from his birth mother. His return, however, is met with some consternation. Miryam explains to Laura (p.93):

> "And then for the first time I realized that this shattered boy — he was fifteen then — was all that I had planned in the first place: a true child of power." She shook her head, less at Laura than at Winter, sharing a memory that could not be described.

Miryam and Winter are acutely aware that Miryam's lack of "maternal instinct" and the rejections that Sorry has endured may lead to his misusing his power – his genetic inheritance of Witchcraft. Miryam and Winter are mindful that

they must provide a safe and secure home for Sorry as (p.94), "Sorensen is very much a broken-down car himself, none of us can tell how badly broken." Due to the Carlisle family's wealth Miryam can adopt the role of "single mother" without having to work outside the home, unlike Kate who must work to support her children. What is pertinent in relation to Miryam is that she was never married. She completely "buys out" of the "natural/nuclear" family structure mentioned by Fineman. Mahy presents the structures of the Chant and Carlisle families as both "normal" and "natural" for the inhabitants. Miryam has no desire for a male partner and thus does not have one. Nevertheless, what is significant is Mahy's privileging of the biological mother. She is not portraying examples of the sexual-natural family as "normal" but she is locating the children in the homes of their biological mothers. This mother is privileged – whether married or single. By the end of the novel, Kate has decided to remarry. The impending marriage does not however diminish the status of the "single" mothers in the text. Rather it demonstrates the evolution of Kate's character, as an individual rather than an ideological position.

Kate's and Laura's interpersonal relationship shifts throughout the course of the narrative. In the early stages of the text, Kate is clearly reliant on Laura to take on some mothering and nurturing roles for Jacko, when Kate herself is unavailable. Kate reminds Laura of this (p.5):

> "Write a note on Thursday?" cried Kate coming out from under the bed, brushing dust from her palms. "You must be crazy, Laura! I need you too much on Thursdays. It's late-night tonight, and who'd collect Jacko, take him home, give him his supper and read him a story? No notes on Thursdays and that's final."

Laura requests the note in direct response to the warning and the warping of her reflection. Kate, who has limited understanding of the situation for Laura

and little time to delve deeper, reminds Laura of the practicalities of her *working* mother's day. A day in which she, Laura, has an important role to play. On this particular morning of warnings she must go out into the world. A world that is (p.6) "breathing a hot and wolfish breath at her". It is a world which is predatory and, with the influence of Carmody Braque, parasitic. The temporality of this world is such that it will shift and sway in ways that Laura has no control over. Laura does begin to take control though when she comprehends that she must act as a saviour to rescue Jacko from Braque's insidious power.

Early in the novel Mahy hints that Kate is not to be cast in the role of saviour, as it is suggested that she is the one who requires liberation. Kate is not overtly limited by her relegation to interior spaces (home, car, bookshop) but she is subtly coupled with a Cinderella analogy (p.2):

> "I can't have driven home in just one," she was saying. "I'd have noticed everytime I changed gear."
>
> "Lost shoe!" announced Jacko...

Cinderella lost her shoe when she escaped from the drudgery of her interior domestic duties. She was escaping victimisation, monotony and poverty. Kate differs from Cinderella in that her status as worker is a financial necessity, but Mahy does not imply that this is too much of a bind for her. However, it is not a role that can be divorced entirely from her role as mother. Having to provide for her children requires her to work. Yet her life is not drudgery, like Cinderella's, but it is filled with responsibility, responsibilities that Kate would like (adult) relief from. What the lost shoe refers to in this novel is a sexual Cinderella figure. Walker (1988a, p.54) states, "Many sources identify shoes with female sexuality." A missing shoe implies that sexual activity is absent from a female character's life. This is the case with Kate.

Sexualisation of female characters in adolescent fiction is a tricky business. How much sex, how many partners, who has sex with whom and why, are viewed as sensitive issues in texts for teenage readers. It appears, also, that presenting sexually active mother figures is rare in children's literature. In addition to this the roles of mothers and motherhood have been diminished by restrictive representations of maternal figures. Diana Beere (1998, p.16) argues:

> A review of other relevant research indicates that, in the fictional narratives made available to Australian children and adolescents throughout this century, 'motherhood' has typically been represented in limited and highly conventional terms — as virtually synonymous with 'womanhood' and as the expression of supposedly natural feminine capacities to love and nurture... they [mothers] are assumed to neither have nor want any separate identities because, as women, they are 'instinctively' inclined to nurture and to take pleasure in merging their own interests with those of their children.

Mahy undermines this assumption through Miryam, as she is not inclined to nurture. She is not however consistently presented as a "bad" mother due to her lack of maternal instinct. She is presented (on the whole) positively, that is she is not really criticised for her initial rejection of her son. Furthermore, Kate is shown to want to develop an identity that is not reliant on her status as mother. The conflation of woman with mother is problematic, as it does not allow the mother to take up a subject position as a (desiring) woman in her own right. Heather Scutter also suggests that living mothers are often presented as mentally inept in much fiction for teenagers. She (1999, p.201) states:

> In the few texts which keep mum as a living presence, she is inscribed with eccentricity, stupidity and vacancy. Present mums are valorised only if they have absent minds.

The main mother figures in *The Changeover*, Kate, Miryam and Winter are not eccentric, stupid or vacant; rather they are active, involved and aware. Sorry's foster mother is presented as actively involved when he was a young child. However, as previously mentioned, her lack of intervention into Sorry's violent

abuse tends to present her as either unaware or uninvolved at this latter stage. While not necessarily having an "absent mind" she can be read as an absence when Sorry needed her to be a presence. Her mothering is an example of the "good" mother who fails to successfully continue in this role. Ultimately she becomes the neglectful mother. Sorry's mothering must now come from his birth mother. Whilst she is not a "naturally" maternal woman she is presented as a figure that is both a "bad" and a "good" mother. Fostering him as a young baby, especially when she has the economic and social means to care for him, is sufficient grounds to place her in the "bad" category. However, her welcoming him back combined with her awareness of his need for support and psychological help (she takes him to a psychotherapist Witch p.119), places her in a "becoming good" category. Miryam is presented as a mother who becomes quietly considerate. Winter describes the family as (p.101), "a fond family rather than a loving one, so consideration is doubly important." The variety of mother figures in the text suggests that the statement from Beere regarding the representation of mothers in fictional narratives is challenged in *The Changeover.* Making Kate sexually active contributes to a reconfiguring of static and stereotypical representations of mothers and mothering.

Kate ceases to be just a mother figure, albeit one who works. As Luce Irigaray (1993, p.63) suggests, "A woman's subjectivity must accommodate the dimensions of mother and lover as well as the union between the two." Laura is initially unable to perceive her mother as a mother and a lover. She sees her mother having sex with the recently acquired friend – Chris Holly – as a transgressive act. In retaliation Laura offers herself to Sorry. He has made his sexual desire for her apparent on many occasions. This time, however, Sorry

refuses Laura's advances as her intentions are tied up with her mother, not with him. Sorry is aware of this and his rejection of her is a moment of reckoning for Laura (p.120):

> Perversely enough, Laura now found she was really longing for Kate once more, as if by offering herself so insultingly to Sorry she had in some way caught up with her mother or got her own back on her. She felt suddenly easier, smiled shakily and let Sorry pull her to her feet. She began to feel free of the gnawing anger that had been eating her.

Laura admits to Sorry that she is jealous of Chris Holly's presence in her mother's life. This acknowledgment of her mother's sexual self is a significant step in Laura's development. When Laura returns it is as daughter to mother, who can now be acknowledged as a mother-with-lover, thus extending the boundaries of the "good" mother category. This also suggests that feminine desire has not been subsumed by the maternal function. Kate is both maternal and sexual. Yet Laura returns to her mother because she wants a maternal, comforting, presence in her life. She needs to re-connect with her own mother before engaging the assistance of symbolic mothers and embarking on the changeover that will alter her forever.

When Laura does return home, Kate endeavours to explain both the complexity of the situation, coupled with the simplicity of her choice to have sex with Chris Holly (p.122):

> "It's the wrong time..." she sighed. "It's the wrong time to say these things. But it's the only time, as it turns out. Everything happens all at once. First I met Chris, then Jacko grew ill, and the two things have run into one another so that they've become part of the same thing. I've got to say things, even though it's the wrong time to say them. Laura, you are a consolation to me, but you can never be an escape, because I feel responsible for you. I have to try and protect you and look after you, and anyway one of the things about sex..." She stopped and began again. "You make me more myself than I want to be, at times, you and Jacko between you. And there are times when people make love that they get a rest from being themselves. Just for a few moments they can become nothing and it's a great relief. That's what I mean by escape. I've been myself, unrelieved, for a long time now and I've loved it, loved being with you and Jacko, even loved work, although I've grumbled so much. But I wanted escape. Chris didn't ask me last night — I asked him."

By inviting Chris Holly to have sex with her, Kate is establishing her own sexual agency. Even if the sex act translates into nothing, it is a significant nothing that allows Kate to rescript herself. When speaking of this scene in the novel Lawrence-Pietroni (1996, p.36) states:

> What might be seen as the supreme act of union, the most meaningful act possible, is in fact an attempt to reach a state of non-signification. Of course, that Kate speaks these words at all indicates that, while the act itself might not hold any fixed and intrinsic meaning, it has a wider, socially imposed significance, which prompts her need to excuse herself to Laura. The sexual act holds no value or meaning itself.

I do not see Kate as excusing herself to Laura. She follows up her explanation by saying (p.123), "I'm sorry if you were upset, but not enough to wish I'd done anything different." What Kate does in the discourse about her reasons for having sex is to attempt to define herself as more than her roles of mother and shop assistant. She is attempting to articulate her sexed identity. The value of the sex act lies in Kate's ability to reclaim an important aspect of herself as a desiring and desirable woman. She does not go into the "mysteries" of sex or how the sex act can be played out differently. What she does is explain to Laura that in *this* instance, sex was used as a means of escape from the everydayness of her life. Kate is now more able to have her own self-representation and become the subject of her own discourse.

Conventional and stereotypical notions of the "mother" are destabilised through the representation of Kate as a sexually desirable and desiring woman. Kate's honesty with Laura about sex helps to break the taboo surrounding the subject of sex. Kate addresses her own reasons for having sex to Laura whilst still speaking to her as a mother to a daughter. This scene is pivotal, as the relationship between Kate and Laura shifts after Laura's acceptance of her mother's sexual self. Laura is more able to view Kate as a woman with needs of her own that are not connected with her children. Kate

has balanced her maternal functions with her own, separate, desires. She says to Laura (p.125) "The day's going to come when you want to be free of me, and it'll be much easier for you if I've...if you don't have to leave me on my own." Kate is showing her awareness of Laura's sexual development and her interest in Sorry. Kate, however, does not encourage a sexual relationship between the two, particularly as Sorry is eighteen whereas Laura is only fourteen. Kate states (pp.209-210):

> "I'll admit," said Kate thoughtfully, "that this thing you've got going with Sorensen Carlisle does worry me. He's too knowing, too – serious. He should have a girlfriend of his own age – and someone else's daughter," she added, grinning rather shamefacedly. "I'd be really tolerant over that. 'Oh well, girls will be girls,' I'd say. But Lolly – for the life of me, I can't be easygoing over you. And you're just too young."

Kate is speaking to Laura as mother to daughter. Even though Laura is given responsibilities in relation to caring for Jacko, Kate is disinclined to suggest that her daughter embark upon a sexual relationship that has its own responsibilities. Laura is legally too young to be in a sexual relationship and Kate, whilst tacitly acknowledging Laura's sexuality, reinforces the legal convention juxtaposed with her own maternal view. Nevertheless, in Jessica Benjamin's terms, Laura and Kate are experiencing mutual recognition. Benjamin (1995, p.2) states:

> Intersubjective theory postulates that the other must be recognized as another subject in order for the self to fully experience his or her subjectivity in the other's presence. This means that we have a need for recognition and that we have a capacity to recognize others in return, thus making mutual recognition possible.

Kate's decision to have sex with Chris Holly causes her to consider her daughter's sexuality. Kate and Laura recognise each other's sexual self.

Laura's return to Kate evokes the notion of mother/daughter mergence and separation as mentioned earlier by Lindsey Tucker. Laura's continued development hinges upon her ability to connect with her mother *and* her

ability to move away from her mother in order to forge an identity of her own — one that is emphatically related to her changeover and her quest for independence. In much fiction for young western adults, the period of adolescence is often associated with an individual's quest for autonomy. John Stephens (1995, p.261) states:

> On the whole, children's literature is preoccupied with the individual, and events are subordinated to character development, exploration of personality and personal growth. This largely accounts for value being placed on complex and convincing (that is, lifelike) characters in fiction (though it is partly still rooted in the old character-setting-theme approach). A common topic is that of the struggle with the transition from child to adult, and particularly the process of defining one's own selfhood in relation to other individuals and to society.

Mahy works within the framework suggested by Stephens and moves beyond it. Her narrative does focus on Laura's personal growth from child to adult but not at the expense of the character development of the adults. Joan Gibbons (1994, p.12) states:

> In her serious novels, Mahy has also developed the relationship between mother and child, showing not only the process of the child growing towards adulthood, but also the continued development of the adults.

Gibbon's statement is an accurate description of some of the interpersonal relationships in the novel. Many of the characters exhibit signs of personal growth and development. In relation to Laura's development, Mahy includes the characteristic struggle for autonomy and parental conflict. This conflict does not cause Laura to mature by breaking away from Kate.

Issues of separation often fall within a Freudian framework, which is one that the novel challenges. Freud's account of development suggests that such separation is of critical importance. According to Elizabeth Grosz, within Freud's oedipal model, it appears that there must be a separation from the mother that serves to reinforce the female's inferior place in society. Grosz argues (1990, p.69):

> For Freud, the girl's oedipus complex is structurally different from and complementary to that of the boy. For her, the oedipus complex involves no rewards, no authority, no compensation for her abandonment of the mother; rather, it entails her acceptance of her subordination. It involves the 'discovery' that what the boy has been threatened with – castration – has already taken place in the girl. He believes that she and the mother are castrated. In her 'recognition' of her narcissistic inadequacy, the girl abandons the mother as a love-object, and focuses her libidinal drives on her father, now recognized as 'properly' phallic. The girl has quickly learned that she does not have the phallus, nor the power it signifies. She comes to accept, not without resistance, her socially designated role as subordinate to the possessor of the phallus, and through her acceptance, she comes to occupy the passive, dependent position expected of women in patriarchy.

Grosz suggests that within the Freudian model the girl comes to occupy the passive and dependent role expected of her; and is subjected to the Law of the Father. It may be argued that there is a *resolution* to the complex when the girl accepts that she is the same as the mother, and adopts the role expected of women within patriarchy. However, I see this argument as flawed, as the daughter is required to accept a passive role that denies her a positive identification with her mother. Once separation from the mother has occurred the daughter enters into an economy of exchange between males. This separation can mean that the daughter has no woman with whom to identify. Grosz (1990, p.182) states:

> Her oedipus complex deprives her of direct access to the maternal body, and a positive evaluation of her sexuality and identity. It erases her potential as an active lover, situating her in a narcissistic, passive position as the love object of an active, phallic male lover. Her earliest - homosexual - attachment must be given up so that she is able to enter the circuits of sexual exchange, her pre-history is erased and her relation to the primal love object, a body similar to her own, is lost.

To confirm and conform to this model the daughter is expected to renounce her attachment to her mother. This means that any positive form of identification with a "like" being is effaced.

Luce Irigaray argues against such thinking that suggests a girl must relinquish her attachment to her mother. She (1993, p.20) states:

> When analytical theory claims that the little girl must give up her love for and of the mother, abandon the desire for and of her mother, if she is to enter into desire for the father, woman is thereby subjected to a normative heterosexuality, common in our societies, but nonetheless completely pathogenic and pathological. Neither the little girl nor the woman needs to give up the love for her mother. To do so is to sever women from the roots of their identity and their subjectivity.

Irigaray's assertion that the girl does not need to give up the love of her mother is significant. In claiming that "normative heterosexuality" is both pathogenic and pathological she links the norm to being capable of producing disease or illness. How the symptoms of illness manifest could be psychological and/or biological. A core problem with psychoanalytical theory is its reliance on viewing sexual normalcy as based on the phallic model and a male libidinal economy. Irigaray advocates a rethinking and a restructuring of this economy in order to consider the desires of the female within a female libidinal economy. In part, this rethinking and restructuring comes from privileging the mother/daughter dyad. In *The Changeover* the relationship between Kate and Laura is one that does allow the daughter access to the maternal body. Laura is not expected to relinquish her attachment to her mother. Laura's jealousy of Chris Holly suggests that it does not follow the classic oedipal model of jealousy of the same sex parent. Laura is not jealous of her mother. Even when she embarks upon a relationship of "normative heterosexuality", Sorry is well aware of the importance of the closeness between mother and daughter (p.203) "you and Kate get on well together". The relationship between Winter and Miryam, also a mother-daughter dyad, is one which privileges the interpersonal relationship between the two women; they share in Irigaray's terms, "a woman-to-woman relationship of reciprocity" (Irigaray in Whitford, ed, 1994, p.50). Their sharing the family home, their belated care of Sorry and their roles in Laura's changeover confirms this. In these mother-daughter

dyads there is evidence of mutual recognition. Yet mutual recognition is often absent in theories of identity as Jessica Benjamin argues.

Benjamin (1988, p.23) suggests, "that the child has a need to see the mother, too, as an independent subject, not simply as the 'external world' or an adjunct of the ego." Benjamin's approach focuses on gender and the notion of intersubjectivity. Importantly, (similar to Irigaray) she recognises the need for female subjectivity that is not based on the phallic model. Benjamin (1988, p.126) states:

> If we are going to discover woman's independent desire – a desire that does not have to be presented by the phallus – we should consider the intersubjective mode where the two subjects meet, where not only the man, but also the woman can be subject.

This suggests a reciprocal arrangement of recognition where all subjects are recognised and the female is not debased in favour of the male. Her intersubjective model places emphasis on the mother/child dyad. She does not argue for a disruption to the mother/child relationship in order for the child to develop a sense of personal identification (see Benjamin 1995 & 1998). According to Benjamin's theories, the girl child does not have to efface the like figure – her mother.

For a girl who is entering her cycle of menarche the effacing of a like figure is a dilemma. Mahy, however, does not efface Kate. Laura is not required to sever her roots with her mother; rather, Laura is permitted to continue her affiliation with her mother and to extend the relationship beyond the parameters within which it had previously been placed. Mahy, by giving Kate a sexual aspect, ensures that Laura perceives her mother as more than just a mother. That is, Kate is seen as encompassing attributes and qualities that are not solely related to nurturing and socialising her children. She is not

simply presented in "limited and conventional terms" (Beere, 1998, p.16). The category of "mother" is extended to include a sexual being. Mahy, by setting up a female-to-female relationship that requires the discussion of the sex act, gives Laura access to her mother's sexual identity. As a result, Laura is able to see her relationship with Kate and, in turn, her relationship with Sorry from a different perspective. She becomes aware of her own sexual self (p.189):

> Somewhere, she thought, there must be a single, unifying principle that would make sense of all this rich variety, and would explain, too, why suddenly the sight of Sorry standing at the school gate that morning had filled her with a soft electricity, exciting but not totally amiable.

This awareness of a sexual self is something that Laura is not entirely comfortable with, as the realm of sexual desire is still relatively unexplored for her. Her perception of her own sexed identity also marks a change in the relationship she has with her mother. Laura's realisation of her own sexual self assists her to comprehend her mother's sexuality.

When considering the implication of notions of relinquishment, what Laura has to give up is the *exclusive* relationship that she has with her mother, one in which Kate is restricted to working and mothering roles only. This does not mean that Laura is denied access to the maternal body; the body is still there for her but the relationship she has with it must alter. It is not to be seen as a site of refuge but a potential site of development. Luce Irigaray (in Whitford, ed. 1994, p.50) states:

> In a sense we need to say goodbye to maternal omnipotence (the last refuge) and establish a woman-to-woman relationship of reciprocity with our mothers, in which they might possibly also feel themselves to be our daughters. In a word, liberate ourselves along with our mothers.

Although not a direct illustration of Irigaray's statement of "woman-to-woman reciprocity", the ways in which Kate is dependent on Laura – especially on Laura's mothering of Jacko – are important considerations. Kate's dependence on Laura to collect Jacko from the caregiver, to feed him and look after him,

does suggest a relationship in which the category of child (in regard to Laura) is destabilised. Consequently the category of mother comes to encompass that of (older) child. Although technically a child in many ways, Laura takes on the role of mother and nurtures and aids in socialising the much younger child. Kate trusts Laura's ability to nurture Jacko competently. Kate as biological mother has the responsibility to ensure that Jacko is nurtured, but she is not necessarily the one to perform that role herself. Jacko's nurturing comes from his mother, his sister and his caregiver. Thus "mothering" becomes a shared pursuit rather than a solitary obligation.

An indication of Kate's and Laura's shared lives is found when, at night, they share the table to work (p.25):

> Kate did her course on one side of the table at home while Laura frowned over her homework on the other... It was cheerful to have someone to work with, and to have time alone with Kate when Jacko was washed and read to and tucked up in bed.

During these nights of study Kate and Laura discuss the past – the time when the children's father lived with them. Kate is candid in her appraisal of the marriage and its breakdown. This candidness suggests an intimacy that is important to both mother and daughter. It forms the basis of their interdependent relationship. In *The Changeover* there is evidence of a more positive identification of self for both Laura and Kate. In Benjamin's terms, Laura is developing the "capacity for mutual recognition" (Benjamin, 1995, p.2). Kate can be an active lover whilst still fulfilling her mothering roles and Laura can be a daughter who identifies with a body similar to her own. As such there is the potential for Laura to, eventually, become an active lover in her own right. Further evidence of this is shown when Laura has completed her changeover. Sorry kisses her and says (p.151):

"The Sleeping Beauty always loves the prince who wakes her. You've had it now, Chant ... no hope for you, I'm afraid."

"I woke myself," Laura said.

Laura is claiming her right to independence and autonomy. If she and Sorry do become lovers, it will be on potentially equal terms. Laura's sexed identity will not be prescribed by either a fairy tale or an oedipal formula.

To embark on her changeover Laura visits the Carlisle family home, *Janua Caeli*. Here Miryam explains the connection between women and imaginative capacities (p.134):

"Sometimes I think all women are imaginary creatures, as Sorry chooses to put it. He doesn't mean that we're simply imagined, you know, but that our power flows out of the imagination, and that's the faculty that makes magicians of all of us. Witches just act upon it with such conviction that their dreams turn into reality. Come with me."

It is at this point in the narrative that the interior setting is doubled, and the notion that interiority is immobilising is both confirmed and contradicted. The contradiction comes via Laura and the confirmation via Jacko. Thus there is a reversal in the stereotyping of gendered space. Laura is physically located inside (the bathroom) and she is to be taken inside herself to her psychic space. The notion of psychic space is reiterated by her psychically connecting with Jacko just before she begins her inner journey. Jacko is contained in a world-within-a-world; he is coma-like and very near death in his hospital bed. Time and space are meaningless in this netherland between life and death. Laura attempts to make contact with him (p.141):

Jacko did not call her. He floated in his hospital womb, tied to life by wires and tubes, devoured from within by the ravenous lemure.

The use of the word "womb" implies that the hospital has been attributed a maternal function. However, it is neither nurturing nor nourishing. The interior space of the hospital is a metaphorical mother figure that can only guess at the nature of the child's illness and consequently provide only the

illusion of being beneficial. It is a womb space that is flawed. In keeping with Tucker's description of maternal presence, the hospital womb is most definitely an obstacle to movement. It does not seem able to bring forth life; it takes the power of the feminine that Laura effectuates after her changeover to give life back to the child.

Laura starts her quest in the company of (the mother) Miryam who says to Laura (p.136):

> "For tonight, this room is a crossways of many lines of space and time," Miryam murmured. "They cross in all of us all the time, these lines, but only the witches and similar people can catch fish on them — strange fish sometimes. Outside, the moon is rising higher — a full moon. You couldn't have chosen a better night, really. I am the Preparer," Miryam went on in a more formal voice, "Sorensen is the Gatekeeper, and Winter will be the Concluder."

In order to access the faculties that will make Laura a magician, she is taken into a ritual space from which she enters the looking-glass. Laura is adorned with silver which Walker (1988a, p.522) suggests, "has long been regarded as the metal of the moon", and clothed in white – representing her status as maiden. In the bathroom (the preparation space) Laura sees the words TAM HTAB – BATH MAT in reverse, further echoing the mirror references early in the narrative, except now Laura is on her way to the other side. She is no longer spectator; she has become an active participant.

As part of the preparation she is given some mulled wine with "the juice of a girl" (p.137) - a drop of her own blood pricked from her finger like Sleeping Beauty and Snow White's birth mother. After drinking this Laura is turned to the mirror by Miryam who says (p.138), "But for the moment — look — it's a wonderful and mysterious thing to be a girl." Here the mystery of the changeover is combined with Laura's sexual maturation; it is a celebration of

the power of the feminine. Laura at this moment is not only Kate's daughter; she becomes the sacred maiden of the mother (Miryam) and the crone (Winter).

During Laura's changeover Mahy reminds us that some folk and fairy tales, that punctuate the narrative, were coming-of-age tales. She further utilises the blood symbolism of *Sleeping Beauty* and associates it with Laura (pp.145-6) "the true path was always marked by a drop of her own blood and she followed it faithfully." It is not an easy or comfortable journey that Laura pursues (pp.146-147):

> ...she shivered and retched on her way through the screaming, writhing briars which now began to drip her own blood on her, streaking the water which came up to her waist.

On *one* level, the use of water and blood suggests the physical process of childbirth. Expulsion of the child is only achieved in a fluid environment that consists of mucous, blood and water. It reflects a path (but certainly not the only path) to her womanhood as a *potential* birth-giving female. The idea of giving birth can also be read metaphorically. I read Laura as not only a maiden figure of the triune deity but also as a mother. A mother who is experiencing herself give birth to herself. This is so she can give life back to Jacko. In a symbolic way she births him. There is also another way to read Laura's journey through the briars. Just as Sorry, as Witch, interrogates the traditional feminine, Laura can be read as interrogating the traditional masculine. She takes on some of the characteristics of the prince, in *Sleeping Beauty* and other similar tales, who stereotypically must chop his way through the briars to arrive at his goal of the (future) princess. Laura must deal with the briars in order to arrive at her goal of saving Jacko; and like a traditional

prince she does get a romantic reward. At the end of the novel she and Sorry are embarking on a romantic relationship.

Laura's internal realm represents an element of all humankind whilst being a creation of her own individual imaginative capacities. She is a figure accessing the collective unconscious of humanity as well as a personifying transcendental individualism. This may seem to suggest somewhat contradictory notions of the subject. Mahy's all-embracing approaches allow for the construction of characters that are a combination of both the liberal humanist subject and the postmodern subject. Terry Eagleton argues that in the late twentieth century we have both the bourgeois humanist subject and the more contemporary postmodern subject. Eagleton (in Waugh, ed. 1992, p.158) states:

> The subject of late capitalism, in other words, is neither simply the self-regulating synthetic agent posited by classical humanist ideology, nor merely a decentred network of desire, but a contradictory amalgam of the two.

Laura's and Sorry's characters (in particular) give support to Eagleton's premise that the subject of late capitalism is a "contradictory amalgam of the two." The combining of both notions of the subject is most evident in Laura after she has completed her changeover and become a Witch. The final stage of her changeover brings the collective, universal and individual forces together in a rebirthing ritual.

Laura gains a (magic) wand and she works her way through the symbolic (re)birth canal (p.151):

> It occurred to her she was being born again and, as this thought formed, the helix took her as if it had come alive. She was held and expelled, moved in a great vice, believing her intransigent head with its burdens of thoughts, dreams and memory must split open, and she came out somewhere in the darkness.

Laura's experience is both corporeal (she suffers from a nosebleed) and conceptual. The boundaries between her interior and exterior realities blur into oneness at the completion of her changeover. The three Witches greet her and after a short while Laura enquires if the changeover worked. In response Sorry shows Laura her mirrored reflection (p.152):

> He turned her gently to the mirror and by candlelight she saw plainly that she was remade, had brought to life some sleeping aspect of herself, extending the forest in her head.
>
> She was no longer formed simply from warring Stephen and Kate, but, through the power of charged imagination, her own and other people's, had made herself into a new kind of creature.

At this time of heightened power, a time when she unconditionally identifies with the Carlisle Witches, Winter gives Laura a stamp that she is to put on her enemy Carmody Braque. The effect on him will be equivalent to his mark on Jacko. Just before Laura invests her stamp with power she looks again in to the mirror and notices the reflections of the Carlisle Witches. She has joined their league and her identity is fused with theirs. This fusion of identity does not serve to restrict or immobilize Laura, instead it opens up possibilities for her. The mirror suggests a spatial construct that in this text does not freeze, fix or entrap those within it. Rather the mirror is a metaphor for psychic emancipation. Laura can now go through the looking-glass at will.

After Laura has named (she calls it Laura) and instructed her stamp, the allusions to fairy tales decrease. Her metamorphosis allows her to operate on a more sophisticated level. When speaking of rebirth Barbara Walker (1990, p.98) suggests:

> Symbolic rebirth may solemnize any moment in life that can be perceived as a spiritual turning point, a resolution to change one's life, a curing of an illness, a breaking out of an uncomfortable situation, or a consolidation of a new membership.

In time Laura manages to achieve all of the above. She does destroy Carmody Braque and cures Jacko's mysterious "illness" and she also breaks out of and away from the uncomfortable relationships that she has with the other males in the text. In order to exorcise Carmody Braque from Jacko's body Laura must take on the role of the triple goddess in her manifold form. That is, she must at the one time be maiden, mother and crone.

The figure of the maternal is especially significant when Laura sets out to destroy Braque. Although she encompasses all the attributes of the triple goddess figure, it is arguably the mother/maternal aspect encompassing characteristics of "self-knowledge, adequate resources and knowledge of the situation" (Tronto, 1996, p.143) that most assist her achieving her goal. That said, when Laura approaches Braque it is as a chaste teenage virgin; he refers to her as (p.161) "my little spring bud." Laura uses this to her advantage, as she pretends to be naively innocent of his evilness. Even though she is, in fact, acutely aware of the extent of his insidiousness, she can see through his façade (pp.161-162):

> But instead she looked into his eyes and saw there, not the curious wolf, not the tiger Sorry sometimes suggested, but something so insatiable that her recognition of it caused the sunlight to falter and the roses, the neat lawn and the expensive house to undergo a transformation. For a moment they became nothing more than a painted screen behind which a dreadful machinery was at work. Not only that, she recognized that this same machinery operated at large in the world, in mixed forms, many of them partial and largely impotent, sometimes tragically married to opposite qualities. On this occasion it was her lot to see it almost pure in the round, bird eyes, in the angle of his head, mirroring the more innocent, but none the less terrible, attitude of a hawk about to tear a live mouse in two, and all she had to combat it was an old ritual of possession which her hard-won new nature enabled her to use. But she knew she must not even think of that, and concentrated urgently on Jacko instead.

Laura's awareness of the forces of corruption that operate in the world displays a maturity that was only hinted at before her changeover. Braque is an example of a flawed "paternal" located in the masculine. Laura's enacting of

the feminine-maternal opposes and destroys the evil evident in this masculine-paternal figure. Thus privileging the maternal but not at the expense of the feminine. Laura becomes both a feminised and a maternalised figure. In order to achieve her goal she concentrates all her energy on Jacko – the child who is both hers and not hers. She is like an over-protective mother wanting to shield and save her child no matter the cost. Braque is intrigued by these complex qualities present in Laura (he realises that she is more complicated than a "little spring bud") and he lets his guard down long enough for her to place her mark on him. She becomes the coloniser, and her hold over Braque is such that that she can quite literally instil the fear of death in him (p.166):

> "What have you done?" he cried. Laura heard, in his changed voice, the first groan of mortality. She knew at once that a gate had opened for her. He could not be private from her any more. Nor could his fingers, closing spasmodically over the picture in his palm, prevent her from following the chemical electricity of this nervous reaction and exploding in his head, where she was immediately powerful. Like a model man he was under her remote control and no matter where he was in the city she could either consume or nourish him. It was so easy it was hard to believe such an ability had not always been natural to her. All the same, her skin crawled and her stomach twisted with horror. She had no mercy to offer. Sorry merely laughed.

Laura has enacted the trickery that was implied by her treacherous reflection at the beginning of the novel. She has become the ultimate trickster and met the treachery of Carmody Braque on its own terms. She only manages to stamp his hand because he extends it to her. He "invited her in" solely because she tricked him into being careless. At this juncture in the narrative Laura embodies all the aspects of the triple goddess figure — creator, preserver, or destroyer — the choice is hers.

Braque, however, knows what her choice will ultimately be and that his existence is ominously fated (p167). Braque attempts to bargain with Laura; he asks her to be reasonable and offers her money. This means little to Laura. She cannot be bought like some commodity. Laura's strength lies in her

awareness of her ability to destroy Braque. Her final enactment of a triple goddess figure (in relation to Braque) is such that she will become the destructive crone figure. In order to save Jacko's life Laura must destroy completely the force of Carmody Braque. In regard to Braque, Laura displays none of the nurturing qualities that are stereotypically associated with Witchcraft. The crone figure can manifest in different forms. In this instance, however, Laura will only draw on her ability to destroy so that her young brother may live.

Once her mark is on Braque, Laura returns to Jacko's hospital "womb" space so she can give symbolic birth to him – give him back his life. He has his birth mother and his rebirth mother at either side of his bed. The latter attempts to connect with him (pp.174-175):

> Then a calm bead of light rose up out of the night and gave her something else to think about, for she had the unconscious support and companionship of Kate. If she opened her eyes she could see her mother on the other side of the bed, leaning forward towards Jacko, quite still and apparently reflective, thinking of the first time she had held Jacko and had fed him, remembering his nose pressed into her breast. Unbound, his new, creased hands had made gentle swooping gestures in the air as if he were inventing a dance. Laura's mind was so mixed with Kate's that the memory seemed entirely her own.

Perhaps this is a textual example of a mother and daughter sharing a woman-to-woman relationship of reciprocity as theorised by Irigaray (in Whitford, ed. 1994, p.50) when she states we need "to establish a woman-to-woman relationship of reciprocity with our mothers, in which they might possibly also feel themselves to be our daughters." The boundaries between mother and daughter are blurred. Laura feels at one with her mother's thoughts. At this moment Laura could be the mother of the child that they both hold so dear. This oneness contributes to Laura's role as rebirth mother for Jacko. She can experience the intensity and magnitude that a birth mother may feel moments after her child is safely delivered. Laura talks to Jacko, she tells him (p.175)

"...you can come out now." Laura is marking the way for Jacko. What she means is, you can be reborn; I am the mother figure who will guide you out of the darkness and back into the loving light of your family – "with promises of stories, family meals with F & C., all the strong, happy routines of everyday life..." (p.176). This family scene suggests harmony and happiness. It is reminiscent of a 1950s or 1960s scene with Mother at home – running the household, and Father at work – running the world. Thus it can be read as a universalising scene based on the sexual-natural family. This scene does differ slightly in that there is no father at work; Kate is the breadwinner in the Chant household. However, her decision to marry Chris Holly, which on the one hand, as previously mentioned, demonstrates her evolution, on the other hand it reinforces the notion of the "sexual-family-as-natural". Although Chris is not the Chant children's biological father, he will become the father that Jacko knows. The erstwhile fatherless child will grow up in a version of the nuclear family. This suggests that Mahy's text does, to a small degree, support universalising and normalising discourses of maternity, where there is a father, a mother and more than one child.

Once Jacko is safe, Laura still has to deal with the remains of Carmody Braque; she can manipulate him at will. Her power is at its height. She can use or misuse it as she pleases. Sorry, as a person well acquainted with misuse of power, suggests to Laura that she is toying with Braque (p.184):

> "Are you playing with your mouse a bit?"
>
> "I want him to suffer," Laura said. "Jacko did. Kate did. I did. He's coming to bits anyway, isn't he?"

Braque's "coming to bits" suggests that his identity, which was illusory anyway, is now completely fragmented. It is up to Laura to decide what to do with this fragmented entity. Sorry's words cause Laura to consider the idea

that cruelty takes someone to suffer and someone to be cruel. Laura does not want to be a "wicked Witch" so she meets with Carmody Braque in order to tell him that he is dead. Here the use of language is especially significant; her voice claims agency for her. Laura cannot remain mute like some of the fairy tale heroines of the internal terrain of her changeover. Her victory depends upon her verbal conveyance of death to the lemure. Here again, the politics of "inviting in" is evoked. In this instance Laura uses it against Braque when she tells him he is "uninvited" (p.191). Laura continues to tell Braque to "go back" until he becomes nothing but a pile of dead leaves enclosed within a suit. Laura tells Braque (p.191) to "Stop pretending to be human. Be what you truly are." This suggests – in reverse – notions of a core or essential self. However, Mahy consistently destabilises this idea through her ambiguous characterisations. My position on this is to argue that Mahy does posit the notion that there is a self that one must be "true" to; nevertheless this self is not necessarily unified or whole. The self can be multiple without destroying the notion of "being true to oneself".

When Braque is finally obliterated, Laura is able to take on the roles that she held before Jacko's illness, that of daughter and of (sometimes) surrogate mother. However, the girl that she has become will never be the girl she was before. Her transformation is not ephemeral – Laura is not empowered temporarily. It is a change that disallows reversal.

Now Laura is able to fully accept her mother's relationship with Chris Holly, and is finally ready to forgive her father for leaving (p.179):

> It no longer seemed to matter that he loved someone else more than he loved her or loved Kate, and in a way she felt, that, like Jacko, she had begun to recover from a secret illness no one had ever completely recognized or been able to cure.

This recognition of Laura's is vital to her development; only by recognizing her anguish and dealing with it can she move on and handle her own life on a more sophisticated level. She has entered into a subjective economy that allows for a refiguring of relationships. The resolution of the narrative offers the potential, in Irigarayan terms, for an "economy based on *subject-subject* relations" (Irigaray 1993, p.196). Within this economy relationships between daughters and mothers and other women-women relationships allow for women to have non-destructive relationships with men. Irigaray (1993, pp.196-197) argues:

> We must cease to assume that the daughter must turn away from her mother to obey her father or to love her husband. If a sexual identity is to be built, a genealogical relationship with one's own gender and a respect for both genders are essential. This in turn demands that we establish viable erotic paradigms rather than neutralizing, unrepressing, or desublimating the sexes in the ways we have become accustomed to.

In part Mahy's text demonstrates the importance of the ongoing relationship between mother and daughter. She did not sever the bond between Laura and Kate; rather she allowed the two to continue to engage in a subject-subject relationship. This relationship is similar to that between Miryam and Winter. Women in *The Changeover* are not pitted against each other as rivals for the male prize.

The mirror motif that is so lavishly used throughout the narrative allows for the exploration of Laura's multiple subjectivities, thus subverting the phallocentric bias found in many fairy tales. At the novel's dénouement Laura recognises her own personal growth through her mirrored reflection (p.208), "– and there it was – the very face she had been promised earlier on the day of the warnings. Was it possible to be in love with someone who was trying not to have a true heart?" This is the mature and more knowing Laura who recognises herself and her capacity for exploring her sexual self. Laura's new

identity will continue to be formed through her ability to understand the complexities of interpersonal relationships. In Benjamin's terms Laura has developed the "capacity for mutual recognition" (1995, p.2).

Laura's new identity is a composite mixture of who and what she was before the changeover, combined with the Witch-woman she has become since the changeover. She is a daughter-figure who has effectively given (re)birth to her young brother and to herself. The growth that Laura achieves is both internal and external. By becoming a Witch she now has access to her internal imaginative terrain in ways that had not been possible before the changeover. She is much more able to comprehend Sorry's world because she is now an active participant in it. Her identity is as both mother and daughter but the maternal identity that she adopted to save Jacko is one that she will call on only when necessary. She is mature enough to understand that her roles are fluid; she can be who she needs to be at any given time.

The end of the novel sees Laura as a daughter, a teenage girl exploring the province of teenage love. She appears to be unified and whole. Her characterisation is, in fact, far more complicated than this. As Carmody Braque was the negative embodiment of the (masculine) postmodern subject, Laura is the positive embodiment (with a humanist slant). Humanist in the sense that she has depth, agency and continuity and postmodern in the sense that she can dissolve her inner and outer realities and distort her identity. By becoming a Witch she has entered into a league that is marginalised. The marginalisation, however, does not serve to repress her. She has the capacity to go through the looking-glass; the mirror will never fix or contain her. She has the ability to manifest herself in a number of different guises.

The Changeover is a novel about reconnection and reconciliation. Laura's personal quest not only allows her to reconnect with her father and to reconcile herself to her mother's relationship with Chris Holly; it also paves the way for the Carlisle Witches' to reconcile their past mistakes. Miryam can enter into an intersubjective relationship with her son, in order to build a more positive affiliation with him. They too can engage in mutual recognition. In *The Changeover* the categories of mother and daughter have been destabilised. Laura saved her younger brother by embarking on a quest that allowed her access to other realms and realities. By taking up the challenge Laura was able to adopt numerous roles and to move freely between them. She acted as a surrogate mother to Jacko and as the mother or preserver figure of the triune deity, as well as adopting other triple goddess roles. The merging of Kate's and Laura's minds (p.175) is symbolic of many of the new patterns of mergence that are articulated by the novel's end.

In relation to models of maternity, the novel, generally, challenges universalising and normative models. There is Miryam who is single by choice, Kate who divorces, then remarries (both by choice) and Laura who enacts a number of maternal roles. Motherhood is privileged within the novel as mothers are presented as central figures in the raising and well-being of their children. Miryam entered into a "becoming good" category because of her changed attitude towards her son, Kate manages to be both a sexual being and a maternal figure and Laura enacts a number of maternal roles. Sorry's foster mother becomes a "bad" mother when she fails to assist him (but as mentioned the abuse is partially forgiven). Although there are instances of normative and universalising models of maternity – such as when Laura is guiding Jacko back into the world – they are not presented as restricting

(homogeneous) roles for women. Rather maternity/motherhood is presented in a number of ways, which serve to allow the mother figures a sense of self-identification. The fragmented family is presented as a site for reconciliation, rather than a battleground for wounded and revengeful souls. The nuclear family is not privileged although the biological mother is. In this novel marital status takes a secondary role to that of interpersonal relationships between mothers and children. *The Changeover* offers a certain resistance to models of maternity based on universalising theories. That said, the mothers are white and they do have degrees of economic security. In this way the dominant discourse of western society is perpetuated, but not at the expense of alternative models of (western) maternity. Male desire (although present in the text, especially via Sorry) does not take precedence over female desire, and female desire has not been subsumed by the maternal. In this way the text reconfigures the phallogocentric economy within "a culture of the female" (Irigaray, 1996, p.47). The mirror motif so prevalent in the novel acts as the means by which Laura explores identification of self(s), which includes a maternal subjectivity. On the whole the mother figures in this novel are presented as "subjects-in-process" (Lucas, 1998, p.39) who grow and change not only according to the needs of their offspring, but also, importantly, according to their own needs and desires.

The maternal features of this novel are employed as a means of comparison in the following chapters, in order to examine the extent to which the presentation of mothers may have evolved since the 1990s.

The mirror motif and the motif of reconciliation along with the destabilising of fixed notions of self are present in Isobelle Carmody's novel *Greylands,* which is the subject of the following chapter.

Don't remain caught between the mirror and this endless loss of yourself. A self separated from another self. A self missing some other self. Two divided selves distanced from each other, with no ties binding them. The self that you see in the mirror severed from the self that nurtures.

Luce Irigaray - *And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other* (p.64).

Chapter Two: *Greylands* by Isobelle Carmody.

This reading of *Greylands* (1997) examines the oxymoronic position of the mother as an absent present figure. The mother is dead but her presence permeates the narrative from (p.1) "The Beginning" through to (p.172) "The End". Her character evokes the double or doppelgänger figure. The double in this text is complicated because the mother's double is her child self; and the mother is presented as internally split or fragmented. The mirror motif is present in relation to the mother and her son Jack. For Jack the mirror acts as the means by which he accesses the greylands of the title. By doing so he discovers much about his mother's life, and he recounts this in the form of a story. Initially he displays little understanding of his mother's past and how this impacted upon her present. Jack's younger sister Ellen is, however, granted some insight into the mother's past. Arguably Ellen has an intersubjective relationship with her mother. Jessica Benjamin (1995, p.2) states:

> Intersubjective theory postulates that the other must be recognized as another subject in order for the self to fully experience his or her subjectivity in the other's presence. This means that we have a need for recognition and that we have a capacity to recognize others in return, thus making mutual recognition possible.

Ellen recognises her mother as a subject, and arguably the mother recognises Ellen as a subject. An intersubjective relationship between mother and daughter was not, however, accorded to the mother during her formative years. The mother's relationship with her mother was such that the child was

not acknowledged. As a consequence, she found it difficult in Benjamin's (ibid) words to "experience... her subjectivity".

The concepts of identity and subjectivity are important to consider in relation to the mother. Robyn McCallum (1999, p.3) argues:

> The ideological frames within which identities are formed are inextricably bound up with ideas about subjectivity-that sense of personal identity an individual has of her/his self as distinct from other selves, and as being capable of deliberate thought and action.

The mother had not formed a sense of identity that allowed her to be consistently capable of deliberate thought and action. Her identity was marred by a lack of love and parental neglect from an early age. It seems that no one valued her, thus making it difficult for her to value herself.

Throughout this chapter the mother, as an adult, will be referred to by the generic term "the mother". In the novel the children refer to her as "Mama" and the narrator (not Jack) refers to her as his/her mother or their mother. When Jack meets his mother as her child-self in the realm of the greylands, although unaware of who she is, he names her Alice, from which the mother's name Lissa is a derivative. She, however, is rarely referred to by this name. The generic term "mother" suggests that her identity is based upon the relationship that she has with her children. She is not presented as an agentic subject, as Kate Chant is; rather she is presented as a maternal function - a flawed one.

The mother's self is presented as fragmented and socially and culturally inscribed - arguably a postmodern subject. However, unlike Laura Chant, the mother is unable to access her multiple subject positions so as to operate as an agentic subject. Jonathon Culler (1997, p.46) suggests that agency "is the

question of how far we can be subjects responsible for our actions and how far our apparent choices are constrained by forces we do not control." As a child the mother was unable to "control" the way her parents treated her, and her choices were limited. As an adult the mother was responsible for her actions but her ability to enact the role of a "good" mother was impacted upon by the way she was mothered. Her fragmentation of self was a source of personal anxiety (p.32), "'I'm a bad mother and a bad wife. I warned you!'" In part her "bad" mothering comes from the disunity of her subjectivity, which is revealed through both her selves - the adult and the child-self double. Thus the category of mother is impacted upon by the category of child not only because the mother has her own children, but also because she is both adult and child within the narrative.

Sigmund Freud (1919/1973, pp.234-235) argues:

> The theme of the 'double' has been very thoroughly treated by Otto Rank (1914). He has gone into the connections which the 'double' has with reflections in mirrors, with shadows, with guardian spirits, with the belief in the soul and with the fear of death...

In *Greylands* the mother is associated with mirrors, spirits and death. Her death is the result of a fall after being in a mirror maze. Her child-self summons Jack into the greylands through a mirror. Jack's entry into another realm provides him with knowledge of his mother's life. Her past is a dimension of absence in his present. The mother as an absent presence can be equated with Freud's theories of the uncanny. Rosemary Jackson (1982, p.64) explains:

> Freud begins with a fairly wide definition. 'The *uncanny*...is undoubtedly related to what is frightening - to what arouses dread and horror... it tends to coincide with what excites fear in general' (p219). He proceeds to a more particular theory, reading the uncanny as the effect of projecting unconscious desires and fears into the environment and onto other people.

The mother when in the greylands projects her fears onto this environment and onto Jack. Both the real world and the greylands can be read as unhomely, and this is linked to the notion of the uncanny in relation to its origins in German. Ken Gelder & Jane Jacobs (1998, p.23) explain:

> In brief, Freud elaborates the 'uncanny' by way of two German words whose meanings, which at first seem diametrically opposed, in fact circulate through each other. These two words are: *heimlich*, which Freud glosses as 'home', a familiar or accessible place; and *unheimlich*, which is unfamiliar, strange, inaccessible, unhomely. An 'uncanny' experience may occur when one's home is rendered somehow and in some sense unfamiliar; one has the experience, in other words, of being in place and 'out of place' simultaneously.

Arguably, Jack could be thought of as looking for an authentic home. His home in the real world is full of silences and grief and thus is rendered unhomely and unfamiliar, whereas the greylands, which is literally unhomely and unfamiliar, provides the necessary means for Jack to address the unhomeliness in his real world. This unhomeliness would have been felt by the mother as a child when she was told (p.135) to be unseen and unheard - a present absence. Jack's moving between the two realms allows him to acknowledge and face up to the fears and desires that cause his anxiety, and in fact, fuel his quest for some truths about his mother. Jane Marie Todd (1986, p.520) argues, "The *Unheimliche*, then, is first of all a *re*appearance of material from childhood that has been repressed." What the mother repressed comes to the fore when she (as her child-self) summons Jack into the greylands. That which had remained obscured from Jack is, eventually, revealed to him.

In *Greylands* constructions of motherhood are based upon normative models of maternity with a focus on the "good"/"bad" binary; all the mother figures display negative and/or destructive tendencies. The families presented are examples of Fineman's (1995, p.145) "sexual-family-as-natural". The mother

lived with her biological parents and Jack and Ellen live with their biological parents - when their mother is alive. Mothering in *Greylands* is not synonymous with care or nurture. The representations of the mother figures do little to challenge the binary or to posit a more positive reconfiguration of the role of the "mother"; dominant (negative) cultural constructs of maternity are still in place.

The construction of the narrative is such that Jack occupies both a subject and an authorial position in the text. Jack writes the mother's story, further complicating the mother's subject position. In regard to occupation of space the mother occupies both child and adult spaces, yet she is presented as a displaced person in both realms.

In the previous chapter on *The Changeover*, it was noted that the mirror acts as a metaphor for psychic emancipation. This emancipation leads to regeneration for Laura Chant that, in turn, impacts positively on the characters, excluding Laura's nemesis Carmody Braque. The mirror provides a means for Laura to enact a (m)other self. Laura learns to destroy in order that life continues. Jack too learns of destruction, although in his case he does not enact it. For Jack, as for Laura, the mirror acts as a means to access another realm. His journeys through the mirror lead to an acquisition of knowledge that, in turn, leads to regeneration for him and his father and sister. However, in the case of Jack's mother the mirror acts as a site of incarceration. Lindsey Tucker (1994, p.6) suggests that there is a literary and cultural tradition that connects women with mirrors:

> The mirror is another, and far more complex, spatial construct that a number of women writers appear attracted to, mainly because it is a space in which concerns regarding the female subject, the double, and the gaze can be critiqued and subverted. Given women's longstanding cultural

associations with the mirror and the privileging of the visual in Western culture, this interest in what has come to represent another form of entrapment is not surprising.

The mirror is most certainly a form of entrapment for the mother. She is extremely reluctant to observe herself in a mirror as it reflects back to her a self that she does not want to confront. Entrapment and not wanting to confront oneself are synonymous in the case of the mother. The reasons for this feeling of entrapment will be explored within this chapter.

In *Speculum of the Other Woman* Luce Irigaray argues that the female construction of identity is based on a masculine model. Irigaray challenges the dominant model of identity by arguing for changes in the ways "woman" is articulated. She suggests that the male ego needs the female to value it. Irigaray (1985, p.54) states:

> Now, if this ego is to be valuable, some "mirror" is needed to reassure it and re-insure it of its value. Woman will be the foundation of this specular duplication, giving man back "his" image and repeating it as the "same." If an *other* image, an *other* mirror were to intervene, this inevitably would entail the risk of mortal crisis. Woman, therefore, will be this sameness-or at least its mirror image-and, in her role of mother will facilitate the repetition of the same, in contempt for difference.

Irigaray is referring to Lacan's use of "the flat mirror [that] reflects the greater part of women's sexual organs only as hole." (Irigaray, 1985, p.89). The flat mirror fails to reflect the specificity of women's sexuality. This is why she advocates the use of "an *other* mirror", a curved mirror or a speculum. Then, and only then, would the possibility arise to conceptualise and formulate a discourse that addresses, specifically, female (psychosexual) subjectivity. However, Irigaray suggests that this type of thinking and reconceptualising of the female would result in a crisis (for phallocratic culture). Irigaray is cognisant of the fact that sexual difference needs to be elaborated in totally new and different ways in order to challenge phallocratic models. She (1985a, p.78) states:

> In other words, the issue is not one of elaborating a new theory of which woman would be the *subject* or *object*, but of jamming the theoretical machinery itself, of suspending its pretension to the production of a truth and of a meaning that are exclusively univocal.

Irigaray's concerns in *Speculum of the Other Woman* and *This Sex Which Is Not One* are (amongst other things) to draw attention to the way that "woman" is constructed to reinforce the dominance of "man" in patriarchal culture. She wants "woman" to be free from her one-dimensional position, in order that all voices be heard. Until there is a restructuring of patriarchy and phallocratic dominance women will, when they mother, assist in maintaining the status quo.

This premise is significant in regard to the mother in *Greylands* and her relationship with her parents. The mother's voice is not heard and she finds it difficult to privilege her own visual image. The mother is told (p.135), "Bad children are invisible." Thus she functions as a form of absence, a child who is neither seen nor heard. Her lack of positive self-identity stems from her relationship with her parents, who both neglect her needs. Importantly, however, in terms of mother-daughter relationships is the fact that she is not bestowed any maternal love. The mother's mother enacts the role of phallic mother within patriarchal society. In Irigarayan terms the mother's mother has perpetuated hegemonic, phallocratic discourse by showing "contempt for difference." The mother's girl-self is silenced by both her parents but, arguably, the silencing and ignoring of the child by the mother is more damaging.

Karen Horney suggests that people suffering from neuroses often experienced traumatic early mother-child relationships. Horney (1967, p.254) argues:

> The early history of these persons shows indeed that they did not get enough love and warmth from their mothers... the neurotic need for love is the expression of a persistent longing for the love of a mother, which was not freely given early in life. (Ellipsis added).

The early mother-child relationship is significant as it is (usually) the first interpersonal relationship for the child. Whilst it may be an ambivalent relationship for the new mother, this ambivalence does not, typically, result in a complete lack of bonding between mother and child. However, if bonding is absent the child may not develop a strong sense of self-identity.

Western cultural ideologies maintain that children's needs are met primarily by mothers. The mother is the means by which the child learns to read the world. D.W. Winnicott (1971, p.111) states, "In individual emotional development the precursor of the mirror is the mother's face." Similarly, Roland Barthes (1990, p.168) argues:

> The gratifying Mother shows me the Mirror, the Image, and says to me: "That's you." But the silent Mother does not tell me what I am: I am no longer established, I drift painfully, without existence.

Arguably Jack and Ellen's mother is adrift with no positive sense of self. Winnicott (1971, p.113) suggests that the baby whose mother is an inadequate mirror "will grow up puzzled about mirrors and what the mirror has to offer." On the one hand, these theories of maternity conflate woman with mother and they place the mother under enormous pressure to be a "good-enough" mother, who will provide her child with the "right" start in life. The mother who does not bond with her child in the appropriate way is therefore negligent. On the other hand a young child does need to bond with *someone* in order to develop positive self-identification. Traditional discourses of maternity do not advocate that the father (or any other male) bonds with the child early in life to ensure healthy psychological development. Such views are located within phallocratic discourse that fails to recognise the specificity of "woman". Thus it

is difficult for a mother to be a subject-in-process as she is expected to socialise her child/ren according to dominant cultural discourses. The mother in *Greylands* is placed in a double-negative position as she has no intersubjective relationship with her mother or father. She is unable to find an identification of self from which to proceed.

Understanding the mother's lack of positive self-identity is one of the problems that Jack must tackle in his quest to discover information about his mother's life. In the greylands he eventually learns that his mother did suffer a traumatic childhood (p.171), "'but in the end all the sadness of not being loved when she was little made her sick.'" This knowledge is only revealed to Jack after numerous visits to the greylands. As stated the mother's family structure is in accord with Martha Fineman's (1995, p.145) definition of the "natural" nuclear family, which is "considered to be both ideal and sacred." Yet within the mother's family, as in Sorensen Carlisle's foster-family, there are incidences of child abuse. In *The Changeover* the physical and emotional abuse inflicted upon Sorensen is, as argued, somewhat glossed over. The novel is a product of its time in that child abuse was not as seriously dealt with in the 1980s as it was in the 1990s, and is in the twenty-first century. Although published in 1997, the abuse in *Greylands* is located in an even earlier time period - perhaps the 1950s. In social terms, it is persuasive then that there is no evidence of intervention by "outsiders" in order to modify the parents' behaviour. The abuse occurred "behind closed doors", within the sanctity of the nuclear family.

The mother suffered because she had no one to protect her. The love of her own mother was a constant lack in her life. Horney's argument regarding the

longing for the love of a mother can be applied to the mother in *Greylands*, it could be argued that the source of the mother's suffering came from not having a first love. Luce Irigaray (1993, p.19) states, "...the first body we as women had to relate to was a woman's body and our first love is the love of the mother..." The narrative suggests that the mother had a negative experience of being mothered. Irigaray's (extended) agenda is to promote positive (re)evaluations of the mother/daughter relationship, not to search for areas of mother-blame. Similar to Jessica Benjamin (1995, p.2) Irigaray advocates an "intersubjective relationship between mother and child."

Unfortunately this novel does not convey any positive mother/daughter bonds between the mother and her mother, as the primary source of love is consistently denied. The mother's subjectivity is shaped and constructed within a discourse of neglect coupled with a form of passive domination. I say passive domination, as there is no evidence to verify that she was physically abused or maltreated by her parents. Rather she is ignored, silenced and disregarded. When in the greylands Jack discovers this (p.135):

> 'The child is late,' the man said.
>
> 'Good children should be unseen and unheard, the woman said.
>
> 'Look at me!' Alice demanded.
>
> 'Nobody looks at bad children,' the mother said.
>
> 'Bad children are not seen or heard. Bad children are invisible.'
>
> 'I'm not bad,' Alice whispered. 'You're bad.'
>
> The man opened his paper and began to read it and the woman started to set the table.

The child here is in a no-win situation. If she is a "good" child she will remain out of sight and silent. If she is a "bad" child (which the passage suggests she is) her parents refuse to look at her and listen to her.

Penelope Hetherington (1998, p.2) argues:

> It is during the period of childhood that individuals construct their understanding of the world in terms of their gender identity, their class position and their ethnicity, all of which may be either unequivocal or shot through with ambiguity. It is in this period that personality is formed out of the complex interaction between powerless children and powerful adults.

The mother's construction of her self in the world would be tainted by the lack of acceptance given to her by her parents. Hetherington (ibid) when speaking of the construct of the family asks:

> Under what circumstances does it provide a secure and creative environment for children who will respond positively to other people when they are adults? Under what circumstances does the family become a place of insecurity and violence?

In the case of Jack and Ellen's mother the circumstances for provision of security and creativity were lacking. Her family as a site of socialisation failed to provide her with an environment that nourished her sense of self worth. McCallum (1999, p.3) states, "Concepts of personal identity and selfhood are formed with society, with language and with other people..." In the mother's case her home environment did little to allow her either to use language as a positive means of communication or have any positive interaction with her parents. This led to her linguistic and emotional immobilisation. She was unable to enter into dialogue (and a dialogic relationship) with her parents as they refused to listen to her. Her social inscription was one of powerlessness.

Jack becomes privy to some of the secrets surrounding his mother, and her relative lack of power through his visits to the greylands. He recounts these secrets, and this serves as a form of healing for him and eventually for the father. Jack acts as both an author of the narrative and a character in the text. He mediates the account of the mother's life. In this way he metaphorically inhabits his mother's space. He takes the story of her life and writes it his way – it becomes Jack's story. Thus Jack renders her present in

her absence. Jack reconstructs the mother. Consequently the category of mother becomes a product of the category of child. This is significant, as the child becomes the *author*itative voice of/for the mother. Thus the categories of mother and child blur because Jack gives her a voice by proxy – one that her own parents had disallowed her. Unlike Laura in *The Changeover* whose identity occasionally merges with that of her mother, Jack's identity remains separate to his mother's. The child/adult spaces do, however, intersect in the greylands due to the mother's presence there as a child. The greylands is not, however, a realm that divulges its secrets easily. Jack's entry into this space is dual-edged. He *must* learn some unsettling truths about his mother's life in order to exonerate himself from the guilt he feels over her untimely death, and to help his father overcome the overwhelming grief he suffers. The realm of the greylands is full of foreboding and fear. It is a place for the wounded (p.20).

Despite the mother occupying most of the narrative (as both an absent presence and a present absence) I read the mother, and all the characters, as marginalised. Occupation of narrative space does not necessarily mean that the character is consistently in a position of authority or power. The mother as a central figure of the discourse does not represent the "centre". Arguably her socially sanctioned role as mother is restricted due to her overwhelming feelings of inadequacy. She is not occupied outside the home and she is not seen as central to the day-to-day running of the home. The latter point could be viewed as a positive reconfiguration of the representation of mothers, by de-emphasising the "good" mother syndrome. When speaking of the "good" mother Rose Lucas (1998, p.39) states:

> Such a Mother is required to be totally selfless in her devotion to her children and, as the emotional and domestic pivot of a family characterised by a patriarchally determined division of labour, carries the primary responsibility for the well-being of the family.

In a sense Carmody undermines the notion of the "good" mother through the mother figure, as she is not presented as the mainstay of the patriarchal family home. Unfortunately though her position, whilst not perpetuating the traditional category of "Mother", is not assigned any sort of valued role, either in or out of the home. The mother is presented as one who rarely fully determines her own actions, and who exists, partially at least in the realm of story. Her presence in the lives of her children is accompanied by a sense of (material) absence.

The mother's imaginative realm acts as an escape from reality for her, but often did little to reassure her children (pp.3-4):

> His mother liked to tell them wild and unexpected things, and later laugh and admit she had made them up. Stringing them along like that. But lately she was just as likely to mean whatever strange things she said, and it was safer not to react until you were sure.

The mother becomes a rather frightening figure when she inhabits her world of story, especially when she does not clearly define, for her children, the parameters of fantasy and reality. This lack of defining is emblematic of the novel. That is, this is how we are positioned as readers of *Greylands* - unsure of what is fantasy and what is meant to represent reality. The novel itself performs ambiguity and unreliability; the reader is placed in a position not unlike that of the children Jack and Ellen. The mother self-reflexively performs mother/woman/child/madwoman/death in a way that draws attention to all these as performances. Part of the mother "performing woman" is related to her role of actress. Acting is a profession that requires the performer to role-play. Judith Butler argues gender should be played out, it should be seen as the way we behave at particular times rather than who we are. Butler suggests that gender is fluid rather than fixed. She (1990, p.25) states, "There is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; that identity is performatively

constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results." The expressions of gender, whether traditional or not, are the results of the performance, not an abiding, coherent, unchanging or given role. Consequently, how one enacts one's gender establishes notions of identity and selfhood. What is significant in regard to Jack and Ellen's mother is the question of what form the performances take. Her performance of the role of mother was subversive in that she challenged the traditional category of mother. Her role as madwoman may also be read as subversive as she threatens the social order by not behaving "normally". She retreats into an imaginative realm which allows her to experience a transitory sense of security. It appears that in her enactment of the various roles she gains a temporary subjectivity, which accords her a provisional illusion of self-identification. It is these (fragile) performances that allow her to survive as long as she does. However, her final performance – death – suggests that she is not able to maintain the performances. She is unable to find a sustained sense of self-hood because her performances are not, ultimately, coherent.

The role of mother is a site of anxiety that erodes her ability to provide security for her children. Jack recalls her becoming sad and serious (p.10):

> But she laughed less and less over the years, and that time she had looked very serious and told him there were lots of places in the world that bad things hid themselves.

The mother's lack of laughter suggests that her performances are more difficult to enact, and that she is becoming more and more like her parents. Once again it is arguable that the mother's world-view is indebted to how she was parented. Hetherington (1998, p. 2) argues:

> Deeply held convictions and strongly felt emotions, some of which maintain patriarchal structures, are passed on from one generation to the next through the funnel of childhood.

As the mother's parents did not take pleasure in her, she finds it difficult to take pleasure in herself and, to some extent, in her children.

The mother's inability to provide consistency in mothering may be read as her wielding misused power over Jack and Ellen. This reading is less persuasive if we consider the mother as woman who teeters on the brink of madness; and at times topples into the domain of madness. It is at this point that she most strongly transgresses her social function of mother. Yet this performance does not bestow subversive power upon her because there is little or no "laughter" in her performance. Julia Kristeva (1984, p.195) suggests that transgression is "the key moment in practice." Practice is seen as "the place where the signifying *process* is played out" (1984, p.203). Kristeva argues that practice can only be innovative if there is laughter, which represents a return to the semiotic. She (1984, p.225) states:

> Every practice which produces something new is a practice of laughter: it obeys laughter's logic and provides the subject with laughter's advantages. When practice is not laughter, there is nothing new; when there is nothing new, practice cannot be provoking: it is at best a repeated empty act.

The mother in *Greylands* is only able to enact a repetition of empty acts. Her performances are devoid of laughter, so her return to a space devoted to movements, tones rhythms and a connection with the maternal body is to return to a duplication of barrenness. The return to a semiotic realm does not provide her with the opportunity to positively experience a variety of (becoming) subject positions, because it does not retain a relationship with the symbolic. For Kristeva to be exclusively in the realm of the semiotic is to enter into the psychotic.

In some respects the mother is like the hysteric described by Catherine Clément (1996, p.5):

> The hysteric, whose body is transformed into a theater for forgotten scenes, relives the past, bearing witness to a lost childhood that survives in suffering. ...
>
> This feminine role, the role of the hysteric, is ambiguous, antiestablishment and conservative at the same time. Antiestablishment because the symptoms - the attacks - revolt and shake up the public, the group, the men, the others to whom they are exhibited. The hysteric unties familiar bonds, introduces disorder into the well-regulated unfolding of everyday life, gives rise to magic in ostensible reason. These roles are *conservative* because ... every hysteric ends up inuring others to her symptoms, and the family closes around her again whether she is curable or incurable. This ambiguity is expressed in an escape that marks the histories of sorceress and hysteric with the suspense of ellipses.

In *The Newly Born Woman* Clément, in her section of the text, concentrates on the Sorceress and the Hysteric. She argues that these two figures, the witch and the madwoman, are exemplary figures of the female in history. Yet these female figures were constantly and consistently placed on the margins of patriarchal society. As marginalised figures they were often oppressed and silenced - judged by a system that denounced their very being. Denouncement led to these women becoming anomalies of society and culture. Whilst the mother in *Greylands* might not have had her body transformed into a theatre, (although she has presumably worked in the theatre) she did bear witness to a lost childhood that survived in her own acute suffering, and she was marginalised and silenced by her parents. She is the hysteric of the text. Her performances introduce disorder into the traditional family structure as she does enact the role of "good" mother. As argued, her performances are subversive in the sense that she does not represent a coherent self, but her roles ultimately do not challenge the status quo because the family do close in around her - her parents and then her husband and children - and she destroys herself because she perceives herself as incurable. When alive her life is presented as a "suspense of ellipses." This is further complicated by the fact that she lives on as Alice in the greylands. However Alice's character also destroys herself when she climbs the grey tower, and her identity merges with

that of the mother (p.169). The mother's lost childhood does survive in suffering, until the child can suffer no longer. Alice destroys herself when Jack acquires the necessary knowledge of his mother's life. This suggests that the past will not be repeated as the family narrative is exposed and revealed. The mother's performances are (predominantly) scripted in accordance with power relations, especially those found in the dominance of a rigid (patriarchal) "sexual-natural-family."

Jack recalls his father attempting to explain her periods of regression (p.10):

> Actresses were highly strung. That's what his father said to people whenever his mother went off the deep end.

Even though Jack knew his mother "went off the deep end" he was unable to consciously equate this with any form of sickness. This implies that Jack can only see the surface of his mother. It takes him a journey to the other side of the mirror to reveal the depth of her sickness to him. The mirror acts as the spatial construct that dissolves the boundaries between the real world and the greylands. By entering the mirror Jack has access to how the trauma of the mother's childhood, which had produced feelings of worthlessness, had embedded itself in her psyche. It takes Jack numerous visits to the greylands to discover the facts about her childhood, and the impact of her parents' maxim (p.135) "'good children should be unseen and unheard... Bad children are invisible.'" As argued, these comments serve to render the child a present absence in the lives of her parents.

As Jack is ignorant of many aspects of his mother's life he feels responsible for her death. He is marginalised through his lack of knowledge. Both his father and Ellen know of the mother's illness but the father neglects to inform Jack

of this. When Ellen informs Jack, he displays limited understanding (pp.128-129):

> 'Mama couldn't help it. The secrets got into her. They made her sick.'
>
> Jack stared at his little sister. Sometimes he had the weird feeling she was older than him, and the things she said could be downright spooky. What on earth did she mean about secrets getting inside their mother?

There is no suggestion in the narrative that Ellen did not understand the nature of the mother's illness - it is only Jack who is ignorant. There are two ways to look at Ellen's knowledge. One is that Ellen, as the younger child, is granted an intuitive understanding of her mother's condition. Another argument is that as the same sex child as their mother, Ellen is more observant of the only other female in her immediate surroundings. Ellen's identification of self would come from identification with the mother. This is not to suggest that Ellen identifies herself as sick. Rather that by observing and identifying with her mother, Ellen is more able to perceive her mother's illness, but is not fated to repeat the mother's story - thus implying that the mother may function within the category of "good-enough" mother. As stated it could be said that Ellen recognises her mother as a subject.

Irigaray (1993, p.196) argues that if the daughter does recognise her mother's subjectivity, then the two may enter into an intersubjective relationship. Irigaray (ibid) states that the economy between women

> is that of the *subject-subject* relations, not subject-object, and is thus a highly social and cultural economy that leads to women being interpreted as guardians of love. This subjective economy between mother and daughter can be partially translated into non-verbal communication...

It would be difficult to argue that Jack and Ellen's mother is presented as a guardian of love, particularly as she was not shown love from her own mother. However, it is feasible to consider the possibility of an intersubjective relationship between Ellen and her mother that "can be partially translated

into non-verbal communication". Metaphorically speaking Ellen has access to her mother via a curved mirror. The child is granted access to her mother's sexual difference (from the male) and her psychological difference (her illness). Although Ellen has a marginal role in the text, her ability to understand that her mother was ill does, on one level, signal her perceptiveness of her mother's subjectivity. She understood her mother in ways that eluded Jack. Ellen does not need to go through the (flat) mirror in order to understand the nature of her mother's illness. This suggests that the mother's mothering of Ellen was such that she was not silenced and ignored. However the mother did repeat some of the mistakes of her parents as evidenced by her frightening and inconsistent behaviour.

Ellen's relationship with her mother also differs from Jack's in that Ellen does not carry the weight of guilt for their mother's death. Ellen's comprehension of her mother's illness places her in a relatively guilt-free zone - she knows she could not save her mother. After the mother's death the father ignores his children and Jack feels this profoundly (p.34):

> 'Dad?' Jack said. But their father did not answer him either, or look at him. He had not looked at Jack since the day his wife died.
>
> *Because it was my fault,* Jack thought, chilled.

The father marginalises both children, but it is more acute for Jack as he does carry the weight of guilt, a weight that his father initially does nothing to ameliorate. This implies that the father refuses to accept and fulfil the responsibilities of the role of father.

The father, as a policeman, represents societal authority. He works within a hierarchical system in which he is required to enforce the letter of the law. This places him in a position of relative power and control, yet in his home

this position is ambiguous. He separates himself from his children through his silent withdrawal from them, which is an undeniable weapon of alienation. By keeping his grief to himself he places himself in an inaccessible border region that serves to marginalise Jack and Ellen. Yet this also serves to isolate the father, and renders him alone and isolated. Nevertheless, as the surviving adult member of the family his alienation is all the more alarming for the children, because they have no one to whom they can turn to for support. There is no adult figure of nurturance in this text, although it may be argued that the act of writing serves some of this purpose for Jack. However, even if writing provides a symbolic nurturance, Jack is doing this himself - there is an absence of adult nurturance.

Apart from the dead mother and the present/absent father the only other adult figures in the real world are the children's grandmother, her carer, and a neighbour, Mrs MacKenzie. These three women provide little in the way of comfort to the children. Mrs MacKenzie seems keener to upset the children than to console them (p.126):

> Mrs MacKenzie smiled, and Jack thought she ought to have sharpened teeth like the man in the greylands circus. She sounded concerned, but you could see she liked talking about hurtful things. If he came to her with a cut, he had the feeling she would push her fingers into the gash and smile in the same way.

The children's grandmother, their mother's mother, and her carer "Aunt" Rose are also characters that display little in the way of empathy or understanding. The grandmother, perhaps not surprisingly, shows no interest in her grandchildren (p.147):

> 'Hello, Grandma,' Ellen said. She made no move to hug the old woman, who did not like to be touched.
>
> 'Children should be seen and not heard,' the old woman said. Then cackled as if at a joke.

The fact that the grandmother did not like to be touched implies that she would not have liked to touch her daughter. Consequently the mother as a child would not be seen, heard or shown any physical affection. Irigaray (1993a, p.187) states, “No nourishment can compensate for the grace or work of touching.” Arguably the mother received little or no nourishment, apart from the most basic fundamental needs. The attention that “Aunt” Rose gives the children is little better than that of their grandmother (p.140):

> She was a tall, cold woman with a sharp nose and a matching voice. Her eyes reminded him of the eyes of those birds that peck the worms out of their holes.

The reactions of these women towards the children show how persistent out-moded attitudes can be. As mother figures these women are representative of an earlier era when children were expected to remain unseen and unheard. The children’s father also enacts this role through his silent withdrawal from his children. He represents a paternal-masculine absence similar to that of his wife’s father, thus locating him, in his emotional development and relationships, in a previous generation. The older women in *Greylands* display no signs of love, nurturance or warmth towards Jack and Ellen. This does not contribute to a reconfiguring of stereotypical representations of mothers and mother figures, because the portrayals of these women evoke the “bad” mother model. Once the mother dies there is an obvious lack of any sort of caring mother figure, let alone a “good enough” mother figure. The children are left to provide love and caring for each other.

Ellen is presented as a loving, intelligent and aware child but her main narrative functions are to act as the means by which Jack returns from the greylands, and to request stories that are connected with the mother. In relation to Jack, Ellen’s role is that of mediator. Ellen assists Jack in carrying

on the tradition of story set up by the mother. This again suggests an intersubjective relationship between daughter and mother; and the potential for a belated form of intersubjective relationship between mother and son. For Ellen the stories act as a means of solace and a way of maintaining a positive connection with her mother. I say positive because although some of the mother's stories were often frightening to the children, Ellen requests, from Jack, the ones that the mother was especially fond of. In particular, the mother liked a tale of two lovers who survived time and the elements to become immortal lovers. It was a tale filled with unconditional love and hope. A tale that the mother clung to despite, or because of, her own traumatic life. The other tale the mother especially liked was *The Snow Queen* by Hans Christian Andersen (1961, pp.214-255). This tale tells of a wicked goblin that smashes a mirror and when a fragment gets in one's eye or heart the person sees only negative things in the world. A boy (Kay) gets a fragment in his eye and follows the Snow Queen to her cold and inhospitable land. He is without love and his friends and family believe him dead. However, the love of his friend (Gerda) is so strong that she sets out to find him. She realises what has happened and her unconditional love serves to remove the curse of the mirror. These tales suggest that the mother would have liked to believe in the strength and potency of absolute and unconditional love. She is, however, presented rather more like one who has got a fragment of the enchanted mirror in her heart and is thus debilitated by negativity. There were times though when the mother could escape this negativity, thus highlighting the ambiguity and instability of the mother that is present throughout the narrative.

Distinctions between concepts of identity and subjectivity are important to consider in relation to the mother. Roberta Seelinger Trites (1997, p.26) asserts:

> Different from the concept of "identity" often used in the study of children's literature, which implies that an individual has one fixed inner essence that makes her unique from all other people, subjectivity is a fluid concept more based on the primacy of language than on the individual mind.

Trites' statement suggests that identity is fixed, personal, and unique and is not affected by outside influences. Conversely, subjectivity is a mutable state that is formed in and by language. An individual can occupy a number of different subject positions that are "constructed by the social force of language" (Trites 1997, p.27). She suggests that identity is located in a humanist ideology, which assumes that each individual is distinct and possesses a fundamental and unique self that is able to withstand the effects of culture and environment. In *Greylands* the mother was unable to withstand the effects of her home environment and this contributed to her inability to form a stable sense of self. Robyn McCallum (1999, p.3) views the notions of identity and subjectivity a little differently to Trites when she suggests that subjectivity is a sense of personal, individual identity, which allows a subject to be capable of deliberate thought and action. McCallum sees subjectivity as formed within ideological frameworks and in dialogue with others, as well being "shaped by social ideologies" (ibid). McCallum rejects the notion of an essential self, but she is also wary of viewing subjectivity as being exclusively influenced by outside forces. The problem for the mother in *Greylands* is her lack of ability to withstand the effects of her environment (Trites) and her inability to be consistently capable of deliberate thought and action (McCallum). She existed in a realm that was reliant on fantasy.

Rosemary Jackson (1982, p.35) states:

> The fantastic exists in the hinterland between 'real' and 'imaginary', shifting the relations between them through its interdeterminacy.

In *Greylands* the hinterland is the space between the surface of the mirror and what is found on the other side of the mirror. What is on the other side is a place for the wounded. It is a site that houses fear and at the same time offers insights into concepts such as love, prejudice, and belief. It is a place based on reflection (p.21), "'Whatever shows in mirrors is here and in between all of the reflections are the wild places.'" I use "reflection" in two senses, one in relation to mirrors and the other in relation to thoughtful consideration. By entering the mirror Jack is granted the facility to reflect upon his mother's life. The mirror is the means by which Jack is shown the power of belief and conversely the debilitating effects of not being believed in or having belief in oneself. Jack is an itinerant in this realm of greyness but he is there for specific reasons. Firstly to learn about his mother's life, which leads to his absolution from guilt, and secondly to save his father from the devastating effects of grief. Here the category of child impacts upon the category of adult. Jack is able to save his father because he forces his father to face not only the tragedy of his wife's untimely death but also the fact that he has neglected his children. The child enacts an adult role in order that the adult sees the error of his ways. Hence *Greylands* is arguably a product of the late 1990s by suggesting that the children have outstripped their parents' development in some ways. The children will not be fated to necessarily reproduce the mistakes of their parents.

Jack as storyteller enters into his mother's "real" world and thus enters into a *form* of an intersubjective relationship with her. The adult used story as a means of relief from reality but the child uses story as a way to construct a

reality - his mother's reality. Jack continues her tradition of story, and keeps her story alive, through his writing about her tragic life. By discovering the secrets of her childhood he is accorded - in a more self-conscious fashion - access to the knowledge that Ellen possesses due to her intersubjective relationship with the mother, who was never able to enter into an intersubjective relation with her own mother. As mentioned, Jessica Benjamin (1995, p.2) argues:

> Intersubjective theory postulates that the other must be recognized as another subject in order for the self to fully experience his or her subjectivity in the other's presence.

Jack and Ellen's mother was not recognised in her home; as a consequence she found it difficult to recognise her own self as a meaningful subject in society. Her bouts of depression and madness led to her doubting her ability to enact the form of mothering that was not given to her. Ellen's ability to have an intersubjective relationship with her mother suggests that the novel avoids endorsing a fatalistic view of inevitable repetition.

The mother's stories did not *always* act as a means of comfort or serve as a time of sharing between mother and child. Apart from her fascination with the love story theme underlying the story of the ever-youthful lovers and *The Snow Queen*, she tended to dwell on the more negative or admonishing aspects of a story. Perhaps this was a means for the mother to try to make sense, through narrative, of her world that was littered with negativity and sadness.

After seeing (as a young child) a particularly frightening Queen (a maternal figure) in a pantomime of *Snow White* Jack is fearful of mirrors. His mother does little to reassure him; he recalls her saying (p.15):

> 'Never trust a mirror,' his mother had told him. 'They never tell the truth unless you make them.'

In Irigarayan terms the mirror cannot be trusted as it only reflects the masculine. It is in the mother's attempt to discover the truth (her own psychosexual identity) in mirrors that she falls to her death - at a local fun fair. The family is there to celebrate Jack's birthday. Jack and his mother enter the mirror maze at her request. Jack is bemused by this (pp.160-161):

> 'You don't like mirrors,' Jack said.
>
> 'They lie,' his mother said. 'But they show the truth too. I must face the truth now.'...
>
> 'Let's go the Ferris wheel instead,' he said, tugging at her.
>
> 'The mirrors must be faced,' she only said grimly and paid the ticket seller...
>
> 'See yourself, beautiful lady, and see if you can find the way out. Enter the maze of mirrors and you will see yourself as you have never been seen. Once you have faced your deepest self, you will find the way out of the maze. You will be free!'

The ticket to the mother's freedom however was death. Whatever truths the mirror offered up to her, the truths she made them tell were "home truths". They were related to the traumas of her childhood and the seemingly irreparable relationship she had with her parents. Facing this reality in the hyper-reflective realm of the mirror maze was too much for her.

In an attempt to escape the mirrors she climbed a power pole (near the tent) and fell from this to her death (pp.165-166):

> His mother had fallen to her death with a terrified scream that he still heard falling and falling through his dreams. Then she had lain like a broken bird, blood leaking from her ears, with light from the hole she had torn in the tent making her pale face shine.

The mother could be read here as "performing bird" or "performing angel". She told the children that she had wings, and an element of over-active imagination may have led her to believe this was true. The tragedy for her and her family is that she enacted a flightless bird or wingless angel and her inability to fly led to her plummeting to her death. The final performance is the

only way for her to escape from her suffering. The fact that Jack witnessed his mother's death acts as further impetus for him to try and unravel some of the secrets of her life - what she was constantly trying to escape from. It is only by going through the mirror in the bathroom that Jack learns some of the truths about the troubled childhood that haunted his mother from childhood into adulthood.

The notion of truth is problematic, as it implies a definitive insight into the mother's life; yet the novel itself undermines the very idea of definitive truths. Jack, as author, is working in a space that allows him to draw on his mother's stories, his memories of her, and the information he obtains from the girl in the greylands, in order to gain some pertinent insights into his mother's life.

The impact of the mother's traumatic childhood led her to confuse fact and fiction and to rely on telling stories as a means to navigate her way through adulthood. *Greylands* itself is emblematic of this trait and the mother's confusion serves to endorse the perplexity and complexity of the text. There *is* a confusion of fact and fiction and the novel as a whole enacts this. When addressing her children the mother was not always mindful of the appropriateness of her words. Jack's father reminded her of this (p.15):

> 'You'll fill his head with nonsense,' his father said, smiling and shaking her a little. 'He has to understand that some things are real and others, not. Children need things defined.'

However things were not always defined for Jack. Rhona Mayers (1998, p.22) states:

> Ironically, Jack's father fails to define the illness that brings about the traumatic death of Jack's mother; the events in the Greylands become Jack's quest to unravel this painful mystery for himself.

The key to Jack's unravelling of the mystery lies in the very mysterious bathroom mirror that ripples in front of him one night.

The journey Jack embarks upon to the other side of this mirror does in fact (eventually) reveal some of the truths of his mother's life. Like Alice of *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* and Laura in *The Changeover* Jack goes *through* the mirror. However, unlike his female counterparts, who enter their mirrors by choice, Jack falls, unwillingly, through his (pp.17-18):

> The mirror rippled harder, as if it was water and someone was blowing on it, and Jack could no longer see his face. He could still see his eyes, but all around them the pink of his flesh swam and blurred. He opened his mouth to cry out, but all at once the mirror began to settle. When it was perfectly still, the face looking into Jack's was not his own! He was looking at a pretty girl with dark shining eyes and crow-black hair framing a white face.
>
> Jack swayed forward, really feeling he might faint. He reached to steady himself, touching the mirror.
>
> *His hand went right through the glass!*
>
> He moaned and tried to pull away, but instead he was falling forward, through the mirror, into the mirror.

The fact that Jack falls through the mirror, as opposed to entering by choice, suggests that he is being forced into a space/realm that is arguably gendered female. As Tucker (1994, p.6) suggests, "the mirror... is a space in which concerns regarding the female subject, the double and the gaze can be critiqued and subverted." Jack's concerns are to do with the female subject - his mother. Jack's entry into the mirror allows him access to an understanding of why she reviled mirrors. As a child he could not comprehend how his grandmother's socialisation of his mother was, in Irigarayan terms, "a repetition of the same, in contempt for difference." (Irigaray, 1985, p.54). That is, the grandmother, as phallic mother, maintained the patriarchal social order. Yet Jack's entry into the mirror gives him some insights into how his

mother was socialised and entrapped within this socialisation. He meets his mother's child-self and she reveals the tragic story.

According to Barbara Walker (1983, p.660) there was an ancient belief that "the reflection was part of the soul". The soul is often considered as a spiritual or ethereal aspect of beings. Walker (1988a, p.274) states:

> The term *immortal soul* means essentially the same as a ghost: that is, some sentient part of a human being that continues to exist after the human being dies.

The girl that Jack sees reflected in the mirror is the same girl he meets on the other side of the mirror. As in *The Changeover,* the idea of the spirit or ghost is connected with breath - the spirit of life. The word spirit is derived from the word "*spiritus* - breathing, breath, air, related to *spirare* to breathe" (*The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, p.1972).

Walker (1988a, p.305) makes these connections:

> Breath has been nearly synonymous with "soul" or "spirit" for an enormously long time. The concept dates back to a matriarchal theory that woman not only forms her child out of her own uterine blood, but also *animates* (provides a mother-soul for) her child's *material* (mother-given) body with her own breath. Behind this ancient theory may be seen the habit of gently blowing into the mouth of a newborn to initiate breathing.... [In conjunction with this] to expire in death means literally to breathe out, that is, to return the air-soul to the *atmos*-sphere. Souls of the dead thus took an airy form and became gaseous ghosts....The familiar custom of placing a mirror before the face of a dying person arose not to check on the cessation of breathing-which could be more easily checked by other means-but rather to magically catch the fugitive soul, for mirrors were always supposed to be soul-traps. Sometimes in folklore, the realm of the dead was known as the Hall of Mirrors.

There is much in Walker's work that relates to *Greylands.* The mirror ripples as though someone is *blowing* on it and when it settles down Jack sees the girl (the spirit) looking back at him. This can be read as her breathing Jack into her world. Although the girl's form is more than airy and gaseous, she is in fact quite substantially formed albeit only in shades of black, white and grey;

she does carry a bundle that represents something airy and gaseous; it glows and seems (p.54) "very faintly luminous". It is later revealed that this bundle is part of the father's spirit (p.172), "'The bit of him that could laugh and play was in the bundle. The brightness of him.'" This implies that the bright and happy aspect of him died when his wife died - as such he has become a ghost of his former self. The father can metaphorically be read as a ghost-like figure in the lives of his children. This indicates a changing relationship with the children from one that was pleasurable and fulfilling to one that is deficient, particularly in terms of the children's needs. Returning to Walker's work in relation to the novel, it was the "Hall of Mirrors" or the mirror maze that led to the mother's death. It is her "fugitive soul" that is trapped in the greylands. In conjunction with this it is the bathroom mirror that leads Jack to discover some of the truths about her life, which in turn, led to her death.

The other side of the mirror is the greylands - a black, white and grey place that mirrors the real world. There is a sense of play going on here with the word mirror; there is the connotation of a "mirror image", but it is a mirror image that is also removed from the realm of the "real". Jackson (1982, p.87) states, "A mirror produces distance. It establishes a different space, where our notions of self undergo a radical change." As such the mirror can be read as the spatial construct that allows versions of the self to be represented. This can be empowering as it, potentially, allows women to reinvent their specular image rather than, in Irigarayan terms, give man back his image. However for Jack's mother what was (re)presented was an unstable self who could not face the "truth" of her identity. She argued that mirrors only tell the truth if you make them. Yet her attempt to face the truth led to her death. For Jack, however, the facing of truths leads to an acquisition of knowledge. He learns

about his mother's suffering and illness. When he understands that she was ill he is freed from guilt and this in turn aids the father in overcoming his grief. The acquisition of knowledge about his mother does not come easily for Jack. He is often put in anxious and, seemingly, life-threatening situations. Yet Jack does have a subconscious awareness of his mother's illness. This is evidenced by the girl he meets on the other side (p.70), "She was a peculiar girl and maybe a little mad..." At this stage he does not know who she is, but it is her implied madness that Jack must learn more about so he can positively enact regeneration for the family. He must look to the past for answers.

When in the greylands the girl tells Jack (p.20):

> 'No one can come here unless they are wounded.'
>
> Before Jack could ask what she meant, she said, 'The longer you're here the harder it is to go back.'
>
> 'Back where?' he asked cautiously.
>
> 'Back through the mirror, stupid.'

As the girl is the mother's child-self this passage implies that she will not recover from the wounding she has suffered. In Clément's (1996, p.5) terms she is, "bearing witness to a lost childhood, that survives in suffering." The girl is reliving for Jack the mother's suffering. The mirror as a metaphor for producing other selves is applicable only if the subject has a strong sense of self-identity. As the mother lacked a sense of identity she remains trapped on the side of the mirror that she cannot escape from. Jack, however, does find a way back through the mirror by thinking of Ellen. His love for his younger sister is so resolute that she becomes the means by which he returns to the world they inhabit together - the world that is synonymous with the "real".

Love is an important consideration in this novel. There is a bond of devotion underlying the relationship between the siblings. The mother never experienced this kind of love and devotion in her "normal" nuclear family home. Even as an adult the love of her husband and children could not sustain her and ensure her feelings of personal security. Jack reflects that although his father is a policeman he could not keep his wife safe (p.15). The implication here is that all the security and protection offered by society will account for little if the home environment has not provided love and security to its children. For the mother it was a case of too little too late. As safety is both a material and a psychological issue the effects of neglect left her physically insecure and mentally unstable.

In the greylands Jack attempts to impose a sort of logical order on the place; he asks the girl her name. She is not interested in naming (p.21):

> 'Give yourself a name for me. I don't need naming for myself, do I?'...
>
> 'How about Snow White?'
>
> She wrinkled up her nose. 'Boring. I should feel as if you were waiting for the dwarfs'...

Jack, as child, is actually naming his mother; hence the boundaries between child and adult are once again indistinct. Jack is empowered by naming the girl not only because he names his mother but also because the choice of name is entirely his. The notion of naming has connotations with the soul. Walker (1988a, p.147) suggests, "Naming people often meant bestowing life or soul upon them." Jack's insistence on naming the girl implies a bestowal of life to her. On another level, some cultures believed that if people found out your "true" name they gained control of your soul. In this context, by letting Jack name her, the girl prohibits him finding out what her "true" name may be. Like much else in the novel the associations between naming and the soul are

both multifaceted and indeterminate. There is no unambiguous way in which to read the connections; it is left to the reader to make the links and to fill the textual gaps.

In relation to the name Snow White, it is not so much the girl's rejection of the name that is significant; it is Jack's choice of this name in the first place. In part she fits the fairy tale description of a daughter "as white as snow, as red as blood and as black as the wood of a window frame" (Grimm, 1986, p.249) (unfortunately her red blood has been drained from her, another absence); and she is treated as an unwanted daughter - similar to how stepmother/Queen treats Snow White. The name also symbolises the fear that Jack felt when watching the pantomime. It was a fear that his mother did nothing to abate. Perhaps Jack felt "dwarfed" by the control held by the figure of the stepmother/Queen and perhaps by the girl. The girl is an unknown entity to him, but it is her image that Jack saw when he looked into the bathroom mirror. She is responsible for him being there. The use of the fairy tale intertextuality is a skilful way of connecting Jack with his mother. The use of the *Snow White* tale in this novel differs from the pre-text because the adult/child relationship is female/male as opposed to female/female, and the mother (as Alice) is enacting a child role. Jack and the mother (as mother and as Alice) will not be rivals for the attention of the patriarchal father figure. As in *The Changeover* the mirror is utilised as means to access other realms and truths. The mother's existence was marked by her fear of mirrors and Jack is (re)living this fear in the greylands. Such use of intertextuality also suggests that *Greylands* is an "old" story with a long tradition, one which is not bound by time or place. Although the novel is contemporary and set in late twentieth century Australia it is not contained by these factors. In many respects it

reads like a fairy tale and as such transcends its contemporary setting. In relation to the presentation of mothers, the novel perpetuates the "bad" mother stereotype (as found in the stepmother/Queen figure) through the older women, but allows for a "good-enough" (although sometimes "bad") mother figure in Jack and Ellen's mother. Her "bad" mothering is partly accounted for by her traumatic childhood, which is revealed by her child-self.

The girl settles on the name "Alice" (p.22), an obvious intertextual allusion to Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass.* In a sense Jack *is* bestowing a life upon the girl, not in order to gain control of her soul, but to uncover some of the secrets of her existence. Barbara Walker (1983, p.710) states, "Egyptians said 'to speak the name of the dead is to make them live again.'" Jack is essentially making her mother's child-self live again so that he can discover the secrets of her past. Jack connects the name Alice with his mother's name, Lissa, late in the narrative (p.163):

> 'Alice!'
>
> 'Liss Alissa Lissa Lissa ...' the echoes ran on for too long.

Jack is speaking the name of the dead by calling the girl Alice. Once he makes the connection between his mother's name and the name he has given the girl, he understands that the girl is his mother. Returning to the Lewis Carroll intertextuality, there is a passage in Carroll's text where according to Jackson (1982, p.143) "Alice walks through 'a wood, much darker than the last wood' where things have no names." This realm is similar to a womb space where there is no language, no linguistic discipline. When Carroll's Alice leaves this realm she is placed once more in a linguistic space. In this space Alice is constantly asked to explain who she is. This is difficult as, in the land through the looking glass, she is not sure who she is. In much the same way the

mother as a child and as an adult is unable to construct a sense of self. She is unsure of who she is.

Just as Alice accepts the name from Jack, a very explicit element evoking fear comes into play. Jack hears a scratching and whining sound that Alice identifies as a (p.21) "wolver". Carmody is drawing on the fairy tale representation of the "big bad wolf" in conjunction with the frightening concept of the werewolf. The concept of the wolvers, as a mix of the cultural and literary constructions of wolf and werewolf, points to Carmody's overt intertextual borrowing. Susan Clancy (2000, p.58) raises some pertinent points about Carmody's use of the wolvers:

> The wolf or wolver as it has been named here has embedded in it far more complex ideologies, closely aligned with a reading that focuses on the relationships between the mother/Alice character, life and death and the wolvers. There are many lesser known old stories from other cultures that link elements of women, life and death and wolves.
>
> These stories portray archetypal images of the mother as one who both nurtures and withholds, characteristics which are both evident in Jack's mother. Another story links the creation of the wolf with the Bible story of Adam and Eve, portraying both wolf and woman as dangerous... Jack's mother, through her power over her husband and son, even after her death, has unleashed these wild animals and in doing so has a dangerous hold over their lives.

Clancy's point about the mother who both nurtures and withholds places her in a "good"/"bad" dichotomy. She can only be considered a "good" mother when she nurtures, if she withholds this she is "bad". There is little evidence of the mother's agency as she is defined by her ability to nourish her children. The mother saw herself as deficient in this area. Her feelings of worthlessness were so deeply ingrained that she felt inadequate in her roles as wife and mother. Jack recalls her accidentally smashing a cup and her extreme reaction to this (p.32), "'I'm a bad mother and a bad wife. I warned you!' she had yelled at their father." The mother's calling herself "a bad mother" suggests that she does not see herself as what Lucas (ibid) would describe as,

a "good" mother, one who is "selfless in her devotion to her children". The children's mother perceives herself as a failure in the socially prescribed, normative role of mother. The father's attempts to reassure her that she was loved did little to console her. The fact that she was not loved as a child haunted her in a most disturbing way.

According to Clancy's reckoning, through her ability to draw Jack into the greylands and her ability to keep the father locked in a world of grief, the mother is projecting her fears into the two environments present in the text - the worlds on either side of the mirror. The father exists in his own grey land in the real world. The effect of this has implications for his children who are seemingly unparented. He has become a parent that "withholds", but there is little possibility that the father will be accused of "bad" fathering. Discourses of paternity are not loaded with the same social and cultural baggage as those of maternity. Martha Fineman (1995, p.71) argues:

> "Mother" is a universally possessed symbol (although its meaning may vary across and within cultures)... As a lived experience, Mother is shared virtually universally in our culture and, is therefore, more intimately and intensely personalized than many other symbols.

"Father" as a symbol (in western culture) is not as potent and does not face the same ideological scrutiny. Fineman (1995, p.72) states, "In contemporary society, Mother has accumulated negative as well as positive symbolic content." Whilst it may be argued that Father, too, has negative and positive symbolic content, the connotations of Mother and Father vary immensely. Socially and culturally Jack and Ellen's father can exist in his own world, because his job as policeman and his grief would (to some extent) exclude him from active parenting. Nevertheless the father is at risk of becoming the same sort of parent as his wife's parents – enveloping his children in an

overwhelming silence. Jack, as the character who exists in both his father's grey land and the actual greylands, is placed in a double-risk category.

The removal of speech is also a means of connecting the father with the mother as her parents consistently reinforced that she was a child to be silenced (p.135), "'Bad children are not seen or heard'". The mother internalises the words of her parents and carries them with her throughout her life. When she attempts to repress the disapproval of her parents she ends up doing what they expected of her in that she silences herself. She does not speak and relate the distress she experienced as a child. Her silencing of herself leads to further internalisation of her suffering. Luce Irigaray (1993, p.19) states, "Silence is all the more alive when words exist. Let us not become guardians of dumb silence, of dead silence." The mother in *Greylands* did become a guardian of her own dumb and dead silence. When she did speak, her capacity to speak in a lucid and comprehensible way was negated. Jack was often unsure what her words meant or if she was serious or joking (p.10). When the father withdrew into his own silent realm after the mother's death, he too became a guardian of dumb and dead silence. It is the child, Jack, who breaks the silence.

It could be argued that the novel is concerned with breaking the cycle of neglect and abuse. Through the character of the mother and that of Alice there is the notion that there *is* an inevitable link between nurture and subjectivity. By showing just how deeply the mother was affected, the novel highlights the negative effects of neglect and abuse. By producing an ending that brings the remaining family members together, there is the implication that the children will form subjectivities based on positive interactions with family and society.

These children will not feel like caged birds or animals. There is the hope of a future that allows them freedom as opposed to restriction. They will not participate in Alice's fate, where she is aligned with caged circus animals (pp.137-138):

> 'We have to go back to the circus,' Alice said. Her eyes seemed to grow cloudy. 'I like the circus. All those animals in the cages, pacing and pacing with their white teeth showing. I am like them in this house. I am pacing and pacing and they are outside the bars watching me. They are my keepers,' she said, looking back at the closed door.

This passage suggests the sense of entrapment and fear that surrounded the mother as a child. This tension and fear haunted her into adulthood.

The notion of being imprisoned and guarded brings to mind the *Rapunzel* fairy tale, on which the mother had an interesting slant. She suggested that Rapunzel would not want to be freed from the tower, as the witch would have told her that the outside world (p.96) "was poisonous or dangerous or frightening". As a consequence Rapunzel would feel safe and secure in the tower. The prince would actually remove her from the protected world she knows and put her into an environment that is both unfamiliar and frightening, thus evoking notions of Freud's *unheimlich*. The mother explains (as she perceives it) Rapunzel's situation to Jack (p.97):

> 'She would keep her unhappiness locked up inside her, but slowly she would learn that her life had been wrong in the eyes of the world. She would be ashamed of it and her contentment. She would go mad and in the end she would return to the tower so they would not have to see madness.'

Some aspects of the mother's synopsis of the tale parallel her life. The idea of keeping unhappiness locked up is most significant; my reading of the text suggests that this is exactly what the mother attempted to do. Repression of her unhappiness led to her precarious hold on life. The mother differed from Rapunzel in that she was not content in her entrapment. The mother's point raises the idea that you become accustomed to the life you live. Until someone

shows you another way of life, you think that your way of living is appropriate for you. This could be read as a means for her to justify her own sad existence.

As argued the mother's reality was partially formed by her reliance on stories. She drew from a wealth of old and seemingly timeless tales of love, rejection and, in the case of *Rapunzel*, entrapment. This tale suggests a flawed maternal in that the mother figure keeps the girl locked away so she cannot explore her (hetero)sexuality. Her development would be unnatural, just as keeping a wild animal caged is unnatural. Alice remarks that she is like a caged animal in her house. In addition to her feelings of entrapment she is also constantly silenced and demoralised. These factors are correspondent with the theories that Gilbert and Gubar espouse in their text *The Mad Woman in the Attic* (1984). They argue that confinement in interior spaces combined with gender-defined roles for females very often contributed to mental illnesses in women in the nineteenth century. The mother becomes the metaphoric "mad woman in the attic". Alice constantly tells Jack that she is going to the "grey tower". In this sense she is like Rapunzel wanting to return to the tower so the outside world could not see her madness. The grey tower is the place where wings are obtained and once one has wings, there is no escape from the greylands (p.52). This implies that there is no escape from the madness; one will remain confined within it, as evidenced by Alice's inability to go back through the mirror (p.20). The concept of caging or enclosing and confining is one that works on a number of levels both in literary works and in society; and it is particularly evident within this text. Entrapment is juxtaposed with freedom. The concept of freedom is explored through the cats that can readily come and go from the greylands. It is a cat that leads Jack away from the wolvers and to

the laughing beast. This character is presented as wisely philosophical and it is the first character Jack meets in the greylands who is literally caged.

Jack thinks that the laughter in the greylands has more to do with sorrow than happiness (p.80), echoing Alice's words that the greylands contain the wounded; and reiterates the fact that his mother laughed less as she got sicker. Jack thinks the beast is a sad and beautiful being and he considers freeing it. The beast understands and entreats Jack not to do so (pp.81-82):

> 'If I were uncaged, I could not help but tear at the enchantment until I was unnamed. Then I would fly into all of the windows and mirrors and into shining footpaths after rain. The mirrors would become wild and they would be absolutely, utterly truthful. Everything would be seen for what it truly was. My laughter would greet every lie and every pretence. It would rumble like a volcano the smooth surface of everything. You can imagine the chaos it would cause here, for those who dwell in the greylands do so because the mirrors are tamed. If I were free, people would be afraid of them. They would cease to believe in their reflections and eventually they would no longer believe in themselves. No, laughter must remain caged here. '

The idea of ceasing to believe in oneself is indisputably bound up with the mother/Alice and notions of restraint as opposed to freedom. The laughing beast says to Jack (p.82), "'If your mother feared the mirrors in your land, she feared herself.'" It is this fear that the mother constantly carried with her and, as Clancy argues, is used as a hold on the father and Jack. The laughing beast brings Jack's own internalised and unacknowledged fear to his attention when Jack finds he cannot get out of the greylands. Jack realises that he is fearful of the emptiness that his father has become (p.85):

> 'Better never to return than to face such emptiness,' said the boy in the mirror.
>
> Jack gasped as the knife of truth slid deeply into him. For it was true. He did not want to look at what his father had become and if he stayed here, he would not have to see it ever again.

It is at this juncture of the narrative that Jack is most closely aligned with his mother. He does not want to face the truth of what his father has become and

staying in the greylands is a means to avoid this. Jack could become desensitised to his father's predicament if he remained in the land on the other side of the mirror. In a similar way the mother seemed to exist in her own greyland as a means to numb the pain of her traumatic childhood. Her claim of mirrors telling lies was a means to avoid the truth of her existence.

The mother could not explore her mother's subjectivity nor her own via the mirror. Female subjectivities are not critiqued or subverted via the mirror in *Greylands*; rather the mirror represents another form of entrapment (Tucker, 1994, p.6). As mentioned the mother's mother does not play the role of "gratifying Mother"; she is instead "the silent Mother who does not tell me what I am" (Barthes, 1990, p.168). The mother has no basis of love or nurturance. The telling difference between Jack and his mother lies in relation to Jack's belief in the power of love which helps him to get out of the greylands (p.86):

> *Then he knew!*
>
> He had tried to tell himself the only reason to go back was to share the responsibility of his father with Ellen, but the truth was he had to go back because he wanted to see Ellen again.
>
> Yet there was something even under that, and Jack felt his desire to return swell. It was not only love for Ellen that drew him back, but also love for his father, even in spite of what he had become. Jack understood that he had to go back and he wanted to go back because they belonged together. He and Ellen and their father. *All for one and one for all. Always. All ways.*
>
> In the mirror, Jack's eyes blazed blue, and all at once the mirror started to ripple. Putting his hand out, Jack laughed in triumph.

Jack's understanding that the love of his family is vital to him represents a maturation that his mother never completely achieved. Jack's belief in the love of and for his family is a turning point for him. He can laugh in triumph as he has achieved a personal break-through that is vital to his family's existence. Jack's insight into his mother's past indicates the abusive and negligent family

structure that so affected the mother, and which the father was perpetuating, will not necessarily be repeated.

Before Jack realises his mother is Alice he questions her as to where she came from (p.113):

> 'Did you come from my side of the mirror, Alice?'
>
> 'Everyone starts off there,' she said absently, peering up at the sky.
>
> 'Did the wolvers catch you and take you to the tower?'
>
> 'There was no need. I was looking for the tower. All my life I dreamed of it. I wanted to climb it, but no one would let me. They said people who live in the world of smells and colour can't climb the grey tower. So one day when no one was watching, I climbed it.'

Jack still does not make the connection, although the signals are more obvious. Alice and Jack go to the circus where the notion of believing is raised once more. A man at the circus tells Jack (p.117):

> Being seen is believing, see? Not believing in yourself is a disease and in the end it sends you mad.

The mother's madness was based in a lack of belief in herself.

Carmody subtly aligns the mother with the mythological creatures the unicorn and the gryphons, through her use of belief and non-belief. Jack sees these creatures but claims that they are not real. His disbelief causes them to disappear (p.120):

> 'Oh, they didn't go because their feelings were hurt,' the man assured him. 'They didn't *choose* to go. You made them disappear because you don't really believe in them. That's what happens to things that don't get believed in sooner or later.'

In a sense Jack *is* metaphorically implicated in his mother's death. Not knowing can be aligned with not believing. Reading the narrative in this light suggests that Jack does, in fact, have to exonerate himself from the guilt he experiences because of his mother's death. This further complicates the

already complex narrative. On the one hand, how can Jack be guilty of something that he, seemingly, did not contribute to? On the other hand Carmody's subtle aligning of the creatures with the mother in relation to belief insists upon consideration of Jack's, albeit unconscious, involvement in the death. This is a further indeterminate section of the narrative whereby a definite answer or resolution is not easily attained. A question is posed without offering any definitive answer. The non-metaphorical reading, however, absolves Jack from guilt and offers the reader a sense of completion and closure. The mother, within her "sexual-family-as-natural" family, is made to "disappear" because her parents refuse to see or hear her. The universalising claim that this type of family is both "normal" and "ideal and sacred" is severely challenged by Carmody's aligning of the mother and the mythical creatures.

Jack's exoneration from guilt is directly related to his coming to understand that his mother was sick. It is a slow process of realisation (pp.132-133):

> Sick? Where had Ellen got the idea that their mother was sick? She had never been in hospital and she hardly ever went to the doctor. There were pills, but she bought them from a chemist so there couldn't be anything that bad wrong with her. You needed a prescription for anything that was really wrong. His mother said that they were to stop her feeling unhappy, but unhappiness wasn't a sickness, was it?
>
> Ellen might have thought being sad was the same as being sick, though. It was the sort of weird idea she got into her head, and it was even reasonable. He felt sick whenever he thought of his mother dying. He never let himself think of how she died and of his own part in it. That was something he put in a dark corner of his mind and he only looked there in his nightmares.

This passage suggests that Jack equates "serious" illnesses with the medical profession. In Jack's mind his mother was not really ill as she was neither under constant medical care nor hospitalised. Ellen, though, displayed a more intuitive awareness of her mother's condition. Her role, as younger child, did not require her to interrogate the mother's illness; in her case perception of

unhappiness as sickness was sufficient. As mentioned previously, Ellen, too, may have been more observant of her mother as they are of the same sex. The notion of intuitive awareness is traditionally associated with the female; as a consequence it is not surprising that the girl child is aware that her mother is ill. However, Jack's naivety about the illness was an obstacle to his psychic well being. Carrying the (assumed) guilt of her death is too much responsibility for a child.

Jack's realisation that Alice and his mother are the same person is the key to his salvation. It comes to him after he comprehends that the old people in the greylands are his grandparents (p.149):

> Jack was thinking about how it must have been for his mother to have lived with his grandmother, who hated children and the smell of roses, and his grandfather, who wanted only silence and order. Like Alice in the greylands, she must have paced and paced in the silent house liked a caged tiger.
>
> Jack almost gasped aloud for an incredible thought occurred to him.
>
> *Could it possibly be that Alice in the greylands was his mother as a little girl?*
> But could it mean that she had died, yet she was still alive there? His grandmother was alive so that couldn't be her ghost in the greylands. The same with him. If Alice was his mother as a girl, maybe she was completely in the greylands because there was nothing of her left here. But why was she there as a girl and not as a grown woman?
>
> With a terrible chill, Jack understood suddenly why Alice was attracted to the circus.
>
> On this side of the mirror it was the fun park where his mother had died.

Alice's attraction to the circus is related to an attraction to both performance of self (as caged) and to death. Yet Alice as the mother's double or doppelgänger should or could be read as an assurance against death. Elisabeth Bronfen (1993, p.114) states:

> The double is an ambivalent figure of death since it signifies an insurance that one will continue to live, that the soul is eternal even as the body decomposes and as such a defence against death.

However Alice's claims her mission is to climb the "grey tower" with the father's spirit. She would be death-bringer to his soul and that of the mother. Alice (the child) is still wounded even though the adult woman is dead, which suggests that the wounded soul wants to put suffering to death. Jack now realises that what he is discovering is the "real" story of his mother's life. The process of writing leads him to the realisation that his mother's subjectivity was formed within an economy of neglect. He takes on an adult role when he attempts to save Alice - implying that the child will not repeat the mistakes of his elders (his grandparents and, to a degree, his father).

Jack climbs a pole at the fun fair with his mother/Alice in a bid to save her and the bundle (the father's "brightness")(p.167):

> 'It belongs to me. It was a gift,' Alice said defensively, and behind the radiance she was suddenly his mother, her long dark hair waving in skeins like smoke. 'He gave it to me.'
>
> 'He?' Jack's lips felt numb. The laughter from the bright thing shimmered and seemed to make the air golden.
>
> 'He. The immortal lover. He gave me his soul and his heart. He gave me himself. He belongs to me.'

The narrative blurs past and present and also blurs the mother/Alice figure into one. At the same time Jack relives the mother's violent death. He is clinging onto the pole she fell from and weeping, when he hears his name being called. It is his father, shocked back into reality by his son's actions. Jack tells his father that he feels responsible for the mother's death, his father finally tells him the truth (p.170):

> 'It was not your fault. It was never your fault. She was ill for a long time...'
>
> His father was now level with him. 'Come, put your arms around my neck.'
>
> 'I didn't save her. I should have stopped her from climbing the grey tower.'
>
> 'She had been climbing the grey tower all her life, son,' his father whispered against his cheek. 'Put your arms around me. Please.'

The coming together of father and son in this passage allows for a dialogue to take place between them, one that the father had previously prohibited by his silence. Jack tells his father (p.170) "'She left because she loved you...'". This statement causes the father to fully reveal to Jack the extent of the mother's mental illness and that it was based on her not being loved as a child. She could not overcome the pain and trauma of her neglected childhood. The father comes to realise that he had for a time committed a comparable act of neglect to his own children.

At the end of the novel Jack explains to Ellen how the girl is an aspect of their mother (p.172):

> 'She was the hurt, sad part of Mama,' Jack said. 'She was the little girl who was not loved enough by her mother and father. That part was inside her always, even when she grew up.'

Here Jack is able to give words to what Ellen had earlier intuited due to her intersubjective relationship with her mother. Jack now has the knowledge *he* requires to explain his mother's life and death.

The novel concludes with a section entitled "The End" where Jack and Ellen discuss Jack's story. This anchors the overall text as a fabrication, as a story. Nevertheless the issues raised by Carmody about belief and love and neglect and the blurring of realms are not diminished due to this sense of closure. The novel finishes with the children discussing these very factors. What is paramount is their love for one another (p.174):

> 'You wouldn't have jumped, would you? In the story she wanted you to jump,' Ellen asked.
> 'I couldn't go because I had you to bring me back.'
>
> 'You thought of me and then you could come back,' Ellen said, then she nodded and smiled her rare, sweet smile.

This display of love implies that any pattern of lovelessness that may have emerged due to the mother's death is broken, and that these children are not going to suffer from the same sort of neglectful abuse as their mother. The novel starts with a death but ends with an affirmation of life.

However, the problem of the lack of nurturing figures is troubling. Whilst Carmody avoids perpetuating the dominant ideology of the "good" mother syndrome, she does little to establish any other type of positive mother figure. Jack and Ellen's mother as the "madwoman" is, at times, a negative figure and an inadequate ("bad") mother; at best she is a "good-enough" mother. Love and nurture do not, of course, equal "mother" or "woman" but to disassociate these attributes from the other females in the text is problematic. It seems to undermine the positive attributes that Carmody appears to want to promote. Arguably Carmody wants to maintain that lives are not fated by (lack of) nurture, in regard to the Nature/Nurture debate, through her portrayals of Jack and Ellen. She may be arguing for the capacity of the children, particularly Jack, to rise above their circumstances, and not be caught in a destructive cycle. In part, this is achieved through Jack taking hold of the children's story. Jack as both the author of the narrative and also a subject of it is rarely relegated to an object status. This position is, nevertheless, not entirely convincing, as too much rides on the children (and they *are* children, neither of them has even reached the teenage years) having to provide the nurturance to each other. This is not to suggest I would herald a return of the sentimentalised, domesticated, asexual mother figure in texts for young people. Rather, that constructs of maternity offer the reader a variety of mother (and father) types and forms of nurturance. It seems that Carmody has not been able to fully disengage the narrative from the dichotomy found in the

"good"/"bad" mother syndrome. The mother in *Greylands* called herself a "bad" mother and she did not live to redeem herself of this negative self-image. Her mother was a "bad" mother and though she lives, she is portrayed as a malevolent old woman. The "good" mother is non-existent and the "bad" mother model permeates the text.

When considering the presentation of mother figures in *Greylands* to those presented in *The Changeover*, it is apparent that in the thirteen-year time span between publication dates there is little evidence to suggest that there has been a positive evolution in the ways in which mothers are portrayed. There is no suggestion that Jack's and Ellen's mother is given more than a fragile and tenuous sense of agency, unlike Kate and Laura Chant. The mother does not recognise or cannot acknowledge her other within. Her split self remains a tortured self because she identifies herself as unlovable, and as an inadequate mother. She is not granted a presence of mind, which denies her the ability to be gainfully occupied outside of the family home, and the opportunity to have another (possible) source of identification. There is no opportunity for the mother to develop a positive identification of self because she views herself as "bad". In *The Changeover* ineffective mothering, as presented via the character of Miryam Carlisle, is not due to mental inefficiency but due a lack of "natural" maternal instinct. Perhaps the mother's mother too lacked a "natural" maternal instinct, which could account for why she neglected her daughter. In *The Changeover* Sorry is temporarily ill-treated, but he is taken into the family home and treated with care. This behaviour establishes Miryam's ability to adapt to a role of mother. The issue of sexual desire is a more difficult subject in a text that is aimed at a younger age group. Consequently the mother figures in *Greylands* are not presented as sexual or desiring women. One level

of explanation for this lack is that the grandmother figure functions as a phallic mother who is blind to her daughter's psychosexual difference to the male. The daughter is unable to find a sense of self in her mirror image. She did not know how to privilege her own image; she was constantly told she was "invisible", which could translate (for an adult) into undesirable. Identification of self for the mother is not multifaceted as for Laura (as both daughter and mother figure, and Witch) or Kate (as mother, lover, worker) or Miryam and Winter (as mother and Witch). Thus in *Greylands* conservative and patriarchal models of motherhood are maintained.

In the following chapter on *Speaking to Miranda* notions of identity and subjectivity play significant roles. The mother in this novel is also dead and the daughter must reconstruct her mother's life in order to construct a sense of both her own and her mother's identity. Notions of "good" and "bad" mothering are not as clearly defined, because the mother is only "knowable" through other people's recollections of her. She is not present to relate her story. This is further complicated as the daughter has no memory of her mother. *Speaking to Miranda* also differs from the previous two texts, because there is no biological basis to the family structure - the daughter lives with her adoptive father. However, as in *The Changeover* and *Greylands* notions of communication and reconciliation are important.

For the heart of the matter is always
somewhere else than where it is supposed to be.

Trinh T. Minh-Ha
Woman, Native, Other. (p.1).

Chapter Three: *Speaking to Miranda* by Caroline Macdonald.

Caroline Macdonald's novel *Speaking to Miranda* (First published in 1990, I refer to the 1992 Puffin edition) focuses on the eighteen-year-old protagonist's (Ruby Summerton's) quest to uncover the real identity of her dead mother who is known to her as Emma Blake. This woman, who died when Ruby was two, deliberately erased any trace of her past. Emma left New Zealand, not telling anyone where she was going, and travelled to Australia with her young daughter. Emma drowned at sea whilst surfing with her partner of twelve months, Rob Summerton, who was the only witness to the drowning. Ruby's search for her mother's past coincides with her own quest for selfhood. This search takes Ruby to New Zealand where she discovers her mother's name was Magda Brady and that her name is actually Miranda and not Ruby. Ruby was her half-sister who died on the night that she herself was conceived. In *Speaking to Miranda* there is a double rupture of the mother-daughter bond through death. The first-born daughter dies thus making the mother daughterless; then the mother dies leaving the second-born daughter motherless.

The main family structure in *Speaking to Miranda* differs again from those found in the previous two novels. As in *The Changeover* Fineman's (1995,

p.145) "sexual-family-as-natural" is not the normative or predominant family structure in this text. Ruby lives with her adoptive father, Rob Summerton; she does not remember her mother, and has no idea of the identity of her biological father. However Emma/Magda's first-born daughter was born into a "sexual-family-as-natural" family structure. This baby, though, lived with her paternal grandmother and her mother when her father was away at war. There were also times when the mother was away working, and the baby lived only with her grandmother. Consequently the normative family model is not upheld within the narrative. As Emma/Magda was seventeen when she gave birth to her first daughter she was, according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states "a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years..." technically still a child. Hence the categories of adult and child are not clearly separated. Emma/Magda inhabits both a maternal space and a child/teenage space. This is not unproblematic for her and the implications of how the narrative positions the teenage mother as a "deviant" will be examined.

In this chapter part of the discussion focuses on notions of subjectivity and agency in relation to Ruby and her mother. Ruby is denied agency due to the voice in her head that she calls Miranda. The character of Miranda acts as an internal double in the psyche of Ruby. Her adoptive father, Rob, also thwarts Ruby's agency. Rob is presented as a character who is unable to perceive Ruby or Emma as separate from himself. Their subjectivities are mediated through his own status as subject – he keeps the two females in the role of an other or object.

The rupture of the mother-daughter bond will be addressed in relation to Ruby's quest. What underpins her search for selfhood is a parallel search for her mother's self. At times within the narrative the categories of mother and daughter merge, allowing the daughter to, albeit briefly, experience a sense of her mother's otherwise unknown identity. The lack of knowledge about her mother is problematic for the daughter, particularly during her early teenage years. It is during this time that the presence of the Miranda of the title is most profound. Miranda (as internal double) acts a maternal presence (both a "good" and a "bad" mother) in Ruby's child-space. My elaboration of the motif of the double or doppelgänger will incorporate notions of spirits and the trickster figure. I argue that there is a sub-text in the narrative that invites such a reading, which suggests that the voice of Miranda is inextricably bound up with the dead baby, Ruby. It is the character of Mum Manuatu, Emma/Magda's Maori mother-in-law, who brings the spirit aspect into play. Ruby encounters Mum Manuatu late in the narrative when her quest takes her to New Zealand. Mum Manuatu is a key figure in Ruby's quest. It is this Maori matriarch figure who assists the daughter figure to enter into a belated *form* of an intersubjective relationship with her mother.

There is a difficulty in writing about characters that are doubly or triply named. As much as possible, in keeping with the text when the protagonist is called Ruby she will be referred to as Ruby and when she is called Miranda, she will be referred to as Miranda. Likewise with the character of Emma/Magda. Naming is an important consideration in this text and names will be looked at in relation to models of identity and subjectivity.

The concepts of identity and subjectivity are integral to literary and feminist theory. In a great deal of children's literature there is a narrative focus on individual identity formation. John Stephens (1995, p.26) states:

> On the whole, children's literature is preoccupied with the individual, and events are subordinated to character development, exploration of personality and personal growth.

The focus on the individual and her/his personal development leads to notions of identity and the development of the subject. In children's literature criticism the meanings of the terms "identity" and "subjectivity" vary according to different critics. As noted previously (p.93) there are distinctions between the concepts of identity and subjectivity. Roberta Seelinger Trites (1997, p.26) asserts:

> Different from the concept of "identity" often used in the study of children's literature, which implies that an individual has one fixed inner essence that makes her unique from all other people, subjectivity is a fluid concept more based on the primacy of language than on the individual mind.

Trites' statement suggests that identity is fixed, personal, and unique and is not affected by outside influences. Conversely, subjectivity is a mutable state that is formed in and by language. An individual can occupy a number of different subject positions that are "constructed by the social force of language" (ibid, p.27). She suggests that identity is located in a humanist ideology, which assumes that each individual is distinct and possesses a fundamental and unique self that is able to withstand the effects of culture and environment. The use of the term "individual" is often reserved for the liberal humanist term "identity"; that is that which cannot be divided. Trites however uses the term individual in a broader sense as she argues an individual can occupy a number of subject positions. She sees subjectivity as located in a post-structuralist ideology, which insists upon the subject being viewed as constructed in language. Trites (ibid) argues:

> Because language and the institutions it represents are so fluid, any given individual can occupy simultaneously a number of subject positions, some of which can seem at times even contradictory.

An argument such as this indicates that language defines subject positions and that subject positions are dependent on language. There is no essential core that defines a person's subjectivity. Trites also focuses on gender issues (ibid, p.xi):

> I begin with an analysis...of how characters in children's and adolescent's literature reject traditional gender roles to find self-awareness and self-acceptance in enacting more balanced values in their lives than society's prescribed gender roles might have allowed them.

Trites establishes a connection between the part that society plays in socialising the individual and the significance of the individual being able to accept or reject the socialisation process. This raises the question of agency, which is intrinsic to notions of identity and subjectivity.

Robyn McCallum (1999, p.3) views the notions of identity and subjectivity a little differently to Trites when she suggests:

> The ideological frames within which identities are formed are inextricably bound up with ideas about subjectivity—that sense of personal identity an individual has of her/his self as distinct from other selves, and as being capable of deliberate thought and action.

McCallum sees subjectivity as personal identity that is formed within ideological frameworks. It is formed in dialogue with others and "shaped by social ideologies" (ibid). McCallum rejects the notion of an essential self, but she is also wary of viewing subjectivity as being exclusively influenced by outside forces. McCallum (1999, p.4) suggests that the key terms in theories of subjectivity are individual, subject and agent. McCallum draws on Paul Smith's work to elaborate her position:

> In *Discerning the Subject* (1988) Smith makes the following distinctions. The subject is to be understood as a conglomeration of provisional subject positions "into which a person is called momentarily by the discourses s/he inhabits" (p.xxxv). A person is not, however, "simply determined or dominated by the ideological pressures of any overarching discourse or ideology, but is also the agent of a certain discernment" (p.xxxiv). Agency,

> then, refers to "the place from which resistance to the ideological is produced and played out" (p.xxxv). Thus, subjectivity is an individual's sense of personal identity as a subject—in the sense of being subject to some measure of external coercion—and as an agent—that is, being capable of conscious and deliberate thought and action. And this identity is formed in dialogue with the social discourses, practices and ideologies constituting the culture which an individual inhabits.

The distinctions that Smith and McCallum make are significant as they maintain that subjectivity is not *just* constructed in and by language but also through agency; to some degree the subject is able to resist dominant ideologies and form a sense of personal identity. This is produced in dialogue with wider cultural practices and discourses.

McCallum's position differs from that of Trites as McCallum views subjectivity as personal identity, which is formed in a dialogic relationship with society and social discourses. The term "identity" is closely linked with notions of agency. Trites, however, limits the meaning of identity when she associates it with fixed essences.

I draw from both McCallum and Trites to formulate my position on identity and subjectivity. Unlike Trites the term "identity" is not employed to mean that which is fixed or that is located in "essences". Like McCallum identity is viewed as being bound up with notions of subjectivity which, in turn, is influenced by agency. Issues such as race, class, gender and so on influence and affect just how agency is played out in society at any given time. For this reason Trites' focus on gender roles and race and class issues is important. Both critics view language as significant in determining subjectivity. Notions of the speaking subject are significant, especially the question of who is speaking for whom? This question is integral to the reading of *Speaking to Miranda.*

The above-mentioned theories argue against concepts of fixed or stable identifications of self. Hence the theories imply notions of "subject-in-processness." (Kristeva, 1980, p.153) argues that the speaking subject is never fully unified; rather the subject is always negotiating subjectivity through an interaction between the semiotic and the symbolic. Lucas' (1998, p.39) deployment of the term "subject-in-process" repositions it in terms of a subject's agency. As agency has been referred to as "the place from which resistance to the ideological is produced and played out", (McCallum, citing Smith, 1999, p.4) it is relevant to consider identity, subjectivity and agency in relation to the category of mother. Rose Lucas (1998, p.36) states:

> ...the body, or the subjectivity, that is central within phallocentrism is the masculine one which is crucially defined and delineated precisely through eschewing the tentacles of maternal connection.

Thus the subject, who is male, must renounce his connection with the mother's body in order to develop into a "normal" masculine subject. Female subjectivity within phallocentrism is further complicated when women are defined by their capacity to give birth, as argued by Irigaray (1985a). In *Speaking to Miranda* Emma/Magda attempts to resist the ideology of patriarchally prescribed motherhood. That is, she endeavours to have (at least) two identifications of self – as teenager and as mother. As will be seen the two are, at times, at odds. The notion of conflict is also present in her daughter, due to the voice inside her head.

Ruby believes that Miranda is a voice in her head rather like an imaginary friend and this is (initially) what the reader is expected to assume. The novel opens thus (p.1):

> Miranda was always there. We talked to each other endlessly during long car journeys, or while standing on the fringe at strange new schools, or while lying awake at night listening for the sound of Rob's car. She used to tell me things I needed to know. And Rob told me once that I was talking to her even during my mother's funeral: chattering in a two-year-old's

> nonsense language while the others there ducked their heads, embarrassed, and Rob put his arms around me, murmuring hush. I remember touching the tears on his face. No. I don't suppose I really remember that; probably Miranda told me. It was no shock when Rob got around to telling me he wasn't my real father. Miranda had told me ages before.

Miranda acts as a purveyor of information for Ruby. It seems that Miranda is privy to all sorts of otherwise unknown aspects of Ruby's life. Ruby claims that Miranda tells her what she *needs* to know. How Miranda comes to have access to this knowledge is not examined in the narrative. How the voice of Miranda functions within the narrative will be explicated further in this chapter. Initially Robyn McCallum's ideas will be examined.

McCallum's research into *Speaking to Miranda* has focused on the self, the other and the double. The concepts of self and other are important in relation to (female) subjectivity and are crucial to consider in regard to the maternal. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the very category of mother is dependent upon the category of child. Judith Arcana (1984, p.5) remarks, "Our culture defines a mother as a woman who bears a child...and/or raises a child or children..." Thus the self (as child or mother) and other (as child or mother) are interdependent. The double is not usually considered in maternal discourse, but it is relevant to the categories of mother and child in *Speaking to Miranda.* The internal double (Miranda) of the protagonist is named by the mother and Miranda provides a vital link between Ruby and her mother. When Ruby attempts to sever ties with Miranda, she is in fact severing a maternal connection.

McCallum (in Bradford, ed. 1996, pp.18-19) states:

> The function of the double in realist novels such as... *Speaking to Miranda,* is quite different from that in fantasy novels... Studies of the double (Jackson, 1981; Dolar, 1991) have focused on its use in fantasy fiction and have been influenced mainly by Freud's early account of the *doppelgänger*

in 'The Uncanny' (1959:368-407). Freud's ideas are pertinent and useful in analysing the function of the double in novels in fantasy genres, especially fantasies in the mode of the uncanny... For Freud the relation between a character and its double is usually directly oppositional and has an allegorical and moral function: the double is a symbolic manifestation of a character's alter-ego or unconscious, and often represents that character's other 'evil' or repressed self.

> However, in many Australian novels for children the double is also represented as an aspect of the developmental process. Doubles often have a formative influence on a character's development and maturation as in *Speaking to Miranda...* In realist fictions such as *Speaking to Miranda* the double is often a way of exploring the social construction of subjectivity, rather than a psychological or moral aberration.

McCallum suggests that realist fictions which incorporate the figure of the double are better addressed within Lacanian and Bakhtinian constructions of subjectivity. Whilst acknowledging fundamental differences between these particular theories of subjectivity, McCallum (ibid, p.19) focuses on "the ways in which the two theorists conceive of the relationship between self and other." The premise of her argument is that fragmentation or multiplicity are (ibid) "conceptualized as conditions of subjectivity, rather than as a psychological aberration or moral allegory in the more limited Freudian sense." Arguably *Speaking to Miranda* contains elements of the fantastic and can be read in the light of both McCallum's views *and* Freud's theories of the uncanny and the doppelgänger. Both sets of ideas will be applied to explore the nature of the double, especially "the voice" in *Speaking to Miranda.*

Freud's work on the figure of the double or the doppelgänger is often viewed in relation to "otherness as evil" (Jackson, 1982, p.86). However, the Freudian figure of the double also suggests a fragmented self. Elisabeth Bronfen (1993, p.114) suggests "the double is by definition also a figure of a split or a gap". In *Speaking to Miranda* the character of Ruby is represented as internally split. Ruby's quest to discover who her mother really was is due to her wanting to fill the gaps connected with her-self and her mother's-self. The construction of

the daughter's sense of self is inextricably linked to her lack of knowledge about her mother's life. The figure of the double does not give Ruby access to her mother as a child, as it does for Jack in *Greylands*. Nevertheless, in part, the narrative function of Miranda is to fill some of the gaps and silences surrounding the identity of Emma.

McCallum states (1992, p.103):

> The representation of Miranda as the "trace of a voice" (p.6) and emphasis on Ruby's "speaking to Miranda" imply Miranda's existence as the internalised speech of an other. She functions in two primary ways. Firstly it is significant that it was Emma/Magda who "named" her, because in this sense she functions as memory to mediate and communicate Ruby's past. Secondly Emma/Magda's renaming of Miranda as Ruby grounds the textual relation between Ruby and Miranda in an act of denial - an attempt to pretend Ruby's death never happened (p.180). In this way, the relation between Ruby and Miranda functions to articulate a split between the sense of self as subject and as agent, whereby agency is located with the other, Miranda, who is seen by Ruby as responsible for decisions and actions (p.30).

According to McCallum it is the voice of Miranda who acts as agent in the split self of Ruby. This occurs before Ruby discovers that *she* is actually Miranda. McCallum suggests that the narrative places agency with the voice of Miranda thus denying Ruby the same sense of agency. Jonathon Culler (1997, p.46) suggests that agency "is the question of how far we can be subjects responsible for our actions and how far our apparent choices are constrained by forces we do not control." This is relevant to both the mother and the daughter. Emma/Magda seemingly acted irresponsibly by becoming pregnant at seventeen, and her choice to marry is partially based on the fact she has a baby. Once married her husband goes away to war, something she did not want him to do, but she had little choice but to let him go, thus her agency as wife, is restricted due to the choices her husband makes. On the whole, Ruby is not presented as a character that seems able to fully construct herself as an agent. She allows her adoptive father Rob and the voice of Miranda to restrict

her ability to construct herself as able to act upon her desires. The power of Miranda to restrict Ruby's independent agency is an area of investigation in this chapter.

The elements of the fantastic or the supernatural present in the narrative are emphasised by the dead baby, who impacts upon Ruby's identification of self. As Miranda, the dead baby acts as a maternal presence in Ruby's psyche, "a wise and comforting voice" (p.19). It is possible to read her as a type of pseudo or virtual mother, a mother who at times enacts a "bad" mother role as well as that of wise comfort. She is an ambivalent "other" in Ruby's psyche. Rosemary Jackson (1982, p.70) states, "As a literature of absences, fantasy throws back on the dominant culture a constant reminder of something 'other'". The dead baby functions as an absence in all the accounts of Emma Blake's existence in Australia. Emma arrives in Australia with her second daughter Miranda, whom she calls Ruby, thus masking the live baby's true named identity. As suggested by McCallum earlier this can be read as an act of denial – an attempt by the mother to make the dead baby a presence rather than an absence. However, in reality, she is an absence – and Emma is acutely aware of the fact her first daughter dies whilst the second was conceived. In a sense, Emma attempts to double the baby Ruby by having both a dead and a living daughter called the same name. That is, she tries to fill the absence with a presence. Emma also adopts a name that serves to mask her real named identity. As such, the character of Magda Brady functions as an absence in the text too until she is (re)discovered by Ruby.

The wrongness of naming is one of the devices that serves to trick the reader and the protagonist. The mother figure is known as Emma Blake and Magda

Brady and perhaps Magda Manuatu, if she took her husband's name when she married. Her personal identity is, to a degree, dependent upon what she is called. If Magda did become Mrs Manuatu then her public persona (subject position) is determined via her husband. If however she chose not to take her husband's name, she may be read as exercising agency. McCallum, (citing Smith, 1999, p.4) asserts, "agency refers to the place from which resistance to the ideological is produced and played out." Magda could have been resisting the patriarchal ideology of the wife having to take on the husband's name.

Irigaray (1993, p.2) argues "male and female genealogies are collapsed into a single genealogy: that of the *husband*." As Magda is never referred to as Manuatu, it is conceivable to think that she resisted the ideology of a single genealogy, in regard to her own subjectivity. Her first-born daughter is named Ruby (Manuatu?) but becomes Miranda in the psyche of her sister. The second daughter is named Miranda (Brady? or Blake? or Manuatu?), but the mother calls her Ruby. After her mother's death she becomes Ruby Summerton and when she returns to New Zealand she takes on the name Emma Blake and then claims the name Miranda Brady. The adoption of the name Emma Blake by the mother and then the daughter allows both of these characters a sense of anonymity. It is never established conclusively who the "real" Emma Blake was. It is implied that she may be a great-great-grandmother of Magda. Adoption of her name allows a connection with the past whilst also providing a degree of obscurity for the two women. The mother used this anonymity to escape her past and the daughter used it to discover the mother's past. In this way the category of daughter merges, to some extent, with that of the mother. The daughter becomes the mother, albeit briefly, through the adoption of her name. The implications of naming will be examined throughout the chapter.

There is an interplay of presence and absence surrounding Ruby and in relation to Magda Brady – further highlighting the subtle mother-daughter connections throughout the narrative. These are, however, beneath the surface – they are cloaked – and must be revealed through the daughter's quest. The cloak is a significant narrative trope and will be considered further in the chapter. On the one hand Magda has been dead for seventeen years but her daughter thinks it is Emma Blake who is dead; on the other hand her husband and mother-in-law in New Zealand think that Magda is alive. Sonny Manuatu (Magda's husband) questions Ruby when he meets her in New Zealand (p.154):

> 'Do you think she'll come back here? I'd make sure it [her house] was kept for her if she was coming back.' He doesn't know she's dead. He goes on before I can think how to answer him. 'Did she send you back to see if the house was okay?'

Ruby tells Sonny that her mother died seventeen years ago and that no one in Australia knew anything of her past life.

Rob Summerton had been acquainted with Emma for only twelve months and his information is scanty. Despite this he is less than willing to share what he knows with his adopted daughter. He apportions snippets of information to Ruby, claiming that his grief makes it impossible to talk about Emma (p.35). Even though his information is limited, by not telling Ruby what he knows he is denying her a much-needed sense of a relationship with her mother. Luce Irigaray (1994, p.19) claims:

> Woman has a direct intersubjective relationship with her mother. Hers is more an *inter-subjective* economy than an economy of subject-object relations; it is thus a very social and cultural economy that has doubtless led to interpretations in which women are seen as the guardians of love.

Rob keeps Ruby in a subject-object economy and disallows the *possibility* of a belated form of intersubjective relationship with her mother. Ruby needs

access to her mother's existence in order to establish a sense of her own self. Her lack of knowledge about her mother disallows the opportunity of a foundation on which to build her own sense of identity. Rob objectifies Emma and in turn her daughter. When Ruby questions Rob about her relationship with her mother Rob claims that Emma was not forthcoming with information. Emma's silences act as fuel for Rob's silence. He tells Ruby (p.50):

> 'Well yes, I did ask about you. Ruby-baby, you accuse me of being evasive about questions. I had a bloody good teacher in your mother in avoiding straight answers. She didn't tell me a thing. I didn't care. I thought she'd tell me when she was ready. I thought there was all the time in the world.'

Rob's lack of information about Emma is no excuse to keep what he does know from his adopted daughter. He has an obligation to fulfil in telling Ruby what he knows about Emma. He reneges on this responsibility.

Emma's silences can, in part, be accounted for by her anguish about being surrounded by death. This argument could be applied to Rob but it fails to be convincing, as Emma has been dead for seventeen years when Ruby asks for information about her. In Emma's case her first daughter had been dead only one year when she met Rob. Emma silenced the death of her daughter and tried to make, for herself at least, any signs of death invisible by calling her second daughter her first daughter's name and by calling the voice in her second daughter's mind by that very daughter's name. Yet, as mentioned, I argue that the dead baby does not remain silent and that she becomes a (maternal) presence in the psyche of her younger sister. This presence has a profound effect on the development of Ruby's identity.

In previous chapters it has been argued that the term "spirit" is synonymous with breath and life. According to *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (p.1972) spirit also means, "the soul of a person, as commended to God, or

passing out of the body, in the moment of death." Magda Brady's first daughter died on the night that her second daughter was conceived. Mum Manuatu reveals this (rather chillingly) to Ruby (p.151):

> 'You're not Ruby,' she says. 'Ruby was the daughter that Magda really loved, not you. You're not Ruby. You're Miranda. That's your name.'
>
> 'Miranda?' I whisper. The room grows cold. I shrink inside the cloak. I catch sight of myself reflected in the glass doors of a cupboard. A pinched white face shivering in a black wrap. I'm Miranda?
>
> 'Ruby's dead,' the voice from the chair goes on. 'Ruby died when she was one year old. On her first birthday. Ruby died while your trashy mother was out making you in the back seat of some pakeha's car.' Her voice rises to a shriek.

For a daughter in search of knowledge about her mother, Mum Manuatu's words would be shocking. Firstly Ruby's named identity, which she took as (mother) given is stripped from her and then she is told that she has a (dead) sister who was the preferred child of their mother. The notion of naming playing a role in how one identifies oneself is significant in relation to subjectivity. As McCallum (1999, p.4) observes, "subjectivity is an individual's sense of personal identity as a subject", then Ruby's sense of personal identity is that of Ruby Summerton. Mum Manuatu effectively deprives Ruby of her subject position. Hence her identity, which she considered to be formed by an undeniable connection with her mother, is destabilised. She is not who she thought she was and consequently her quest to discover her mother becomes a quest to discover her-self. The mother is labelled "trashy", implying that she was at best cheap, at worst a whore. The implication is that she is a "bad" mother who put her own sexual desires before the needs of her child. She was severely punished for enacting a (teenage) sexual-self – the loss of her daughter. In regard to the dead baby (Ruby), it is possible to suggest that her spirit passed out of her and into her sister. This position suggests a closer affiliation with the spirit world than is usually implied in western narratives. However, *Speaking to Miranda* is not just a western narrative. There is a Maori

component that opens up another dimension to the text and establishes another perspective.

Magda married into a Maori family and became part of that family group. Sonny and his mother Mum Manuatu provided support for Magda after the birth of her first daughter Ruby. Sonny relays this information to Miranda (pp.157-158):

> 'You should have seen Magda with that baby. It was as if it was all she'd ever wanted. We thought it would be a good time to get married. Magda said she wanted to get some savings together first, and off she went to work as a live-in waitress at a pub at Waitomo over the summer. Ruby stayed with Mum.'
>
> It doesn't add up to me, doesn't make sense the way Sonny's telling it. If Magda was so happy with Ruby, how could she leave her for so long? But once again I don't interrupt.

Sonny's story is somewhat of a paradox and this is further highlighted by the knowledge that Magda was a champion swimmer who had won a scholarship to go to Auckland, but could not take it up as she was pregnant with her first child – at seventeen. As mentioned, she can be read as a child having a child. These factors suggest the potential for an ambivalent relationship between mother and child. Sonny represents Magda as a wife and a mother, but what he avoids in his account of her is any subject position of her own. Her daughter is well aware of the limitations of Sonny's version. Sonny's interpretation of his wife relates only his perspective. He sets up a romantic account of the wife/mother/child relationship without considering the impact of this on the girl/woman involved. One reading of Sonny's representation of Magda is that he tries to situate her socially and culturally within a paradigm of prescribed motherhood, that of the "good" mother who is "totally selfless in her devotion to her children" (Lucas, 1998, p.39). Sonny however fails to understand the ambivalent role that Magda played in this mother/daughter relationship. It was a script of motherhood that Magda herself, partially at

least, rejected. One explanation for this rejection is that she is technically a child enacting an adult role in society. As a western teenager she, arguably, wanted to act as an autonomous being and not be restricted by her roles of mother and (soon-to-be) wife. That is Magda wanted to exercise her agency, to in McCallum's (1999, p.4) terms be seen as, "capable of conscious and deliberate thought and action." In order to exercise some autonomy she left her baby with her future mother-in-law while she went away to work. However the savings she amassed she spent on a cloak for herself – rather than on their wedding, and on her daughter's first birthday she left once again and engaged in extramarital sex. In Trites' terms, Magda is "occupying a number of subject positions, some of which can seem at times even contradictory" (Trites, 1997, p.27).

As Magda is a teenager when she gives birth and marries, part of her ambivalence to her assigned feminine role could be attributed to a lack of freedom and choice. This is important at any age but especially significant to western teenagers. In relation to subjectivity it can be argued that the ideological position that Magda is meant to adopt is unquestionably that of the protective, caring, maternal figure. In part Magda resists this position. The notion of resistance demonstrates Smith's argument (cited earlier) about agency, where he states that agency is the place where resistance to the ideological is produced and played out. Luce Irigaray (in Whitford, ed, 1994, p.50) asks, "So what is a mother? Someone who makes the stereotypical gestures she is told to make..." Whilst Magda inhabited the space of motherhood, she was either unable to or else she refused to accept entirely the patriarchal ideology, that expected her to make the stereotypical gestures of maternity. Trites' (1997, p.xi) point about resisting prescribed gender roles is

relevant here, as Magda resists enacting the conventional role of mother. Magda also inhabited the space of teenager, which is often associated with rebelliousness, questioning of authority, including stereotypical and prescribed roles, and the teenage-self is often egocentric. Consequently the two positions of mother and teenager are in conflict. Magda is caught in a bond/bind dichotomy. That is, maternity placed limitations on her freedom, but she did not completely reject her maternal role. It must be assumed that at least part of what Sonny says is the truth and that Magda did have a bond with her daughter. However, in order to experience much desired freedom it was necessary for her to leave her daughter. This was also a practical decision as Magda could not work and care for a dependent child. She knew her baby would be loved and cared for by Mum Manuatu.

The narrative implies a very close relationship between grandmother and granddaughter (p.159):

> 'Ruby died during that night Magda was away. No particular reason. Ruby wasn't sick or anything. These days, they call them cot deaths. It nearly broke Mum's heart. She loved Ruby.'
>
> 'I expect Magda didn't feel very happy about it either.'
>
> 'Well, you see, Miranda, I don't know, I wasn't there, and I never saw Magda again. I get back from Nam and find my wife's gone, and my baby daughter's in a grave.'
>
> 'Your mother drove Magda away.'
>
> 'No. She wouldn't have done that. You've got Mum all wrong.'
>
> 'Oh, really? She called my mother trashy.'
>
> 'Listen to me! She saw Magda as her daughter! Magda was *family* as far as Mum was concerned. And so were you. Magda ran away and took you. She didn't ever let Mum know where she was, if she was safe, if you were safe. That's what makes Mum bitter. That's why she said what she did to you. And don't forget she's getting on a bit. Seeing you like that gave her a shock, opened up all that old hurt. Seeing you would have shaken me up a bit too, I can tell you, if she hadn't warned me. As it was...' His voice drops away.

Here Mum Manuatu is portrayed as an all-encompassing mother. In relation to western maternal discourses, she represents in Lucas' (1998, p.39) terms, "the emotional and domestic pivot of family". That said, notions of family are important to Maori peoples and Mum Manuatu's position in Maori culture may not be unusual. Importantly, once again, the narrative undermines the notion of the "sexual-family-as-natural" because neither Magda nor Miranda are related by blood to Mum Manuatu. However, they become Mum Manuatu's kin. It is in shock and anger that she refers to Magda as "trashy". The narrative does not suggest that this is how she consistently thought of or referred to her daughter-in-law. Sonny's relative dismissal of Magda's feelings regarding the death of her daughter, suggests that there is a part of him that, perhaps, holds Magda responsible for the child's death. This may be a suppressed or unacknowledged thought that only surfaces with the arrival of the living daughter. On the one hand Sonny articulates that his child died a cot death and that *his* mother is devastated; on the other hand he does not consider the feelings of the child's mother. The second Ruby realises that her presence has opened up a lot of old wounds (p.160). The lack of information about Magda's thoughts and feelings juxtaposed with Sonny's reminiscences suggest that perhaps Magda was carrying the burden of guilt and shame. Although she (seemingly) rejected the script of maternity expected of her this is not to suggest that she did not love her daughter, her husband and his family. I would argue that Magda was attempting to forge a subjectivity based on her own need for independence as opposed to one based upon a prescribed cultural role.

When speaking of feminist critics Jane Ussher (1997, pp.442-443) argues:

> They have also explored the tensions involved in reconciling aspects of female experience that might traditionally have been restrictive – such as

> beauty, sexuality or mothering – with women's desire to be an autonomous agentic subject. This demonstrates women do not have to throw the baby out with the bath water, rejecting everything deemed 'feminine' in their quest to be something other than the 'second sex'. Reclaiming or reframing the body, sexuality or the relationship between mother and child can provide a very different interpretation of what it means to be 'woman' than that represented in archetypal representations of the Madonna or whore.

Ussher's argument suggests that women can take up positions of resistance to traditionally prescribed roles by reclaiming or reframing what it means to be a woman. Arguably this is what Magda attempted to achieve by leaving her baby daughter and going away to work, and then by (re)claiming her sexual self when her husband is absent. Unfortunately for Magda her resistance to prescribed cultural roles, whilst allowing her a sense of agency and perhaps an opportunity to inhabit a teenage-self, as well as a sexually desiring self and a maternal self, resulted in an overwhelming loss. Magda's seeking of independence was severely punished, the price being her daughter's life. Magda had to live with this death as well as the knowledge that she had been unfaithful to her husband, (her second child being living proof of this transgression) which was an insult to the Maori family who had embraced her and considered her their kin.

As a part of the Manuatu extended family Magda would be exposed to cultural practices particular to Maori peoples. Her subject position would be impacted upon by Maori cultural codes. McCallum (1999, p.4) states, "identity is formed in dialogue with the social discourses, practices and ideologies constituting the culture which an individual inhabits." Magda inhabited both pakeha and Maori cultures and arguably, her sense of personal identity was produced in dialogue with both cultures. It is feasible to suggest that she was exposed to Te Ao Maori.

Paratene Ngata explains some aspects of Te Ao Maori: The Maori Universe (2001, p.1):

> The chain of events and reactions associated with sickness and dying can be more easily understood by having some knowledge of Te Ao Maori [the Maori Universe] and of the cultural fabric through which health, healing, illness, death and grieving centres upon notions of unity, harmony and balance. This means that a person lives in harmony with the natural, physical and spiritual world, and that this delicate balance is maintained through systems of customary practices and the law of tapu [sanctity]. Transgression of this law invokes the anger and wrath of the Gods (Atua and Tipua), a breakdown of the person's defences and protective barriers (kaitaki), thus allowing the intrusion of harmful and evil influences. The outcome may be Mate Wairua (spiritual sickness), which results in sickness and sometimes death.

Magda broke the laws of tapu by having sex with a man other than her husband. Cleve Barlow (1991, p.128) elucidates further on the meaning of tapu:

> There are many meanings and conditions associated with tapu. First and foremost, tapu is the power and influence of the gods. Everything has inherent tapu because everything was created by Io (Supreme God), each after its kind or species. The land has tapu as well as the oceans, rivers and forests, and all living things that are upon the earth.
>
> Likewise, mankind has tapu. In the first instance, man is tapu because he is created by the gods. Secondly, he becomes tapu in accordance with his desire to remain under the influence and the protective powers of the gods.

Magda did not remain under the protective power of the gods when she had sex with her second daughter's father. As a consequence the death of her first daughter *could* be viewed as a spiritual punishment (the wrath of the Gods) for this transgression. Perhaps Magda was suffering from Mate Wairua and the new baby Miranda was prey to this as well. It is feasible to suggest that Magda left New Zealand, and became Emma Blake, in order to escape the effects of Mate Wairua. Magda's move to Australia, however, does not remove the associations of spirits and ghosts. Close examination of the narrative suggests that the themes of life after death, ghosts and voices from the grave are present. A friend of Emma's in Australia evokes their presence (p.108), as does Mum Manuatu.

The second born daughter is in her mother's house in New Zealand, talking with Mum Manuatu. She questions Mum Manuatu about Magda (pp.168-169):

> 'Why did she run away? It can't have been just because I wasn't Sonny's daughter.'
>
> Mum Manuatu shrugged slightly, sighed. 'She was a very troubled girl in those last few months. She was surrounded by death. You could see it growing day by day in her eyes. As if she couldn't turn around but another loved one would be lost. In a few months her grandfolks went, and little Ruby, and Sonny was away fighting and for a long time he was listed as missing. When you were born you were sickly, always crying. She wouldn't let you out of her sight.'
>
> 'She told people I was Ruby.'
>
> 'Perhaps it was a way of tricking the bad spirits snapping at her heels.'
>
> There's an old electric kettle on the end of the bench. It's criss-crossed inside with cobwebs and crusted with dried water salts. I rinse it with cold water from the tap. Mum Manuatu is quiet, perhaps sensing I need a few moments to think. I fill the kettle and plug it in, waiting until the movement in the water tells me the element is working. 'If it was bad spirits she was running away from, they caught up with her. You know, all the time I was growing up, from as long as I can remember, I had someone talking to me inside my head. She was very real. I've always known her as Miranda. She wasn't always friendly.'
>
> I see Mum Manuatu's eyes move sideways fractionally, as if to check no one else is in the room. 'Some would say that the little dead one was jealous of you. You had a life, and you had Magda all to yourself, and you even had the dead one's name. But that's hocus-pocus. Most likely you were lonely, missing your mother. You had the voice to keep you company.'

It could be argued that, at the surface level, normative (western) family models are not upheld in this text. There is no explicit suggestion that Magda had to run away for being a dishonourable wife. The narrative implies that both Mum and Sonny Manuatu would accept the child, and that she would grow up embraced by the Maori family. Ostensibly Magda is not presented as a deviant for having two children to different fathers by the time she is eighteen. However the fact that her first daughter dies whilst the second is being conceived and the fact that Magda dies so young, does suggest a sub-text, which argues otherwise. It could be argued that because Magda did not mother according to the dominant prescribed model she is "killed off". Consequently the narrative does reinforce, if not normative family structures,

normative models of maternity. Mothers can be teenage mothers, but they must conform to prescribed notions of "good" mothering. Magda as a "bad" mother is sexually active outside of marriage and then she leaves her second daughter motherless, with no knowledge of her mother's past. Also, as argued, Magda could have been suffering the effects of Mate Wairua. Thus, there are two sub-text readings that could account for her death. Ruby is left with Magda's fragmentary existence, which is pieced together via Miranda with the assistance of the Manuatu family.

As Ruby's identity is impacted upon by the presence of Miranda, who is both a "good" and "bad" virtual mother figure, it is important to consider her presence in relation to Mum Manuatu's words. In regard to the concept of "hocus-pocus", in the passage above, Mum Manuatu is implying the notions of trickery and deceit as, according to *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (p.908) hocus-pocus is, "a juggler's trick; jugglery; sleight of hand; trickery or deception." Mum Manuatu is quick to (seemingly) dismiss this idea and instead suggests the more rational view that the young child was lonely, and the voice kept her company. Whilst the latter may be the case, it is feasible that hocus-pocus is a force at play in the voice of Miranda that Ruby hears.

The reading of Miranda as the spirit of the dead baby Ruby highlights the idea of the returned dead in relation to the uncanny. Freud (1919/1973, p.241) states, "Many people experience the feeling in the highest degree in relation to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to ghosts and spirits." The antagonism the real Ruby, known as Miranda, projects onto the second Ruby can be viewed as hostility based on the second child's appropriation of the first child's named identity. The antagonism is an act of punishment on

the first Ruby's behalf. She reinforces this by wanting the second Ruby to believe that she is the one in control of her life. However, at thirteen, the second Ruby rejects the first Ruby's (Miranda's) psychic presence and attempts to turn her into an absence. This echoes the absence of her mother; hence maternal connections are being severed in Ruby's rejection of Miranda.

During the period of the absence of Miranda, the second Ruby endeavours to adopt an independent self-hood and a sense of agency that the force of Miranda had previously disallowed. As McCallum (1992, p.102) states, "for Ruby, it is the inability to perceive her own selfhood as independent of the world, that is the inability to construct a sense of herself as an agent." Ruby had been so clearly reliant on Miranda for signs and cues on the ways in which to operate in the world, and for friendship. Due to her reliance on Miranda, Ruby had not cultivated a sense of agency whereby she was responsible for her actions and not constrained by other forces. Ruby's reliance on Miranda could be viewed (metaphorically) as analogous to an emotional bond between mother and child. Such a relationship may be marked by dependence of the child on the mother. The loosening of the mother-child emotional ties is an important step in the child constructing a sense of her/his own identity and asserting her/his agency.

Initially Ruby misses Miranda's presence but she does start to develop a feeling of her own agency (p.29):

> There were times I missed her, near panic at situations where previously she'd have guided me. There were times when I thought that by wishing her dead I'd truly killed her, and I felt aches of grief.
>
> But these times grew fewer as the year in Perth continued. I remember it as a good year. I made friends and felt curiously free, independent, without Miranda's constant supervision, her judgements, her interference. And I was at last able to understand the reason I liked this moving sort of life. Every place was a new start, a chance to present myself to new friends as

> any sort of person I wanted to be. This was even easier now that Miranda wasn't there bringing me always back to my old self.

The notion of being brought back to her old self suggests that Ruby perceived herself as having a sense of personal identity that was stable and reliable. Yet the subject positions she adopts are provisional and dependent on her circumstances at the time. In Kristevan terms, her subjectivity is produced through the interaction between the semiotic and the symbolic. Kristeva (1980, p.135) states, "The subject is in a state of flux between stability and instability." Ruby, particularly before she becomes Miranda, is in a state of flux as her identity is not unified. Ruby's independence from Miranda permits her to inhabit subject positions that she is responsible for determining as opposed to being determined by Miranda. She can be likened to a teenage girl who makes her own decisions as opposed to those suggested by her mother. If, however, Miranda is read as an aspect of Ruby then the notion of her inhabiting a subject position that is not determined by Miranda becomes complicated. One way to read this is that she has integrated her split-self and become, in McCallum's framework (1999, p3), "capable of deliberate thought and action." However, this notion is undermined because Miranda is still internally active.

The force of Miranda is such that she cannot be silenced indefinitely and her absence – a repression in the psyche of Ruby – becomes a presence once more (pp.29-30):

> So when, slowly, slowly, during my fifteenth and sixteenth years she turned up again, I resented her intrusion. I refused to speak to her. Generally I did the opposite to what she told me to do. I'd cast her as malicious. I expected her influence to be against my best interests.
>
> The buying of the cloak was disturbing. Miranda was the obvious explanation. She'd taken me to that shop and dangled the cloak in front of my eyes and made me want it. It was like realising a whole new area of her influence over me. I remembered her words back in Hobart – something like 'nothing you do is without my direction'. She'd realised she could no

> longer steer me with her words so she'd been planting ideas in my head. Perhaps I had no volition of my own at all. Possibly even the words she told me directly were chosen knowing I'd do the opposite.

It is now difficult to perceive the voice of Miranda as an imaginary friend in a child's egocentric fantasy. Ruby at fifteen or sixteen years old can still be viewed as solipsistic, but not so emotionally immature that she would still be dependent on an imaginary friend. The mood swings associated with adolescence could account for the recurrence of an internally split-subject. Feeling uncertain and perhaps insecure, Ruby allows her internal double to influence her once more. The other way to read the re-emergence of Miranda is as the spirit of the dead baby, which has been repressed in Ruby's psyche. In the above passage Ruby presents Miranda as a manipulative and cunning force who employs different strategies to influence her. Miranda acts as a trickster figure that mischievously places self-doubt back into the mind of Ruby. Miranda advocates uncertainty and it is this feeling of doubt placed in Ruby's mind that gives Miranda her ("bad" mother) power.

The notion of uncertainty is also found in the multiple naming of the characters. Emma is not actually Emma, Ruby is in fact Miranda and Miranda is Ruby. Throughout the narrative there is a deceit happening on the part of the author as to who is who. The "real" Ruby (as a spirit presence) is privy to certain knowledge but as a source of information, she is fallible. The inclusion of the cloak in the narrative hints at fallibility and deception. On the one hand a cloak is an article of clothing, a loose outer garment, on the other hand it also means, "that which covers over and conceals". (*The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary,* p.325). There is much that is covered over and concealed in *Speaking to Miranda.* The cloak can be read as a metonym for the deception of the mother. Ruby states that it is Miranda who makes her buy the cloak. This

further reinforces the notion of Miranda providing a maternal connection between Ruby and her mother. When Ruby purchases a cloak that exactly matches her mother's she becomes obsessed with the idea that the cloak actually was Emma's, so she asks Miranda (p.15), "*Of course,* she replies. *Of course it's Emma's cloak you're wearing.*" In actuality it is not Emma's cloak – yet another example of Miranda's ability to enact the role of virtual "bad" mother and to trick and deceive Ruby. It is not important that the cloak is not Emma's, what is significant is the three-way bond that is set up between the mother and her two daughters via the cloak. This garment is one that ties both daughters to their mother. Magda purchased a cloak with her wedding savings; she owned it when the first Ruby was still alive. It was one of the few items that she took with her to Australia and it is something that all who knew her remember her for.

Ruby remains convinced that the cloak was her mother's. After much pleading she obtains some limited information from Rob about her mother, but she decides that she needs to know more. Ruby thinks that the lining of the cloak may contain some secret document that will make her mother more knowable. She hacks at the cloak and finds that there is nothing in the lining. The sense of nothingness brings the realisation of what she has lost (p.72):

> What had I expected to find? A name, address, and telephone number? Emma's Medicare card?
>
> It takes me a long time to go to sleep. Emma is suddenly real. For the first time in my life I grieve for my mother.

The grief that Ruby experiences prompts her to go through with her plan to find out who her mother was – to try to unravel the enigma of Emma Blake.

Just as Emma took a cloak from New Zealand to Australia, Ruby takes a cloak from Australia to New Zealand. The cloak, as mentioned, can be read as a metaphor for concealment. An obvious area for concealment is the "true" named identity of the mother and daughter characters. Both Magda and Ruby use the name Emma Blake as a cloak. In Magda's case this renaming helps to both cover and conceal her past so that she cannot be traced. Ruby mimics her mother's actions in reverse. That is, she goes to New Zealand, effaces her known identity as Ruby Summerton, and becomes Emma Blake. She allows herself to take on this name after, by chance, she discovers her mother's name was Magda Brady (p.132). The knowing of this name is a serendipitous revelation to Ruby (pp.136-137):

> I'm like Emma all those years ago in Australia. The only difference is I don't have a baby in my arms.
>
> Not Emma. Magda.
>
> *I'll* be Emma Blake now.
>
> Magda. It's beautiful. I don't know anything about the name. Perhaps it's from Mary Magdalen. I've never known anyone called Magda so I have no preconceptions about it. Magda. My mother's name. I treasure the sound.

When considering the name Magda there are two ways in which it can viewed. Ruby sees it as a beautiful name and associates it with the biblical character Mary Magdalen. According to *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (p.1185) Magdalen is "a repentant harlot elevated to saintship" or "a reformed prostitute." Ruby says she has no preconceptions about the name but presumably she associates it with the positive aspects of repentance and sainthood. However, if the name is considered in the light of prostitution then Magda's changing her name to Emma is extremely significant, especially when considering that Mum Manuatu referred to Magda as "trashy". Emma may be read as feminised version of Emanuel, which according to *The Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names* (1977, p.102) means, "God with us", and

Emma (p.103) means "whole, universal". The name change may symbolise a re-making of an "immaculate" new self in a new land. The cloak as a device of concealment adds credence to this argument as Magda can be read as concealing her past. Taking on the new name of Emma Blake is a means of symbolically rebirthing oneself. Here the identities of the mother and the daughter metaphorically merge as the daughter becomes identified by the same name as the mother. As the daughter is approximately the same age as the mother when their respective changes of named identity occur, it signals a symbolic amalgamation of the two. This implies that the subject position that the daughter occupies is, superficially, that of the mother. Ruby is, however, exercising agency in taking on the name of Emma Blake as she is, in McCallum's (1999, p.4) terms showing how she is "capable of conscious and deliberate thought and action."

The adoption of the Emma Blake persona is a definitive step in Ruby's rebirth process. It also allows her to take up a position of agency. However, this agency *may* be read as being partially negated as the daughter is simply replicating the mother's actions. Nevertheless the anonymity that this replication affords Ruby is crucial to her development as a subject who is self-defined as opposed to defined by others. Her taking on her mother's fictitious identity enables her to move through New Zealand with a sense of freedom that had not been accorded to her before; because of her dependence on Rob, coupled with his disallowing her a subject position that was not defined by him.

The cloak that concealed the true named identities of Emma Blake and then Ruby Summerton is later used as a device to bring the Australian and New

Zealand components together via the baby girls. Both babies were cradled in Magda/Emma's cloak and this image is one that stays with both Sonny and Rob. Miranda is aware of this when on the beach in New Zealand with her extended Maori family (pp.175-176):

> 'Would you like to hold him while I get a feed?' Shonna asked me. 'All right,' she went on to the sleepy baby, 'here we are, go to your Auntie Miranda.' I cradled the baby, wrapping the edge of my cloak around him because of the coldness of the night creeping in against the dwindling fire. I thought about Rob's story of my mother cradling me beside a beach fire the first time he met her. I watched how the glow from the fire threw a sheen on the soft brown cheeks of the sleeping baby. I noticed Sonny and his mother looking at me from the other side of the embers. Their faces were full of meaning as if they were seeing Magda sitting with Ruby.

In going back to New Zealand, her "mother" land, Miranda is psychologically giving birth to herself, therefore the mother-daughter bond is endorsed. The psychological absence of the real mother is established through the voice of Miranda (the real Ruby) as a needs meeting voice; and further as Miranda viewing herself as a replica of her mother. One reading of this scene suggests that by appropriating this position she both installs her mother and effaces herself. It is a reading that I regard as questionable, as I do not consider that in *choosing* this role Miranda does efface herself and thus denies herself an independent subject position. Any role carries with it certain constraints; this does not necessarily result in a lack of independence. In part Miranda takes on her mother's gendered identity and she "performs" her mother. For Miranda this is empowering as it gives her a sense of her mother that had previously been denied.

McCallum, (1992, p.104) however, suggests that in performing her mother Ruby/Miranda denies herself an independent subject position:

> In describing herself as a replication of Emma as she has been represented by Rob and as she is seen by Sonny and his mother, Ruby encodes herself as an image, or representation, as Ruby/Miranda/Magda/Emma she simultaneously occupies all, but none, of these positions. Ruby/Miranda's

appropriation of the image of the other then involves an effacement and loss of self, analogous to that of Emma/Magda herself.

McCallum's statement regarding "the loss of self" implies that there is an essence, a core that constitutes an individual's personal identity; yet McCallum (1999, p.4) argues, "the subject is to be understood as a conglomeration of provisional subject positions". Arguably there are some contradictions within McCallum's arguments, as surely the daughter enacting herself, as Ruby/Miranda/Magda/Emma is an example of her occupying a number of provisional subject positions? I would suggest that Miranda is not effacing herself but that she is, in fact, exercising her agency. As Jonathon Culler (1997, p.46) states, "agency is the question of how far we can be subjects responsible for our actions and how far our apparent choices are constrained by forces we do not control." When Miranda was Ruby Summerton she was restricted in her ability to make choices and act upon her desires. However, this situation is altered when she goes to New Zealand and is reconnected with her homeland and with her mother's past. Miranda's occupation of simultaneous subject positions aids her in constructing a sense of self rather than resulting in a loss of self. This is not to suggest though that this self is necessarily unified, rather that Miranda is now more able to occupy a site of agency. In addition to this it is possible to suggest that Miranda had to perform her mother in order to firstly, feel connected with her and secondly, to go through a process of resignification that allows her to fully adopt the name that her mother had initially given her.

In order for Miranda to come to terms with her mother's absence she must re-enact her as a presence. This appropriation allows Miranda the opportunity to feel, albeit very briefly, like her mother. It is a case of *symbolic* mergence in order to separate. That is, Miranda must identify with a like person in order to

successfully forge an identification of self. As Virginia Woolf (1922/1957, p.69) claims, "we think back through our mothers." In Irigarayan terms enacting the mother as a presence would (partially) enable Miranda to establish a genealogical relationship with her. Luce Irigaray considers that there is a genealogy based on procreation that binds women to their mother, to her mother and so on. It is vital that this genealogical link is acknowledged. Irigaray (1993, p.19) suggests, "Let us try and situate ourselves within that female genealogy so that we can win and hold on to our identity." I would argue that Miranda can only grieve for her mother and lay her to rest (so to speak) when she has acknowledged her likeness to and affinity with this woman. Miranda is restoring Magda to a position where she feels she can have a symbolic, reciprocal relationship with her. Once this is achieved Miranda is able to forge an identification of self that is based on her recognition of her genealogy, and this is reinforced by the claiming of her first mother-given name. Magda kept this name alive by calling the voice in her daughter's head "Miranda". As discussed, Magda probably called Miranda "Ruby" as a means of keeping the presence of her first daughter alive. The adoption of the name Miranda is, in part, a means of the daughter entering an intersubjective relationship with the mother, as theorised by Luce Irigaray (see p.136). She (1994, p.19) speaks of this relationship as "a very cultural and social economy". Naming is often a social and cultural indicator, and a name is frequently given with love. By claiming the name that her mother initially bestowed upon her, Miranda is claiming a piece of her past that will take her into her future.

As Miranda does not remember her mother her thinking back will be coloured by those who do. The partial view of Magda that comes to Miranda via Sonny

and Rob problematises the "thinking back" but does not render it impossible. She can form a *sense* of her mother by compiling information from all the versions she hears, that is, from the men and also from Rob's mother and Mum Manuatu. After Mum Manuatu's initial frightening outburst she befriends Miranda and becomes a fairly reliable source of information. Even though Miranda is not biologically related to Mum Manuatu, this woman knew her as a newborn baby. Sonny states that Mum Manuatu loved Miranda (p.160):

> 'The thing is,' he goes on after a moment, 'if Magda hadn't run away, you'd have grown up as our daughter, Mum's beloved mokopuna...'

Mokopuna means grandchild. Sonny's words assert that Miranda would have been considered family regardless of who her father was. Hence the notion of the "sexual-family-as-natural" is contradicted by Mum Manuatu's and Sonny's willingness to treat Miranda as kin. She would have been brought up in a home with two parents, but with no biological connection to her Maori father. As it is she grows up with another father who has no biological connection to her. Both her father figures are somewhat unusual in their respective willingness to take on another "man's" child. What appears to be important to Miranda is her maternal origin as opposed to notions of paternity. By returning to New Zealand, her place of birth, Miranda can begin to find her roots. Magda left a house that had been in her family for generations (p.161), "each generation altering the house in tune with its taste and fashion; generations of my own family." In conjunction with claiming her connections to the Manuatu family and Magda's family, Miranda claims her named identity, given to her by her mother only, there was no father figure present to influence the name choice.

Anna-Claire Walsh (2000, p.20) argues:

> "In search of my mother's garden I found my own" encapsulates the major narrative theme in Caroline Macdonald's *Speaking to Miranda*. Eighteen-year old Ruby Summerton embarks on a quest to establish her own agency. To accomplish this goal, Ruby must reclaim her dead mother's past in order to create her own future. By discovering her mother's actual identity and history, Ruby literally finds her own identity and it is through her connection with her mother that she is able to assert her independence from her adoptive father.

The narrative does suggest that Ruby must reclaim her mother's past in order to establish her own agency. However, what is significant about Walsh's argument is her assertion that Ruby discovers her mother's *actual* identity and history, which leads to a similar discovery of selfhood for Ruby. I suggest that the reader and Ruby (Miranda) do not discover the mother's *actual* identity, as this is unknowable. Magda's identity will always remain fragmented and unstable. What Miranda is able to achieve through her replication of her mother's actions is a sense of her mother that contributes to her being able to adopt a sense of self. Part of this sense of selfhood comes from her calling herself Miranda Brady.

Naming is extremely significant for Miranda, as her sense of identity comes from her mother-given first names. It is not surnames (paternal names) that she concentrates on. This is evident when Rob tracks her down in New Zealand and much of their interaction focuses on names (p.178):

> He sighs. 'I get it. You replayed Emma's games. Changed your name. Became a new person and disappeared.'
>
> 'Not Emma. Her name was Magda.'
>
> 'Magda - Miranda – for God's sake what's with all these names? What do they matter?
>
> 'They matter,' I murmur...

and (p.180):

> 'Well, you're coming back to Australia with me, aren't you, Ruby-baby? I've finished the Darwin contact, but there's another one coming up –'

> 'Rob! My name's Miranda'
>
> He laughs. 'Come on, have a heart. I've always called you Ruby. I can't change now. It's not that important, is it?'
>
> 'It's important.'
>
> 'I see.'
>
> 'For a start, it's the name I was given when I was born.' And for another thing if Rob starts calling me Ruby-baby I'll trail after him again and I'll be back where I was a year ago and I'll have achieved nothing. It's like panic rising.

Before looking directly at the two quoted passages I would like to look briefly at the significance of the names Ruby and Miranda. Ruby means a precious stone and when Magda's first "precious" Ruby died, she bestowed the name of Ruby onto her second daughter. Firstly though she named this daughter Miranda, which means "worthy to be admired", (*The Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names,* p.221). Both names have connotations of value and importance. This suggests that both Ruby and Miranda were important to their mother. Her changing of her own name from Magda to Emma has been discussed. It is noteworthy that Miranda not only claims her mother-given name but also bestows the mother's name of Magda back upon her. Similarities can be made with Jack in *Greylands* when he names his mother's child-self Alice, from which the mother's name Lissa is a derivative. In *Speaking to Miranda,* the naming is an example of the (adult) child (re)identifying the mother. The renaming of Magda also establishes a form of "woman-to-woman reciprocity" as suggested by Luce Irigaray (in Whitford, ed, 1994, p.50), as the mother named (and renamed) the daughter and the daughter renames the mother. Miranda does not equate the name Magda with the prostitute connotations but with the more repentant or saintly qualities. This does not however diminish the fact that textually the prostitute implications are present. This implies that Magda may have perceived herself as a social deviant and a "bad" mother.

In relation to the two passages quoted above the narrative focus rests with Rob and his inability to perceive either Emma or Ruby as Magda or Miranda. Part of his reaction is due to his concern over the whereabouts and welfare of his adopted daughter. However this is undermined by his conceited attempt to take control of Miranda's life again. He shows little understanding of the significance of her journey and its revelations. He assumes that "Ruby" will follow him back to Australia and become, once more, object to his subject. If subjectivity is as McCallum (1999, p.4) asserts, "an individual's sense of personal identity as a subject", then it is vital that Miranda is recognised as Miranda. Rob is revealing his patriarchal notions of feminine identity, where women are defined by men and their relationships with men. As noted earlier "male and female genealogies are collapsed into a single genealogy: that of the *husband*" (Irigaray, 1993, p.2). Admittedly Rob is not Miranda's husband but he is representative of the dominant masculine culture, and he asserts his dominance by calling Miranda by the name that is familiar to him – not the name she wants to be called. Rob fails to comprehend that Miranda has found a space that she can call her own and from this space she is able to formulate a sense of her own place in the world. McCallum (1992, p.99) argues, "Her personal history is derived not from a family she belongs to but from the places she has lived..." In part this is true as by the end of the narrative New Zealand is represented as her homeland, her Motherland. Yet family is an important consideration; Miranda wants to discover her personal family history – this is why living in her mother's family home is so significant to her. Also Miranda is unquestionably embraced by her mother's (by marriage) Maori kin. This suggests that the social, the genealogical and the geographical are important in Miranda's ability to claim a sense of self and agency. She is thus able to find a place for herself within an extended Maori family and within her

mother's house. This is not to suggest that she rejects Rob and the love and support that he has extended to her. She is not, as he argues (p.178) making "a mockery of all those years." What Miranda is doing is determining the grounds on which she wants her relationship with Rob to be established. Miranda wants to exercise her right to autonomy in order for a new articulation of self to be possible. This is why she can never be "Ruby-baby" again.

Rob's use of "Ruby-baby" is interesting on at least two levels. The "real" Ruby was only ever a baby in the physical world. Rob could not have known this but his persistence in calling a growing and maturing girl "baby" could imply a psychic knowledge of the baby. On another level, the term "Ruby-baby" can be read with sexual connotations. Rob did start to call Miranda "Ruby-baby" when she was a baby and at this age it is an understandable "pet" name. However, the long-term usage of the word "baby" can be viewed as somewhat suspect. There is a subtle, underlying, sexual tension present in the narrative surrounding the characters of Rob and Ruby (before she becomes Miranda). Another point to consider is the use of the term "baby" or "babe" in adult parlance; it is a patriarchal term of endearment and possession of the female. Women are referred to as "babes" and this often has sexual and sexist implications. The question as to whether Rob wants Ruby to be his "babe" lies uncomfortably beneath the surface of the text.

When Ruby/Miranda wears the cloak that is the replica of her mother's she apparently looks very like her mother at the same age. Emma/Magda is about nineteen-years-old when she meets Rob Summerton. It is Rob who tells Ruby (p.9) "Emma had one exactly like it." As mentioned a cloak can represent that

which covers and conceals. Perhaps the cloak, in this instance, symbolically conceals Rob's desire for Ruby and/or her desire for him. When Ruby meets an acquaintance of her mother's, he asks her if Rob ever remarried (p.88), "'Lots of girlfriends,' I tell him, 'but no wife.'" When later in the narrative Rob decides to marry (p.117) "the gorgeous Evie", who is only four years older than Ruby, the latter is deeply disturbed by the news (p.117), "I want to die." This is a very strong reaction to a forthcoming wedding.

Ruby (who has not yet become Miranda) is in New Zealand with Evie's younger sister Kate. When Kate receives a letter from Evie relating news of the wedding, Kate realises that Ruby is not pleased about the impending marriage. Ruby calls Evie a bitch, which upsets Kate. She challenges Ruby to consider her relationship with Rob (p.126):

> 'You're jealous. That's what it is. You don't want Rob to be happy with anyone but you.'
>
> 'That's not true – '
>
> 'Oh, yes it is. You should just sit down and examine your feelings about Rob, Ruby. I think you want him for yourself.'
>
> 'That's *grotesque*!' I shout but she's already gone, and the slam of the door drowns the words.

This is the only time in the narrative that any sort of sexual tension between Rob and Ruby is addressed directly. It is interesting that it is Ruby who is challenged to examine her feelings in this context, and not Rob. Perhaps Ruby does want to keep Rob to herself but I would argue that the motive behind this comes from Rob. Throughout the narrative he has kept Ruby in a dependent and objectified position. It is only when he becomes entangled with Evie that he distances himself from Ruby. She feels dejected and incapable of making decisions (p.100):

> I'm starting to see that with Rob around I've never had to make any moves on my own. Always he's been the motivator, the front that's given me an

> aura of being a free and independent spirit. But I'm not. On my own I'm hopeless.

This passage points to Ruby's obvious reliance on Rob but what it also implies is his dominant role in her life. He is only prepared to relinquish this when he "falls for" the twenty-two-year-old Evie. His mother suggests that his distancing himself from Ruby is because he is finding out what it is like when a child wants some autonomy from the parent (p.100). It is no coincidence that the woman he decides to marry is young and attractive. Ruby may not like Evie but she is someone who she could be envious of. When considering names, Evie comes from Eve which means "lively" (*The Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names,* p.112) but it is also associated with the biblical Eve – the temptress. Ruby sees Evie in this light and I suggest that she is challenged by it and jealous of it. This is not explored but is an example of the underlying sexual tension in the novel. It is also pertinent that Ruby is now the same age as her mother when she and Rob met. Arguably the sexual tension could be read in an oedipal way, as the daughter taking the mother's husband. In this sense their merging of identity becomes more profound than that of the daughter taking on the mother's name, she takes on the mother's role. However, the finding of a sense of self and a sense of home in New Zealand disallows a sexual encounter between (adoptive) father and daughter.

Whilst Ruby is still in Australia she retains a feeling of hopelessness, particularly in relation to a sense of self, but once she goes to New Zealand and embarks upon her quest she gains a feeling of independence. Rob attempts to threaten this when he arrives in New Zealand and starts calling her "Ruby-baby" and not Miranda. The way in which Miranda ensures that Rob will accept her new named identity is by mentioning her mother's death. Rob finally tells her the truth surrounding the swimming accident (p.181).

This divulgence seemingly eases much of the tension surrounding the pair and Rob does appear to accept her named identity of Miranda Brady. However, I would argue that the subtle sexual tension is still present and his move to call "Ruby-baby" Miranda is a ploy to win her over (p184):

> 'Not a good idea Miranda?'
>
> He's crafty, dropping the name in like that. But I've got another move. 'What about the wedding, Rob? Remember – Evie?'
>
> 'Well. Yes.' He looks at the floor and shuffles fractionally. 'I got a bit distracted from that. I had this missing daughter to worry about.'
>
> 'Don't try and make me feel guilty, you rat. You've run out on her, haven't you?'
>
> 'It wouldn't have worked, would it?' I get the full blast of those blue eyes, full of innocent appeal. 'Well, what's so funny?'
>
> 'It's just that I've – I've heard it all before.'

Rob goes on to say that he has never found another Emma. Arguably he *has* found another Emma, in the form of Ruby/Miranda and whilst he can manipulate her he will not bother to seek out permanent relationships with other women, albeit "gorgeous" twenty-two-year-olds. Rob has come to New Zealand to claim "Ruby-baby" back. Perhaps his flirtation with Evie was a ploy to make Ruby resentful and thus make her want to return to Australia with him. "Ruby-baby" however has become Miranda – her mother's daughter, not her adoptive father's lover.

Miranda will not follow him back to Australia as she is determined to set up home in New Zealand. The narrative ends with her thinking about her mother (pp.184-185):

> But then perhaps Emma/Magda was extraordinary. She's left a strong image with everyone who knew her, but the images are all in different shades, flickering, changing, and I wonder if I'll ever be able to distil the essential Magda.
>
> Before, at times like this, I might have asked Miranda about it. But I'm on my own now.

The fact that Miranda states that she is on her own suggests that she has not only laid the spirit of the baby to rest but that she is not going to be drawn into Rob's "blued-eyed" innocence. That is Miranda will not play the role of Magdalen as prostitute or Evie as the temptress. She wants to be admired on her own terms, not those defined by others. Miranda's desire to "distil the essential Magda" suggests that on the one hand she believes that identity and subjectivity can be reduced to a selfhood that is unique and fundamental. On the other hand her description of her mother as a series of "images, flickering and changing" implies that subjectivity is reliant on provisional subject positions. The ending of the novel presents the reader with ambivalence in regard to identity and subjectivity. This is in keeping with the narrative structure of the novel as a whole. Ambivalence is a key element throughout. It is found in the relationships between Ruby and Miranda, Rob and Ruby, Rob and Emma, and Sonny and Magda. There is an interplay of interpersonal relationships between these characters that is enacted through the character of Emma/Magda. All characters construct her differently and it is these variations in construction that help to reinforce the difficulty in representing Emma/Magda in only one fixed "essential" subject position.

When considering the mother figures in *Speaking to Miranda* in relation to those found in *The Changeover* it would be difficult to argue that there has been an evolution in the presentation of mothers. In *The Changeover* maternity as a normative role is challenged, to a degree, through the character of Miryam Carlisle. She initially rejects her son but as argued, enters into a "becoming good" category through eventual acceptance of him. Kate Chant is both sexually active and maternal. Perhaps she is allowed to live, as she is an older woman whose children have the same father and, although single, Kate is

preparing to remarry. It may be that the deviancy discourses outlined by Teresa Arendell (1999, p.9) are more potent when the mother is legally considered a child. In *Speaking to Miranda* Magda, as a teenage mother, is subtly aligned with a deviancy discourse – single motherhood – in that she is not permitted to live. Her death disallows her any further involvement in her daughter's life. Arguably she is "killed off" because she has had two children to two different fathers by the time she is eighteen. As a child inhabiting an adult space (that of mother) Magda is presented more as questioning the stereotypical constructions of maternity, rather than one who enacts the role of what Bird (1989, p.41) describes as a "good, nurturing mother". Mum Manuatu is presented as a strong and caring matriarch who is prepared to love and nurture her mokopuna regardless of their genealogical connection with her. On the one hand this suggests her capacity to care for all children, regardless of their heritage. This can be viewed positively as it takes pressure off the birth mother and allows for the child to be cared for in an environment that is not limited to or by the mothers' capacity for care. On the other hand it tends to idealise Mum Manuatu's relationship with both Magda and her children. Her character, too, is presented as only that of mother as advocated by her name – thus implying that motherhood is indeed the normative role for women. It must also be remembered that Mum Manuatu is examined within a dominant cultural discourse that differs from that of Maori cultural discourse. Within the dominant discourse it may be argued that she is a "good" mother who is the "domestic pivot of the family" (Lucas, 1998, p.39). Maori ways of life are not fully examined in the narrative but when Maori characters are present the focus is on the extended family, implying that the western normative model is not entirely relevant to Maori family dynamics.

Sydney Melbourne, a Maori writer of an essay entitled "The Portrayal of the Maori in New Zealand Children's Fiction" (in Lees, ed. 1980, p.82) argues that Maori circumstances are usually interpreted according to *pakeha* (white peoples') attitudes. The dominant agenda of Macdonald's text centres on the white-girl finding her identity. The lack of narrative focus on political issues tends to present New Zealand as a stable and enduring bi-cultural society where Maori and pakeha live together in a state of mutual harmony.

That said, Macdonald has highlighted and focused on features of Maori culture that seem to be significant to all tribal groups. Douglas Sinclair, (in King, ed. 1993, p. 64) claims:

> The Maori loved his [sic] land and identified with it. His close spiritual relationship with the land stemmed from his traditional concept of the basic origin of mankind. Deriving from the loving union of the earthmother, Papa-tu-a-nuku, with the sky-father, Rangi-nui-tu-nei. The union was bountiful, and by a series of semi-evolutionary processes, the heavens were filled with their hosts of gods and attendant spirits. Eventually the terrestrial world was populated by gods and myriads of vassal spirits and animate creatures.

Despite his Anglicised name, Sinclair is a Maori who is authorised to speak on behalf of Maori peoples. The spiritual legacy and affiliations with the land that Sinclair highlights, along with the extended family, are the aspects of Maori culture that Macdonald has emphasised. Whilst her handling of these very important cultural legacies must be questioned in relation to broader social and political issues, she does not demean Maori culture. It *is* presented as idyllic and idealised but the underlying attitude she presents is one of respect of Maori peoples and their culture. In her presentation of the Maori she has concentrated on traditional values and emphasised the importance of family. It is the Manuatu family, especially Mum Manuatu, who aid Miranda in her reclamation of her mother and her homeland. It is this cultural contact zone which proves to be so significant for Miranda, these people do become her

family. Their power lies in their ability to accept Miranda and help her to establish an identification of self.

A lack of positive self-identity is found in one of the protagonists in the next chapter on *Touching earth lightly*. This young woman (Janey Knott) is sexually abused, falls pregnant at seventeen years of age and is brutally murdered when she is eighteen. Her story is juxtaposed with that of her best friend, whose life is vastly different. The relationships these characters have with their mothers also varies greatly – their senses of self come, in part, from the ways that they are mothered. Unlike Miranda Brady they "know" their mothers, but for Janey this knowing holds no value.

As a society we use children poorly. We tell them we are here to nurture and protect their vulnerability; we teach them they have rights to a sound mind and healthy body; but we are still not ready to face the truth of child sexual abuse.

Jane Gardiner
Incest and the Community: Australian Perspectives (p.97).

Sex is violence – Perry Farrell of Jane's Addiction (from the CD – *Nothing's Shocking*)

Chapter Four: *Touching earth lightly* by Margo Lanagan.

In this chapter my primary focus is on the incest and abuse that surrounds one of the female characters, Janey Knott, in Margo Lanagan's novel *Touching earth lightly* (1996), and how this impacts upon her capacity to mother. Janey becomes pregnant at seventeen and gives her baby up for adoption. It is implied that Janey's lack of self-esteem, in regard to maternity, leads to her belief that her baby is "better off" with a "normal" family. Her perceived lack of maternal capacity can be attributed to her incestuous home life. The incest is alluded to on the opening page and it underpins the trajectory of Janey's "story". The issue of incest will be addressed in relation to feminist theories based on the structure of the social order, that is, "the Law of the Father" in conjunction with social and clinical perspectives on incest. Death is also present in the text and it is the character that is sexually abused who is murdered. The narrative suggests that her life is fated due to her circumstances. I hold with this view; however, it will also be argued that the novel offers a sub-text that proposes an alternative to this reading. Lanagan ostensibly equates the character's existence with a pre-determined outcome, that is, an early death; but the notion is also posited that the outcome could have been different with adult intervention into the character's circumstances. Whilst this position is not as evident as the one based on determinism, I

propose that the sub-text exists as the "subconscious" of the novel. This chapter essentially covers three specific aspects, in three broad based sections. These being, Janey's sexuality and her incestuous family environment, the mother figures, including how Janey is inscribed as a person who should not "mother", and the sub-text.

The novel is presented in two interrelated parts titled *Now* and *Then.* The latter section relies on the use of flashback and much of this is told in italic font. My quoting from the novel will be in keeping with the original text.

The narrative of *Touching earth lightly* centres, predominantly, on the friendship between the two eighteen-year-old protagonists, Chloe Hunter and Janey Knott. Although both come from families that are examples of Fineman's (1995, p.145) "sexual-family-as-natural", the characters and their respective families are set up in opposition to one another. Chloe is fair, pretty, celibate (for the most part) and comes from an educated, middle-class family who are presented as broad-minded and understanding. Chloe is the only daughter, situated between two sons. In this household all views/opinions are heard and each individual is autonomous within the close family unit. Open communication between family and friends is encouraged and the opinions and ideas of all generations are respected. The family home is clean, orderly, loving and welcoming.

Conversely, Janey is dark haired – with long dreadlocks (until just before her death when she becomes a shorthaired blonde), overtly sexually active and comes from a dirty, lower-class home where she receives little in the way of caring and support. Although this family also fits Fineman's description of the

"sexual-family-as-natural", it is a site of abuse and neglect for Janey. Her mother barely acknowledges her existence, whilst both Janey's father and her brother, Nathan, sexually abuse her. The father of Janey's baby remains unknown. As mentioned in previous chapters the legal definition of "child" is a person under the age of eighteen years. Hence Janey, like Magda in *Speaking to Miranda*, is technically a child when she gives birth to her baby. She is a child inhabiting an adult space. A married couple (Maxine and Terry Hayward) adopt the baby but he does spend the first two weeks of his life with his birth mother at the Hunters' home. The adoptive parents keep in touch with Janey through letters and photographs of the baby, whom *they* name (Edward) Eddie. Janey's life ends violently at age eighteen when she is murdered, by four youths – a girl and three boys – in a car wrecker's yard. Part of the narrative focuses on the impact of this on Chloe.

Like *The Changeover, Touching earth lightly* presents a number of mother figures. In contrast to Mahy's novel where the mother figures are granted complex and, at times, ambiguous characterisations, Lanagan's characters are represented as the antithesis of one another. Joy Hunter is presented as clean, educated, articulate, middle-class, kind, sincere and a "brilliant mother" (p.52), as opposed to Mrs Knott who is presented as dirty, inarticulate, poorly educated, and is described as the type of mother "it wasn't healthy to think about" (p.52). Janey is representative of the wrong or inappropriate mother as opposed to Maxine Hayward, the adoptive mother, who is represented as the correct or appropriate, married, mother. Janey is a representative "bad" mother – single, non-monogamously sexually active and a teenager. She represents the type of mother who would be described within "deviancy discourses".

Teresa Arendell (1999, p.9) argues:

> The standard of mothering presupposed in the dominant ideology – the mother absorbed in nurturing activities and situated within the biological nuclear family – contributes to a variety of deviancy discourses, targeted, albeit differently, at mothers who, for whatever reasons, do not conform to the script of full-time motherhood. Single mothers, welfare mothers, minority mothers, and immigrant mothers, overlapping but not mutually exclusive categories, are commonly subjects of deviancy discourses of mothering.

Obviously by giving her baby up for adoption, Janey cannot conform to a script of full-time mothering. Nevertheless Janey qualifies as a "deviant" because of her non-monogamous sex life and her single status when becoming a mother. It is revealed within the narrative that it is these unstable aspects of her lifestyle which mark her as unfit to mother her child. There is also another teenage mother, Sheree, a classmate of Chloe's and Janey's, who provides a contrasting role to that of Janey as teenage mother. Sheree's narrative presence is small, but it does help to reinforce the notion of the "good" married mother. Sheree marries the father of her baby, which strengthens the concept of the "sexual-family-as-natural". This family type is not, however, unproblematic within the text. Whilst Sheree and her family, the Haywards and the Hunter family are set up as "good" examples of this type of family, the Knott family represent the "bad" and undesirable example. It is, perhaps, not surprising that their daughter is a "deviant", as she comes from a dysfunctional and sexually deviant family.

The narrative opens with Janey relating to Chloe that she must find somewhere else to live (p.7):

> 'I've got to get out of that house.' Janey looked almost small...
>
> 'Grim is it?' said Chloe, digging in her backsack for a scrunchy.
>
> 'Absolutely. Lock-the-door-at-night-type grim.'
>
> 'Oh, Janey.'

'I know. It's kind of my own fault, I guess.'

Chloe made a face, tying her hair back. 'It's still *off*.'

The reader discovers that the "lock-the-door-at-night-type grim" that Janey refers to is the sex she has with her father and brother. It is worthwhile quoting in full the passage where Chloe discusses it with her father Dane. This is recalled as a memory of Chloe's. The girls are about thirteen or fourteen years old (pp.136-137):

> *She asks Dane, 'Is it child sexual abuse if the child doesn't really* mind *the sex?' They are shelling peas—the pods crack, the peas zip out and patter into the colander. Crack, zip, patter. Crack, zip, patter.*
>
> *He says, yes, straight away, then gives her one of those looks that says,* Confess all now.
>
> *'Not me,' she says, 'but someone my age.'*
>
> *'You can only mean one person.' He gives a big sigh and goes back to shelling. After a pause he says squeamishly, 'Is it someone who's ... got something over her? Like, a* teacher *taking advantage of her?*
>
> *'It's her father and Nathan—but he's under age too, so I guess that doesn't count,' Chloe says flatly.*
>
> *'Holy Manoly, Clo!' He stares at her, a pea-pod in his hand.*
>
> *'I know.'*
>
> 'Do *you know? For sure?'*
>
> *'Well, she's told me. I haven't actually gone round and got a—a* statutory declaration *from them! But they started making it really, you know, obvious that they wanted ... I mean, not just leaving those centrefolds lying around, and perving on her in the shower and hinting... '*God, that stuff gives me the heebs, *Janey said.*
>
> *'Jesus.' Dane cracks the pod and rolls the pea between his forefinger and thumb. 'How does she feel about it?'*
>
> *'Anyway, she says if she meets them halfway sometimes, they might not hassle her so badly the rest of the time. She might get a say in things.'*
>
> *'How does she figure that? How can she possibly think—' He goes back very efficiently to the peas, then breaks out, 'I mean* her father's *old enough to know what he's— Oh Christ, it doesn't bear thinking about.' 'Then again, Janey's a funny girl. She's got a pretty good imagination. This might be something she dreamed up to—I don't know—to make her life seem more dramatic or something, not what's actually happened, hey?'*
>
> *'It could be,' Chloe says. But she can tell the difference between Janey 'dreaming something up' and confiding that she's actually done it. Thinking of Janey relating the details, Chloe feels the hairs rising on the back of her*

> *neck. Janey's done it.* It wasn't so bad, *Janey said, staring doubtfully into her memory.*
>
> *But because Dane,* [sic] *seems upset about the whole thing (well, Chloe is, too, or she wouldn't have brought it up), and so relieved to think it's just one of Janey's stories, Chloe goes along with him. She even feels a little bit of misplaced relief herself—before wondering why she should, before realising* how *upset she must have been, and that she isn't as cool as she thought. She falls silent, in the uncomfortable knowledge that her silence protects Dane and herself, protects not Janey, but Nathan and Janey's father. She doesn't ask, as she intended, whether there is someone official she ought to inform, if anything should go wrong.*
>
> *But, Janey's confident nothing* will *go wrong. She seems to think she's solved all her problems by making this happen on her own terms. How can* Chloe *tell whether she has or not? She doesn't have the right, she feels, to do more than stand to one side, her knees wobbling with indecision, her face scrunched up with doubt. She can't see how it can be good, in any way—nothing involving that jerk of a brother of Janey's, that father whose eyes never look straight at you, can be okay. While Janey goes blithely on, Chloe follows a step behind, laden with foreboding. That seems to be their way.*

This is a densely written, complex passage and it is one that will be referred to again in this chapter. What will be considered initially is Janey's role in this incestuous situation. She is the daughter/sister to whom the sex crimes are directed. No matter what her own personal sexual desires or drives may be, the fact remains that father/daughter and brother/sister incest is a crime. It is not a matter of consent, albeit given so Janey will not be so harassed by the males in her family; it is a matter of interdiction. This sex just should not be happening. What is significant is Janey's willingness to accept some of the blame for the violent and incestuous situation she is in. This crucial detail will be examined in light of some feminist theories surrounding the incest taboo.

In "Women on the Market" Luce Irigaray (1985a, p.170) suggests:

> The society we know, our own culture, is based upon the exchange of women. Without the exchange of women, we are told, we would fall back into the anarchy (?) of the natural world, the randomness (?) of the animal kingdom. The passage into the social order, into the symbolic order, into order as such, is assured by the fact that men, or groups of men, circulate women amongst themselves, according to a rule known as the incest taboo.
>
> Whatever familial form this prohibition may take in a given state of society, its signification has a much broader impact. It assures the foundation of the economic, social, and cultural order that has been ours for centuries.

The order that Irigaray refers to is the phallocratic order upon which patriarchal society is based. It is founded on laws of kinship whereby sexual relations are determined by prohibitions on particular interfamilial and intrafamilial relationships. Marriage within this system is one of "gift-giving" whereby the women are given to the men. It is a system that is never equitable as the female constantly and consistently is placed in an inferior position. In "Women on the Market" and "Commodities among Themselves" (1985a) Irigaray's agenda is "to defy women's phallocratic relegation to subordinate counterparts of men and to affirm the existence of two autonomous sexes" (Grosz, 1989, p.148). In relation to Janey I would suggest that Irigaray's agenda fails as, in her family home at least, Janey is subordinate; she is not autonomous. In the above passage Irigaray is addressing Claude Lévi-Strauss' argument found in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship.* He is "doing the telling" when Irigaray states, "we are told". It is Lévi-Strauss who suggests that without the exchange of women we fall into the anarchy of the natural world. The question marks are Irigaray's, implying that she is questioning whether randomness and anarchy do operate in the natural world. When considering these points in relation to Lanagan's novel, it is notable that even with the exchange of women and the patriarchal laws surrounding this, there is evidence that Janey has fallen back into Lévi-Strauss' "anarchy of the natural world". Lévi-Strauss' argument fails on two accounts as Janey is not protected by the incest taboo and her exchange, within her family home, results in her engaging in a form of moral anarchy – promiscuity. Irigaray elaborates upon the notion of the exchange of women and at one point she discusses the (1985a, pp.184-189) "status value of women in such a social order". Her focus is on the mother, the virgin and the prostitute.

According to Irigaray the mother remains private property, excluded from exchange. This is, of course, because she has already been exchanged and now must fulfil another role that ensures the further functioning of the social order. Irigaray (1985a, p.185) states:

> This means that mothers, reproductive instruments with the name of the father and enclosed in his house, must be private property, excluded from exchange. The *incest taboo* represents this refusal to allow productive nature to enter into exchanges among men. As both natural value and use value, mothers cannot circulate in the form of commodities without threatening the very existence of the social order. Mothers are essential to its (re)production (particularly inasmuch as they are [re]productive of children and of the labor force: through maternity, child-rearing and domestic maintenance in general). Their responsibility is to maintain the social order without intervening so as to change it.

In regard to this quote, Janey becomes a mother but this fact does not change her status within the social order. In fact, as mentioned, Janey is likely to be judged as deviant due to her single status when becoming pregnant. Janey's productive nature does not grant her exclusion from exchange; her father and brother continue to have sex with her whilst she is pregnant and after her baby is born. As a single woman, unsure of who the father of her child is, Janey does not move from the house of her father to the house of her husband where she would be somewhat "protected" from her incestuous father and brother. Instead Janey remains an object of exchange and achieves a "non-mother" status when she gives her son up for adoption. Janey is more like the figure of the prostitute. For the purposes of this section of my argument I will address Irigaray's theorising of the prostitute in relation to the character of Janey.

Luce Irigaray (1985a, p.186) asserts:

> The *prostitute* remains to be considered. Explicitly condemned by the social order, she is implicitly tolerated. No doubt because the break between usage and exchange is, in her case, less clear-cut? In her case, the qualities of woman's body are "useful." However, these qualities have "value" only because they have already been appropriated by a man, and because they serve as the locus of relations—hidden ones—between men.

> Prostitution amounts to *usage that is exchanged.* Usage that is not merely potential: it has already been realized. The woman's body is valuable because it has already been used. In the extreme case, the more it has served the more it is worth. Not because its natural assets have been put to use this way, but, on the contrary, because its nature has been "used up," and has become once again no more than a vehicle for relations among men.

Part of this chapter will show that the prohibition on sex between close family members does little to protect the female child from abuse. Janey Knott is caught up in a culture of exchange that serves to reduce her to the status of commodity within her family group. I argue that Janey *is* a representative prostitute in her parents' home. Janey is "*usage that is exchanged*". In her family home she becomes the vehicle of exchange between her father and her brother. Judith Herman (1981, p.4) states:

> It is no accident that incest occurs most often precisely in the relationship where the female is most powerless. The actual sexual encounter may be brutal or tender, painful or pleasurable; but it is always, inevitably, destructive to the child. The father, in effect, forces the daughter to pay with her body for affection and care which should be freely given. In so doing, he destroys the protective bond between parent and child and initiates his daughter into prostitution.

In Janey's case there is little textual evidence that her father does, or did, provide her with "affection and care". Janey is merely an object of his desire. The "sexual-family-as-natural" becomes (even more) "unnatural" and represents that which is not "normal" when the patriarch's power transgresses its more traditional boundaries. Mr Knott is able to have an incestuous relationship with his daughter as no one attempts to prevent the abuse. It appears that there is no maternal intervention to reduce or end the abuse that Janey is subjected to. Thus the power of the patriarch is firmly in place. Janey's mother is barely accorded a subject status – let alone a "subject-in-processness" (Lucas, 1998, p.39) status. Sara Ruddick (in Bassin, Honey & Kaplan, eds. 1994, p.34) states, "Mothers are identified not by what they feel but by what they try to do." Even though she is barely recognised as a subject, Mrs Knott is still identified as a "bad" mother as she fails to provide a caring

and morally sound maternal presence in her daughter's life – she seems not to do anything positive for Janey. She has also participated in raising the despicable Nathan, who behaves just like his morally deviant father. Mrs Knott acts as (re)producer of the social order, as she "maintain[s] the social order without intervention so as to change it" (Irigaray, 1985a, p.185). She allows (even encourages?) the father to initiate Janey into a form of prostitution.

The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (p.1604) states that prostitute means, "To offer (oneself or an another) to unlawful, esp. indiscriminate sexual intercourse, esp. for hire." Janey does, to a degree, offer her body to her father and her brother so as to claim a degree of autonomy within otherwise forced sexual relations. One reason why she does this is because she is a minor (a child) who is dependent on her family for financial support, and is supposedly safer at home than on the streets. As a minor Janey would have few legal rights both within and without her family. In order to receive assistance she would have go outside her home for help, and *prove* that the sexual abuse is occurring. As a minor this would be a difficult task both legally and personally. Jocelynne Scutt (in Hetherington, ed. 1991, p.133) states, "according to the *Evidence Act* of 1958, no person may be convicted of an offence, based on the unsworn evidence of a child under fourteen years of age, unless that evidence is corroborated by some other material evidence." For Janey's father to be convicted of incest this would have to be confirmed "beyond reasonable doubt". If Janey was not successful in proving the abuse the repercussions for her could be worse than the incest. The silencing that Dane imposes on Chloe by postulating that Janey's abuse is a story that Janey might have made up to get attention, echoes the general silencing that surrounds taboo issues in our culture and society.

Scutt (ibid, p.118) suggests:

> Social and cultural institutions adhere to a hierarchical structure placing men, and particularly fathers and husbands, at the top. Giving proper recognition to the enormity of the sexual abuse of children and wives threatens not only male concepts of justice, but the organisation of society itself. All legal institutions—police, courts, the legal profession—are so strongly imbued with the notion of ownership, combined with 'male right', that requiring the legal system to respond to children's and women's needs, rather than to maintain male privilege, is no easy task.

With little or no support, Janey as a sexually active minor would have small chance of victory or justice in a system that is stacked against her. What must also be considered is Janey's own assertion that (p.137) "*nothing* will *go wrong. She seems to think she's solved all her problems by making this happen on her own terms.*" The narrative suggests that Janey does not want to, or does not know how to, publicly implicate her father and her brother in the incest that they are caught up in. The text, in part, suggests that her voracious sexual appetite serves as a justification for the forced sex within the home; thus the comment she does not actually "mind the sex". This is not to suggest however that she *enjoys* the intrafamilial sex or the circumstances surrounding it. The beginning of the novel shows that the situation does get out of Janey's control and that she wants to escape from the house where she is being violated. Escaping from the "family home" does not save her though, Nathan finds her and rapes her; the consequence of this attack leads to her death.

However, the narrative proposes that Janey's life was ominously fated from the outset. Her chosen sexual encounters operate outside of the realm that is considered "normal". She is a figure of the monstrous feminine – her sexuality is too threatening to the social order for her to be allowed to fully grow into adulthood. Janey has what is called (p.92) "her adventuring time of the month". During this time Janey has sex (usually in a car wrecker's yard) with any willing (often younger) males. After one such episode Janey is described as

(p.14) coming out of the car "like some kind of mysterious extrusion from the car corpses." Janey (later) becomes a literal corpse at this very site. By linking Janey's place of sexual activity with the car corpses Lanagan, metaphorically, alludes to Janey's death very early in the narrative. When still at school Janey would sometimes have sex in the boys' toilets. Her sexual appetite and agency are looked down upon by Janey's and Chloe's peers (p.123) "*'It's disgusting. She's worse than a prostitute; she doesn't even get paid'.*" It is pertinent that Janey is considered "*worse than a prostitute*" because she does not get paid. This implies that it would somehow be morally more acceptable if she did take payment for sex, and they would have an explanation for her behaviour. What these young moralists fail to understand is there may be underlying issues which contribute to Janey's behaviour and, that prostitution does not *have* to mean payment for sex. Also if payment *is* involved it does not always take a monetary form. The response of these young people comes from mainstream societal reactions to girls'/women's role in the act of prostitution. The boys are not considered "disgusting" because they have sex with Janey, that is they "prostitute" her. Arguably Janey is caught up in a cycle of prostitution because, as mentioned, I do consider that she is initiated into a form of prostitution in her family home. My reading of the novel does not find it remarkable that Janey engages in "prostitute-like" indiscriminate sex with boys at school. Ostensibly the novel endorses another position; Janey describes herself as having (p.29) "famous hormones" and claims that being over-sexed keeps her happy. She is portrayed as a female who has an unnatural excess of sexual drive and because she acts upon this she is viewed by her peers as "disgusting".

The notion of natural and unnatural needs to be considered in relation to Janey. She is considered unnatural because of her hormonally driven sexual appetite, but is she un/natural because she is (too) close to nature? She is quoted as being (p.120) "on heat", a discourse more commonly related to animals than humans. Arguably Janey is given a "biology is destiny" subjectivity that positions her on the nature side of the nature/culture dichotomy. If she is read in this way then it seems that there is little she, or anyone else, can do to change her circumstances. The sub-text that I argue for tends to read against this position, as it is possible to read her promiscuity as a result of the family incest. Either way, Janey offends both males and females because she uses sex in a very non-feminine way. The narrative states that she (p.160) "is using sex the same way some people use food or drugs, to console herself and to celebrate, for basic sustenance and for entertainment." Because of her sexual activity Janey resides outside of the moral order, she is neither respectable nor chaste. Her moral deviance prohibits her admittance into the socially prescribed realm of "good" mother.

She is also presented as sexually aggressive; her young sexual partners see her as a threat (p.33):

> Chloe couldn't work it out, how these little street rats could have such buckets of pride, still, that they were threatened by Janey's jolly fucking, by having to do it her way. She was so amiable, so harmless, really. It was so funny to know that and to see this guy shrinking into his group, terrified she might nail him again with his mates watching...

At certain times of the month Janey becomes a body without boundaries whereby the pleasure of sex is for her benefit and not especially anyone else's. The text suggests that Janey displays a forthright enjoyment of her body and the pleasure principle. This is evident in Chloe's term "jolly fucking" and the emphasis on Janey being the one in control.

Just because Janey is supposedly in control of her sexually adventurous self, combined with the assertion that she likes the (p.23) "kind of fucking" she practises, does not mean that her body is not being prostituted. This is required of her at home and the effects ripple outward to her own chosen sexual encounters. Janey may enjoy the actual sex she initiates but she consistently chooses boys who are younger than her and have little power or prestige in society. Chloe calls them "rat-boys" and at least some of them are street kids. Chloe's choice of moniker for these boys reflects her middle class attitudes, "rat-boys" having connotations with the term "sewer-rats". Concepts of home are further highlighted by the fact that some of these boys have no home. The family, for whatever reasons, did not provide a safe child space. Janey's choice of partners suggests that she has low self-esteem and does not consider herself worthy of better partners. This attitude is presented as a result of her lower-class status.

Clare Bradford (in Clancy and Gilbey, eds. 1999, pp.114-115) argues:

> Janey's family...is entirely Other: drunkenness, violence and incest are located within a class difference identified by the speech patterns of Janey's family and the squalor of their home. These associations of class difference with sexual pathologies assume a programmatic social structure which adds to the sense of determinism surrounding the figure of Janey. (Ellipsis added)

There is a sense of determinism, including hormonal, surrounding Janey. It seems almost impossible for her to escape the sordidness of her life. Lanagan is not reticent in her exploration of issues of teenage pregnancy, abuse, murder, and incest but she undermines the potency of the exploration by locating them all in and around Janey. The implication is that she will never rise "above her lot"; she will never be a socially acceptable citizen and certainly not a "good" mother. The reading of Janey's life and death as pre-determined is seemingly at odds with the idea proposed in the introduction wherein it was

stated there is a sub-text that suggests the outcome could have been different with adult intervention. The alternative reading will be addressed further in the chapter. The focus, for now, will remain with the more obvious reading and the significance of this.

Joanna Harris (1999, p.44) asserts:

> Lanagan has linked the financial situation of Janey's family with dirtiness, neglect, and uncaring parental attitudes which have pushed Janey out into a dangerous world, where she is unprepared for the consequences of risky behaviour and vulnerable to predatory actions of others. Acts of violence are depicted as commonplace occurrences between people of Janey's class, in contrast with the articulateness and rationality of Chloe's middle-class background. Chloe is shown to be protected by her class from the brutality to which Janey is automatically exposed.

The arguments of both Bradford and Harris suggest that neglect and abuse are correlated with a lower class. Hence, the abuse is accounted for in the text. There is not a failure to fully acknowledge the abuse as in *The Changeover*, or to completely ignore it as in *Greylands*; it is instead foregrounded as a "natural" phenomenon of an "inferior" class. This not only negatively stereotypes the working classes, it also misrepresents the fact that abuse is a cross cultural, cross class occurrence. It also fails to take into account any social or cultural factors that may explain the behaviour of the Knott family. How this text differs from the other two mentioned is that the abuse is ostensibly accounted for because the Knotts are considered blameworthy – they are dirty, neglectful and uncaring. In neither *The Changeover* nor *Greylands* is culpability attributed to the perpetrators of the abuse. This laying of blame does little to expose the actual circumstances that led to the abuse. As Harris (ibid) states:

> Lanagan, rather that extending an understanding of the social forces which shaped Janey's existence, has promoted a misleadingly simple perspective to explain the circumstances of Janey's murder.

Therefore, although Mahy tends to pass over the abuse that Sorenson suffers, she does make an attempt to locate it socially, with reference to the foster father's drinking and his recent loss of employment. There is no such explanation given for the way in which the Knott family live their lives. They are essentialised as working class, and set up in opposition to Chloe's idealised middle-class family.

As a representation of the "lower" class, Janey is made culpable and responsible for her burgeoning sexuality (pp.149-150):

> *Janey's mum is in the kitchen making tea, and she looks up at Janey as if Janey's a complete, and very unwelcome, stranger. Janey once told Chloe that her mother reminded her of an unborn piglet that had been preserved in a jar, and really, she was right—that kind of aimless, vulnerable floating, and the little pink eyes with the pale lashes. She gives Chloe the shivers, and she gives her the same look she gives Janey, and doesn't speak to either of them. She doesn't offer them any of the food she's cooking either—she cooks for herself and the men. 'They stopped feeding me when I started going out in the evenings,' Janey maintains. 'Reckoned I was getting too fat. Actually, I think they got embarrassed when I started bringing my breasts to the table—I mean, covered up and everything, but, you know, there.'*

The relationship between Janey and her mother is extremely dysfunctional. The mother ignores the daughter and the daughter equates the mother with a preserved pig foetus, implying that Janey views her mother as incapable and ineffective, rather more dead than alive. As an "unborn piglet" the mother is thus unable to intervene in the abuse that her daughter is subjected to. Janey effectively condones her mother's lack of care and concern through her foetal analogy. That said, there is no intersubjective relationship between the two females and no Irigarayan notion of "woman-to-woman reciprocity" (Irigaray, in Whitford, ed. 1994, p.50). The (bad) mother has failed to provide care and nourishment for her daughter, but is willing to provide nourishment to her depraved son and his father. Mrs Knott is only a negligent mother when it comes to caring for her daughter. There is an insinuation in the above passage that Janey's "going out" is a code for prostitution – thus the family have no

need to support her. The reference to being "too fat", whilst obviously drawing attention to her developing body/breasts, could also be alluding to attractiveness. If she is "too fat" her attractiveness to potential customers may be diminished. The notion of Janey receiving money for sex is denied via the girls at school, who call her "worse than a prostitute" because she does not charge the males. However whilst it is acknowledged she has a low income, Janey's source of income is never revealed. It may be that her night-time activity was that of paid prostitute. What we do know is that on the one hand Janey is a source of embarrassment – and what a price she pays for this – a denial of care and food. On the other hand she acts as a source of sexual gratification for the father and Nathan. Janey receives no love or nurturance from her "bad" mother and the wrong sort of "love" from the males in the household. She is in a no-win situation.

When Janey is pregnant she considers what she will do with the baby. She decides not to keep it because of her own experience of family (p.159):

> *'It's not so much not wanting to look after a baby,' says Janey out of the dark, 'although I know I'd be hopeless at that; I'm just not that kind of ... I just don't think I* could. *Anyway, it's more, when I think of Mum having anything to do with it, when I think of Nathan even in the same room—or my dad, him either. I just ...' Chloe can hear the sheets rustle as Janey squirms in the spare bed. 'Something says no, you know? I'm not going to...bring it into...my kind of life. That has to stop with me. I mean, Nathan can go on and do what he wants, have kids—poor things. But I'm not going to. I'm going to stop the tradition, you know? You hear, you know, how "abused" people abuse their kids and I ...' Her voice drops almost to nothing. 'I just wonder, is it something you could control? Like, is there any way I could be* sure *I wouldn't?...'*(Ellipsis in original)

Janey is fearful of perpetuating the cycle of abuse that she is caught up in. There is also the *implication* that her parents come from abusive families, "that has to stop with me." This suggests that life is somehow inevitably marked by how one is parented, the type of family one comes from will be the type of family that one (re)creates. Janey wants to protect her child from her

family and also what she believes she could become. Due to her own lack of nurturing she feels inadequate to nurture. This implies that Janey feels unable or ill-equipped to "rise above" or escape from the ill-fated legacy that is her family. To exacerbate her problems her father is still having sex with her while she is pregnant. She seeks refuge at the Hunters' to get away from her father and also to be in a home that is clean; she has thrush and needs to spend much of the day bathing (p.167). As Bradford states Janey's world is so "Other" it is surprising that the only vaginal infection she has is thrush. The narrative implies (p.162) that Janey becomes pregnant through a broken condom, presumably to one of the boys she engaged in casual sex with. What is not considered is that the child could have been conceived through the sex she has with her father or brother. There is no mention of them using condoms, thus the notion of her father or her brother, as father, is feasible.

If Janey considers that either one could be the father she never alludes to it. There are instances when Janey tends to hate herself and take the blame for her abusive and neglectful existence. She seems to accept her mother's silence and neglect in a similar way to how she accepts the incest. She does not hold her parents or Nathan responsible for contributing to her anguish. Janey is conditioned by the social order and her class (as explicated in the narrative) to believe that she should not expect anything better for herself. Perhaps, if her parents were abused, Janey may think that they know no other way; she may assume that her parents cannot help it. She believes that the incest that she is subjected to is no more or less than she deserves. When speaking about incest Judith Herman (1981, p.62) states:

> The incest taboo may be understood as a biological law which prevents inbreeding, as a psychological law which creates the family, as a social law which creates kinship, or as a sum of all of these. However it is understood, the incest taboo in its abstract form applies equally to both

> sexes. It is the refraction of the incest taboo through the institutions of male supremacy and the sexual division of labor which results in the asymmetrical application of the taboo to men and women. Only under male supremacy do women become objects of exchange. Only male supremacy determines that men have the right to give women for marriage or concubinage, while women have no comparable rights either in men or in themselves. Only under male supremacy do incest taboos become agreements among men regarding the disposition of women. ...
>
> Whereas male supremacy creates the social conditions that favor the development of father-daughter incest, the sexual division of labor creates the psychological conditions that lead to the same result. Male supremacy invests fathers with immense powers over their children, especially their daughters. The sexual division of labor, in which women nurture children and men do not, produces fathers who are predisposed to use their powers exploitatively.

I would like to consider the issue of the asymmetrical application of the incest taboo between the sexes. This is produced by inequalities in the power structures which determine political, social and personal relations and relationships between females and males. Within such an economy the female is always placed in an inferior position – she is less than the male as he is always supreme. It is a hierarchical system that disallows a sense of horizontality in relationships. A vertical model of relationships is adopted to enable a system that subscribes to the notion of grading and privilege.

Hélène Cixous (1996, p.64) when speaking of male privilege in relation to sexual difference, claims:

> Moreover, woman is always associated with passivity in philosophy. Whenever it is a question of woman, when one examines kinship structures, when a family model is brought into play. In fact, as soon as the question of ontology raises its head, as soon as one asks oneself "what is it?," as soon as there is intended meaning. Intention: desire, authority – examine them and you are led right back . . . to the father.

The father, the most powerful figure in the patriarchal family, whose position is held in place by the social order, is the final arbiter in the male/female dialectic. This is evident in the sexual relationship between Janey and her father and which is carried on in the name of the father via Nathan. These males are an insidious presence in Janey's life, overtly violent as well as

sexually abusive. Nathan too, has no qualms about seeking Janey out at the Hunters' home (p.47). Nathan kicks at the door incessantly until Joy intervenes and sends him away. He will comply with Joy's request, but in the Knott home he derives part of his power from the fact that no one will stop him abusing his sister. His father is guilty of the same crime so he will not react and Mrs Knott (p.102) "hasn't bothered with her for four years." It is during these four years (at least) that Janey's father and brother have sexually abused her.

When considering Cixous' idea of women's association with passivity in relation to Janey, it is clear that she has no authority in the family home and is pushed into acceptance of the intrafamilial abuse. However, in her self-initiated sexual encounters she takes on an active role. It is as if she is overburdened with an active sexuality that plays itself out at a certain time of every month, thus suggesting a biological determinism that places her overt sexual desires as somehow out of her control. This is somewhat at odds with the notion that Janey is the one in control. If one considers that Janey is in control, such as when Chloe tells one of the rat-boys (p.13) "'you're just angry because she calls the shots'" then it can be argued that Janey is exercising her sexual agency. She does this by having sex with a number of partners, usually one following the other. There are two ways to view this. In one sense she is appropriating an active masculine role in her initiation and performance of the sexual acts. They are sexual encounters whereby the males are (usually) subordinated to the female. Janey enacts a power imbalance – perhaps to compensate for the power imbalance that she is subjected to by her father and Nathan. It seems that Janey knows no other way to have sex except where one partner "calls the shots" and the other obeys. In another sense Janey's

libidinous activity can be read as an essentially female power that (theoretically) allows for near continuous sex. It is a power that the male cannot have as he cannot have a rapid sequence of erections and orgasms. There is a time lapse between ejaculation and the next erection, whereas the female can have multiple orgasms. This is evident in the passage below where the male says he is "all done" (pp.50-51):

> Janey went on rocking, eyes closed and mouth slightly open. Her face was slack with exhaustion, white, with spectacular purple rings under the eyes, a patchy rash reddening her jawline and neck. Around the bin at the end of the bed was a litter of torn condom foils. ....
>
> 'Come on let me up, you mad bitch. Jesus. Come on. I'm all done.'...
>
> Janey continued to pin him and to move evenly, as if in a trance. Bass was almost crying with rage.

The fact that the male is "all done", suggests that he is undone by sex, he no longer has an erection and his sexual power (for the time being) is rendered powerless. The fact that he is "almost crying with rage" further reinforces the powerlessness, fear and anger that is felt when the male is confronted by the emasculating female/vagina. In this sense Janey can be read as the embodiment of the *vagina dentata.* Barbara Creed (1997, p.2) suggests:

> As well as its expression in surrealist art, the myth of the *vagina dentata* is extremely prevalent. Despite local variations, the myth generally states that women are terrifying because they have teeth in their vaginas and that the women must be tamed or the teeth somehow removed or softened – usually by a hero figure – before intercourse can safely take place.

Janey, however, has not been tamed and she retains the power to, metaphorically at least, play out the role of woman as castrator. Even this role for Janey is ambiguous – like her mother/non-mother status. Her status is ambiguous because her power is only influential outside of her "family home". Within the home Janey's status is that of object and she is the one who lives with feelings of powerlessness and fear.

For all Janey's active sexuality in her chosen sexual encounters, Lanagan does not consistently present her libidinous behaviour as positive. It is midway through the novel when we are told (pp.50-51) that Janey has hosted an all night party at her new room. The narrative implies that she has been engaged in sex acts for most of the night and into the morning. Chloe finds the room full of boys and young men and Janey having sex with a former boyfriend named Bass. He may be undone by being "all done" but it is the description of Janey's appearance (p.50) "face slack with exhaustion, white, with spectacular purple rings under eyes ..." that undermines the idea of (p.33) "jolly fucking" set up earlier in the narrative. Janey's appearance suggests a self-destructive aspect of her overt sexual desires and her need to act upon them.

I will diverge slightly here and discuss Janey's room in relation to space and boundaries. The room was supposed to be her "room of one's own", a safe place where she could escape from the dangerous world. Instead she allows lots of males to invade her safe place because she (p.52) "'wasn't thinking, was I?'" Because Janey's body is without boundaries during her adventuring time of the month she does not think to put boundaries around her own space. Once again it is Janey who suffers the consequences of this. Her lack of forethought results in her room being trashed when she is out, the smell of urine and stale beer (both sprayed on the walls and furniture) greets Chloe and Janey when they enter the room; things are smashed and her books are torn (pp.59-60). Janey can cope with this – her primary concern is for her photos of Eddie. In the introduction it was stated that the photographs of Eddie serve to reinforce Janey's non-mother status. They show her images of the child whom she cannot touch or speak to. All she can do at look at moments of his past. She is denied any sensual relationship with the boy her

body birthed. Her maternal function is redefined by loss, via the photos she is made acutely aware of what she cannot have. As a sexual "deviant" who got pregnant to an unknown male at seventeen she is not considered worthy of keeping her child. She reinforces this position when she states (p.185), "*And there are two of them, and they want him so badly, and I feel so* not *ready, it makes sense.*" Thus the ideal of the married couple as worthy parents underpins Janey's position. She considers the photographs a vital link with the child that she relinquished. Chloe calls them (p.64) "this contract to salt Janey's wounds" and the reaction of pain and sadness that they provoke in Janey when they first arrive strengthens this position. However, Janey seems to need to see her son's image, to determine how much he has grown and to be aware of his developmental milestones. This suggests that her decision to have the baby adopted is not one that she is altogether comfortable with. No matter how worthy his adoptive parents may be, she is not prepared or able to let go completely. Janey's ambiguity about being a relinquishing mother is evident when she says to Chloe (p.24) "—and a baby I could *keep*—like be capable of keeping..." (emphasis in original). Consequently her desire for a child that she can mother is palpable. Janey is accorded a non-mother status because she sees herself as unfit to mother. The "bad" mother syndrome is entrenched in her psyche. The attack on her personal space is nothing in comparison to a denial of her right to knowledge and vision of her son. None of this, however, alters the incident of the room invasion. It probably came about because of her promiscuous activity. The males were caught in the act by Chloe and removed by her – the result: revenge. A link can be made here to Janey's "unmaking" of the males mentioned previously. Because she has the ability to emasculate them – take away their potency – they return to use their penises in a (pathetic) display of power (urinating all over her room) as a

means to assert territorial power over her. They, like Nathan and Mr Knott, use their penises as a means to degrade and abuse Janey.

It is arguable that Janey's overt promiscuity is a result of her incestuous background. Robert Kosky (in Hetherington, ed. 1991, p.177) states:

> Children who are sexually assaulted by their parents can also develop a propensity to act out their assault on other children by imitating the offence. Where the violent sexual tendency is self directed, some children become promiscuous or enter prostitution.

Janey's promiscuity defines her socially and personally, but this definition has its foundation in her home environment. By being treated like a prostitute by her father and Nathan, Janey then acts out this role in society. It is not simply a matter of liking or disliking sex; it is more a question of why the sex happens in the way that it does. Janey's lack of discrimination in selecting sexual partners and the abuse by Nathan are what leads to her murder in the car wrecker's yard. Her agency is undermined by the more destructive agency of others. Janey's eventual death is due to her lack of self-worth which is the result of her abuse. An abusive situation that the males of her family perpetuated and one that her mother did little to stop. Yet there were people in Janey's life who did have the ability to attempt to stop the cycle of abuse. Dane and Joy Hunter knew of the incest yet they did not act upon the information they had. *If* Janey's sexually active behaviour was solely biologically determined then little could be done to change her indiscriminate sexual activity, the result of which led to her death. However, *if* the indiscriminate sexual activity was a result of her dysfunctional family and her incestuous background, then the possibility of social intervention to alter her circumstances is highly feasible. My reading of the sub-text suggests that Dane and Joy were complicit in Janey's cycle of abuse. In conjunction with

this Mrs Knott enacts the role of passive female in relation to her daughter. She does nothing to protect Janey nor is she seen to offer her any assistance.

The next area of focus is that of the mother figures in the text. After Janey's all night orgy she wants coffee and cake but Chloe, appropriating the role of mother, insists on something more substantial (p.52):

> 'Proper food first,' said Chloe steering her past El Bahsa's.
>
> 'Aw, don't be such a *mother.*'
>
> 'Oh, that's a term of abuse, now, is it?'
>
> 'Those guys last night were all saying it,' Janey giggled. 'To each other, not to me.'
>
> 'I hope you told them where to go.'
>
> 'I didn't hear 'em until now. It just sank in. "Such a *mother*," like it was the *worst* thing—'
>
> 'That is so off.'
>
> 'Only because you've got a brilliant mother. The rest of us, who're just trying to forget...'
>
> 'Maybe.' It wasn't healthy to think about Janey's mum for too long—about any members of Janey's family, in fact. Even about Janey, sometimes.

"Mother" in this context is usually short for mother-fucker. There are possible layers of meaning here that neither Janey, nor Chloe, want to think about. Seemingly Janey is oblivious of the impact of using the word *mother* as a term of abuse until Chloe brings it to her attention. In this instance it is a further term of abuse because it echoes the greater transgression of the incest taboo. Janey is in fact a mother who is "fucked" as mother by her father and brother, as well as being "fucked" as daughter and sister. The narrative implies Janey's lack of awareness or caring about how the "guys" were using it stems from the relationship she has with her own mother – for Janey "mother" as a term of abuse is an appropriate usage.

By extension, Mrs Knott is an absent presence in the text and in Janey's life. She is mentioned only a few times and speaks, directly, only once. The reader is told very little about her but is able to perceive her presence and absence by implication. Her absence is marked by her lack of intervention into her daughter's sexual abuse. Clare Bradford (in Clancy and Gilbey, eds. 1999, p.115) states:

> In passing, I think that, like Grace Willow, the mother in Sonya Hartnett's *Sleeping Dogs,* Janey's mother demonstrates the very great difficulty, for women writers, of writing an evil maternal: faced with the problem of depicting mothers within families where physical and sexual abuse occur, both Hartnett and Lanagan represent such mothers as blank or unknowing; hence, as less culpable than *knowing* mothers would be.

Whilst Janey's mother can certainly be considered blank I do not think that she is altogether unknowing. Stereotypically mothers in abusive homes are abused themselves (see Goodwin, 1982 and McHugh and Hewitt, 1998), or are represented as either happy to deflect the sexual attention away from themselves or, contradictorily, jealous of the daughter as a younger and more sexually attractive female. Judith Herman (1981, p.113) suggests that in some reported cases of sexual abuse "the mother-daughter relationship was marked by deep estrangement. From the daughters' point of view, at least, there was little affection, cooperation or trust between mother and daughter." Chloe's and Janey's appraisals of Mrs Knott reinforce the position that there was "deep estrangement" in the relation between Janey and her mother. Chloe's remark (p.102) "Her own mother hasn't bothered with her for the last four years" suggests that Mrs Knott wanted little to do with her sexually maturing daughter. She is the representative "bad" mother in a society that expects so much more of mothers.

Rene Denfeld (1997, p.50) states:

> No matter what their philosophical or political stance, just about everyone believes in the sanctity of motherhood. Women's responsibility in

> mothering is so crucial to our culture that it has taken on a romanticized life of its own, with a mythology built up around the belief that women are inherently protective and loving.

The cultural sanctity of motherhood does place too much emphasis on the "good" mother and too little emphasis on the multitude of ways in which mothering is played out. The consequence of this locates nurturing and protection with the mother and, as Denfeld states, the false belief that these attributes are natural. This falsehood helps to maintain the status quo of the social order and imbalance within family groupings. Theories and views surrounding fatherhood are not subject to sanctimonious mythology. The tragedy for Janey Knott is that she has no form of nurturance within her home environment. Her mother, her father and her brother all subject her to some form of deprivation or abuse.

The relationship that Chloe has with Joy is almost the complete opposite of that between Mrs Knott and Janey. Although Janey has Joy and Chloe as surrogate nurturers this does not fully compensate for the lack of nurturing within her family. The narrative implies that the incest began when Janey started to mature physically. Her coming-of-age differs radically to that which Chloe would have experienced. Laura Chant in *The Changeover* also has a very different coming-of-age. Laura is surrounded by a number of mother figures all of whom aid her maturation process. Laura is able to go through a metaphysical transformation that coincides with her corporeal transformation. Female maturation is treated as a "wonderful and mysterious thing" in Mahy's text. However in Lanagan's novel sexual maturation for Janey is the signal for deprivation and abuse. At a developmental stage when girls require advice about menstruation, sex, and contraception, Janey's mother seemingly reneges on this responsibility. It is possible that Mrs Knott is conscious of the

abuse but for reasons unknown to the reader, she remains passive and silent. She sanctions the abuse of her sexually maturing daughter through her silence. She is depicted as a mother who gives too little and says not enough. Like the family situation for the mother in *Greylands,* one wonders if Janey ever experienced the first love, that of her mother. If not, Janey would always be in exile from a mother's love. The implications of this are far-reaching, especially when considered in conjunction with the abuse from the males in the family.

Janey enacts the role of mother for the first two weeks of her son's life. It is during this time that the doubts she had about keeping him when she was pregnant resurface (p.187):

> *'I do. I do love him,' Janey says, matter-of-factly. 'Which is why, you know? Get him away from me, 'cause I can't do him any good, and you can't do it for me, and I don't want my family ever to see him, or be able to recognise him on the street. And because this...this rips me up, just sitting watching him sleep, you know? It's too much. I could never relax. I'm scared shitless. I mean look at him! ... 'He can't do... anything! He can't...even...just* roll out of the way.'

Janey's concerns for Eddie centre on her perceived lack of ability to mother him correctly and her desire to keep him from her dysfunctional family. Brent Waters and Norman Kelk (in Hetherington, ed. 1991, p.105) state, "parenting is in part a learned behaviour, acquired through the experience of being a child and of being parented. Thus, parents generally show many similar parenting behaviours to their own parents..." This statement suggests that in part parenting patterns are handed down generationally. Waters and Kelk (ibid) argue that it takes "strong conscious views" to attempt to parent differently to how one has been parented. Arguably Janey possesses a strong conviction to be a better type of parent. She, nevertheless, doubts her ability to

break the abusive pattern. She sees herself perpetuating the script of "bad" mother, correlating her experience with what she could potentially reproduce.

Joy Hunter is a very different sort of mother than Mrs Knott – who is not even granted a first name. Mrs Knott is identified as wife and mother only, and the latter is tokenism in relation to Janey. If characters were to be defined by their names Mrs Knott would more appropriately be called Mother K(not)t, as she certainly does not mother her daughter. Joy, as a noun, means to be glad, highly pleased, or rejoice. Joy Hunter is constructed as a character who is glad to be alive and is pleased with her life and her family. There is no sense of conflict or undesirable behaviour in the Hunter household. Joy manages to be wife, mother, and university lecturer as well as enjoying an active social life. Joy is (supposedly) such a positive mother figure that she not only loves her own children but Janey as well.

Every time Janey receives news and photographs of Eddie, she is filled with doubts about her decision to have become a relinquishing mother (pp.64-65):

> Joy handed the photo back to Janey. 'You should be a very proud mum,' she said seriously, Chloe felt proud herself—or was it relieved?—that *her* mother always said the right thing.
>
> 'Oh, I'm not—I don't really do anything for him. I just admire him. He looks—he looks so—' Janey's face crumpled and she covered it and sobbed...
>
> 'He looks so *happy*!' Janey finally got out. 'And I do *want* him to be happy!'
>
> 'Of course you do,' said Joy, stroking Janey's black locks. 'And so he is. You made the right decision, Janey, you know you did.'
>
> 'I *don't* know I did!' said Janey, and sank to the table sobbing.

It is noteworthy that Joy calls Janey a "proud mum" as the term "mum" is typically employed by offspring when speaking to or about their mothers. It implies a relationship between mother and child, which is notably absent

between Janey and Eddie. Janey is acutely aware of this, hence Joy's choice of words seems inappropriate, a detail that eludes Chloe. Yet Joy helps Janey through these times by affirming her love for her (p.66). The love that Joy and Chloe extend to Janey is possibly the only love that she has known in her life.

Janey is presented as a figure who fluctuates between two emotional extremes of being either happy or sad. Underlying this is a person that Bradford (in Clancy and Gilbey, eds. 1999, p.116) describes as "needy and unwell". Janey is clearly reliant on Chloe and Joy to maintain any sort of constancy and she is aware of this (p.66):

> 'Every time it's the same, like you say. I get a photo and everything falls apart, and you guys put it all back together again for me. I can't work out a way to do that for myself. Why can't I?'
>
> 'Maybe there isn't a way, yet.'
>
> 'But what if there isn't ever?' Chloe felt fright run down Janey's back. 'What if I can never? And Cole minding me when I go off the deep end – what, is she going to do that for the rest of her life?' Her voice went deep with holding back the sobs, 'I don't think so.'

The narrative reveals that Janey has not been given the necessary grounding in her own family to cope with her emotional needs. As a consequence of this she may not be able to adequately parent a child. It takes a married couple to make the child a "happy boy" (p.65). Maxine Hayward's position as a childless woman (prior to adoption) is not examined within the narrative. In the 1990s childlessness is not *generally* considered "deviant" according to the description given by Martha Gimenez (in Trebilcot, ed. 1983, p.288):

> Deviations from the established expectations (eg. homosexuality, childlessness, single status etc) are punishable by a variety of social, economic and psychological sanctions.

The deviant focus is shifted on to Janey, as she is wanton and promiscuous. Maxine however is married, (presumably) monogamous and stable – a "good" worthy mother.

Sheree is a "walk-on" character, and, as mentioned, her pregnancy acts in juxtaposition to Janey's (p.157):

> *All she can remember is Sheree narrowing her eyes against her cigarette smoke, somewhere up here in the shops, belligerent in school uniform. Now Sheree has a daughter Madison, a husband, has made up a family, just like that, out of nothing.*

Sheree (also pregnant teenager) can legitimately claim "mother status" as she has the backing of a man. Janey does not know who the father of her son is, and is persuaded into giving her son to a more *deserving* couple. Thus Janey, the birth mother, becomes a non-mother. Single parenthood is not advocated as an option in the narrative. This is partly because Janey is presented as being morally unsound. Teresa Arendell (1999a, p.3) argues that within patriarchy "the good mother is heterosexual, married and monogamous." This raises the question of Janey's own mother, as according to this description she qualifies as a "good" mother under patriarchy. She nevertheless does fall short because she does not provide "caring [that] involves thoughtfulness, deliberation and good judgement" (Tronto, 1996, p.143). The narrative implies that Janey's whole family is so lacking that they are unable to provide Janey with any sort of foundation with which to establish herself. They certainly would not (could not) assist her in raising a child.

After Janey's murder, Joy goes to visit Mrs Knott. This is a rare instance in the narrative where Joy acknowledges that Janey actually has a mother. Why Joy leaves it until Janey is dead to visit this other woman is not explained. It is too late to help Janey, and seems a belated and facile attempt at goodwill towards the other woman. What Joy discovers is that the Knott family did not have a funeral for Janey, but went to a crematorium that had a "burn and scatter" done. Chloe is appalled (pp.138-139):

> 'What do you mean, *did*?' Chloe feels a hardening inside her chest. 'What do you mean?'...
>
> 'Did they go? Why didn't they tell us? I should've gone! What do they—'
>
> 'Nobody went.'
>
> 'Oh *God*!' Chloe puts her head down on the table. 'That's so awful! I hate them! I *hate* those useless, vicious—rapist, bloody—I mean, what kind of a *family*—?'....'It's like she never *was*. They should be ashamed.'
>
> 'Well, maybe they are. I couldn't tell—the men kind of melted into the shadows, you know the way they do,' says Joy. 'And Mrs Knott was just... blank. Well, she didn't know what to do with Janey when she was alive, so why should it be any clearer now?'...
>
> 'I don't know' says Joy, her eyes on Chloe unseeing. 'Such sad, botched people. I don't know.'

Joy as an educated liberal-minded adult tries to comprehend the Knott family's lack of concern about their daughter – in life and death. Her words imply that the family is to be pitied for their "botched" existence and their lack of love for Janey. Chloe, however, can only see the family in relation to her closest friend. They neglected her in life and in death.

Near the end of the novel Chloe dreams of apprehending the "true culprits" of Janey's death, the Knott family (p.186):

> In this dream... Chloe goes for Janey's mother – she's the only one small enough to tackle. Immediately Mrs Knott turns pathetic, loose-mouthed, feebly whingeing. Chloe smacks and smacks her face but it seems to have no effect; she just keeps *doddering* there, alive and useless... 'Why didn't you open your eyes and see what was going on in front of you, you silly sagging old non-person of a cow? Why weren't you some *help*! Mothers are supposed to *help*!' Mrs Knott's head lolls back and forth, a long high-pitched complaint squealing out of it.

Interestingly, again, Janey's mother is associated with an animal. She is somehow less than human and this ironically links her with her daughter. Janey is linked with animal-like behaviour because of the way she has sex – she goes on heat. This is the only instance where mother and daughter have any sort of connection, and is negative in its connotations. The discourse of motherhood that Chloe invokes here is that of the caring, supportive and

aware mother, one who "naturally" attends to the needs of her child. Although this discourse confines mothering to stereotypical representations, in Janey's case a trace of maternal intervention may have resulted in a different life. Herman (1981, p.48) suggests, " a strong alliance with a healthy mother offers a girl a modicum of protection from sexual abuse." Mrs Knott is thus an unhealthy mother – an unnatural mother. She assists in producing a family of sexual deviants, while remaining a sexless figure herself. She is a wretched "bad" mother figure.

Earlier in the chapter it was suggested that Janey's life was fated due to her extreme sexual practices and her family background. This position has been qualified throughout the discussion of the text. It is now pertinent to examine how Janey's life could have been altered with adult intervention. Janey's life situation could, perhaps, have been different if Dane had been prepared to assume that Chloe's words about Janey's abuse were truth rather than fiction. His silence, his reticence to believe his daughter, is as reproachable as Janey's mother's silence. In fact it could be considered even more reproachable as it is *assumed* that Janey's mother knew, but we *know* that Dane did know. As Chloe is aware, his silence does nothing to protect or help Janey, it merely serves to cement her in her own vulnerability. Dane's silence also lets his own daughter down. He effectively silences her and helps to uphold the social order — the Law of the Father. He allows Mr Knott and Nathan to continue to abuse Janey when he could speak out against it, or at the very least provide his daughter with the means to take action. As established in previous chapters, anyone under the age of eighteen years is legally considered a child. Janey and Chloe were officially still children when Chloe told Dane of the incest. Janey was fourteen years old, or younger, when Chloe first informed Dane of the

abuse, and as Chloe actually uses the term, "child sexual abuse", Dane is neglecting his role as a responsible adult to protect the rights of the child. He offered Janey no assistance or protection.

Joy's position in the incest issue must also be considered. The Hunter family is presented as having open lines of communication between family and friends. One must assume that Joy knew of Janey's incestuous home life. She is not surprised when Chloe calls Janey's family "vicious—rapist" so she must have been aware of the abuse. On the one hand Joy acts as a surrogate mother figure for Janey, proclaiming her love and support for her; on the other hand she too fails Janey by her lack of willingness to speak out about the crime of incest. In the Hunter family incest really does enact itself as the unspeakable crime, as Louise Armstrong (1979, p.68) states, "the real incest taboo seems to be talking about it." Yet Janey did talk about it to Chloe and Chloe did talk about it to Dane but the dialogue ceased there, with someone who could have made a difference. Instead the responsibility of Janey's well being is placed in the hands of another minor – Chloe.

Chloe took on a lot of responsibility in befriending Janey; she saw her as an (p.115) "exciting and curious friend". A companion who would add some vitality to Chloe's more mundane existence. The friendship took its toll on Chloe as (p.47) "Janey took up all the room in it and more when she was there, but she left a whole lot empty when she wasn't." Chloe sees Janey as her only friend, a demanding friend when she is there and a loss when she was absent. Chloe's role in this friendship became that of (maternal) guardian, particularly in relation to Janey's sexual exploits. It was Chloe who insisted that Janey use condoms and engage in safer sexual practices. Chloe even

procured some of the "rat-boys" for Janey, picking ones that that seemed to have the lowest opinions of themselves (p.183). By actively procuring young boys for Janey, Chloe enacts the role of pimp. She selected boys with low self-esteem because they were used to being cast aside. When Janey was alone with a group of them, however, she was unable to cast the group aside and this lead to her murder. Arguably, as a pimp who did not give Janey the means to completely look after herself in dangerous situations, Chloe can be read as complicit in Janey's death. Janey consistently turned to Chloe when in need and Chloe was always available to her, except at the moment when Janey needed her most.

Chloe had a minor role, as the Ice Princess, in an opera production. On the morning of the full dress rehearsal, Janey arrives at the Hunter household just as Chloe is preparing to leave. Janey tells Chloe (p.81) "'It didn't work— none of it worked!'" Janey is referring to her moving into a room of her own and then getting her long black dreadlocks shaved off and dying her hair white blonde – as a means of disguise. She saw her new address and her new look as a way of escaping from her family. It failed because Nathan found her and raped her – evidenced by blood seeping through the crotch of her pants (p.82). Janey is distraught, not only from the attack but because she considers the possibility that Nathan may find her photos of Eddie and his address. She is worried because she is powerless to protect her son. Janey's maternal feelings towards Eddie do not diminish because she has given him up for adoption. Whilst Joy makes it clear to Janey that she has made the right choice in giving Eddie two (normal) parents who love and protect him, this does nothing to dispel the overwhelming love that Janey herself has for the child. Even after a

brutal attack her first thoughts are for her son. Chloe's first thoughts are that Janey needs help but that this time she cannot be the one to provide it.

Chloe suggests Janey seek help. Janey baulks at this idea as she has scant regard for the people who work at these places (p.82):

> 'Oh, the *caring professions,'* Janey spat. 'They aren't what I need! To go through all that *talking* again, *explaining*, watching their faces change—like, "This is disgusting but I'm too professional to show it." I've seen them. I hate all that. I hate seeing that my whole life disgusts people, that it's a big dirty *hole* I'm always having to be dragged out of. At least you *know*, and your mum, that I'm not—I'm not *all*—' She put her head down on her knees again and shook with sobs.

Janey's reticence about seeking help from the caring professions is based on her fear of being judged and disapproved of. It also suggests that Janey had already spoken to at least one caring professional and the outcome for Janey was less than satisfactory. As the narrative does not give any more details the reader is unsure if Janey had spoken to someone directly about the incest. The implication is there but no actual evidence. To whom Janey spoke and the subject matter engaged in remains a grey area. My reading of the text holds the adults in Janey's life significantly responsible, and if she did speak about the incest the "caring" professionals did nothing to alleviate it. *If* Dane and/or Joy acted on Janey's behalf in order for her to talk to someone they must have known that the outcome was negative, nothing changed for Janey.

When Janey is truly in need Chloe is torn between wanting to help her friend and her own professional commitment (p.83):

> '...I'm "always on time", that's why they hired me.' She was talking to herself as much as to Janey. The opera was looking more like an enormous, decorated, irrelevant *cake* with each passing moment.

Nevertheless Chloe reluctantly chooses the opera as opposed to Janey. Chloe attempts to get Janey to go to Joy at the university; Janey refuses so Chloe persuades her to go to a Rape Crisis Centre by taxi. That is the last time that

Chloe sees her friend alive. Janey does not reach the centre, she does not allow anyone to help her. Chloe is initially laden with guilt about leaving Janey, but on the opening night of the opera she escapes into its unreal world and wants to forget about her friend (p.95):

> She'd had a gutful of Janey. She was just *tired*, of being *dragged*, up and down, round and round, all over town. She was sick of the anxiety, she was sick of being on the run after Janey; she just wanted to sit still, to feel nothing. She wanted to be a tight-bodiced Ice Princess who cared about nothing and no one.

Chloe wants to relinquish her maternal, nurturing role in Janey's life. She realises that do this she must shut down her capacity to care. This is something that Chloe finds difficult to achieve. Her nurturing instincts are too well honed for her to relinquish them when her best friend is in need. During the opera Chloe realises that Janey would have gone somewhere private – a place that only the two of them would consider going – the car wrecker's yard. Isaac Goldman, a close friend of Chloe's brother Nick, is at the opera and afterwards he and Chloe go in search of Janey.

As Isaac is accompanying Chloe she feels safe enough to go to the squalid Knott household. This is the only time in the narrative that Mrs Knott speaks (p.102):

> 'Come chargin' in 'ere like she owns the place,' Janey's mum complained, standing in the kitchen doorway with a pair of tongs in her hand. 'Bringin' strange men.'

Mrs Knott does not ask after her daughter or show the slightest interest in her whereabouts. Interestingly she is in the kitchen, enacting the role of what Lucas (1998, p.39) describes as the "domestic pivot of a family characterised by a patriarchally determined division of labour". Mrs Knott is cooking for the men. The irony in her lack of concern for Janey is shown by Mr Knott's outburst (ibid):

> 'An'—an' you can tell 'er from me!' yelled Janey's dad, rooted to the floor in the lounge room, waving an arm in the upper shadows. 'I'll tan her bloody hide, when I see her. Tell 'er she's not too old to take me belt to, the trouble she's caused 'er mother.'

It seems ridiculous to accuse Janey of causing trouble for her mother when Mrs Knott has not shown the slightest interest in her. Mr Knott's "concern" seems dishonest, fabricated and shallow. It is conceivable that this is the sort of home life that Janey has regularly experienced – violence, abuse and neglect. This lack of concern is highlighted by Janey's lonely and violent death. If Chloe had not realised where Janey was, her body, which was already long dead, could have been left for days (p.104):

> Janey seemed to float above the rusted metal, outlined in her own shadow. Then Chloe realised that shadow was a cape of blood, flown down around her from the back of her head and off over the edge of the boot. Janey's arms had stiffened as if she were lifting her tide-marked hands in distaste from the blood. Her body was marked up and down with bruises old and new; her mouth and eyes were open in an expression of glazed surprise.

Chloe sends Isaac to get the police, as she cannot bear to leave her friend again. She understands that Janey *is* dead but she tells Isaac (p.106) "'I've got a—got an *obligation*—'". Chloe knows only too well that her (non-maternal) choice to be on time for the opera rehearsal has, in part, contributed to Janey's death. She too has enacted a "bad" neglectful mother role.

Joanna Harris (1999, p.43) comments on this choice in relation to Chloe's path to adulthood:

> The theatrical image of the frozen character is first used to express Chloe's anger at 'being on the run after Janey; she just wanted to sit still, to feel nothing' (p.95) and then frustration, when she realises where Janey must be, at being unable to discard this role. After the discovery of Janey's body, in the process of mourning her loss, the symbolism of the Ice Princess conflates with the helplessness and stillness occasioned by her guilt at choosing frivolity before her friend's needs. What had seemed like an adult choice had been the wrong choice.

However, Chloe's transition to adulthood is hastened by Janey's death when she accepts some of the responsibility for the murder. Joy feels this way too (p.181):

'I mean we're talking about an *eighteen*-year-old here, technically an adult. And still, I feel...' She covers her mouth with her palm.

'Hindsight,' says Dane. 'And besides, you weren't Janey's mother.'

'Oh I know that. I'm just wondering—you know, I drive myself crazy— where was the gap, where was the moment, where we should have said...I don't know, *more*, or done... whatever it took, you know to avert it.'

Dane's comment "you weren't Janey's mother" is telling. It implies that such a dreadful event could not happen to Chloe because she has a "good" mother, and it reinforces the idea that one does not interfere in the other family's 'business'. Somehow Dane manages to shift any blame away from himself (and *his* family) and onto Janey's mother, who is not the only culpable person. He goes on to say that there was nothing that they could have done and he accuses Joy of "guilt-tripping". However there was something that could have been done; Dane could have spoken out on Janey's behalf when she was a child who needed protection. Chloe remembers the first time Janey mentions the incest to her. Initially it is the father who Janey needs to be protected from (p.143):

'Nathan isn't the problem. I'm bigger than Nathan. It's Dad who's built like a ... like a ...' Janey jerks her head back dismissively and turns back to the scenery. ...

'Are we talking about what I think we're talking about? says Chloe with an awkward laugh.

'I don't know. Are we?' Janey flashes her eyebrows coldly. ...

Finally she asks fearfully, 'Does he hurt you?' The question hangs there, soft, foolish. Of course he—

'Not if I do what I'm told.' The flicker of expression in Janey's eyes is instantly shuttered over.

Chloe feels "out of her depth" and for this reason she goes to Dane who reduces Janey's plight to fantasy. Yet when Janey is dead he claims there was nothing more that could have been done to avert the murder. On the one hand, as I have argued, this is exactly what the narrative suggests – Janey's

life was fated from the outset; on the other hand an argument can be made for an alternative reading.

Arguably there is a sub-text that suggests culpability lies within the social order and within the class system that is presented in the text. The Now/Then structure of the narrative and the use of italics helps to establish not only the past, but to some extent a repressed realm, that returns after Janey's death. A knowing voice becomes evident in the conversation between Chloe and Dane when Chloe tells her father about Janey's incestuous family relationships. The narratorial voice that is present is a way in which the primary text and the sub-text are brought together (p.137):

> *But because Dane,* [sic] *seems upset about the whole thing (well, Chloe is, too, or she wouldn't have brought it up), and so relieved to think it's just one of Janey's stories, Chloe goes along with him. She even feels a little bit of misplaced relief herself—before wondering why she should, before realising* how *upset she must have been, and that she isn't as cool as she thought. She falls silent, in the uncomfortable knowledge that her silence protects Dane and herself, protects not Janey, but Nathan and Janey's father. She doesn't ask, as she intended, whether there is someone official she ought to inform, if anything should go wrong.*

In this passage there is an acknowledged, mature and knowing position that does take responsibility beyond that of the characters in the novel. The point of view presented by the narratorial voice, although particularly close to Chloe's point of view, does suggest that the outcome of Janey's life could have been altered by acts of intervention. In this way, the sub-text that I argue for becomes less "subconscious". This suggests that the text does know what it is doing at this level but does not foreground the issue of adult intervention. My position on this is to argue that, for the most part, the narrative presents Janey's life as pre-determined. The knowing position sits beneath the surface of the main narrative; it is embedded in the 'psyche' of the text, rather than flagrantly displaying itself.

When Dane, Joy and Chloe discuss what could have been done to avert the murder, Dane claims they did all they could (p.182):

> 'You have to hedge your kids about with fears about the worst things that could possibly happen to them?' says Dane. 'I'm telling you, this was just bad *luck* as much as anything, Joy.'
>
> 'Yes, but there are ways, of...of staying the hand of luck; there are ways of—'
>
> Chloe reaches across and lays a hand on Joy's arm. 'Will you stop, please? It's done, isn't it? And we're not—I mean, we can beat ourselves around the head with it, but in the end we're not the ones on trial. We're not the ones who did it.'
>
> 'Well, you see, I don't know—I'm not so sure!'
>
> 'Joy,' warns Dane.
>
> 'Okay I won't go on. I just feel as if *everyone* is guilty, of this. Catching and trying those stupid kids is just our easiest way out. They're just...I don't know, our agents, somehow.'
>
> 'That's ridiculous,' murmurs Dane.' As if we *wanted* them to do that.'

The idea of calling the street-kids who raped and murdered Janey "stupid kids" seems to be an astonishing understatement. It serves to mask or disguise the horrific reality of Janey's violent death. On the one hand Joy is prepared to accept some the blame for Janey's death, but on the other hand she seems to want to somehow deny the dreadfulness of it. In relation to class, the street-kids are representative of an under-class that is as "other" as Janey's family. It really is no surprise that "kids" who have no place or prestige in society, murder the "girl from the back streets". These are not just, or perhaps not really, "stupid kids": they are representative of a society that is failing its young people. Their violence is perhaps indicative of the violence that is played out to them by a social order that does not seem to care. My sub-text reading suggests that these young people, although perpetrators of a violent and brutal crime, are victims of a system that offers few choices for those who reside outside the realm of what is considered normal. Family for

these young people would be their peer group, further highlighting the inadequacy of the "sexual-family-as-natural" discourse.

Dane seems completely unaware of how he figures in Janey's life, and her death. Whilst Janey's family is solidly located in their lower-class status Dane, too, is a product of his middle-class attitudes. Lanagan's depiction of the classes tends to stereotype both but it is her depiction of the lower-class Knott family that, clearly, suffers most from the stereotyping. Mr and Mrs Knott and Nathan are ignorant, dirty, negligent, and in the case of the males, violent and sexually abusive. Everything that is undesirable and negative is located within the Knott family. The Hunter family, seemingly, represents everything that is desirable and positive. However it is possible to read Dane as just a little too snug (and smug) in his middle-class existence. He adamantly rejects Joy's claim that everyone is guilty by suggesting that they did not *want* the youths to murder Janey. He equates his lack of intention with Janey's "bad *luck*" without considering the position that Joy proposes. Joy's statement that everyone is to blame puts the onus back on the society and culture (and herself) that permit child sexual abuse and violence to be committed. These crimes often happen "behind closed doors" and within the sanctity of the family. The family is privileged in middle-class discourse and is also seen as a private as opposed to a public domain. The family unit is viewed as something that outsiders do not interfere in.

Dane has (p.21) "the smells of wood fire and roasting lamb" to return to after work or some leisure pursuit. Once there he is able to shut out the external world with its horrors and abominations. I suggest that the sub-text presents Dane as sheltered in his middle-class existence. He utilises the choices and

privileges that his class accords him. His comfortable position in society allows him to perceive Janey and her family as Other, the subordinate group, the group he does not have to associate with, the group that defines his "middle-classness". Whilst he is represented as, superficially, caring and liberal-minded, he is also lacking in the depth of compassion that allows him to extend this outside of his own kin and social circle. He accepts Janey because she is Chloe's friend but he does not accept any real responsibility for her.

Dane sanctions the abuse that Janey is subjected to through his silence. When Chloe tells him of the abuse (pp.136-137) the narrative states that Dane "*seems so upset about the whole thing... and so relieved to think it's just one of Janey's stories*". Consequently, he abstains from action and clears himself and the offending males of blame. It is as though the reality of the situation makes him uncomfortable or embarrassed and dealing with it would take him out of his middle-class comfort zone. Judith Herman (1981, p.205) states, "Many parents initially feel anxious and threatened by a discussion of incest." This was the case with Dane, but as an educated adult he should have been able to shift his focus away from his initial response and respond to the needs of the child.

Hélène Cixous (1976, p.880) argues that women have

> always occupied the place reserved for the guilty (guilty of everything, guilty at every turn: for having desires, for not having any; for being frigid, for being "too hot"; for not being both at once; for being too motherly and not enough; for having children and for not having any; for nursing and for not nursing...)

If not aware of this place of guilt before Janey's murder, Joy Hunter is well aware of it after Janey's death. Her role as a protective mother figure in Janey's life ultimately failed. Janey was not protected and Joy claims the guilt.

She is not, however, prepared to accept it as just her guilt – everyone is guilty. The narrative never implies that Dane accepts any of this guilt – perhaps because he, as a male, has not been conditioned to do so. Referring back to Irigaray's argument regarding the circulation of women, Dane can arguably be read as one who upholds the social order, the phallocratic order, where the female is consistently placed in an inferior position to the male. He may not be consciously aware of this, but his reluctance to speak out on Janey's behalf suggests that he does adhere to the idea of the circulation of women. In Cixous' words he has not had to occupy "the place reserved for the guilty". His daughter, however, is not relieved of the implications of guilt. She is forced into a complete awareness of it when she confronts Nathan (p.189):

> 'But she was better off dying,' she says, 'than coming back to you.'
>
> She's never seen someone actually *blanch* before. One moment his face is just pallid; the next it is startlingly colourless, the lips gone. Janey had her father's eyes, wide, blue and sometimes frightening. Nathan had inherited their mother's, enfolded in flesh, dark and indeterminate. These eyes check over both Chloe's shoulders, then return uneasily to her face.
>
> 'I know what you did to her. I've *always* known—' she hears her voice rushing and takes a breath '—exactly what you and your dad, were doing to Janey.' Nathan throws away his cigarette and stands up straighter, the back of his head against the wall, his eyes looking away down the street. 'Why didn't I tell someone? Why didn't I get you both put away?' The heat-seeking missile begins to turn around and guide itself back to its source. Chloe watches, aghast. *I'm no better than either of you. I'm no better than your mother, standing aside and pretending nothing's happening.* Nathan's looking at her as if she's holding a syringe of poison against his jugular. *With friends, and relatives, like us, Janey didn't really need enemies, did she Nath?* He looks at the gutter near his feet. She feels a sudden urge to slap that whitened cheek, to see her hand print on it. She steps back. 'Well. I guess she's gone somewhere where you won't find her. Where none of us will. I guess that's something—none of us can do her any more damage.'

This revelation of her own guilt is shocking for Chloe. She sees herself as culpable of perpetuating the abuse Janey suffered. She also implicates Mrs Knott in the abuse, as a "bad" mother who did nothing to protect her daughter. In her encounter with Nathan, Chloe does not recall going to her father for help and his denial of the incest. The sub-text suggests that, had

Dane offered Janey and Chloe some assistance when needed, a life may have been saved.

From the outset I have stated that the sub-text of *Touching earth lightly* works in apparent contradiction to the main narrative that presents Janey's life and death as fated. In the mainstream narrative, Janey's life situation and her death are the result of her family, her class and her sexuality. All members of her family are responsible for her neglect and abuse and Nathan's brutal attack led to her ultimate death. Chloe's family is also responsible, their middle-class sensibilities compel them to help Janey but not to the extent that they actually intervene in the "business" of another family. The tragedy lies in the sub-text, those who could have spoken out did not. Joy and Chloe are left occupying the place of guilt, whilst Dane refuses to acknowledge the guilt. The Knott family may ostensibly suffer the more negative narratorial depiction, but the middle-class Hunter family is not as wholesome and virtuous as they first seem. The crime in this family was silence, when Dane turned his daughter's words into Janey's fantasy. The plight of an abused child was ignored in order to make a grown man feel relieved. As stated, the prohibition on intrafamilial sexual relationships as outlined by Irigaray did nothing to stop Janey Knott being a commodity for exchange within her own family. Janey gave up the person she loved most in the world – her son – so as not to perpetuate the cycle of abuse that surrounded her, thus allowing a slippage from being a potentially "bad" mother to a "good" non-mother. Dane, Nathan, Mr and Mrs Knott gave up nothing. Joy and Chloe, who gave Janey support, friendship and time, suffer and learn from Janey's death – the others remain unaffected. The sub-text asks, "What will it take before we accept responsibility for *all* children?" Janey showed responsibility towards her son by having him

adopted by people who could feasibly offer him a better life. Janey lives with the pain of this decision on a daily basis and her feeling of loss is exacerbated every time she receives news of her son. Joy and Chloe come to Janey's assistance at this time but this does little to change her internal anguish. Whilst it is true that the Hunter family, in various ways, do take some responsibility for Janey and offer her a safe place away from her father and brother, this proves not to be enough.

This discussion of *Touching earth lightly* has acknowledged the two contrary strands present in the narrative. That is, that Janey's life was fated from the outset and that her life could have been different, and she may have lived, if there had been adult intervention into her abusive and neglectful family situation. I say adult intervention, as Chloe herself was technically still a child when she informed Dane of Janey's incestuous situation. As a child she did not have access to the resources and information that are more readily available to adults. Chloe felt she was protecting Janey by procuring the "rat-boys" and encouraging Janey to engage in safe sex. In this way Chloe did what she could to assist and care for her friend. However, Chloe's realisation of her complicity in Janey's death left her guilty and ashamed. This guilt is not accorded to the males, the Law of the Father, stands firm at the novel's end.

Hélène Cixous (1996, p.65) writes:

> Now it has become rather urgent to question this solidarity between logocentrism and phallocentrism – bringing to light the fate dealt to woman, her burial – to threaten the stability of the masculine structure that passed itself off as eternal-natural, by conjuring up from femininity the reflections and hypotheses that are necessarily ruinous for the stronghold still in possession of authority.

Margo Lanagan has set up the possibility of challenging the patriarchal structures by raising subjects such as incest, teenage pregnancy, and

violence, as well as having a protagonist who acts on her sexual desires, not in response to those of the male. My reading shows that the impact of incest is overtly detrimental and that it is the males of the narrative who both produce the abusive situation and remain silent about it, with no remorse shown. Lanagan's challenge to patriarchy fails to alter the (potential) fate of the female, as the other females in the narrative are also complicit by their silence. Mrs Knott is obviously a "bad" mother who essentially ignores her daughter. Not only does she not feed or speak to her daughter, but she also does nothing to shield her from the violent and abusive males in the family. Joy as "good" mother becomes a partially "bad" mother as she does not intervene and attempt to stop child sexual abuse. As a maternal figure Chloe, too, slips into the "bad" category, as she does not do enough for her friend. Once again the onus is on the mothers and mother figures to provide care, nurturance, protection and stability. The status quo of the phallocratic order remains firmly in place by the novel's conclusion. The "sexual-family-as-natural" (or even unnatural) model remains intact; and although Janey has died, leaving Nathan and Mr Knott with no one to abuse, (at least in the immediate term) there is little suggestion that the wider community will address the issue of abuse of females by males.

By the novel's dénouement Chloe is paired off with Isaac, thus reinforcing the notion of the middle-class nuclear family as the "norm". This is a gesture that Clare Bradford (in Clancy and Gilbey, eds. 1999, p.116) argues is "a corrective to Janey's flaws, [Isaac] being sane, healthy and rich." The implication being that these two sane, healthy, wealthy young people will themselves produce more of the same. Middle-class values and "chaste heterosexuality" are approved of and reinforced within the narrative.

Ostensibly the representations of the mother figures in *Touching earth lightly* differ from those found in *The Changeover.* In *Touching earth lightly* there is an obvious dichotomy between those mothers who are considered "good" and those who are considered "bad". This binary is not so clearly demarcated in Mahy's novel. Nevertheless this chapter has shown that the "good" mother who shows "thoughtfulness, deliberation and good judgement" (Tronto, 1996, p.143) can experience slippage into the "bad", or at the very least the "faulty" mother, when she fails to protect a child from sexual abuse. In much the same way that Sorry's foster mother is subject to scrutiny for her lack of intervention into his abuse, Joy Hunter is scrutinised for her failing to intervene in Janey's abuse. We do not know what Sorry's foster mother feels but we do know that both Joy and Chloe feel guilty for not doing more for Janey. As established, the men are exempt from this guilt. Janey as a sexualised mother figure is given an excess of sex, unlike Kate who is desiring and desirable without being promiscuous. Ostensibly, Janey's sexual excesses contribute to her death and mark her as unfit and undesirable mother figure. Joy Hunter is presented as a mother who works, runs a home and has a social life; she exhibits a "subject-in-processness" (Lucas, 1998, p.39) subjectivity. Kate Chant also manages to work, run a home and have a social life, and as Jacko is only three the achievement is perhaps more creditable. Hence it would be difficult to argue that in *Touching earth lightly* there has been an evolution in the presentation of mother figures. The "good"/"bad" mother binary is in place and the worst of the "bad" mothers, Mrs Knott, is firmly entrenched in her lower-class and, in this instance, squalid state.

Who dies in novels provides us insights into ideological (sometimes suppressed) positions. In *Touching earth lightly* the other character who dies is

a homosexual male who had been in a long-term relationship. The homosexual men were friends of the Hunter family. When considering his death in conjunction with Janey's, it is feasible to suggest that these characters transgressed (conservative) social mores through the deployment of their sexuality. Janey had an excess of sex (or abuse) that led her to engage in near continuous sex at certain times of the month. Gus (a homosexual character) gets (p.36) "sick"; it is never stated categorically what his sickness is but it is something that he dies of slowly. Whether or not the reader is supposed to assume his death is caused by the AIDS virus is not the crucial issue. What is significant is that he offers an alternative sexuality and he, too, dies.

The next novel under consideration – *Closed, Stranger* – bears some thematic similarities with *Touching earth lightly.* Both texts contain teenage mothers who give their sons up for adoption, both contain protagonists who die and incest is present in both novels. *Closed, Stranger* features a character who transgresses social mores through his sexual relationship with his birth mother. This relationship impacts upon many of the other interpersonal relationships in the text, in particular that of the boy and his adoptive mother.

There's a stranger and he's
standing at your door
maybe your best friend
might be your brother
you may never know.

Van Morrison - from the song
Irish Heartbeat.

Chapter Five: *Closed, Stranger* by Kate De Goldi

The preface to *Closed, Stranger* (1999) states:

> 'Closed, stranger' adoption was the term used to describe the practice of placing non-biologically related children with adopting parents.
>
> Birth and adopting parents remained unknown to each other, and the identities of his or her parents were unknown and unavailable to the adopted child. This practice prevailed in New Zealand until the early 1980s.

The term "closed, stranger" and the implications surrounding it are especially significant to the character of Andy Westgarth (referred to as Westie) – who is adopted and lives with his adoptive parents in Christchurch, New Zealand in the mid 1990s. The term "closed, stranger" does not however refer only to the adoption practice; it also alludes to the intricacies of relationships and friendships between, within and without families. The issue of how well individuals can know themselves and other individuals is evident in this novel. This chapter will examine the presentations of the mother figures, especially with respect to who has the right to be called "mother". The adoption issue plays a significant role in the narrative and the closed, stranger adoption system will be addressed by utilising recent research into the impact of this system on the birth mother, the adoptive parents and the adopted child. The

category of mother will be examined in relation to the category of family and what constitutes the family.

As in Margaret Mahy's *The Changeover, Closed, Stranger* contains a number of mother figures that represent various configurations of the category of "mother". Dee Jackson is mother of eighteen-year-old Max and eleven-year-old Leon. She has recently become a single parent as her husband, Martin, left her and the boys to live with his twenty-five-year-old Personal Assistant – Gilly. During the course of the novel Gilly gives birth to a daughter – Julia May Jackson. She is named after Gilly's and Martin's mothers. Liz and Dave Westgarth have one adopted son Andrew (Westie). Lindsey Robinson is a single mother to eighteen-year-old Meredith. Meredith's father is married with a family and lives in England. Meredith has never met him but he does support her financially. The other mother figure is Vicky Crawford, who is Andrew Westgarth's birth mother. As Vicky was a teenager when she gave birth to her son she too is subject to scrutiny as a "deviant", similar to Miranda Brady in *Speaking to Miranda* and Janey Knott in *Touching earth lightly.*

The configurations of mother figures are associated with the various permutations of families. Fineman's (1995, p.145) "sexual-family-as-natural" is problematised within the narrative, as it is frequently destabilised. The Jackson family did represent this model but, as mentioned, the father's departure resulted in a single parent family. Nevertheless, Martin Jackson and Gilly, although not married, do enact the normative model when Julia is born. Dave and Liz Westgarth attempt to reproduce a pseudo-normative family structure when they adopt Westie. As will be examined in this chapter the closed, stranger adoption system is a social contract as well as a legal one. The

adopted child is treated as if "born to" the adoptive parents. The consequence of this is significant in relation to who has the right to be called "mother". Once Westie meets his birth mother he no longer wants to be considered Liz's son. The relationship between Vicky and Westie is further complicated as they enter into a sexual relationship. It is a consenting incestuous sexual relationship which confronts deep-seated taboos. It demands explanation and one possible avenue is a theory known as "Genetic Sexual Attraction". Maurice Greenberg (1997, p.94) states that Barbara Gonyo coined the term "Genetic Sexual Attraction", to "describe the erotic feelings experienced after reunion between relatives who had been separated soon after birth." This theory attempts to examine and explain sexual relationships between blood related family members who do not know each other. Greenberg (1997, p.95) states, "In Genetic Sexual Attraction the relationship is between adults who reunite, having been separated following the birth of one of one [sic] of them." The relationship then is between consenting adults; it is not one of an adult having sex with a child.

Closed, Stranger bears some thematic resemblance to Margo Lanagan's *Touching earth lightly.* Both novels focus on the friendships of protagonists who are aged about eighteen. The issue of sexual relations (incest) between parents and children, albeit portrayed quite differently, is present in both texts and focalisation of both narratives is done through the close friends. The issue of teenage pregnancy is present and both the teenage mothers, Janey Knott and Vicky Crawford, are mothers who lose their babies to adoption. The adoption practices, however, differ. The adoption of Janey's son is open – she meets the parents and receives news of her son. The young characters who are involved in parental sexual relationships, Janey Knott and Andy Westgarth,

die as teenagers. In both instances these deaths are precipitated by the actions of others. Janey is murdered and Westie jumps to his death from a cliff after Vicky leaves (again) and the friendship between Westie and Max begins to disintegrate. Westie's death, however, is not overtly presented as fated from the outset, as ostensibly Janey's is. One reason could be the class difference presented in both novels. Janey's family are so definitely and definitively "other" – a very negative portrayal of a working class family. In Lanagan's text, Janey's class does not grant her the skills or the resources to escape from her abusive family, nor do the middle-class Hunter family intervene to stop the abuse. The materially comfortable life of Andy Westgarth is dramatically different to that of Janey Knott.

Andy Westgarth is the only child of the very wealthy Liz and David Westgarth. He was adopted at the age of two weeks and is aware of his adoptive status. Being adopted is something that concerns Westie, as it is an area of his life over which he has little control – Westie likes to be in control and to play by his rules only. Max asserts that Westie is his own master (p.6):

> Andy Westgarth made his own rules. He gave appropriateness a new definition, he ignored all recognised boundaries of good taste and circumspection.

The ultimate significance of Max's words is not realised until later in the narrative when Westie embarks upon the incestuous relationship with his birth mother, which signals a transgression of a different order.

The issue of point of view is significant in this text. It is Max Jackson's story but in postmodern fashion, he states (p.47):

> There is no single story anymore, our Stage One history tutor told us, no definitive story of any one event. There are many stories from a multitude of perspectives, and they jostle and colour and dispute each other.

As the narrative proceeds we do get a multitude of stories as far as Max can tell them. He attempts to show us the unfolding of events as they affect him and Westie but also, importantly, the mothers in the novel.

Sex, drugs and music are significant features in the lives of Westie and Max. They both fall in love at about the same time. Max falls for the unique and musically talented Meredith Robinson and Westie falls for his birth mother, Vicky Crawford. Westie and Vicky enter into a brief, intense, sexual relationship. Westie is eighteen and Vicky is thirty-four when the sex takes place. Vicky has not seen Westie since she relinquished him for adoption when he was ten days old. The intercourse in this novel is not presented as forced sexual relations between two unequal parties. The sex seems to be by mutual consent. Vicky and Westie are presented more as lovers than as a mother and a son engaging in a prohibited sexual relationship. The relationship, however, does not remain closed and private between the mother and son. The consequence of their liaison has an impact on Max, Meredith, her mother Lindsey and Westie's parents, although the adults remain unaware of the sexual relationship.

The narrative does not progress in a linear fashion, rather it shifts from present to past to present (and so on) building up the relationships between Max, Westie, their parents, Vicky Crawford and Meredith Robinson, and the various other characters that people the text. The emphasis is on story(s) and the way in which any particular story is formed. Max frequently poses the question "where does a person's story begin?" This question acts as an interrogative force in the text.

It is a question that haunts Westie although he will not fully acknowledge it. His classic maxims are "who cares" and "gotta have a winner, man, winner takes all". These mutually exclusive mottoes signal the paradoxical nature of the character of Andrew Westgarth. On the one hand he proclaims not to care and that nothing matters. On the other hand Westie's determination to be the winner – to take all – overshadows his "who cares" *modus vivendi*. Max is aware of just how much Westie does care (p.19):

> ...Who cares? Who *really* cares?
>
> Answer: Andy Westgarth.
>
> I worked that one out early on. Westie cared liked hell about coming first, asserting his ascendancy in any and everything from Connect Four to pulling babes.

The area of his life that Westie cares immensely about is the fact that he is adopted. This is the one domain in which Max is the winner and he is well aware of his envied status (p.21):

> I knew – as part of some unspoken but primal creed agreed between Westie and me – that in the unnamed contest of our joint and separate lives, when everything was stripped back, the incidentals of home, school sport and skirt set aside, then I, Max Cooper Jackson, had taken the big, the coveted, the *ultimate* prize, the only one that really counted in Andy Westgarth's universe.
>
> I was my father's child. And my mother's. Though one was terminally useless and the other as good as absent, I was theirs and they were mine. Though I felt like some cuckoo in their messy nest, I had sprung from them, I was the happy accident of Dee's ginny ramblings. I was their flesh.
>
> I was not adopted.

The issues that arise in this passage relate directly to parents and genealogy. Westie cannot trace his biological history. This could, in part, account for his view that (p.7) "History's bollocks". He cannot claim his genealogical past so he acts as if all history is not important. The reader comes to understand that this is not the case, because Max lives to recount the histories of his dead friends and their families. For Westie, Max takes the ultimate prize because he

knows his family of origin. Max's non-adoptive status is something that Westie can never lay claim to. He cannot be the winner in any genealogical contest.

Whilst Max is viewed as the victor, his appraisal of his parents suggests that they are in fact "non-prizes". They serve non-functional or dysfunctional roles in his life due to their being preoccupied with their own agendas. Max's father focuses on his work and his "other woman" – Gilly. De Goldi's portrayal of her is sympathetic. She is presented as an intelligent, capable young woman who has fallen in love with an older man who has also fallen in love with her. Dee Jackson is presented as far less able (p.38):

> Her scattergun kind of parenting drove me nuts. Either she was in bed talking to the Psychic Hotline day and night, letting Leon eat crap, letting him wander round Fendalton unsupervised with his delinquent friends, letting him watch videos all weekend, and hardly noticing *my* existence except to send me out for Chinese or to rave about the old man or Gilly... *Or* she was up and atomic, propelled by guilt, endlessly at our heels, over-attentive, making chive sandwiches for Leon...

Dee's presence, in the lives of her sons, is marked by absence due to bouts of drinking and despair. This implies an immature and unsophisticated style of parenting that the narrative suggests has been a problem since Martin left Dee. The description of Dee's mothering suggests that she fluctuates between being a "bad" mother or a "too good" mother. As a "bad" mother she neglects her sons and speaks badly of their father. The latter behaviour undermines the power of the patriarch. Dee's enactment of a "too good" mother is, according to Max, a consequence of her guilt at being a negligent and neglectful mother. As the only parent in the home and as an "at home" mother Dee confirms Lucas' (1998, p.39) comment that the mother "carries the primary responsibility for the well-being of the family." Hence her "scattergun kind of parenting" is all the more open to criticism within dominant discourses on motherhood. Yet her behaviour is partly accounted for as it is presented as

the result of the breakdown of her marriage. This presentation is problematic as it implies that Dee lost her sense of identity (and partial control of her mental faculties) when she "lost" her husband, thus losing her intact "sexual-family-as-natural" family. A further consequence of "Dee's scattergun kind of parenting" is that Max wants to be away from her as much as possible. She is not someone that he feels he can rely on, and he does not turn to her for guidance or support. This places her in a "bad" mother category, as she is not enacting the role of "domestic pivot of the family" (Lucas, 1998, p.39). In an attempt to escape Dee's contradictory style of mothering, Max spends much of his time with Westie.

Life for Westie before Vicky arrives is filled with getting stoned (on marijuana), running, dating and beating Max in every conceivable way. Once he meets Vicky his life is filled with her and his world shifts. Whilst he still engages in his former pastimes and pursuits, running and Vicky take precedence in his life. Westie's preoccupation with his birth mother, his *real* mother, becomes an obsession with him. Although he is recognised as obsessive this particular obsession is different. Vicky is the only person he has ever known who has a biological, genetic connection with him. She is his blood and this is vitally important to Westie. He has found the one person whom he feels he can truly identify with – she is *his* mother. On another level, they are in actuality two strangers who are reunited without ever having really known each other. This makes no difference to Westie – he clings to Vicky as someone who was lost to him and now that she is found, he will not let her go.

Chapter two begins (p.22):

> **Imagine two mothers.**

> (One was enough for me. Too much, most of the time. The story of Deirdre Robyn Jackson, née Summers, was long and muddled and enraging, but at least it was the only one I had to try to understand.)

Max does in actuality have to try and understand all the mothers, as each of them turn to him during the course of the narrative. Max, as Westie's closest friend is drawn into the Westgarth family drama – by both Westie and Liz. On the one hand, Liz calling on Max for assistance is an attempt by her to understand her son through his best friend. On the other hand, it seems a little unusual that a mature woman would turn to her son's friend for guidance, rather than another mother or female friend. However there is little reference to Liz having friends or extended family. She is occupied solely within the home. Liz covets the roles of wife and mother. If it is difficult for Max to imagine two mothers, it is almost impossible for Liz. She considers herself Westie's mother and she devotes herself to this task. Liz's lack of outside interests suggests that her sense of self is defined by a social imperative in which women should ideally devote themselves to home and family, thus constituting the notion of a "good" mother.

Liz Westgarth has internalised the ideology of the "good" mother who is "the emotional and domestic pivot of the family" (Lucas, 1998, p.39); and it is shocking for her when Westie attempts to destabilise it. Once he meets Vicky he disallows Liz the right to call him her son. Liz tells Max (p.23), "'He won't let me say *my son* anymore'". The effect of this denial of "ownership" of Westie is devastating for Liz. She sees it as a physical, verbal and emotional rejection of her. When Westie tells Liz and Dave that he and Vicky have met, Liz's world seems to disintegrate around her.

The narrative reveals the stage of older adolescence to be a contradictory one of wisdom and understanding, as well a profound lack of these attributes. This is evident in Max's account of Westie telling Liz and Dave that he blames the adoption system that allowed the withholding of information. Westie's anger about this closed stranger practice boils to the surface. Dave sits quietly listening but this is impossible for Liz (pp.66-67):

> But Liz couldn't shut up. She went on at Westie about the hurt, the *hurt*. Her hurt, Dave's hurt and his — yes, his, Andy's hurt; he might not feel hurt, not yet, but he would be, this would hurt him, it couldn't fail to. And then, even worse, on and on about this *woman*, her selfishness, her unfairness, her *deception*, her betrayal of trust, of *contracts*, yes contracts, there was a *legal* arrangement, you know?
>
> Bad move, Liz, I thought watching all this like some hired audience of one. I could have told her Westie was as loyal to Vicky now as Robin to Batman. He wasn't going to hear his mother bad-mouth his new heroine. He wasn't going to let her get away with this legal number, this righteous wounding; he wasn't going to let her call Vicky *this woman*.

Max's reference to the comic book heroes, and their close interpersonal relationship, shows his awareness of just how much Westie is dependent on his relationship with Vicky. They have become the proverbial "dynamic duo", but unlike the comic book characters, no superhuman forces will save them.

Max as voyeur of this scene and as Westie's best friend is well aware that Westie will stop at nothing to both hurt Liz and Dave and to protect Vicky. When Liz starts sobbing Westie takes full advantage of the situation (pp.67-68):

> 'What is your fucking *problem*?' he shouted, standing, pushing back his chair. His face was suffused, furious. 'What're you so bloody upset for? You don't *own* me! She had every fucking right to find me. And none of *you*, you two and those Social Welfare arseholes and bloody MPs making all those fucking rules, none of you had any bloody right to stop her or say when it was *appropriate*, or how the fuck it should be done!'
>
> 'Andy.' Liz's voice came out like a mew. Her hands were up to her face.
>
> 'Don't speak to your mother like that!' shouted Dave at last, sliding off his stool, standing, his hands on the breakfast bar.

> 'I've got news for you Dave,' said Westie, dropping his voice suddenly, making us all strain forward to hear him, though I knew instantly, horribly, what he was going to say.
>
> 'Case you missed the crucial bit. She's –' he raised his eyebrow at Liz – 'Not. Actually. My. Mother.'
> Total silence. I watched two big tears roll down Liz Westgarth's stricken face.

Westie's performance borders on the histrionic, he is so caught up with himself and Vicky he cannot comprehend the hurt he is inflicting on his mother of eighteen years. The impact of Westie's outburst is shocking to his parents and Liz is devastated by Westie's unequivocal, outright rejection of her. To reinforce the rejection, Westie withdraws from the scene and goes to Vicky's, leaving Liz and Dave with the painful aftermath and Max annoyed at being pulled into this domestic drama. Westie's outright rejection of Liz suggests that he now views her as a "not-good-enough" mother, that is, she is not good enough to be *his* mother. Now that he has found, and fallen in love with his birth mother, Liz can play no role in his life. He wants her to become a non-entity.

A non-entity is arguably what Liz felt before she adopted Westie (p.25), "Liz and Dave, married ten years, can't have kids of their own...Liz is depressed, withering away, eaten up that she can't shower her love, all this wealth on a child..." Both Liz *and* Dave are depicted as unable to have children but it is Liz who suffers the adverse effects of this. Martha Gimenez (in Trebilcot, ed. 1983, p.297) states, "To be childless becomes synonymous with failure, and those feelings are reinforced by cultural and social pressures which condemn childlessness." Thus Liz as a married but childless woman is subject to scrutiny as "deviant" according to social/cultural discourses. Gimenez (ibid, p.288) states that "Deviations from the established expectations (eg. homosexuality, childlessness, single status etc are punishable by a variety of

social, economic and psychological sanctions." Liz is prey to the last sanction – she is depressed and lonely – as she fails to meet the social imperative of wife *and* mother. Luce Irigaray argues (1985a, p.27), "maternity fills the gaps in a repressed female sexuality." As Dave Westgarth is away on business much of the time, it is plausible to suggest that Liz's desire for a child is connected to a repressed sexuality. Thus her female desire is subsumed by the maternal function, which she sees as vital to her existence.

Liz Westgarth *needed* a child to help her combat her loneliness and to enable her to feel like the other women in her community who could make statements like (p.23) "'my son wakes up five times a night, my son could read when he was three…' ". Liz feels bonded with the baby boy who is handed to her at two weeks of age. What is interesting here is that Vicky did not see Westie after ten days and he was not adopted for another three or four days. In effect he was motherless in this transition time. When considering mother/child bonding, Westie's bond with Vicky was ruptured with no single person to replace her. This is not to suggest that he was not nurtured within the hospital environment. Rather it is to suggest that shift workers who had other babies and mothers to attend to, carried out his care. The impact of the loss of his mother could have been traumatic. Liz displays no awareness of Westie's life prior to him becoming "her son". Vicky's processes of pregnancy and birth are not on Liz's "mothering agenda". Liz does not go through the pregnancy and birth stages but for her the child she is given becomes *hers.* She can enter that sacred, yet ambiguous, realm of "mother". She constitutes "mother" because she is a married woman with a child. Alternately Vicky, whilst going through the processes of pregnancy, birth and bonding, does not fully enter the socially prescribed realm of "mother" as she has no one to actually mother.

Westie's claim that Liz and Dave do not "own" him is noteworthy. Through the use of language, that is, "my son" Liz does claim Westie as her own. The actual use of "my son" by a parent in and of itself is not particularly unusual; nor is a teenager's claim of "you don't own me". However, in the context of this text the concept of "ownership" becomes fundamentally important. In adoption "ownership" becomes entangled with notions of knowledge and power. Adoption is a legally binding arrangement that effectively moves a child from one set of perceived, socially disadvantageous circumstances to another set of perceived, socially advantageous circumstances. The child becomes "as if born to" the parents who provide the latter set of circumstances.

Denys Delany (1997, p.123) argues:

> The adoption contract (a social contract) involves a shift from paternal authority to contractual authority as well as the physical movement of the child and the changing of its birth name. These movements have involved an uneasy and often contradictory synthesis between overlapping socially constructed discourses. Adoptive kinship demonstrates that the rationally contrived form of modern adoption is internally contradictory. On the one hand biological kinship is presented as sets of normative kinship discourses that proclaims the natural, normal and therefore, the desirability and importance of biological kinship. On the other hand adoptive kinship discourses proclaim that the adoptive family is the social equivalent of biological kinship.

What underlies Delany's position is the question of who "owns" the child. The birth mother loses her rights in relation to the child and the child loses her/his right to knowledge of its kin and genealogy. The adoptive child is placed in a family with whom she/he has no "sexual-natural" affiliation. The state acts as an extremely powerful body that can remove children from their birth mothers and then disallow those children the knowledge of historical and genetic information. The adoptive parents are seen to "own" the child as the child shares their (or the husband's) surname and resides with them; the adults are responsible for the welfare and well being of the child. For Liz Westgarth the closed, stranger adoption system reinforces to her that she is

Westie's mother. The idea of his having a biological connection with his birth mother is not something that she is socially expected to consider.

Delany (1997, p.125) considers the implications of this:

> However, the most persuasive, sinister, and cruel trick played on adoptive parents is implicit within the discourses relating to the 'best' interests of the child and secrecy. Adoptive parents have been led to believe that their social contract with the state would provide them with their own 'biological' child as long as they complied with the socially engineered, scientifically validated adoption blueprint.

Thus the closed, stranger adoption system perpetuates the notion of the sacredness of the nuclear family. Martha Fineman (1995, p.145) states:

> The assumption that there is a sexual-natural family is complexly and intricately implicated in discourses other than law, of course. The natural family populates professional and religious texts and defines what is to be considered ideal and sacred. The pervasiveness of the sexual-family-as-natural imagery qualifies it as "metanarrative" – a narrative transcending disciplines and crossing social divisions to define and direct discourses. The shared assumption is that the appropriate family is founded on the heterosexual couple—a reproductive, biological pairing that is designated as divinely ordained in religion, crucial in social policy, and a normative imperative in ideology.

The metanarrative of the "sexual-family-as-natural" is at odds with Max's espousal of his History tutor's claim that (p.47) "There is no single story anymore...". Yet Liz wants to believe this family story as it helps to give her life a dimension that it would otherwise lack. Liz adheres to this metanarrative, as she attempts to reproduce a psuedo-sexual-natural family with the adopting of Westie; which according to Delany's argument is just what she is expected to do. Liz views Westie as legally and rightfully *her* son, and this has been for the case for eighteen years. In Liz's view, "this woman" Vicky has not only broken a contract but she irreverently challenges Liz's role as "mother". A role that Liz covets and sees as rightfully hers – both socially and legally.

In the context of laws and regulations surrounding adoption practices in New Zealand Vicky had, in fact, broken the law. She should not have tried to establish contact with Westie until he was twenty and the process should have

been arranged through Social Welfare (p.28). It is a rather bewildering irony that the same set of laws allows (forces) a sixteen-year-old to relinquish her baby for adoption, and agree not to contact her/him for twenty years, which is beyond the child's coming-of-age. These laws punish both the girl (as deviant) and her child. The laws ensure that the pseudo "sexual-family-as-natural" is protected – the unmarried mother is condemned and the adoptive parents are set up as the "rightful" parents. The adopted child, Andrew Westgarth, was born in the 1970s. His adoption would come under the Adoption Act 1955. According to Keith Griffith (1997, p.46), under this Act there were some positive changes such as, "State supervision of adoption procedures and protection of the welfare of the child." However, what this Act helped to encourage was a "complete break" ideology that resulted in "closed, stranger" adoptions.

Griffith (ibid) suggests that the argument for a complete break ran thus:

> A clean break provided maximum security for the adoptive parents to bond to the child.
>
> Psychodynamic theory provided a pseudo psychological justification. It held that unmarried mothers were immature, unstable, the babies conceived to fulfil neurotic needs and now unwanted. To heal their dysfunctional personality birth mothers needed a complete break. Legal fiction became general fiction. The whole focus was on the new relationship created 'as if born to'. The genetic birth relationship was 'as if dead and destroyed'.

It is important to note that there are three unmarried mothers in *Closed, Stranger* – Vicky, Lindsey and Gilly – at no point is there a suggestion that the latter two are immature or unstable, that is subject to scrutiny as deviants. Lindsey was older than Vicky when she got pregnant and received continual financial support from her daughter's father. Gilly, whilst unmarried, lives with her child's father. Vicky's pregnancy is the result of her (p.29) gatecrashing a party and being "practically raped" by an American back-

packer, that she never sees again. Thus the argument that Vicky became pregnant to fulfil a neurotic need is not expounded within the narrative. Rather Vicky is shocked and troubled by her unwanted pregnancy. De Goldi has located Westie, Vicky, Liz and Dave within this "complete break", "closed, stranger" ideology. Her text reveals the flaws in such legislation that disallows each party to be privy to vital information. The trauma of the birth mother in relinquishing her child is completely disregarded – she has no access to knowledge surrounding the whereabouts, welfare and well-being of her baby. She is expected to forget that the experience ever happened. For the adoptee information surrounding her or his genetic parentage is seen as unnecessary knowledge that will not assist the development of the child. The birth mother is best forgotten about, and it was seen as best for her if she forgets the whole process of maternity. Griffith (1997, p.47) argues:

> Research exposed that some key foundations of the complete break were myths. It found most adoptees had a profound need to know the truth. Birthmothers suffered severe emotional trauma, and continued unresolved grief.

Westie's preoccupation with informing people of his adoptive status suggests that he does not want to be solely affiliated with Liz and Dave – he harbours "a profound need to know the truth". This need for the truth is applicable to Vicky also. She is not presented as a character who experiences severe emotional trauma but there is the implication that she experiences unresolved grief. The pregnancy, the birth and the removal of the baby are significant issues for Vicky.

Vicky's pregnancy was marked by social stigmas surrounding ex-nuptial pregnancy. This stigma is not explored in relation to Lindsey, perhaps because she was older and may have had the support of her family, and we know had the financial support of Meredith's father. Gilly, by being pregnant in the

1990s avoids much of the stigmatisation of earlier decades. In the 1970s when Vicky became pregnant, an unmarried pregnant girl/woman was viewed, stereotypically, as an embarrassment to (probably) themselves, very often to the family and sometimes to the community. Anne Else (1997, p.54) states:

> Closed stranger adoption set up a Catch-22 of terrible proportions for the birth mother: she could be positioned as a bad woman for having sex out of wedlock, a bad mother for having a child out of wedlock, and an even worse mother for giving up that child.

This sort of thinking underlines the notions of powerlessness of the birth mother and is relevant to Vicky Crawford. When relating details about Vicky to Max, Westie states (p.28), "'Her parents made her give me up. She's a swimmer. She was only sixteen, Doctor, and she *always* wanted to find me.'" Admittedly sixteen is young (in western culture) to be a mother, but with support it is not impossible. Arguably Vicky's parents subscribed to the type of thinking that situated the mother in the socially acceptable two-parent family. The two-parent family (with Mother at home) was less likely to be subject to deviancy discourses.

Teresa Arendell (1999, p.9) argues that there are "deviancy discourses" surrounding motherhood. She states:

> The standard of mothering presupposed in the dominant ideology – the mother absorbed in nurturing activities and situated within the biological nuclear family – contributes to a variety of deviancy discourses, targeted, albeit differently, at mothers who, for whatever reasons, do not conform to the script of full-time motherhood. Single mothers, welfare mothers, minority mothers, and immigrant mothers, overlapping but not mutually exclusive categories, are commonly subjects of deviancy discourses of mothering.

Vicky, like Janey in *Touching earth lightly* is disallowed the opportunity to enact the role of mother. The narrative suggests that the pregnancy, the baby and the relinquishing of him happened within a haze of disbelief. Vicky tries to explain this to Max; she attempts to get him to imagine her circumstances. This is very difficult for Max (p.79):

> I tried. I tried to imagine being a girl, giving away a baby because people told me I should, because I am numb and dazed, because I'd rather go back to school, to my friends, because it's too impossible to know what else to do...

As a teenage mother disallowed to keep her baby Vicky's sense of identity, which is already located within a paradigm of the social dynamics of identification that involves a dialogical relationship between competing sources, (that is, teenage/adult, parent/child, autonomy/dependence and so on) is further complicated by her being "different" through pregnancy. She can never be the same schoolgirl that she was prior to maternity. Her sense of identity is, in turn, additionally complicated by being a mother who is effectively not allowed to be a mother. The actual processes of motherhood are denied to her.

Research carried out by Robin Winkler and Margaret van Keppel (1984, p.1) maintains:

> The relinquishing mothers expressed a clear view that their sense of loss and problems of adjustment to the relinquishment would have been eased by knowledge about what had happened to the child they gave up for adoption.

It is this lack of knowledge that prompts Vicky to search for her son. What she has to go on is the adoptive parents' surname (p.28) and she follows this lead to find Westie. What ensues is a relationship that transgresses that which is considered "normal" between mother and son.

Their sexual relationship is an example of "Genetic Sexual Attraction" (Greenberg, 1997, p.94):

> From a biological perspective these relationships were incestuous, and it was interesting that they included mothers and sons, which is traditionally considered rare and is often seen as a manifestation of some deep, underlying disturbance.

It is pertinent that a mother who has sex with her son is viewed by society as deeply disturbed. However, the laws of that society often protect a father who engages with sex with his daughter. It is *less* common (but not totally uncommon) for a father who engages with sexual acts in his daughter to be viewed as deeply disturbed. Whilst father/daughter incest does indeed cause public outrage, a woman who engages a child in sexual acts is seen as doubly deviant as she has failed to uphold a nurturing, protective "mothering" role. Judith Herman (1981, p.56) states:

> The tendency in men toward sexually exploitative behaviour of all sorts, including rape, child molestation, and incest, thus becomes comprehensible as a consequence of male socialization within the patriarchal family.

The female in the patriarchal family structure is inferior to the male. As the father is not usually the primary caregiver, his violation of the (inferior) child is very often not regarded as pernicious as that between mother and child.

De Goldi has entered into a particularly controversial terrain with her inclusion of genetic sexual attraction between Vicky and Westie. It raises issues surrounding "the cult of motherhood" as well as issues relating to incest and sexual attraction. At eighteen Westie is not a child; he is a heterosexually active young adult who has a number of girlfriends and who tends to objectify women, even Liz's friends: (p.12): "Westie eyed all his mother's friends and gave them points for sexiness." This changes when he meets Vicky and she becomes the centre of his orbit. The sexual act between Vicky and Westie is implicit rather than explicit although the physical intimacy between them is evident. Max discovers Vicky and Westie together; after Meredith tells him that Westie came to visit her the previous night and that he is staying with Vicky (p.71). Max is overcome with rage and jealousy, wondering why Westie would go to Meredith and not him, and all the while

wondering if Westie is after Meredith (p.74). Max's fury leads him to drive to the address Meredith has given him – ready to confront his friend.

The scene that confronts Max is one that he had not reckoned upon finding. He knocks at the door but cannot be heard over the (p.75) "Irish singer playing loudly inside". He walks quietly down the hallway pushing open doors as he goes until he comes to the room where the music is coming from (p.77):

> ...I waited near the half-open door of the living room hearing Van say *you're the one, the one, the one, the one ...* before I bent my head very, very slowly around its edge.
>
> They never saw me. It was a long room, a fireplace at one end with sofa and chairs around. There was a sofa under the bay window at the other end, and they were on the floor leaning on this sofa, absorbed by, engrossed in the other's look and feel and touch.
>
> I still don't believe sometimes that I saw Westie kissing Vicky Crawford with such passion, kissing and kissing her long neck and tear-riven face, her wet and swollen lips; that I saw her hands in his hair, stroking his face, crying all the while; that I saw him pull her towards him, rock her in his arms; that I heard him tell his weeping mother in the sudden silence that came at the end of Van Morrison's song, and as he kissed her face again and again, 'You're mine Vicky, you're all mine, you're the one, the one, the one, the one...'

Max leaves quietly and slowly, attempting to fully comprehend what he has witnessed.

Max goes to see Meredith. She tells him that she knows – this is the reason why Westie came to visit her. Max describes the relationship between Westie and Vicky as (p.83):

> ...their absorption, each in the other, to the point they were at now – some slippery, penned-in, *dangerous* territory none of us knew the first thing about.

Interestingly, Max becomes preoccupied with the fact that as Westie's best friend Westie should have come to him first with this information. He is well aware that this is faulty reasoning as it detracts attention away from the real issue and his inability to fully comprehend it (p.84), "I'd never felt so much like

a perplexed kid, so much back in that realm where knotty problems needed to be explained and solved by grown-ups." Max realises he has encountered a situation that serves to delimit his tenuous adult status. At eighteen he considers himself fairly autonomous and independent. Juxtaposed with autonomy and independence is his view that his parents are (un)necessary evils who add to his conflicts and seem preoccupied with anything else but him. This latter point indicating that, perhaps, he would still like to be parented in a caring environment. The situation with Westie and Vicky reinforces this and shows Max just how ill-prepared he is in dealing with unforeseen circumstances that impact upon his life. The relationship between Westie and Vicky has moved out of Batman and Robin territory (of close companionship) into an arena that may be as strange as that found in comics; however it is firmly located in the real world and will not be solved by the actions of superheroes. Max wants this situation explained (by adults such as his parents) as he is at a loss to explain it to himself. Max and Meredith discuss what they think. They banter words like, "weird", "repulsive" and "perverted" and decide that they do not really think it is repulsive or perverted but ultimately they do not know what to think (p.84). What does not occur to them is that Vicky and Westie may not know what to think about the relationship either. They have entered into unknown territory that Vicky, at least, recognises as being on slippery ground.

Later Vicky (as mother and as lover) writes Max a letter in an attempt to rationalise the situation (pp.79-80):

> Imagine, she wrote. Imagine, you're a thirty-four-year-old woman and for the first time you meet the baby you gave away eighteen years ago. Only he's not a baby anymore, and though you're filled with a new calm rapture, in the midst of that flowering happiness is an ache for the baby you can never get back. Sometimes you feel yourself searching the face and limbs of your new-found child for that old, lost baby and sometimes you think

> you *almost* see him, but it is so fleeting, a trick of light or memory or hope, a mirage really. So you bury the ache.
>
> And now, the old strangled love and longing battened down so long bursts out, and each time you see your son the most disturbing, the most tumultuous feelings are generated between you. You want to hold him, you want to wind your fingers in his, you want to touch his skin, sing him lullabies and watch him sleep. And he's the same. He's been waiting for you, looking for you for so long with his mind's eye that when he meets you, you are, literally, the woman of his dreams.
>
> Those feelings are with both of you constantly, simmering, humming in the small gap between you, until one day one of you – and you can never remember which – one of you puts a hand out across the gap, touches the other in a certain reckless way.
>
> And then you're really lost. You've lost each other three times over now – that mother, that baby, those lovers; no past, no future, no time, no time at all.

This insightful passage implies that the mother and child become the "ideal" figures to each other and that their bond will make them complete. This is especially so for Westie as Vicky highlights when she states, "you are, literally, the woman of his dreams." This is almost too much for Vicky to live up to. The triple sense of loss that Vicky feels indicates the sense of pain that pervades her story surrounding her son. It is not made explicit by De Goldi, but the pain of Vicky's loss sits uncomfortably beneath the surface of the joy of finding what had been lost for eighteen years – "that old, lost baby". The sorrow for Vicky is that what has been lost can never be recovered. The past for her and her baby consists of ten days. Vicky would like to recapture those days but it is an impossibility. It is also an impossibility to continue to suppress the love that she has for her son. Once she and Westie touched each other in that "certain reckless way" the situation becomes even more complicated and more emotionally charged. They have become lovers and Vicky knows that it is a situation that cannot continue indefinitely. She is aware that the relationship between herself and her son will once again be founded on an acute sense of loss. This is not the only example of loss for a

mother in the text. In fact, the sense of loss particularly for the mother figures is ever present throughout the narrative.

The intimate, sensual and erotic feelings that Vicky describes are linked to the Genetic Sexual Attraction theory discussed by Maurice Greenberg (1997, p.95). Greenberg stresses that this relationship is one between consenting adults not between adults and children. He suggests that the reunion often unleashes sexual feelings (ibid):

> However, a reunion is likely to be complicated by unusual emotional factors which will make it a highly charged affair. The need to demonstrate closeness and intimacy, which had been feared lost, could well translate itself, between sexually active adults, into sexual intercourse; and this likelihood might be reinforced by any physical similarity which increases the attraction.

The relationship that unfolds between Vicky and Westie is the result of a long suppressed need for a mother to demonstrate her love for her son, and for a son to feel loved by that mother – not rejected by her.

The fact that Vicky and Westie have never lived together and do not really know each other does, in part, explain why this attraction exists. Vicky's reasoning is that they are overcome with love and other emotions that have been repressed for so long. Once they meet each other, these feelings can no longer be contained. Greenberg's (1997, p.98) findings also suggest that people involved in reunion have "an intense determination to search for and find someone whom they lost at a key moment in their own development...". In Vicky's case, she was a sixteen-year-old girl who was just beginning to discover a teenage-self and her sexuality. The narrative implies that her family wanted to act as if the pregnancy and resulting baby boy did not happen. Arguably, Vicky wants to rid herself of a negative perception of her young sexual self. What Vicky is unable to change, however, is the fact that she

cannot have any more children. The reasons for her infertility are not detailed; the information comes from Westie, as he metes out "Vicky information" to Max whilst they are running (p.31). It would be unwise to suggest that having other child/ren in some way replaces the child given up for adoption, or eases the suffering of the birth mother in having to relinquish her child. It could be argued, though, that the sense of loss is exacerbated for Vicky, as she can be a mother in name only. However even this is tenuous as the term "mother" is usually equated with a woman with a child. Consequently, Vicky may never publicly call herself "mother". She can never experience the physical, social and emotional realities of mothering. Her loss of Westie is intensified by her inability to have more children.

Patricia Farrar (1997, p.101) states:

> In politicolegal, medical and social discourses women who had their babies taken for adoption have had various descriptors attached to them in accordance with the dominant ideological bias of a particular era: they were represented in either terms of their marital status as unwed or unmarried mothers; according to their reproductive function, as biological or birth mothers; or, as a consequence of losing their children to adoption, referred to as relinquishing or grieving mothers. 'Natural' and 'real mother' made appearances in the literature while the term 'Solomon's mother' has also been used. Women who lost their babies to adoption have not been described outright as 'mothers', for to do so would remove them from the signification of adoption and challenge the verisimilitude of adoption itself.

The challenge to the verisimilitude of adoption is an issue at stake in *Closed, Stranger.* Westie rejects the woman whom he has known as mother in order that her position be usurped by his "original" mother. His adoptive pseudo "sexual-family-as-natural" family is challenged as he refuses to have Liz and Dave signify "mother" and "father". Farrar's research centres on language and initially she examines the term "mother" as it has been set up in the sign, signifier, and signified linguistic system. This system is based on de Saussure's (in Rice & Waugh, 1994) structural linguistic model of language where the sign is made up of two interdependent parts – the signifier (sound-image) and the

signified (concept). In this model both signifier and signified are defined by what they are not. Any particular word gains its meaning by being different to other words within the same language system, that is dependent on social and cultural forces to assist in fixing a relationship of equivalence between signifier and signified. Thus, "mother" as a sign is socially and culturally constituted. Farrar (ibid) suggests:

> Consequently, the sign 'mother' is constituted as a woman with a child, specifically a married woman: there is no concept of the signified 'mother' existing without a relation to the signifier. In this way, the concept of 'mother' has been socially constructed: a woman without a child is not a mother. Signs are only comprehensible within their own system of signification, that is discourses.

The discourse of mother and motherhood is one of the more ambivalent and ambiguous discourses constructed by patriarchy. Within patriarchal discourse, the mother serves a constructed function that very often comprises idealised and sentimental representations or the opposite of this where the mother is disreputable and monstrous. Even when the mother is constructed somewhere between the two extremes she is still consistently constructed as other because her role is mediated through dominant cultural, social and psychoanalytical discourses that view the female as "other". De Goldi complicates the dominant script and creates tensions within motherhood discourse by having a mother who does not signify mother as she has been stripped of the role by forfeiting her child. In De Goldi's mother paradigm there is another mother who signifies mother because she "mothers" but is not considered a mother by the son who rejects her. This raises the question of what constitutes "mother" – what meaning do we attribute to the sign?

Brenda Walker (1989, p.69) argues:

> The process of becoming a mother: pregnancy, birth and bonding; stimulates the most extravagantly sentimental rhetoric and the most acute philosophical debate in today's society.

Walker's statement is significant as she mentions the process of becoming a mother. Is an adoptive mother less than a mother or not quite a mother because she not gone though all the processes that makes one a mother? This question has entered into debates surrounding motherhood following changes to adoption laws in many western countries. It is this point that Farrar focuses on in her discussion. How, socially and culturally, do we "mean mother" when a child has more than one mother and when the term "mother" is constituted as a woman with a child? Another significant question is raised in relation to bonding: is a relinquishing mother not quite a mother because the notion of bonding, particularly long-term bonding, is under threat? De Goldi explores the tensions implied by the term "mother" through Liz and Vicky.

Farrar utilises the work of Julia Kristeva to challenge the structuralist model of language, in order to show that language is not static and that it is the speaking subject who articulates meaning. Kristeva (cited in Farrar, 1997, pp.101-102) speaks of "semanalysis" which "conceives of meaning not as a sign-system but as a signifying process" and in which "the release and subsequent articulation of the drives as constrained by the social code are not reducible to the language system". Farrar (ibid, p.102) argues:

> Semanalysis, then, as a signifying process, provides a way of examining the tensions between the signifier and the signified as they occur in relation to women who have lost babies to adoption: that is, mothers without children.
>
> If, as Kristeva (1975) suggests, that, since the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary and there is no meaning in language other than that which is constituted by the subject, then it must be left to the speaking subject to articulate meaning within signifying practices. In other words, the relationship between the signifier 'm-o-th-e-r' and the signified concept of 'mother' is constructed by the patriarchal symbolic order to give meaning to the social practice of adoption, an expression of patriarchal law.

Farrar is arguing that patriarchal society has dictated the way in which a girl/woman who becomes a mother is to be described and allowed to function

in society. The mother is the one with the child, not necessarily the one who gives birth to the child. A factor that contributes to this is that patriarchal societies have to tame the "unbridled sexuality" of the female so as to control it. In the decades prior to the 1980s, removal of the child from the unmarried mother was seen as a means to reinforce to both the mother and society that flagrant displays of female sexuality will not be tolerated. Why Lindsey Robinson escaped being victim of this narrow-minded view of female sexuality is not examined. She is presented as an intelligent and capable career woman and a caring mother. Her being single is never an issue. Traditionally, however, an unmarried mother has been thought of as a social deviant in our society. This sort of thinking helps to reinforce and maintain the "good"/"bad" mother syndrome. Farrar (ibid, p.103) suggests "This dichotomy also served to distinguish between mothers who were deserving of children: the unmarried mother who was not, and the adoptive mother, always married, who was." As a teenage unwed mother, Vicky Crawford is morally unfit to fill the role of "mother". Yet, Kristeva's approach to language does allow for the birth mother to become the speaking subject who articulates her perceptions of the adoption process and allows herself to be called "mother". It is a means of working against the patriarchal law that endorses the notion that "mother" is a woman with a child.

The system that encourages women to give up their children for adoption without considering the short and long term consequences is a system that fails to consider the maternal body in the process of being "mother". What is ignored in a social approach to being a "mother" is the biological reality of conception, pregnancy and birthing. The female body is inscribed when it becomes a maternal body. Not only does the skin stretch and mottle and the

breasts and stomach grow larger but also the body is marked as that which has been involved in an act of copulation. These indicators show to both the pregnant woman and to society that she is a "becoming mother". This becoming is often ambivalent and highlighted by differences based on age, race, marital status, relationship with the father, number of children already born to the woman and so on. Socially, however, on one level, a pregnancy is seen as a cause of celebration or it denotes dishonour. What is common to the honourable and the dishonourable becoming mother is the fact that her body will forever bear the marks of inscription that come with pregnancy. A body that has carried and given birth to a child can never be the same body that it was before this process. For a mother whose child is given for adoption the outward, external connection with her maternal body is effaced, as she has no child with which to continue a maternal connection. This point is relevant too to a woman whose baby is stillborn, or whose baby dies soon after birth. Once the child is no longer with her, she is excluded from "mother" discourse. She becomes a "non-mother".

Vicky Crawford lives with this socially prescribed "non-mother" status for eighteen years. When she returns to New Zealand to find her son she claims a speaking subject status and calls herself mother in relation to him. She claims this term as a statement of biological fact. Farrar's (ibid, pp.105-111) research into what mothers whose children have been adopted prefer to be referred to, shows that approximately fifty to sixty percent of women in Australia and New Zealand favour the term "mother" with no other qualification. By analysing the responses from the women Farrar (ibid, p.106) states:

> It is apparent that these women have not denied their personal sense of the maternal, despite being exhorted to do so when their babies were taken for adoption. They associated the single word 'mother' with traditional mothering roles and images - 'closeness, bonding, all giving, caring' – and

> with the birthing role of mothers – creator and giver of life', as well as having the meaning as 'the most important person to a child'.

It is interesting that the women concerned chose to associate themselves with the more traditional and, arguably, stereotypical mothering roles and images. The reason for this could, in part, be because the women want to emphasise the nurturing role which was denied them. Closeness to the baby does not begin with the birth of the child as a bond is often established during pregnancy. Perhaps the knowledge that the children they gave birth to would be with them for such a short time (in some cases the babies were taken away soon after birth) made the notion of bonding paramount. Farrar's findings imply that the maternal ambivalence sometimes found with mothers who are keeping their babies, is not evident in the majority of women who are not keeping their babies. Rod Holm (1997, p.329) argues:

> The act of giving away a child for adoption is an act of violence, a traumatic act for both the birth mother and child. For the mother it involves breaking the established bonds of nine months, and the final wrenching away of the inevitable expectations and dreams of future life together. The birth experience itself can most accurately be seen as a relationship between mother and baby, and that too is sundered.

Holm's research focuses on the premise that adoption is traumatic for all parties who are involved: the adoptee, the adoptive parents and other family members. This consideration forms the basis of what follows.

The issue of bonding is important to consider in relation to the adoptive parents, in particular the mothers. De Goldi sets the new baby up as the chosen one (p.26):

> Enter Westie, stage left. Down south, actually. He arrives two weeks old, by Social Welfare car, and is handed to Liz, tears running, arms open wide.
>
> 'And they wrapped you in swaddling clothes, Doctor, laid you in a manger.'
>
> 'More or less.'...

Throughout the narrative, Liz is presented as a woman who defines herself by being a mother. She attempts to explain this to Max (pp.22-23):

> 'Son,' she said, her voice urgent and embarrassing.
>
> 'Son?' I said.
>
> 'You would never have had to think about that word, Max.'
>
> Excuse me?
>
> 'I wanted to say that word for years.' She said, watching me, looking me hard in the eye till I was desperate to turn away. She had blue eyes, the skin around them tired and taut, but the blue was cornflower and pretty, deepened by contact lenses.
>
> 'You wouldn't know, Max, you wouldn't begin to guess how it feels, the nagging, endless, unbearable *pain* when that word is denied you. When you literally cannot *have it*'....
>
> 'Then, suddenly.' She started up again. 'One day, out of the blue, it's yours. You can say it. *Son.* You can say it whenever you like. *Son.*'

For Liz the importance of being able to say "son" outweighs other significant features of her life. Liz wants to be an "at home" mother. Relegation to domestic spaces is not problematic for Liz Westgarth. She is a middle-class woman who wants to be the domestic pivot of the family. However, after Westie has met Vicky this role does not bring much joy. As the narrative focuses predominantly on Westie's life after he has met Vicky, Liz is presented as a character who is, for the most part, hurting. This is acknowledged when she tells Max (p.23) "'He won't let me say *my son* anymore'". Westie's prohibition on Liz's saying "my son" has wider implications when considering the speaking subject. As a child Westie would in all likelihood have called Liz "Mumma" or "Mummy". This implies he is claiming her as the mother figure in his life and this name or label would reinforce to Liz her status as his "mother". The narrative does not posit the idea that Liz considers Vicky's right to claim the term "mother". Liz is shocked into the realisation that Vicky not only exists but also that Westie considers Vicky to be his "rightful" mother. This is something that Liz just had not reckoned on. She calls on a teenager for

assistance. As Westie's friend, Max is put under an enormous amount of pressure through knowing about the relationship between Vicky and Westie, and by Liz who hopes that he can help her understand Westie's actions.

Westie effectively rejects both his adoptive parents but the impact of the rejection has consequences that are more profound for Liz. She is at a loss to understand why the son whom she loves unconditionally should completely reject all that she has to offer him. Rod Holm (1997, p.330) argues there is "unrecognised grief of the wounding nature of adoption for the child." Holm (ibid) suggests that adolescents and adults may act out this grief. Westie wants Liz and Dave to suffer for adopting him. If he had experienced feelings of rejection because Vicky could not keep him, he now wants Liz and Dave to endure those same feelings of rejection (p.88):

> And then there were his parents. Westie was staying at Vicky's but he wouldn't tell Liz and Dave anything, not the address or the phone number. He wouldn't let me tell them either. He wouldn't let me tell *Dee* in case she told them. This was Westie at his megalomaniacal worst – manic and controlling, issuing orders on several different fronts, then wantonly breaking his own edicts.
>
> For instance: He wanted to shut his parents out, slam every door in their faces, but he couldn't leave them alone, either. He went round there to see them, to get things, to keep on chewing on the old sore. Then Liz would ask him if he was coming back and he'd say probably not and she would cry and Westie'd get furious with her tears, her wounded, pleading face.

Westie seems to have little care or concern for the impact of his rejection on the woman who has mothered him for all but two weeks of his life. Max finds this difficult to comprehend (p.89):

> He hated Liz these days, hated her feelings, her claims on him, her *love*.
>
> 'I don't get it,' I said to Meredith, for the hundredth time. 'It's like he has to stamp out Liz's loving him, it's like it *revolts* him. But Vicky loving him is okay, even though it's gone...'
>
> *Wrong* was the word that hung there, unsaid. But I couldn't say wrong. It never seemed *wrong*, what was between Westie and Vicky, just out-of-kilter, and sad, and maybe hopeless – though I tried not to think about their future. I could see Westie's take on that one, his addiction to *now*,

> the now which went on and on, world without end. The future was too troublesome.

The future does in fact reveal itself as particularly troublesome as Vicky realises that the "out-of-kilter" relationship she has with her son cannot continue.

Max, like Vicky, becomes aware of the precariousness of the relationship that the mother and son are in. Max realises that Westie is involved in a situation that will have no winners (pp.90-91):

> You made the rules, sure; but you never counted on it being the one game where there are no winners, none at all, where all the people involved are guaranteed to lose big time. You're up to your neck in it, this game, you're fully fuelled, unstoppable, riding high and unconcerned, but it's all about to end. It has to end. Where can it go? A mother can't go on sleeping with her son, can she? *Can* she?

Vicky answers this question by ending the relationship and returning to Sydney. Westie is, for the most part, inconsolable, as the loss of his birth mother is an irreconcilable loss for him. He feels doubly rejected by her and his only solace is in drugs. This solace results in a loss for Max and for Lindsey Robinson. Max describes the mother-daughter relationship between Lindsey and Meredith (pp.84-85):

> I looked at that note on their kitchen table, on the pad they used to send messages back and forth. I thought how it seemed full of their long, intimate, ordinary mother-and-daughter history, all the language and jokes; it seemed very simple, very straightforward and right.

It is a relationship of "woman-to-woman" reciprocity (Irigaray, in Whitford, ed. 1994, p.50) that is shattered by Meredith's untimely death.

One afternoon Max and Meredith, very much in love, receive a phone call from Westie who wants to see the snow from the hills. They agree to go for a drive with him but during the drive Max realises that Westie is (p.97) "sky-high – subdued maybe, but more stoned than I'd ever seen him. He was reality

adjusted, big time." Westie is tripping and the LSD, amongst other things makes him unpredictable and affects his sense of timing. They make it safely to the summit and Meredith pleads with Westie to let Max drive back down – Westie refuses her request. Max colludes in this refusal by not forcing the issue and wanting to placate Westie. Although Westie drives cautiously, he cannot react quickly enough to avoid some ice on the road and the car plummets over the hill. At first Max and Westie think that they have all survived but this is not the case. Meredith does not survive (p.102).

After Meredith's death Lindsey turns to Max in attempt to share her grief; this is impossible for him. It is another mother, Dee, who offers her temporary solace (p.109). Ostensibly, Lindsey's choice to keep Meredith and enact the role of single mother, with a career, is initially presented as a wise choice. Lindsey is not presented as a deviant. The relationship between Meredith and Lindsey – a successful solicitor – is presented as one of affection and respect. However, the fact that her daughter dies does suggest that she, like Janey in *Touching earth lightly* and Magda in *Speaking to Miranda*, is eventually subjected to scrutiny under normative models of maternity.

Dee Jackson is also subject to scrutiny, especially when enacting her "scattergun style of parenting". However, Dee seeks assistance from a counsellor, and becomes a "good" mother who is willing and able to offer assistance to her grieving son. She is recovering from the grief of the rejection by her husband and the failure of their marriage. Dee is no longer emotionally absent from her sons but Max is unable to accept her advances, nor those of Gilly, who asks Max and Leon to be present at the birth of her first child (p.113). This is an unanticipated invitation that Max vehemently refuses. Gilly

is actually closer in age to Max than she is to Martin. In some senses, it may be argued that the *notion* of incest is subtly raised through these characters. Gilly is in fact Max's stepmother, and it seems odd that she would want a sexually active teenage male seven years her junior, at the birth of her first child. In addition, Martin is old enough to be Gilly's father, and consequently his daughter's grandfather.

The birth of Julia May Jackson is a charged event as she is born soon after Meredith's death. Apart from Vicky and her mother (who is mentioned very briefly), the other mother/daughter pairings in the narrative are Meredith and Lindsey and Gilly and Julia. Meredith's death not only leaves Max without a girlfriend but it renders Lindsey daughterless. When his baby sister is born the event exacerbates his awareness of Lindsey's loss and his own.

Gilly asks Max if the baby makes him think of Meredith (p.116):

> She was all loosened up, Gilly, off-guard, postnatally confessional or something. It was just me and her and the baby, while the old man and Leon went for takeaways, and she was looking at me, speaking like she never had before, crossing some boundary that had always kept us comfortably separate.
>
> I stared at her, felt the sweat break out.
>
> But the baby made me think of Vicky Crawford too, her and Westie. And Lindsey. And Dee. And Liz Westgarth. And Westie again. Everyone, all of them and all of it, then, now, in the future.

Here Gilly is presented as a woman who has become, almost instantly, a "good" mother, not only to Julia but to Max as well. Yet the closeness that Gilly tries to effect between herself and Max is impossible. Max is unable to articulate to anyone how he feels about his recent past – Vicky and Westie, Meredith's death, his mother, his brother – even his baby sister. In his mournful and grieving state he finds it difficult to bond with her. What is

pertinent is that all the people Max thinks about have suffered losses, and many of them are mothers.

For Dee the breakdown of her marriage, and the emotional rejection she experiences due to her husband loving and breeding with a twenty-five year old woman are resolved. The assistance she receives from her counsellor results in her achieving positive personal growth. She lets go of the hurt and moves on to a more satisfying and rewarding existence. By the novel's end she is preparing to open up a dance studio and re-embark on her pre-marriage career (p.146). As such, Dee is given the opportunity to experience multiple sources of identification, which suggests that her "new" self is not to be defined by the limited role of at-home mother. She has evolved into a more dynamic and fluid character who takes an active role in determining her subject position. This is, arguably, comparable with the subject position that Lindsey Robinson had before Meredith's death. However, the death does imply that Lindsey is made to suffer as her enactment of maternity operated outside the realm that is considered "normal". Vicky, too, is granted a more fluid subjectivity but as she is not allowed to keep her baby her subjectivity is based on a profound lack. Liz's identification of self is based on her roles of wife and mother. When Westie dies she not only loses a son, she also loses a coveted social role. There is an underlying sense of sadness that surrounds the mother figures, all except Gilly who is granted a sense of fulfilment via birth. This sense of fulfilment is not granted to Vicky, who must give her baby up for adoption, or to Liz who does not experience the birth process. What Liz does experience though is the physical, emotional and psychological reality of mothering. This is acutely felt when Westie moves back home after Vicky's (second) departure.

Westie's relationship with Liz and Dave is still tenuous at best. He complains that Liz will not give him the car, so Max offers to come and pick him up. Both boys get very stoned and Max drives Westie to the scene of Meredith's accident. Max's grief comes to the fore and he enacts his revenge on Westie. Max confronts Westie about his relative dismissal of the accident and accuses him of ego-mania (pp.159-160):

> But why should I be astonished? I said. It was absolutely characteristic. It showed, absolutely and characteristically in fact, his total fucking inability to *feel*, to empathise, to act like a normal human. But anyway he wasn't normal, was he? He was fucking abnormal, he was a fucking sociopath who knew none of the normal bounds of normalcy; he was so fucking abnormal the only woman he'd ever shown the slightest passionate feeling for, the only real *involvement* with, was his *mother*, for God's sake, a woman who'd taken one look at him at birth and screamed, *Take it away*, the woman who hadn't wanted to know him for eighteen years and when she did finally get inside his head had found him altogether too fucking weird because he wanted to *sleep* with her, did *sleep* with her, freaked her out so goddamned convincingly she had to piss right off again, put as many miles as possible between her and him, blah, blah, blah, blah ....
>
> I told Westie what a shallow, exploitative shit he was, his capacity for friendship, for family life, for love, for *life* as normal people knew it, less than zero.
>
> I told him, sorry and all that, but justice Jackson-style simply couldn't see its way to letting him glide off into the Australian sunset with Vicky Crawford. No, *sorry*, not when Jackson junior, the sad old Doctor, had been deprived of *his* chance of golden sunsets, lingering looks, eternal handholding.
>
> I put my face just centimetres from his and told him slowly that only one sick, inadequate *pervert* would sleep with his mother.

Max leaves Westie on the hillside and presumes his ex-friend makes it home. Westie does make it home – to Liz and Dave – but he is left feeling alone in the world. His birth mother has left him (again), his best friend for the past twelve years has just deserted him totally and he feels estranged from his adoptive parents. Max has no idea of the impact of his words on Westie.

Max's accusation that Westie is "so fucking abnormal" that he would sleep with his mother followed by the suggestion that Vicky had rejected Westie at birth, displays his complete and utter misinterpretation of Westie's pain and

perhaps his suppressed guilt. The trauma of such misunderstandings is already evident to Max through his parents' actions and words. The narrative does not focus on the parents' perspectives, but Max's story presents the marriage between Dee and Martin (who is rarely referred to by this name. Max calls him "the old man") as a war zone where the other person is a target. Max's home environment both when his father was there and after he has gone is not one that surrounds him with love, comfort, support, warmth and acceptance. Meredith provided this and very much more. Dee, as "good" and "sane" mother, does make attempts to offer support, love and acceptance to Max, after Meredith's death. He is unwilling to accept these things from his recently transformed mother.

The absolute tragedy, in regard to Westie and Max, is that had the means of communication been open and equitable between the two they may have shared their experiences instead of closing down and becoming closed, strangers. The interaction on the hillside is the last time Westie and Max see each other. When Westie returns home he is very subdued and quiet. Liz's perspective slips into the narrative, she is keen to talk to Westie but she too is wary (p.162):

> She wanted to talk to him about the arrest, she said, the nature of the offence, but she wanted to keep a lid, too, on any conflict. They'd fought so much over the last year – various things, one matter in particular – she wanted to avoid fighting with her only son, avoid a repeat of those awful things they'd said to each other, so she left it; she thought she'd let a bit of time pass, then pick her moment carefully, talk sensibly, rationally, when she was feeling calmer, when he'd cheered up a bit.

Now Westie has become "her only son", emphasising the significant role he has in her claiming of a "mother" status. With Vicky gone there is seemingly no one to challenge Liz's position. Yet she is vulnerable in this role, and aware that Westie may confront her about her "eligibility" to be his mother. Hence

she will not question Westie as to his part in the growing of the hydroponic marijuana crop. Pleasingly for Liz, Westie does cheer up a bit – on the morning he takes his life. He (p.162) "eats a biggish breakfast, makes a joke about the police and tells Liz he is going running with the Doctor". When Westie does not come home Liz rings the Jackson household, only to discover that Westie and Max have not seen each other for a few days and had not been running together for three weeks (p.163):

> She couldn't sleep after that, Liz Westgarth told the court.
>
> She got up and sat at the breakfast bar in her dressing gown, drinking coffee, watching the morning light leak slowly into her back garden, waiting for her son, waiting for him to come in through the french doors, his eyes wide and innocent, that old *don't*-hassle-me look on his face. Soon, surely, she thought. Any moment now, he'd come through those doors and head straight for his room for the day, sleep it off, whatever it was he'd been doing, whatever it was he's been up to. She wouldn't ask him any questions, she decided, best leave it alone, let him –
>
> But, of course, the only people to come through the french doors that day were the two police officers, one woman, one man, late in the afternoon. She was dressed by then; she'd dressed, made her husband breakfast, allowed him to reassure her, seen him off to work.
>
> But after he'd gone, she sat back down at the breakfast bar, stared out into the garden for hours, waiting still, expecting the worst.

What is so telling in Liz's account is her ultimate goal is to keep Westie happy, not to upset or irritate him. She wants nothing to further upset her in her role of mother. Liz is wary of broaching any subject with Westie for fear of further rejection. What Liz does not comprehend is Westie's feeling of a double rejection by Vicky. Once Vicky leaves Westie she does not contact him, so in effect he has two mothers but neither of them are "in touch" with him. Both Liz and Vicky lose a son that they wanted to love but whom they do not really know.

Conversely, Dee has become a "good" mother who does know her son, and she realises that Max is suffering from an unhealthy obsession and she finally gets him to see her counsellor (pp.172-173):

> I suppose it was Sue, finally, who made me see how impossible, how desperate, my whole Westie-in-Australia scenario was.
>
> And one other thing.
>
> In late August, six months after Westie's disappearance, and exactly a year since Vicky Crawford flew back to Sydney, I got a letter from her.

Max is unable to cope with the opening of this letter on his own. He rings Sue and reads the letter to her; his foremost thought is that it is indeed a letter from Westie, who he believes is alive and in Sydney with Vicky.

It is, instead, another rare moment in the text where the voice of a mother interjects and tells a piece of her story (pp.173-174):

> *Dear Max,* Vicky had written.
>
> *I think of you so often, nearly as much as I think of Westie – you seemed so much part of him, such a huge part of his history – that whole life that I didn't know, but which he tried to tell me during our six months together...*
>
> *But it's so hard, Max. It's so horribly hard. It's a year since I came back here and there hasn't been one day or night I haven't thought about Westie – what he's doing, how he's thinking and feeling, whether things are all right for him, whether he'll ever forgive me. There have been so many days when I've been inches from the phone, from ringing him – but I've stopped myself because I have to believe that it's right for me to stay away...*
>
> *I suppose I'm writing to you, Max, just to make some kind of contact with that time, but without starting it up, without hurting Westie. You probably don't want to know about it – maybe you think it's a terrible presumption me writing to you – and asking you not to say anything to him. Maybe you can't forgive me, either, knowing what a mess I made of things.*
>
> *But maybe you'll write to me one day, tell me how you are, and Meredith, and your good friend – my beautiful son.*
>
> *I hope so.*
>
> *Love, Vicky.*

Vicky's words "I have to believe that it's right for me to stay away" suggest that she is not entirely convinced that her self-imposed veto on contact with her son is the correct option. She, like Liz, is unsure of how to proceed with Westie. Both the mothers neither want to hurt him or be hurt by him so they

leave him alone. There is a literal sea between Westie and his birth mother and a sea of silence between his mothers themselves and they with him.

Judy Durey (1997, p.300) states:

> I think one of the worst things about 'closed adoption' is the silence – the social covering up of the visceral, emotional, psychological, genetic and historical connections to the original mother and the denial of loss for all.

The denial of Vicky's loss is an area that Liz seems unable to comprehend. She sees herself as Westie's mother and as a consequence she blocks out the fact that Vicky too is Westie's mother. In fact Vicky was his mother first. The impact of this silence is such that the two women are not able to share the son that they both love. The silence of and between the mothers also serves to mask the conflicts and ambivalences that they are subject to in relation to their son.

This is not to suggest that these conflicts and ambivalent feelings are the same for Vicky and Liz. They cannot be as they had very different relationships with Westie. That said there are some similarities that can be related to a maternal sacrifice paradigm. Vicky is obviously related to this paradigm as she "sacrificed" her right to *be* Westie's mother when he was taken for adoption. Once she has made contact with him she further sacrifices an ongoing relationship with him because of the sexual intimacy they experienced. She does not have the ability to *fully* confront the issue of their sexual relationship and to help both her and Westie move on from there. Instead she leaves New Zealand and returns to her life in Australia. Her leaving may be read as a way of dealing with the sexual relationship. However I see this as flawed because it only serves to end the relationship, it does not confront the effect of the impact it had on Westie. By leaving, Vicky sacrifices the opportunity to develop a

different type of relationship with her son. Liz, although she sees Westie regularly, also sacrifices a better relationship with her son through her "I won't hassle you approach". It seems that for Liz to be "mother" is enough and she will not damage her perception of that role. She believed that leaving Westie alone and giving him time would heal old scars and battle wounds. What she did not count on was the fact that time was at a premium and her son desperately needed someone to talk to. Both women ultimately let Westie down whilst believing or perhaps hoping they were doing the right thing by him.

When Max realises that Vicky does not know of Westie's death he telephones her in Sydney (p.176):

> One night in September, after a punishing run and a thousand nervous circuits around the house, I rang Vicky Crawford and told her about Westie. It was a terrible phone call. Indescribable. She was disbelieving at first, then inconsolable. I thought the sound of her crying would kill me...
>
> I told her she could ring me any time, to talk, go over things...
>
> Where does a person's story really begin? Maybe it begins when *they* choose. When they open their eyes and see properly for the first time. When they sit up and take charge, look square-faced at the truth, start telling it for themselves.

Arguably Vicky's inconsolable crying is both for the death of the son she knew so briefly but so intimately, and it also would bring to the fore the feeling of loss she experienced when he was taken for adoption. Vicky's "non-mother" status is reinforced once more.

Westie had always claimed that "the past was for Milo drinkers" but without the past there is no now or no future. For Vicky the relationship she had with her son never really had any future. She lost him in the closed adoption system, and when she found him again eighteen years later she found a youth who fell hopelessly in love with her. Their transgression of the mother/son relationship, whilst giving them a unique and exceptional "now", could not

continue – it could not have a future. Vicky lost her son over and over until his death meant he could not be lost to her anymore. Vicky (and Liz) would now only have a past with their son.

The notion of the past and being able to connect with it, comprehend it and, if necessary confront it, is an issue throughout the narrative. De Goldi's text is critical of the closed, stranger type of adoption practice as it disallows the adoptee access to her/his past. In conjunction with this, the birth mother is placed in a state of denial on a number of levels. She was expected to deny the processes of pregnancy, birth and relinquishment. The grief and trauma that she suffers is denied an outlet. De Goldi's text highlights the significance of having access to one's own personal history. This not only means that the child should know who its parents are but that the mother who relinquishes a child has a right to details about that child. The overriding issue is that of communication.

The question of "when does a person's story begin?" is presented as being answered in different ways depending on who is doing the asking. For Westie it was a crucial and fundamental question that partly found an answer in Vicky Crawford. To Westie she represented an indisputable "truth" about his genesis. Unfortunately to embrace her as "mother" he felt that he had to reject the woman who had "mothered" him for the majority of his life. Due to the closed nature of his adoption he saw the situation with these two mothers as an either/or position. The lack of communication between *all* parties proved tragically fatal.

The notion of what constitutes "mother" is raised and questioned within this novel. The social tensions that arise when more than one woman wants to be mother to only one child are not simply dispensed with. De Goldi provides no definitive answer as to who has the right to claim the status of "mother". I suggest that she proposes that the question be given careful consideration with respect shown to all involved persons. The core of this respect lies in an openness of communication, a willingness to listen and an ability to confront issues that are emotionally challenging. *Closed, Stranger* does confront issues that are emotionally and morally challenging. De Goldi raises more questions than she answers in this novel and, more than anything else, she invites the reader to take up the challenge and confront issues of adoption, death, drug use, love, sex, incest and, crucially, the importance of open and honest communication.

Nevertheless, when considering how the presentation of mothers may have evolved since the 1980s, although there is a range of mothers presented, it is difficult to argue that normative models of maternity have been destabilised in *Closed, Stranger*. Heather Scutter (1999, p.201) argues, "As mothers and mothering go, the more things change, the more they stay the same..." This is found to be accurate, as Liz Westgarth is presented as the "good" stay-at-home mother who enacts the role of the domestic pivot of the family. As argued, Liz wanted to fulfil the socially sanctioned roles of wife and mother. As a married woman she was expected to have a child and as a married woman she was viewed as worthy of raising another woman's child. Her role is juxtaposed with that of Vicky who is marked as deviant for becoming pregnant when a teenager, and is disallowed the opportunity to take on the role of (proper) mother.. When Vicky and Westie do reunite it is as lovers. Admittedly this

relationship is treated respectfully within the narrative and would be accounted for, in my analysis, by the Genetic Sexual Attraction theory. However this is a level of explanation that operates beyond the understandings of the characters involved. Westie's death suggests that his transgression is too great, as is Vicky's – in producing him, leaving him, loving him and leaving him again. Liz too suffers from this loss, but as the socially sanctioned mother, she can grieve openly for the loss of "her" son.

Lindsey Robinson's character is, ostensibly, that of a nineties woman who has a successful career (in a male dominated profession), a beautiful, talented daughter and a free and independent life style. Lindsey is granted a sense of agency; and she is in Scutter's (1999, p.202) words, "liberated from the mandates of the domestic sphere." However, Lindsey's mothering occurred outside of the normalised family structure, and the fact that she too loses her only child suggests that she is subject to scrutiny as a deviant – a single mother.

Gilly does not really enact the role of single mother, as she and Martin share a home and recreate the "sexual-family-as-natural" family structure. Gilly's role becomes that of wife and mother, and thus she is not subject to scrutiny as a deviant.

Dee Jackson moves from the contradictory "bad" or "too good" mother to that of "good enough" mother. Arguably her representation does mark a positive shift in constructions of maternity. She moves from the "sexual-family-as-natural" family to the single parent family, and she, eventually, achieves a "subject-in-processness" subjectivity due to her new business venture.

However, when comparing the mothers in *Closed, Stranger* to those in *The Changeover* it would be difficult to argue that there has been a positive evolution from 1984 to 1999. In Mahy's text Kate Chant is single, sexually active and both her children live. Miryam Carlisle is single and evolves from a "bad" mother to a "becoming-good" mother, her child also lives. The single mothers in *Closed, Stranger* both suffer the untimely deaths of their children. Liz Westgarth enacts the role of "good" mother but this role serves to reinforce normative models of maternity, rather than challenging them. Gilly too serves to reinforce normative models of maternity by setting up house with her baby's father. As suggested, it is only Dee Jackson who is granted both a "subject-in-processness", and children who are allowed to live. Perhaps this is because Dee had enacted the proper (as opposed to psuedo) "sexual-family-as-natural" family structure before Martin left her. That is, Dee can be a single mother as her children were born (and in the case of Max, raised) within a normative family structure. Hence the "sexual-family-as-natural" metanarrative is still prevailing in texts from the late 1990s.

Mothers were offered gifts of simnel-cakes and asked to bless their children.

Barbara Walker - *The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects* (p.187).

Concluding Remarks

This thesis is a study of a range of mothers and mother figures, within a variety of family structures. What is apparent is that normative and universalising models of maternity are present within novels published as late as 1999. This thesis suggests that such models of maternity are based on the patriarchal notion of the "good"/"bad" mother dichotomy. My research shows that, on the whole, complex characterisations of the mother figures are rare. Many of the mothers are defined within the parameters of the "good"/"bad" binary. Although the subject matter of many novels for teenagers now includes grim social realities, such as incest, rape, violent death and so on, the presentations of mother figures have not evolved in line with the presentation of contentious social "issues". As stated in the introduction, I am aware that these texts are written with a teenage audience in mind, and that narratorial focus very often rests with the child/teenage characters. This study shows that despite the overt narratorial focus on the child/teenage characters, mothers and mother figures permeate the narratives. In fact, in *Greylands, Speaking to Miranda* and partially in *Closed, Stranger,* the mothers are the "driving forces" of the narratives. Hence, the limited presentations of many of the mother figures are all the more disconcerting. That said Mahy's text is evidence that mothers can be given complex characterisations, which include positive characteristics and serve to create more all encompassing

representations of mothers, with their own requirements, desires and subjectivities.

This thesis is not a comprehensive review of the ways in which models of maternity and family dynamics are present in Australian and New Zealand fiction for teenagers; this was not my aim. Rather, I selected five novels that present a range of pertinent social issues as well as a variety of family structures and mother figures, in order to examine the social/cultural content/comment of the texts in conjunction with models of maternity. My reasons for doing so lie, in part, in relation to Luce Irigaray's (1993b, p.50) statement:

> Today, only a mother can see to it that her daughter, her daughters, form(s) a girl's identity. Daughters that we are, more aware of issues concerning our liberation, we can also educate our mothers and educate each other among ourselves. I think this is essential for the social and cultural changes we need.

Irigaray speaks of reciprocal relationships between mothers and daughters, and other women, in the context of social and cultural changes. As the novels in this thesis are written by women, and they contain a number of mother figures, it is pertinent to consider the ways in which "daughters" are being acculturated by negative and/or conservative portrayals of mothers. Although this is not the place to rehearse a sociological argument about readers and reading practices, it is important to remember that texts do serve a pedagogical function. It is sufficient here to note that values, both implicit and explicit, are being passed on in the presentations of the mother figures. Limiting and limited depictions of mother figures only serve to keep mothers as either blameworthy or sentimentalised. Maternity must be addressed as a social and cultural issue in order that topics such as child sexual abuse,

murder, aberrant sexuality and so on, are not portrayed as the "natural" outcome of a faulty (mad, absent, deficient and so on) mother.

In the introduction I state that this thesis will examine the extent to which universalising theories and normative models of maternity are depicted within the novels under consideration. Throughout the dissertation, I have concentrated on what I consider to be pertinent thematic concerns within each particular text. These concerns have been looked at in conjunction with the models of maternity that are set up in the introduction. *The Changeover* is used as means of establishing how maternity is presented in a novel that contains a variety of mother figures and family structures. Mahy's characterisations are often ambiguous and this ambiguity serves to undermine the "good"/"bad" mother dichotomy. The text presents many of the mother figures as subjects-in-process. That is the mother figures are given a sense of identification which is not reliant solely on the role of mother. Their subjectivities are fluid, dynamic and adaptable. In the chapters that follow *The Changeover* some comparisons are made with Mahy's text in order to ascertain if presentations of maternity have evolved in the 1990s.

This study has found that Joan Gibbons' assertion about Margaret Mahy is accurate. Gibbons (1994, p.11) states, "Feminist critics have seen her as being a leader among writers who have broken from tradition in their treatment of females and children." Mahy's mothers and mother figures exist in "a culture of the female" (Irigaray, 1996, p.47), which privileges the biological mother but not the "sexual-family-as-natural" structure, where the biological *couple* is privileged.

The depictions of the mothers and mother figures in *The Changeover* are various and multifaceted. The teenage protagonist, Laura Chant, is presented as a daughter figure and a mother figure. In her role of mother she enacts both a "good" and a "bad" mother, but her "bad" mother role is justified as she enacts the destructive crone figure of the triple goddess in order to save her young brother's life. This "bad" mother role of Laura's is more apparent than real, it is a function of circumstance rather than the substance of her being. Laura's mother, Kate, is both a single mother and a sexualised woman. Although Laura initially perceives her as a "bad" mother for having sex with a newly acquired friend, Laura's opinion changes when she understands that her mother is a woman with her own needs and desires, as well as a mother. In this respect Kate is given a "subject-in-processness" subjectivity, which allows her a sense of self-identification. A sense of self-identification is also accorded to Miryam Carlisle, who is single by choice. Miryam's mothering moves from a "bad" mother status to that of a "becoming good" status. Conversely, Sorry's foster-mother moves from a "good" mother category to that of "bad" mother, when she fails to protect Sorry from child abuse. As argued the nuclear family is not privileged within the novel but the biological mother is. The novel offers resistance to universalising models of maternity where the mother is, according to Teresa Arendell (1999, p.9), "absorbed in nurturing activities and situated within the biological nuclear family". Neither Kate or Miryam or Laura (as a mother figure) are located in a biological nuclear family. The one mother who is situated in a biological nuclear family is Sorry's foster mother, and her family proves to be a site of violence. In *The Changeover* motherhood is, to a degree, privileged as the biological mothers are presented as significant to the raising of their children. However, their mothering roles do not limit their capacities for other activities. Despite the fact that Kate

Chant is presented as "the cornerstone of the family unit", her characterisation is one of the more positive examples of maternity in this study. Kate as a sexualised, single mother (with both a pre-school child and a teenage daughter), who works outside the home, has a relationship that Luce Irigaray (in Whitford, ed. 1994, p.50) would characterise as, "woman-to-woman reciprocity" with her daughter. Importantly, for Laura and Kate their relationship develops as they grow and change. They have an intersubjective relationship with one another where the daughter does not have to "give up her love for and of her mother" (Irigaray, 1993, p.20).

Displays of mother love are absent for the mother figure in *Greylands.* The lack of love shown to the mother in her formative years impacts upon her ability to mother. In *Greylands* constructions of motherhood are based on normative models of maternity, with the mothers situated within the biological family home. However, the mother's mother is presented as a "bad" and negligent mother, and the mother is presented as a (sometimes) mad, and (usually) an inadequate mother figure. Hence the mothers display negative and/or destructive tendencies. The portrayals of these mother figures do little to challenge the "good"/"bad" binary. Although Carmody does not present Jack and Ellen's mother as the "domestic pivot of a family" (Lucas, 1998, p.39), she does not offer any alternative forms of nurturance to the children. Motherhood is not privileged within the narrative as mothers are presented as mad or bad or both. In this 1997 text there is little evidence of an evolution in the presentation of mother figures since 1984 – the publication date of *The Changeover.* The mothers in *Greylands* are not presented as socially progressive. The grandmother is not shown to be aware of the effect of her negligence on her daughter, and the mother is not granted the opportunity to

negotiate her subjectivity by recognising her other within. Rather these two women are static representations, who are disallowed dynamic and fluid subjectivities. Once again, Gibbons' (1994, p.11) point about Margaret Mahy breaking from tradition in her treatment of females and children is found to be accurate. Carmody's text is traditional in that it limits the possibility for the mothers to be subjects-in-process, as they are confined and defined by negative presentations.

In *Speaking to Miranda* the "sexual-family-as-natural" as theorised by Martha Fineman (1995, p.145) is undermined, as there are few examples of this family structure in the novel. Ostensibly, the principal mother figure, Emma/Magda, is granted a "subject-in-processness" subjectivity. Emma/Magda is presented as questioning stereotypical depictions of maternity as she resists enacting the conventional role of mother; she also enacts the role of a teenage self. However, as argued she is subject to scrutiny as a deviant. She has two children by different fathers by the time she is eighteen, one dies when she is conceiving the other, and then the mother dies when her second daughter is two-years-old. As a sexualised mother figure Emma/Magda can be compared to Kate Chant. Arguably Kate is allowed to live as her children are conceived within a normalised family structure and they have the same father. This suggests that Emma/Magda's transgressions from normative models of maternity are too great. As issues of identity and subjectivity are paramount in this text, I argue that the daughter's subjectivity is constructed through a belated form of an intersubjective relationship with her mother. This allows the daughter to claim her mother-given name and her maternal genealogy. The name is (re)bestowed upon her by the Maori matriarch Mum Manuatu. The presence of Mum Manuatu also serve to undermine the "sexual-family-as-

natural" as Mum Manuatu and her family accept Miranda as their kin. Although Mum Manuatu is rather idealised her character is imperative to the daughter reclaiming her mother(land). Mum Manuatu enacts the role of "good" mother – advocated by her name and the fact she lives.

In *Touching earth lightly* I argue that there are two narrative strands, one in which Janey Knott's life is fated from the outset, and the other (a sub-text) which argues her life could have been altered with adult intervention. The main narrative suggests that Janey Knott's transgressions, in the realm of sexual desire, not only contribute to her death, but also her non-monogamous sex life deems her an unfit mother. In the main narrative, mother figures are juxtaposed with one another, with instances of both "good" and "bad" mothers. The depictions of the mothers serves to reinforce normative models of maternity, as the value-laden terms of "good" and "bad" are acutely juxtaposed so as to privilege the "good" mother. The mothers in *Touching earth lightly* are predominantly situated within Fineman's (1995, p.145) "sexual-family-as-natural" family structure. The main narrative and the sub-text readings show that this family structure can be a site of violence and abuse, and also a site of silence when it comes to confronting issues of child sexual abuse. As such the novel both confirms and contests normative models of maternity. They are confirmed in that the "good"/"bad" mother binary is held intact, due to the juxtapositions of Joy and Mrs Knott and Janey and Sheree and Maxine Hayward. They are contested by the fact that Joy is a working mother and because the "sexual-natural-family" is shown to be aberrant and unnatural. The latter point is achieved (in part) through the depiction of the Knott family. Their lower class status acts as a determining factor in the tragic life of Janey, and also serves to highlight the difference between the (ostensibly) good

middle-class family and the bad working-class family. Although the middle-class Joy Hunter is granted a "subject-in-processness" subjectivity, mainly due to her being gainfully employed at a university, her role serves to highlight the inadequacy of Mrs Knott. Consequently, Joy's character serves to uphold the "good" mother model, rather than problematise it. As shown, the most extreme example of the "bad" mother is Mrs Knott because she fails to protect her daughter from familial incest. She is most closely aligned with the grandmother figure in *Greylands,* who psychologically abuses her daughter. My sub-text reading shows that the "good" mother can experience slippage into that of "bad" or negligent mother. This reading, whilst acknowledging Joy's flawed "good" mothering, does little to change how Mrs Knott is to be read. It is she and not Joy who suffers most severely when scrutinised. The slippage from a "good" to a "bad" mother is also found in *The Changeover,* when Sorry's foster mother fails to protect him from child abuse. However in Mahy's text Sorry's biological mother is privileged, as she moves into a "becoming good" category. The biological mother who is privileged in *Touching earth lightly* is Joy Hunter, however my sub-text reading shows that this privileging is questionable.

In *Closed, Stranger* there is a range of mother figures depicted within a variety of family structures. A dominant issue in this text is the question of what constitutes "mother". In this novel, both Vicky Crawford as birth mother and Liz Westgarth as adoptive mother are presented as mother figures. However, as has been shown, this is not unproblematic and tensions arise when one mother is rejected in favour of another. There are examples of both "good" and "bad" mothers in the narrative, but the dichotomy is not as obvious as that found in *Greylands* or, ostensibly, in *Touching earth lightly.* As in *Speaking to*

Miranda and *Touching earth lightly* the single mothers in *Closed, Stranger* are punished as deviants, because their children die. Therefore, it is argued that normative models of maternity are upheld within this novel. Although De Goldi offers a range of configurations of the family, single mothers and adoptive mothers lose their children. Although Dee Jackson becomes a single mother, her children arguably live as they were born into a "sexual-natural-family", as is their half-sister. Deviations from the "reproductive, biological pairing" (Fineman, 1995, p.145) are not permitted within this narrative. As a result, it can be argued that this novel perpetuates the conventional ideal of the two (biological) parent family. As such there is a conservative morality present in the narrative – Westie dies because his sexual transgression is too great, Vicky loses a son for the same reason, Liz, who cannot have children is punished as she loses her son, and Lindsey is punished for her single mothering. This moral/ising treatment of the mother figures is not found in *The Changeover.* As shown, Kate is sexualised and Miryam does not who know the father of her child is. Neither of these women is punished for their sexual activity.

As a consequence of this study, I would argue that Heather Scutter's (1999, p.201) comment, "As far as mothers and mothering go, the more things change, the more they stay the same..." is still relevant in the 1990s. Although the texts of the 1990s present a variety of mother figures and various configurations of the family, it would be difficult to argue that there has been an evolution in the ways in which mother figures have been presented. Deviancy discourses are to be found in the texts of the 1990s, as mothers are "killed off" for being single, sexual, or mad, and Liz Westgarth suffered due to childlessness. Married mothers are allowed to live and, if the biological mother, their children also survive. The two exceptions to this are the

grandmother in *Greylands* and Mrs Knott in *Touching earth lightly.* As argued, these two exist as "bad" mothers hence they are punishable – they lose their daughters to violent deaths. These deaths, however, do not seem to impact on these "bad" mother figures; rather their respective characterisations remain the same. This suggests that the "bad" mother remains "bad" as her negligence is, in part at least, to blame for the daughter's death. She can have no sense of reprieve. There is a morality discourse operating in such an argument, as it implies that there cannot be a slippage from "bad" to "good". A mother can only go from "good" to "bad". In part, this type of argument may be seen as typical within the genre of children's literature. That is, children's literature is unlikely to be socially progressive in its dealing with moral issues surrounding mothers and mother figures. Scutter (1999, p.23) states:

> It is well to remember that children's and young adult fiction is written by adults with a commercial and cultural interest vested in children and adolescents, and that the constructs of childhood and adolescence thus produced are politically and socially directed. So, also, are the constructs of maternity and, given that children's fiction has remained in a reactionary philosophical and moral cast for most of its history, as has adolescent fiction too, despite the overt bravado of some of its representations, it should not seem surprising if reactionary cultural movements in the wider social community are concentrated, and even exaggerated, in the worlds of children's and young adult books.

Scutter's words are applicable to this thesis as the constructs of maternity in the novels of the 1990s are found to be reactionary, rather than (r)evolutionary. Conservative moral values are ultimately perpetuated in the texts of the 1990s, as only the "good", non-sexualised biological mother can be allowed to live and have children who also survive.

In conclusion, this thesis has addressed the novels in relation to the social concerns of each text and the depictions of maternity. As such, it does not attempt an exhaustive analysis; rather it demonstrates one of many approaches to the reading of these texts. This study serves to highlight the fact

that although many "gritty social issues" were addressed in the novels under consideration, the models of maternity that were presented were, on the whole, both normative and restrictive.

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