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Dead Mothers, Lonely Daughters : Negotiating Intersubjective Space in Young Adult Fiction

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DEAD MOTHERS, LONELY DAUGHTERS
NEGOTIATING INTERSUBJECTIVE SPACE
IN
YOUNG ADULT FICTION

By: Anna-Clairé Walsh

Student No: 0953445

Thesis submitted: January 2000

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YOUNG ADULT FICTION**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the effect of maternal absence on the ability of three central female characters to develop intersubjective relationships in three novels for young adults. The theoretical framework is Jessica Benjamin's psychoanalytic theory of 'intersubjectivity' which seeks to transcend split complementarities such as active-passive creating a model that synthesises traditionally opposed terms. Benjamin situates maternal subjectivity as the foundation from which a baby's identity is constructed and attributes women with both active and passive qualities. The relationship between mother and infant consequently acts as a paradigm for understanding the interaction between adult subjects in later life.

Chapter One introduces my understanding of Benjamin's work. Here I discuss the origin of the 'two-subject', intersubjective approach in psychoanalysis. I explain Benjamin's intersubjective theory and foreground her four stages of child development. I suggest the importance of the transitional space of the 'third term' and finally consider the importance of the mother-child relationship in understanding human interactions.

The subsequent chapters consider three novels in light of Benjamin's model of intersubjectivity. Chapter two focuses on *Speaking to Miranda* by Caroline Macdonald (1990). Here I argue that in the central character's quest to connect with her dead mother's past, she is able to achieve an intersubjective status and assert active agency over her future. Chapter three focuses on *Back on Track: Diary of a Street Kid* by Margaret Clark (1995). In this novel, the central character's dead mother occupies an object/victim position. I argue that this negative role model from her past casts an

uncertain light on the beneficial long-term impacts the central character gains from the intersubjective relationship with her diary. Chapter four considers *Letters from the Inside* by John Marsden (1991). Here I argue that the ultimate failure of intersubjective relatedness with her pen pal causes the central character to regress to an infantile stage of development.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher degree education;
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
- (iii) contain any defamatory material.

Signed .. 

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE:

a. The Intersubjective Approach to Psychoanalysis	1
b. An Introduction: Jessica Benjamin Ph.D.	6
c. The Four Stages of Gender Development	7
d. The Third Term	12
e. The Third Term and the Role of Language	14
f. The Ego and the Act of Splitting	16
g. The Importance of the Mother-Child Relationship	17

CHAPTER TWO:

<i>Speaking to Miranda</i> (Caroline Macdonald, 1990)	20
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CHAPTER THREE:

<i>Back on Track: Diary of a Street Kid</i> (Margaret Clark, 1995)	31
--	----

CHAPTER FOUR:

<i>Letters from the Inside</i> (John Marsden, 1991)	45
---	----

CONCLUDING REMARKS	57
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REFERENCES	60
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THE INTERSUBJECTIVE APPROACH TO PSYCHOANALYSIS

During the past decade and a half, the American psychoanalytic community has undergone a major shift in the conceptualisation of analytical practises and techniques. This shift can be described as a movement away from the traditional ‘one-person’ view of psychoanalysis towards a more interpersonal ‘two-person’ paradigm. This *re-conceptualisation* is attributed various titles such as “object-relational, intersubjective, perspectivist, and social constructivist” (Wallerstein, 1999, p.1). Regardless of which term one chooses to employ, the two-person approach to analysis is declared by Wallerstein as indubitably “[t]he *New American Psychoanalysis*” (1999, p. 1, my italics).

The movement away from a ‘one-person’ psychology is a direct attempt to unhinge the historically privileged position held by the analyst as the sole “arbiter of the patient’s reality” (Gill, 1982 cited in Wallerstein, 1999, p. 2). Instead, the two-person ‘intersubjective’ approach considers that both analyst and analysand perceive their world as unique “but at the same time [are] mutually and reciprocally influenced by the other” (Frayn, 1999, p. 4). The focus of the alternative two-person perspective lies in its attention to the analyst’s relationship with the analysand. This dyadic

relationship is currently considered as integral to the analytic method and also accounts for the major divergence from the techniques practised in the Freudian era. According to Frayn, 'intersubjectivity' is conceived as a phenomenological process that should be considered "an important focus of all analytic interventions regardless of the theoretical orientation of the analyst" (1999, p. 4).

The intersubjective approach foregrounds the study of the shared experiences, feelings and fantasies created through the interaction between analyst and patient. According to Stolorow, Orange and Atwood (1999), the "intersubjective system" closes "the gap between the intrapsychic and interpersonal realms" (p. 1). In practice intersubjective relatedness can quite easily alter to an exclusively 'intrapsychic' scenario depending on the ability of both participants to operate within the paradigm of mutual recognition. 'Intrapsychic', refers to an individual's inner consciousness or psyche where experience is processed internally. Therefore, the 'interpersonal', intersubjective relationship can suffer a collapse when one or either of the subjects refuses to acknowledge the presence of the other. As a result of recurrent disruptions, it is perfectly normal in a single session of analysis for there to be an

alternation between the two scenarios of intersubjective and intrapsychic (Bollas cited in Wallerstein, 1999, p. 2).

A vital element in the intersubjective relationship is the concept of intersubjective space or the “analytic third” (Ogden, 1994 cited in Frayn, 1999, p. 4). Freud was aware of the existence of a transitional field that facilitated the conscious and unconscious communication between patient and analyst. He commented “It is a very remarkable thing that the Ucs of one human being can react upon that of another, without passing through the Cs. This deserves closer investigation...but, descriptively speaking, the fact is incontestable” (cited in Frayn, 1999, p. 4). According to Frayn, the analytic third is “jointly created and maintained by the dyadic interplay” (1999, p. 4) within the reciprocal relationship. This shared communicative interplay produces a “unity of experience” (Frayn, 1999, p. 4) which allows both participants to exchange feelings and intentions. In contrast, one-person, intrapsychic psychology focuses on “a distinct giver and a distinct receiver of ideas” (Frayn, 1999, p. 4). Advocates of the two-person approach regard the mutual reciprocation of ideas to be a more beneficial arrangement for analysis to occur.

Frayn states “the most important discovery that psychoanalysis has made is the significance of the infantile

unconscious on an individual's subsequent adult behaviour, choices, lifelong aspirations and expectations" (1999, p. 2). The implication is that the ability to successfully form and negotiate relationships as an adult is directly influenced by childhood experiences.

Intersubjective theory can and has been used in a variety of ways, for example Marianne Hirsch's (1997) work in cultural studies on family photography. She uses Benjamin's (1988, 1995, 1998) ideas to examine the mother-daughter relationship and explain the dynamics between a professional mother taking and circulating problematic images of her own children in the popular art market. Hirsch writes, "[i]nstead of reflecting the child's image back to the child, the mother introduces herself, her own feelings and preoccupations" (p. 159). Hirsch uses intersubjective theory to explain the negotiation between "that which connects and that which separates" (p.159) mother and child which is a concept that will be examined further in the following chapters of this thesis.

In his paper, *'Who's Afraid of Jessica Benjamin?'*, Allan Souter writes that Benjamin's theories on early childhood development may appeal "to students eager to learn about the dynamics of development, thinking and learning" (1999, p. 3). Benjamin's theory therefore, is useful to students of clinical psychology.

The application of intersubjective theory to literary texts however, is a relatively new practice. E. Ann Kaplan (1992), has noted the value of Benjamin's theory in "rethinking female development on the level of historical subjects" and in the examination of literary texts that fail to "represent the mother as the place of centrality" (p. 54).

Barbara Schapiro (1998) has applied Benjamin's theory to her study of transitional states in the literature of D.H. Lawrence. She cites the value of intersubjective theory in understanding the "play of shifting psychic positions, identifications, and self-other configurations intrinsic to good literature" (p. 8).

Finally, in a review of Benjamin's *Like Subjects, Love Objects* (1995), Elizabeth Young-Bruehl comments on the merit of Benjamin's theory for "its contributions to the rapidly emerging field of psychoanalytic gender theory" (1999, p. 3). It is with these perspectives in mind that my discussion moves to Jessica Benjamin's theory of intersubjectivity and its applicability to the analysis of text and narrative based examples of adult relationships and interaction.

JESSICA BENJAMIN Ph.D.

An Introduction

Jessica Benjamin is a practising psychoanalyst in New York and author of *The Bonds of Love* (1988), *Like Subjects, Love Objects* (1995) and most recently, *The Shadow of the Other* (1998). She is an active faculty member of the New York University Postdoctoral Psychology Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis and the New School for Social Research graduate program in Psychoanalytic Studies. Benjamin draws upon Hegelian Marxism, feminism and relational psychoanalytic theories to postulate her intersubjective theory that attempts to transcend the fixed complementary structures of the Oedipal arrangement.

Her theoretical position is aligned with the 'relational perspective', which champions the intersubjective concept of mutual recognition existing between two subjects in a reciprocal arrangement. Benjamin asserts that 'intersubjectivity' was formulated in opposition to the traditional subject-object paradigm because it operates "in a two-person rather than a one-person field" (Benjamin, 1995, p. 2). The theory refers to an area of experience in which "the other is not merely the object of the ego's need/drive or cognition/perception, but at the same time, has a separate and equivalent centre of self" (Benjamin, 1995, p. 30). Intersubjectivity

demands that the other must be recognised *by* the subject *as* a subject in his or her own right. Therefore, the other subject is different as in *not me*, but alike as also a subject and *like me*. This realisation is integral to the subject experiencing his or her own subjectivity in the other's presence. The capacity for mutual recognition is the basis of the intersubjective model and the platform from which Benjamin re- integrates the mother's role as a thinking subject back into the developmental processes of subject formation in children.

The Four Stages of Gender Development

In her theory of intersubjectivity, Benjamin moves beyond what she terms as the "antiquated oedipal model" (Benjamin, 1995, p. 52) and suggests that early gender development in children consists of four main phases. Benjamin's four stages of gender development comprehensively marks her rejection of traditional Freudian and Lacanian models which debased the role of the maternal in favour of the paternal. Such models considered the mother as a retarding force in the development of her children and situated the father as one who works to break up the "narcissistic couple" (Grosz, 1990, p. 67) signified by the mother-child dyad.

The father's intervention was conceptualised by Freud as the 'oedipus complex' whereby the male child renounces his desire for

the mother by identifying with the father's power as "possessor of the phallus" (Grosz, 1990, p. 68). Once the threat of castration posed by the father has been internalised by the male child, the mother comes to signify one who has been castrated and is not in possession of phallic power. To assume his place in society, the male child must invariably identify with the active power of the masculine role and categorically repress his desire for his mother.

In the Freudian and Lacanian framework, the 'oedipalisation' of girls is reductive in that the female child submissively accepts her role as subordinate to the male phallus. In identifying with both her father's power and her mother's lack, the female child eventually occupies the "passive dependent position expected of women" (Grosz, 1990, p. 69) by a patriarchal society.

It follows that through the positioning of women as inferior to the power of the male phallus, the significance of the maternal role in the development of children has traditionally been de-valued. More disturbingly, the mother-child relationship was determined as detrimental to the successful socialisation of children. In the Lacanian model for example, the mother-child relationship is mutually exclusive and "leave[s] no room for development or growth" (Grosz, 1990, p. 50). According to Grosz, Lacan also claims that without the intervention of the father to enforce oedipalisation, the

mother-child dyad would make “relations with a third, independent term ...impossible” (Grosz, 1990, p. 51).

In contrast, Benjamin’s theories of gender development re-instantiate the mother as the focal point of the child’s identificatory processes thus transcending fixed complementarity structures of active-male, passive-female. Benjamin theorises that the psychic processing between mother-child which have traditionally been seen to occlude a third position, actually creates a transitional space or “third term” (Benjamin, 1998, p. 38). The value of the third term will be discussed in more depth throughout this thesis. Suffice to say that the creation of a transitional space between mother and child accommodates the possibility of an intersubjective relationship whereby a subject’s relationship with its other is a non-threatening, mutually beneficial experience.

Benjamin terms the first phase of gender development ‘*nominal gender identification*’ where the child identifies with both its parents and is only just beginning to perceive them as being different. Benjamin posits that at the point of nominal gender identification, the child is capable of sustaining “multiple [gender] identifications” (Benjamin, 1995, p. 55). The subject-subject complementarity maintains difference in a state of tension with the

result being that each subject is aware of and not threatened by subject positions that are different from the one they occupy.

The second phase of becoming a gendered intersubjective subject occurs in the second year of life and is termed '*gender role identification*'. In this phase, the child begins to conceive its parents as different, but still elaborates both identifications as being aspects of itself. The child becomes aware of the existence of a "masculine or feminine self-image rather than male and female designations" (Benjamin, 1995, p. 56). Related to this concept, is the "rapprochement father" who, in contrast to the threatening oedipal father, represents the "exciting outside" world to the child (Benjamin, 1995, p. 57). The rapprochement father is a conduit through which the child can envisage and identify with the outside world. This identification with the rapprochement father figure occurs during the process of "separation-individuation" (Benjamin, 1995, p. 56) when the child becomes aware that it is an individual in its own right and is separate to its mother.

Unlike Lacan's (1949) essentially alienated subject, who at the moment of production is "subjected" to the other, Benjamin suggests that the act of "creating the ideal, forming an identificatory bond and actively pursuing the relationship" elicits the recognition integral to intersubjectivity (1995, p. 59). This creates the awareness

that “both I and the other can do this symmetrically [we are] like subjects” (Benjamin, 1995, p. 59).

The third stage is the *‘preoedipal overinclusive phase’*. Benjamin borrows the concept of “overinclusivity” from Fast (1984), to explain the phenomena that young children have identificatory love for both parents and can experience themselves as being exactly like both mother and father. Cross-sex identifications played out by children set the precedence for imbibing multiple positions as an intersubjective adult later on. As Benjamin suggests, the ability to both recognise bodily difference and imagine the capacity to “hold the opposites inside”, creates a sense of maintaining difference in tension and the possibility of more than one subject position (Benjamin, 1998, p. 62).

The fourth stage is the *‘oedipal phase’* which commences towards the end of the fourth year of life. Benjamin considers this point as “gender differentiation proper, when the complementary opposites are attributed to self and to other” (Benjamin, 1995, p. 64). By the age of four, the child has progressed to a “dynamic of renunciation” where the hope of fulfilling identificatory love for one parent is tempered by loving the object “who embodies what the self does not, may not or cannot” (Benjamin, 1995, p. 64). In this instance, complementarity can be surmised as “having rather than

being” and it is the intermediate space of the ‘third term’ which maintains the difference of *what one is* and *what one is not* in a manageable tension.

The Third Term

Benjamin’s ‘third term’ is identifiably the transitional space conceptualised by Ogden (1994) as the “analytical third”. The phenomenon of intersubjective space that exists between analyst and analysand, similarly exists between mother and child. According to Stephen Mitchell (1999), “post-classical theorising, especially that derived from Winnicott (1960) and Kohut (1977), has often cast the analyst in terms of maternal metaphors” (p. 1). Therefore, the implication is that the transitional space is initiated and accommodated by the mother’s own subjectivity and is established through the mutual processing of recognition and negation between herself and her child.

According to Benjamin, the one-person, subject-object paradigm only allows for reversals of gender and/or domination and as such, the active subject was traditionally designated the masculine positioning. Therefore, femininity was divorced from activity to prevent passivity “devolving onto the masculine subject” (Benjamin, 1998, p. 39). In contrast, Benjamin posits the role of the

mother as an active-passive synthesis working to represent, reflect and contain the child's cross-identifications.

The value of the third term is that it can accommodate difference in a state of tension, bridging rather than dividing binaries like active/passive. This indeed is an advantage of the intersubjective model, for in manifesting difference in tension, a subject can accept and be aware of multiple positions. The transitional space of the third term (or position) exists externally to both subjects, but nonetheless acts as an intermediary where both mother and child participate in a partnership that requires mutual exchange, but also presumes separateness. The third term is a "potential space outside the web of identifications" (Benjamin, 1995, p. vi), where both subjects recognise the other's difference from their selves. At the same time, both subjects are aware that the recognition of independence is necessary to facilitate the separation that will naturally occur as the child becomes increasingly independent from its mother.

According to Elizabeth Young-Bruehl (1998), oedipal delimitation is constructed by multiplicity and overinclusiveness "rather than on a basis of disidentification". Overinclusiveness is a product of the creation of a third position that facilitates the deconstruction of the reversible complementarity active/passive and

holds in tension the polarities masculine/ feminine that underlay them. Therefore, due to the accommodating qualities of the third term, a subject can identify with difference in a manner that is not threatening. This is a giant leap from traditional Freudian and Lacanian concepts which regarded difference as something to be spurned in order to protect one's own superior subject status.

The Third Term and the Role of Language

Benjamin's view of the role of language in subject formation differs radically from Lacan's. Where he saw language as the alienating system, which marked the subject's entry into the symbolic and the 'law of the father', Benjamin sees language as the important medium through which the subject interacts with the outside and with other subjects. She concurs with Green's (1986) suggestion that language is the "heir to the transitional space" (cited in Benjamin, 1998, p. 28) and resides in the third term. Language becomes a tool and a conduit with which to express and receive communication rather than a force in itself.

Benjamin states "speech is conditioned by the recognition between two subjects *rather than the property of the subject*" (1998, p. 28, my italics). Language is seen less in the Lacanian sense "as subjecting the subject to the symbolic structure", to a more relational concept of "forming the medium of the subject's acting on

and interacting with the world” (Benjamin, 1998, p. 28). Therefore, instead of the subject being as result of language as in the split ego of the Lacanian model, language becomes a mechanism used by the subject. In effect, language is inextricably linked to the subject but does not *determine* the subject.

It is paramount to view communication, be it lingual or unconscious, as something existing externally to the two subjects. Benjamin describes the concept of language existing in the third term as like a “dance that is distinct from the dancers yet coerced by them” (1998, p. 28). To elaborate more fully, I can engage in conversation with friends, expel my dialogue into the ether, but how my friends will interpret what I have said is out of my control. I cannot control their mental processes any more than they can control mine. I can attempt to influence them by the way I phrase my discourse, but I cannot make them agree with me. The third term accommodates my dialogue in intersubjective space where it is outside the mental control of my friends and myself. The purpose of communication between two subjects therefore, is to elicit a confirming response from the other subject that one has secured their attention and conveyed meaning. In effect, one has recognised the other.

The Ego and the Act of Splitting

Clearly, we can understand in conclusion, that the intersubjective self is not fundamentally *split* as in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Instead, the ego participates in the act of *splitting* as an innately active process of psychic spring-cleaning. According to Benjamin, the Lacanian concept of the ego split relies on trauma aroused through division and subsequent alienation that language affects on the subject (1998, p. 88). As a result of the split, the ego loses its claim to omnipotence and thus places itself at the mercy of the other. This relegates the mother-child relationship to the unconscious, pre-history before the self was formed and competent linguistically.

In contrast, the intersubjective view constitutes the ego as engaged in a *continual* process of incorporating and projecting parts of self and other which are then *split off*. In this model the ego can remain intact and whole. Its ability to actively split parts is regarded as an integral and unconscious project of the mind, just as in the mind's ability to think and communicate with language. Instead of the subject being subordinate and weakened by the force of the other, the intersubjective approach sees splitting as an organisational and defensive act that establishes boundaries and

actively discriminates to protect the self from being overwhelmed by the other subject (Benjamin, 1998, p. 88).

The Importance of the Mother-Child Relationship

In opposition to Freudian and Lacanian theories of child development, Benjamin's intersubjective model emphasises that the relationship between mother and infant is not one that needs to be discarded in order for the child to undergo the psychic processes of subject formation and separation. According to this model, incorporating and projecting parts of self and other in a reciprocal fashion forms the dynamics of all human interaction, not only that which exists between mother and child. One can speculate therefore that the reciprocal relationship shared by the mother and child retains its importance and resonance into (and possibly beyond) adolescence.

In the mother-infant relationship, the act of continuous incorporation and projection of self and other enables both subjects to engage in a reciprocal arrangement of exchange. According to Benjamin, intersubjective relatedness means that subjectivity is no longer fixed as one or the other, subject or object. With the mutual acknowledgement that each subject's primary responsibility is to be an "intervening and surviving other" (Benjamin, 1998, p. 99), both mother and child can feel they are making an impact on the other

and that confirmation of this will be conveyed back. In addition, the child must cultivate the ability to recognise and negate the mother concurrently with being aware that the mother is engaged in a similar activity. The basis of intersubjective relatedness is derived from both subjects “each negating the other’s claim to represent any other content than ‘I am not you’” (Benjamin, 1998, p. 53).

In the following chapters I will consider how, in the absence of the mother, the intersubjective mother-daughter dyads inevitably breaks down. I will suggest how the daughter is left with a problem of containment in the absence of the accommodating qualities of the mother and the third term (Benjamin, 1995, p. 40). Intersubjective theory retains an awareness of the susceptibility of the mutual relationship to suffer minor and major breakdowns. However, the “other’s liability not to survive” (Benjamin, 1998, p. 93) can disrupt the remaining subject’s ability to hold multiple subjects positions in tension because multiplicity is simultaneous with the continual process of identification. In this state, the awareness of assuming and switching between different positions can become blocked. As a result, the disposal of negative emotions associated with the mother’s death, such as abandonment and guilt, are processed entirely by the subject.

The novels I analyse demonstrate a wide variation of experience as a result of this absence. Initially, the subject may be overwhelmed following the breakdown of intersubjectivity causing experience to alter to the subject-object paradigm. In order to help the alienated subject recover from the loss of the other and the reciprocal relationship they shared, it is paramount that another 'outside other' is found to help dissolve energy that is too painful for the self to bear alone (Benjamin, 1998, p. 91). The subject's tendency towards destructive omnipotence can be disrupted when countered by the presence of a surviving external other to engage in mutual recognition and negation.

The three characters I analyse all attempt to establish such an external other with whom to engage in mutual recognition and negation. In *Speaking to Miranda* (1990), Ruby embarks on a painstaking quest to reconstruct a palpable sense of her dead mother. In *Back on Track* (1995), Simone creates an intersubjective relationship with her diary. In *Letters from the Inside* (1991), Tracey initiates an intersubjective relationship through the exchange of letters with her pen pal. Respectively, chapters two, three and four consider both the process of attempting to initiate 'like' subject relations and the success with which each character is able to integrate this process into her daily life.

CHAPTER TWO

SPEAKING TO MIRANDA

Caroline Macdonald

"In search of my mother's garden I found my own".

Alice Walker (*Mother's and Daughters*, 1988)

"In search of my mother's garden I found my own" encapsulates the major narrative theme in Caroline Macdonald's *Speaking to Miranda* (1990). 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 this connection with her mother that she is able to assert her independence from her adoptive father. The deployment of her own agency is crucial if Ruby is to assume a cohesive subject position which will enable her to successfully interact with other subjects and negotiate the challenges of impending adulthood.

According to Robyn McCallum in her essay '*[In] quest of the Subject: The Dialogic Construction of Subjectivity in Caroline Macdonald's Speaking to Miranda*', Ruby Summerton suffers from an "inability to construct a sense of herself as an agent" (1992, p. 102). According to Jonathan Culler, *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" (1997, p. 46). In *Speaking to Miranda*, Ruby allows her adoptive father Rob and her imaginary friend "Miranda" to restrict her potential to act upon her own desires. In other words, she permits Rob and Miranda's needs to override her own, placing her at the mercy of their actions. For Ruby, the likelihood of agency, of "responsible action" (Culler, 1997, p. 119), depends on her ability to assert her independence from Rob and Miranda. I would argue that she needs to take control of her desires and act in a way to fulfil those desires.

Ruby's inability to construct herself as an agent, arises in part from Rob's own inability to acknowledge Ruby or her dead mother, Emma, as separate to himself. He actively objectifies Ruby as an essential other/object to himself. He does this by asserting his own dominant position as father and provider at the expense of refusing to acknowledge Ruby's own subject status. For example, Ruby attempts to assert herself as an agent when she offers alternatives to Rob's idea of "Summerton and Daughter" as a company name. While this is an interesting twist on the patriarchal "Summerton and Son", Ruby prefers her own version of "Summerton and Summerton" or "Summerton and Blake" (p. 3). Her suggestions acknowledge her connection to Rob, but also attempt to construct

herself as an individual in her own right. Ruby retreats from this expression of her separateness to Rob when she sees he “gets that stillness in his face” (p. 3). To avoid causing him pain, she decides to suppress her own sense of agency and allows herself to be literally subsumed by his.

Due to the fact that Ruby was a small baby at the time of her mother’s death by drowning, her only primary source of information about her mother is Rob. However, information is sparse, as Rob only knew Emma for one year. Rob keeps what little information he does have about Emma very much to himself. He metes out information to Ruby claiming he finds talking about Emma too painful to go into in any depth. In turn, Ruby empathises with Rob’s position and accepts that she “just can’t question Rob about her” (p. 35) mother because he has never come to terms with his own grief.

Ruby’s empathy for Rob’s feelings force her to shy away from the “stone wall of Rob’s grief” (p. 35) despite her desperation to know more. The metaphor of a “stone wall” of grief explains the effect Rob has on Ruby as a block. His grief binds her to him and her love for him initially prevents her from climbing over the stone wall he has erected between herself and her mother. Benjamin states that “appreciation of the other’s reality that completes the picture of separation, explains what there is beyond internalization: the

establishment of a shared reality” (1995, p. 41). This means that the likelihood of two subjects sharing the same experiences and correlative emotions can only exist if both subjects acknowledge their separateness from each other. In this instance, Rob’s “stone wall” of grief occludes any shared reality between him and Ruby. Consequently, he himself is not operating in an intersubjective relationship of mutuality which “allows for and presumes separateness” (Benjamin, 1998, p. 29).

Mutuality in an intersubjective relationship is ideally held in tension between two “like” subjects. To be a “like” subject, the “other must be recognised as an other subject in order for the self to fully experience his or her subjectivity in the other’s presence” (Benjamin, 1995, p. 30). This combination of factors, recognition and difference between two subjects being held in tension, is essential in making mutual recognition a reality. Rob’s refusal to talk about Emma and Ruby’s subsequent acceptance of this leads her to internalise feelings of anxiety and alienation. She becomes increasingly frustrated with Rob’s active withholding of information about her mother. This is exemplified by her feeling that Rob is a “villain, keeping all the real memories to himself” (p. 65). She feels he is “shutting” (p. 65) her out and her reaction is to internalise

aggressive thoughts about him which are vented through the internal voice of Miranda.

Benjamin's intersubjective model suggests that the unequal reciprocation of love and dependency mean that as a subject, Ruby could be overwhelmed by the needs of Rob. Intersubjectively speaking, "separation is concurrent with connection" (1995, p. 35). Therefore, to engage/connect in a reciprocal relationship with another "like" subject, one must first recognise the "other" as a separate, thinking subject in their own right. Rob does not recognise Ruby as a "like" subject which means his othering of her disallows the creation of a transitional space between them which would normally serve as the medium through which mutual exchange would occur – the third term. The blocking effect which Rob has on Ruby's ability to form her own sense of identity as separate to his own results in their relationship suffering an inevitable breakdown.

As Benjamin argues, each subject exists as each other's "intervening and surviving other" (1998, p. 99) is the only way two subjects can share a mutually satisfying relationship. When this mutuality breaks down, as in Ruby and Rob's case, it is due to the intersubjective relationship reverting to the subject-object paradigm where one subject refuses to accept the other as a "like" subject. The breakdown of a mutually satisfying relationship with Rob causes

Ruby to internalise resentment towards him. With no “outside other” to process internal tension with, she suffers a shift from “the domain of the intersubjective into the domain of the intrapsychic” (Benjamin, 1995, p. 40). The aggression she internalises manifests itself in the form of “Miranda”, her sometime friend, sometime enemy, who is known to Ruby’s conscious mind as an internal voice. She says of Miranda, “she was always there when I was on my own” (p. 5), and I would argue that Miranda is a mechanism through which Ruby processes the intrapsychic tension that she relegates to her unconscious mind.

Robyn McCallum argues that Miranda functions in the narrative “as a memory to mediate and communicate Ruby’s past” (1992, p. 103). Her rejection of Miranda in her early adolescence was in tandem with her acceptance of Rob and choosing to respect his silence about her mother. At that point in her development, her alliance with Rob and rejection of Miranda is clearly evident when she wished Miranda dead – “I wanted to kill her for making me nearly believe I was becoming a burden for Rob” (p. 28). Ruby does not realise at this point that Miranda acts as a link between Ruby and her mother and therefore in rejecting Miranda she is implicitly rejecting her mother. As Rob’s mother tells Ruby, “she left you that other name – the name for your friend. Miranda” (p. 70). The active

recognition of her mother's link to her past converts itself into an opportunity for Ruby to gain greater insight into both her mother and herself. This coupled with the realisation that her mother named Miranda for her, provides Ruby with the foundation upon which to begin to construct her own agency. The decision to leave Rob and uncover her mother's past is an active statement of her own power. By reclaiming her mother's past, Ruby will be able to construct her identity and future as an individual.

I would argue that Ruby's quest is motivated by her desire to literally discover who her mother was. For Ruby, her "search entails a parallel reconstruction of her own identity; it is both a quest for and a quest into the subjectivity of her mother and herself" (McCallum, 1992, p.99). Through an investigation into the origin of a pair of jade earrings that belonged to her mother, Ruby travels to New Zealand. When she discovers that her mother's real name was "Magda Brady" (p. 132), Ruby feels that to "know her name seems like a magic key" (p. 138) with which she can unlock her mother's identity and more importantly perhaps – her own. This discovery leads her to adopt her mother's fake identity of "Emma Blake", deciding "I'll be Emma Blake now" (p. 136). Ruby replicates her mother's actions of destroying traces of her old identity and adopting

a new name in an attempt to understand her better. Literally, what the daughter does, the mother has already done.

Ruby's mimicry of her mother acts as a kind of continuation that links the past with the present. Catching up with her mother's past will allow Ruby "to move productively into the future" (Rich cited in Lucas, 1998 p. 44). Using the name "Emma Blake" becomes a tool or a structure through which Ruby can begin to understand and exercise her own agency. Destroying all the evidence of her former identity as "Ruby Summerton" affords this agent in process a sense of anonymity and protection. Under the guise of Emma, Ruby intellectualises that the "quest seems less of an obsession [and] more one of reason" (p. 146). Furthermore, her adoption of the persona of "Emma Blake" enables Ruby to carry out her quest independently. She has no one to account for her actions to but herself. In this way, she is fulfilling her desires as an active agent.

The pivotal point in her journey comes when she discovers that her real name is "Miranda" and that "Ruby" was in fact her deceased older sister's name. This initially causes Ruby to feel confused – "Magda – Ruby – Emma – Miranda. I'm losing grip on who I am" (p. 152). With the appropriation of so many different identities, one may marvel that Ruby is still speaking from the subject position of "I". It would be admissible for the sentence to

read “Magda – Ruby – Emma – Miranda. *We’re* losing grip on who *we* are”. Importantly though, Ruby speaks from the position of “I” and retains a sense of selfhood despite all her name swapping. Her acceptance of the name her mother gave her and her decision to settle down in New Zealand is a significant turning point in her realisation of a coherent sense of subjective agency. Her statement to Rob “My name’s Miranda” (p. 181) and further qualification of this by informing him “It’s important...it’s the name I was given when I was born (p. 180), signifies her active assumption of agency and knowledge of a history prior to her life with Rob.

Finding tangible evidence of her early life with her mother has the beneficial effect of moving Ruby away from a subject-object orientation with Rob to an intersubjective one. Intersubjectivity is an ongoing process through which Ruby will be able to reconstruct her absent mother, enabling her to fuse her already established subjectivity with her developing sense of agency. By accepting her given name “Miranda”, Ruby/Miranda moves “toward the construction of a sense of selfhood as subject and as agent” (McCallum, 1992, p. 104). Her agency is further made possible by the newly found identification with her mother for as Benjamin explains the “[m]other’s recognition is the basis for the baby’s sense of agency” (1995, p. 34). For Miranda, finding Magda’s photographs

and swimming trophies puts her in contact with a kind of maternal recognition. The mother's image in early infancy is the site upon which the child projects cross-identifications and "acts as an outside other who is able to help the subject to process and tolerate internal states of tension" (Benjamin, 1998, p. 27). Therefore, identification with the image of her mother enables Ruby/Miranda to "own affects rather than be overwhelmed by them" (Benjamin, 1998, p. 27). Moreover, Magda facilitates her daughters continuing development in the form of a well-preserved memory existing in the consciousness of everyone that knew her, including Ruby. As Ruby/Miranda comes to realise, Magda "left a strong image with everyone" (p. 184) and Ruby/Miranda's re-discovery of her has the effect of retracing the developmental stages she would have experienced with her mother during her first year of her life.

At the novel's denouement, Ruby/Miranda refuses to be "overwhelmed" by Rob's demands and she tells him "I can't afford a phone. And you're not paying for one for me, either" (p. 184). She further asserts her independence from him by deciding to stay in New Zealand in her mother's house. She has also relinquished her tie to the internal presence of "Miranda" and the statement, "I'm on my own now" (p. 184), signals her successful separation from both the inner "Miranda" and the external Rob. Her self-imposed

separation from Rob and Miranda has resulted in an important re-connection with her absent mother which in turn has empowered her to realise her own identity. The newly formed subject named “Miranda Brady” has managed a fusion between the past and the present that will undoubtedly result in her creation of a future as an active agent for, “The young girl in the house of her mother is like a seed in fertile ground” (Wittig, *Mothers and Daughters*, 1998). In *Speaking to Miranda*, the daughter has quite literally found herself by re-establishing the lost connection with her mother.

CHAPTER THREE

BACK ON TRACK: THE DIARY OF A STREET KID

Margaret Clark

Back on Track: The Diary of a Street Kid (1995) is written in the form of a diary and traces fifteen-year old Simone Faulkner's descent into street life and drug culture eight months after her mother's death. A review in *Viewpoint* (Winter, 1995), declared *Back On Track* to be a "brutal book" which "provides a very disturbing read on all levels". The narrative action is punctuated by frequent examples of graphic violence, rape and drug use making it a very weighty novel that draws specific attention to the plight of homeless youth in Australian towns and cities. Despite its obviously candid portrayal of an adolescent girl's experiences on the streets, the novel is aimed at the young adult fiction market. If *Back on Track* had been released in 1951, like J.D. Salinger's infamous *Catcher in the Rye*, one may wonder if it too would have been censored and taken off school reading lists.

According to the *Viewpoint* review, Simone represents "the voice of damaged youth" which may serve as a starting point from which to understand Simone's demise into delinquency and drug addiction. The phrase "damaged youth" also situates Simone's character as being affected by factors outside of her immediate

control such as demographics and family life. In the immortal words of Oscar Wilde, “*All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That’s his*” (*Mothers and Daughters*, 1998). In this chapter I will attempt to explain why becoming like her mother is indeed Simone’s tragedy and one which, if she is to *get back on track*, she must endeavour to resist.

Prior to her mother’s death, the possibility of Simone sharing an intersubjective relationship with her mother was denied by her mother’s experience as an ‘object’. As has been discussed in previous chapters, for a relationship between two ‘like’ subjects to be established, both individuals must recognise their similarity to and difference from each other in order to experience their own reality in each other’s presence. Benjamin maintains that “[e]ach self wants to be recognized and yet maintain its absolute identity: the self says, I want to affect you, but I want nothing you do or say to affect me; I am who I am” (1995, p. 36). However, when a subject such as Simone’s mother, denies herself an active subject position and instead is forced to take a subordinate position in relation to dominant male subjects, a “shared reality” (Benjamin, 1995, p. 41) between two ‘like’ subjects is impossible. When mutual recognition does not exist, the intersubjective paradigm alters to a subject-object complementarity.

According to Benjamin, the breakdown of intersubjective processes is a certain fact of life (1995, p. 47). The reversion to a subject-object relationship in itself need not be a sustained experience. As Beebe and Lachman (1988, 1994) have suggested, the early mother-child dyad is characterised by continuous destruction and repair rather than by continuous harmony" (cited in Benjamin, 1995, p. 47). However, as I will show in the case of Simone's mother, her experiences are specifically subject-object orientated where the likelihood of repair or the re-establishment of mutuality is not a reality.

In *'Telling Maternity: Mothers and Daughters in Recent Women's Fiction'*, Rose Lucas states that "what a mother has to pass on will inevitably be shaped by the nature and constraint of her own experiences, the extent to which her own subjectivity has been constructed, within and against the discourses of domination and erasure" (1998, p. 37). If it is true that a mother's subjectivity shapes her daughter's, then it follows that Simone would concur with her mother's belief that "without a man a woman's nothing" (p.11). It also follows that both Simone and her mother define themselves by their relationships with men.

Her mother had a violent husband and violent boyfriends and consistently enacted the victim-object status. The fact that she

remains nameless throughout the narrative and is only ever referred to as “Mum” by her daughter shows that not even Simone recognised her mother’s subject status. Subsequently, Simone repeats her mother’s position as victim in her statements of “I was rape material” (p. 152) and “Rape’s a way of life for babes like me” (p. 162). Her acceptance of rape and violence being “a way of life” is disturbing because, like her mother, she is almost acquiescing to her own mistreatment by men. For Simone therefore, aspiring to intersubjective relations after her mother’s death is extremely difficult considering her obvious acceptance of the ‘object’ position.

On face value, the absent/dead mother scenario in *Back on Track* appears to mirror Ruby/Miranda’s situation in *Speaking to Miranda* (1990). Both protagonists are female adolescents who lack the benefits of sharing an intersubjective relationship with their absent mothers which affects the healthy continuation of their subject development into adulthood. However, due to the disparity between their socio-economic backgrounds, the differences between Simone and Ruby/Miranda’s circumstances are significant.

Ruby/Miranda had a stable family in Rob and his parents and later discovers an additional extended family in New Zealand who are connected to her dead mother. Her adoptive father, Rob, has always been present in her life and as an architect occupies a

financially secure and respectable social position. Simone on the other hand, has had her family break up through her mother's infidelity, her father's violence and the subsequent intervention of welfare services. Her mother was unemployed and according to Simone "drank too much, smoked too much dope and cigarettes, and was hopeless with men" (p. 8). Like her mother, Simone lacks an individual identity and is categorised by her school and peers as "emotionally and socially disadvantaged" (p.2). Therefore, in Simone's case, the loss of her mother is considerably more threatening vis a vis her future development than it was for Ruby/Miranda.

Simone believes she has found the answer to her problems in the form of Mike Walton. Her decision to leave her sister's home and go to Palmino is based on Mike's promises to her – "He said he was missing me heaps and that he truly loves me and can't wait for us to be together" (p. 16). Her belief that "He'll take care of me" (p. 16) is motivated by her dependence on a validating and dominant male other. With a man she feels she will be better off and the ease with which she trusts him demonstrates her replication of her mother's own lack of agency in relation to men. This is exemplified by her statement "I was so glad to be with him I didn't care where we went" (p. 39). In other words, when there is a man around, Simone

surrenders her agency and literally puts her self at the disposal of the male other, Mike.

Unfortunately for Simone, but perhaps inevitably, her relinquishing of her agency in Mike's presence results in him perpetrating the most violent crime of rape against her. Despite feeling embarrassed at Mike feeling her in a car in front of four of his friends, Simone "didn't want to say anything in case he chucked [her] out" (p. 45). The aftermath of the brutal gang rape leaves Simone feeling "dirty, and ripped off and sore and sad, all at once" (p. 46). Naively, she cannot believe that he could be so cruel because of his protestations of love for her. It is arguable that Simone's need for Mike and her wish to be loved by him is actually the outward sign of her deeper need to share a mutual relationship with another 'like' subject. Her disavowal of her own subject position and agency in regards to him however, results in the further destruction and denudation of her own capacity to recognise and be recognised as an active subject in her right.

According to Benjamin, "when experiences with the other are immediately or cumulatively traumatic, the anxiety and intolerable conflict between different reactions leads to *dissociation*" (1998, p. 106, my italics). 'Dissociation' refers to the condition where the self erects "barriers to awareness" (p. 106) in reaction to great pain or

fear. In other words, the self refuses to accept or acknowledge reality and instead develops ways to block the processing of the trauma. Becoming a heroin user is the way Simone chooses to deal with the trauma she has just suffered. Initially, she uses the drug after she has been raped because the horror of the situation is too much for her to handle. She becomes overwhelmed and relinquishes to block out the pain – “That’s how I want it now. I don’t wanna remember NOTHING” (p. 55). The wish to block out pain and repress it further into the unconscious is further exemplified by her taking a hit in order to “calm” her down “after the counsellor stirred up a heap of crap” (p. 135). Simone’s drug use therefore, can be read in terms of her developing a dissociative state and the drug heroin enables her to experience a *fantastic* rather than *actual* reality.

As mentioned earlier, Green’s (1986) concept of language as the “heir” to transitional space” (cited in Benjamin, 1998, p. 28) means that language is the device used by a subject to make sense of the world and therefore forms the basis of the way the subject interacts with the world and other subjects. In the Lacanian view, language is the alienating structure that subordinates the subject to the symbolic order of the law of the father. Language is considered to determine the nature of the subject (Grosz, 1990, p. 148). In opposition to this, the intersubjective perspective maintains that

language is used by the subject as a means through which to communicate with other subjects.

Communication between two subjects establishes a link which connects them through their mutual recognition of one another. A “space of dialogue” or communication is established which constitutes the creation of transitional space between two subjects which is “potentially outside the mental control of either or both participants” (Benjamin, 1998, p. 28). In this way, a “site of meditation” is created which will work to accommodate the intersubjective processes of recognition and negation in a reciprocal relationship between two ‘like subjects’. In other words, the transitional space of the third term can be conceived as the link between two individuals, which enables them to communicate.

An important function of the third term mentioned in chapter one, is the ability of the third term to hold difference in tension. Each subject engaging in the reciprocal exchange of psychic energy is able to do so without fear of being overwhelmed by the other subject because the third term exists outside the potential “web of identifications” (Benjamin, 1998, p. vi). The ability to process difference in a space which is essentially outside of one’s own psychic interior means that the subject in the very act of recognising the ‘likeness’ of the other subject can also negate the other’s opinion if it

is counter to his or her own. The ability to *negate* as well as *recognise* the other subject is vital in a subject's management of their own needs and indeed their survival.

In "co-creating a mutuality that allows for and presumes separateness" (Benjamin, 1998, p. 29) one is also acknowledging the possibility of a breakdown in the reciprocal arrangement of the intersubjective relationship. Indeed, Benjamin argues that "we must tolerate the inevitable misrecognition that accompanies our efforts at recognition" (1998, p. 25). The transitional space to which language is heir, "neither denies nor splits difference [between two subjects], but holds it in a paradoxical state of being antagonistic and reconcilable at once" (Benjamin, 1998, p. 34). The key to a successful intersubjective relationship where both subjects recognise each other as 'like', is their ability to also recognise that the other who survives the act of negation exists externally "outside one's control and yet able to have decisive impact on the self" (Benjamin, 1998, p. 91). I would argue that it is on this set of premises that Simone develops an intersubjective relationship with her diary through language.

Simone's relationship with her diary not only mimics the relationship she might share with a friend, but more importantly it mimics the relationship between analyst and analysand. Simone

consents to release her hopes and fears onto the pages of her diary in much the same way that there must be a consensual relationship between doctor and patient during therapy. The diary functions as a 'like' subject because Simone identifies with it as a friend and confidant. She feels secure writing her thoughts down in its pages because she knows the diary won't betray her like a human being might.

Despite her addiction to heroin and the altered state she occupies much of the time as a result of the drug, Simone keeps up her diary writing. She writes by torchlight in tunnels and by a pool in Surfers Paradise. Her diary goes with her everywhere and she tells it everything that happens to her. Simone does not write in the diary as if it is simply a book with blank pages. She addresses the diary as if it is a person or a friend she is catching up with, "Hi, Diary. I'll write you something happy" (p. 7). The very act of writing and then seeing her efforts sustained on the page mimics the process of recognition for Simone. Not only has she told the diary how she feels but the diary has held onto what she has written. Re-reading the script would also help her to process her anxieties for they are not hidden any more, she has in effect released them into the containing field of the third term.

The diary helps Simone to evolve from a position of sickness where she refuses to “face the shit” (p. p. 71) to one where she is surer of her own agency. By writing her life story down onto the pages of the diary, Simone is able to express and receive ideas in a tolerable state of tension due to the transitional space created by her intersubjective relationship with the diary. This helps her to move towards a reality where she is “less resentful and afraid of projected anger, less terrified of loss, less punitive toward what one desires” (Benjamin, 1995, p. 105). In addition, the cathartic experience of writing releases Simone from the dissociative state, where awareness of the different states of self are blocked, to an acknowledgement of a multiple self which is driven by an ego that is capable of splitting and holding tension. With the acceptance of one’s desperate situation comes the ability to cure the ill that ails. Simone’s rehabilitation from heroin and her commencement of schooling indicates a wish to better herself and move into a future where she is being kind to herself rather than trying to destroy herself.

As a result of the intersubjective relationship she shares with her diary, Simone is able to break the mould her mother has cast for her. The somewhat simplistic advice of Kez the social worker that “some people learn early that if they get rid of it [tension], talk or

write it out - like you and your diary - they can have a happier life”(p. 129) would seem to be proven in Simone’s case. However, it is my conclusion that Simone’s relationship with her diary should be viewed not solely as a cathartic act of *writing the tension out* of her system, but on a much deeper level as the replication of an actual intersubjective relationship. The act of writing in itself does not remedy Simone’s problems. She soon realises after writing about her nightmare that “writing it down didn’t get rid of it” (p. 8). However, writing coupled with the containing/holding aspect of the diary’s transitional space, enables Simone to engage in recognition and negation. These intersubjective processes help Simone to “process and tolerate internal states of tension” (Benjamin, 1998, p. 27) which in turn help her to manage contradiction in her life without the aid of drugs.

Simone’s ‘best friend’ relationship with her diary enables her to release herself from relationships and situations that do not benefit her in a positive way. She realises that the key to ensuring a secure future for herself depends on her breaking attachments to unreliable people and situations that have not served her best interests in the past. She writes, “This diary’s become my best friend. Drugs were my friends, but they let me down... [t]he Townies were my friends, but some of them pissed off and some of them died”

(p. 179-80). In deciding to have her diary published and earn some “legit money” (p. 195), Simone is attempting to lay the first concrete foundations upon which to construct her new future. Giving up her diary also signifies her ability to let go of the crux that the diary has become which, in itself, was preceded by her giving up heroin. The publishing of her diary works as an interesting inter-textual twist in the narrative - the fact we are reading her diary confirms that it was published.

By the narrative’s finale, Simone has taken the first tentative steps in developing her own concept of self worth. To this end, Simone must fundamentally reject the subordinate ‘object’ position in relation to men that caused her mother to internalise feelings of worthlessness and eventually commit suicide. However, the road to reformation is fraught with uncertainty as is borne out by Simone’s initial belief that the new, rehabilitated Simone Faulkner is “one big cover up” (p. 198). This feeling of unease is soon qualified by her realisation that by looking deep enough into herself she might discover the reasons behind why she feels she is only “stale Weet-Bix and toast material” (p. 198). Her decision to deal with the “shit” (p. 198) in an attempt find “something inside worth keeping” (p. 198) demonstrates her decision to assert active agency over her life. To *get back on track*, Simone must respect herself and her own subject

position before she can establish an intersubjective relationship with another potential 'like' subject.

Finally, the novel's ambiguous ending reflects the uncertain future of a rehabilitated drug addict. To afford Simone a happy ending would not be realistic and if *Back on Track* espouses anything in its raw content and style, it is a proximity to the real life situation of emotionally and socially disadvantaged youth.

CHAPTER FOUR

LETTERS FROM THE INSIDE

John Marsden

This thesis has traced the stories of two adolescent protagonists whose mothers are dead. It has examined the way each deals with her "troubles" from an intersubjective perspective. This chapter considers even more prominently the question posed by the doyenne of the 19th century domestic novel, Louisa May Alcott, "What do girls do who haven't any mothers to help them through their troubles?" (*Mothers and Daughters*, 1998). Like Ruby/Miranda and Simone in the previous two chapters, Tracey's mother is dead and she therefore does not have the benefit of an intersubjective relationship with her mother. Not only is Tracey deprived her of her mother's guidance throughout the difficulties of adolescence, but she is also denied the basic freedoms enjoyed by other girls her age because she is an inmate in a maximum-security detention centre.

According to H. Scutter (1999), John Marsden's *Letters from the Inside* (1991) presents a "kind of dystopian world" (p. 18) where "[f]amilies are the sites of utmost danger: either full of abuse, or containing wilfully denied violence" (p. 19). This comment would appear to situate *Back on Track* and *Letters from the Inside* as being very similar in thematic content, for both novels deal with domestic

violence. However, unlike the hope created by Simone's rehabilitation in *Back on Track*, *Letters from the Inside* indeed presents a "dystopian" world where there is no hope for the future.

The character of Tracey is the primary focus of this chapter. The nature of Tracey's crime is important in understanding her situation. In contrast to Ruby/Miranda and Simone, Tracey's father murdered her mother when she was eight years old. Tracey discovered the truth in a newspaper article which she "read to the end and found out it was my mother who he'd murdered" (p. 131). One can speculate that Tracey's crime and consequent incarceration could be Simone's fate if she had not commenced rehabilitation.

The length of Tracey's sentence combined with the fact that she is in a maximum-security centre indicates that her crime must have been particularly heinous to warrant such a harsh sentence at her age. The indication that Tracey's crime was violent and may even have been murder is upheld by her comment that she has followed in her father's "footsteps" and that "some things do run in the family" (p. 130). The unresolved question her mother's death and her own crime parallels the ambiguous withdrawal of her pen pal Mandy from their relationship later in the narrative. Tracey's position as the only "surviving" subject compounds her already unstable mental health. I argue that Tracey's motivation in

advertising for a pen pal in a teen magazine reflects a much deeper desire than the simple wish for someone to write letters to. In *Letters from the Inside*, the sending and receiving of letters mimics the intersubjective processes of recognition, negation, repair and destruction.

Letters from the Inside questions idealised notions of what constitutes a normal or "good family". As H. Scutter states, "the novel suggests that home and family...make no difference. Equivalent violence is bred in an abusive working-class family and a pleasant middle-class family" (1999, p. 22). Coming from a violent home and now detached from the outside world, Tracey is fascinated by what she terms "good families" (p. 127). She admits wanting a pen pal in order to "get closer to one of those families...[to] get inside one" (p. 128).

In terms of intersubjective theory, Tracey's motivation behind wanting a pen pal can be understood as the "active search to find emotional resonance in the other - perhaps to evacuate mental contents or perhaps to represent and share feelings that cannot be borne alone" (Benjamin, 1995, p. 14). Advertising for a pen pal with someone outside of the prison indicates Tracey's "active search" to identify with an "outside other" (Benjamin, 1998, p. 91). Her

initiation of a relationship with Mandy through correspondence signifies her desire to identify with another 'like' subject.

Tracey's correspondence with Mandy can be conceptualised as the engaging of "[t]wo subjectivities, each with its own set of internal relations, begin[ning] to create a new set between them" (Benjamin, 1995, p. 2). The processes involved in receiving and sending letters creates a "new set" of relations between Tracey and Mandy and forms the foundation and means by which their intersubjective relationship is constituted. Sharing her feelings with someone who she has never met affords Tracey a sense of security. She can benefit from an intersubjective relationship with another subject and at the same time remain detached from the experience, firmly locating Mandy outside her own centre of experience. Initially, retaining her the self-confessed status as the "biggest bitch" (p. 74) in the detention centre and being "worse than bad" (p. 56) is important to Tracey. However, to benefit from a specifically intersubjective relationship, Tracey must learn to afford Mandy subject status in her own right.

I argue that it is the active-passive synthesis involved in maintaining a relationship through correspondence that enables Tracey to develop the "capacity for mutual recognition" (Benjamin, 1995, p.2) whereby she identifies Mandy as a 'like' subject.

Developing the capacity for mutuality demands both subjects to "recognise the other as an equivalent centre of experience" (Benjamin, 1995, p. 28). Considering the radically different backgrounds of both girls, successful identification demands the bridging of difference beginning with the mutual recognition of 'like' subject status. Tracey and Mandy do this by agreeing to be pen pals: they are both teenage girls who wish to have a friendship through correspondence. However, identification with another 'like' subject requires the ability to recognise and yet dis-identify with the other. The contradictory nature of the relationship between self and 'other' requires that the self acknowledges and accommodates both its connection to and separateness from the other.

As has been noted earlier in this thesis, "any subject's primary responsibility to the other subject is to be her intervening or surviving other" (Benjamin, 1998, p. 99). Becoming Mandy's intervening and/or surviving other proves problematic for Tracey due to the huge gulf in experience between herself and Mandy. The nick-name given to her by other inmates, "Ice-eyes" (p. 124), signifies the hard exterior shell she has created to protect herself from life on the inside as well as the cold, detached way she views others.

To be a successful intersubjective subject, Tracey must balance the contradiction between recognising the position of Mandy without wholly abandoning her own position (Benjamin, 1998, p. 107). According to Benjamin, the "notion of recognition [is] mediated not only through identification, but through direct confrontation with the other's externality" (1998, p. 96). The recognition that others exist outside of our own internal space and therefore are outside our control is paramount in negotiating the difference between self and not self. Benjamin posits that the other being conceived of by the self as "simultaneously outside [its] control and nonthreatening" (1998, p. 96) is the product of the mutually exclusive processes of recognition and negation. The synthesis of recognition and negation accommodates the "other's claim to represent any content other than 'I am not you'" (Benjamin, 1995, p. 53). Acknowledging the fact that we can negate and be negated back establishes identifications in a less absolute way. Neither subject is fixed as one or the other and occupies multiple rather than singular positions. The co-creation of mutuality allows entry into the transitional "third" place beyond identity (Benjamin, 1995, p. 74).

In a subject-subject relationship, the negotiation of difference between two subjects involves negation, which Benjamin describes as "often leading to partial breakdowns which we might call

disruption" (1998, p. 96). As I have already argued, disruptions or partial breakdowns are common in the interactions of human beings and has been discussed before; the reversion to a subject-object orientation through a breakdown is not necessarily permanent. The breakdown of intersubjective relatedness in Tracey and Mandy's case can be located at two points in the narrative when there is a temporary breakdown in communication. In the first instance, Tracey actively withholds the truth about her real life and in doing so denies Mandy the status of a 'like' subject. Mandy almost pleads with Tracey to recognise her desire "I can hack anything except silence...I've got to know the truth...Please answer this letter" (p. 51). Tracey's silence, in turn, can be conceptualised as her protecting the threat that Mandy poses to her subjectivity. Admitting that she has been lying means that Tracey has to destroy the fantasy that has worked to contain the anxieties and negative emotions she feels. Ultimately agreeing to Mandy's demand signals Tracey's acceptance of Mandy as a 'like' subject. Although this has positive effects on Tracey, it also signals the beginning of Tracey's dependency on the other. With increased dependency comes the unfortunate possibility of being abandoned by the other.

The second minor breakdown in communication occurs with the discovery that Mandy has a gun-obsessed brother. The fact that

Mandy's brother is a very real threat to her safety, serves to crush Tracey's misconception that Mandy is the "world's most normal person" (p. 59). When Tracey's quixotic bubble is burst, she admits to feeling "a bit sick" (p. 30) at the realisation that Mandy has "problems like everyone else" (p. 30). Tracey refuses to acknowledge Mandy's experience and this failure to respond to the information about Steve means that she has negated her other (Mandy) without recognising her need. Benjamin posits that "recognition begins with the other's confirming response, which tells us that we have created meaning, had an impact, revealed an intention" (1995, p. 33). Mandy craves a "confirming response" to her revelation and feels "burned off" (p. 29) and ignored when it is not forthcoming. This of course is the result of their subject-subject relationship temporarily suffering a breakdown to a subject-object orientation where one fails to recognise the other.

As in all relationships, the most important element is that breakdowns are corrected by repair and Tracey's apology in her next letter affords Mandy the recognition she craves. Just as intersubjective theory accommodates the break down of intersubjective relations, the letter writing between Tracey and Mandy also alternates "between the complementarity of doer and done to and the symmetry of reciprocal identification" (Benjamin,

1995, p. 93). To elaborate, the continuous activity of letter writing, where once one has received a letter, a reply is soon written and dispatched, imitates a healthy intersubjective relationship. When a letter is not replied or remains unanswered for long enough to evoke grief in the other, this imitates the breakdown of intersubjectivity whereby mutuality breaks down to form a subject-object paradigm. A healthy and functional intersubjective relationship therefore, requires the "acceptance of the other's independence and unknowability" (Benjamin, 1995, p. 22). The minor breakdowns in the two pen pals correspondence can be understood further as each subject asserting her independence. At the same time, the repair of the relationship establishes their mutual desire for one another and the recognition that their letter writing enables them to process negativity in a way that makes it more manageable for their individual psyches to handle.

Destruction and repair are akin to the infant's gradual separation from the mother. Separation actually proceeds in tandem with and enhances the felt connection with the other. In other words, their mutuality is perpetuated by the "joy of intersubjective attunement", which according to Benjamin, can be conceptualised as "This other can share my feeling" (1995, p. 35). For Tracey, learning to trust Mandy involves some level of surrendering her own absolute

power in order to submit to the intervention of the other. Intersubjectivity only works if both subjects put in and take out equal amounts. For Tracey, learning to essentially 'share' some of herself triggers sensations of fear because she is used to asserting herself through violence and aggression in prison. She writes, "I'm scared I'm getting softer, the more I write to you. I can't afford that" (p. 74). The fact is that Tracey is "getting softer" because, in releasing her feelings into transitional space, she is actually dealing with her feelings via her correspondence with Mandy.

Furthermore, Mandy exists as an opposite to Tracey because she inhabits a world that is outside the inside of the detention centre. Tracey relates to Mandy in much the same way as an infant looks to the mother to help it process internal states of tension. This is exemplified by her nickname for Mandy of, "Manna" (p. 96), being a variation on the child-like diminutive "Mamma". The frequency with which Tracey uses the name "Manna" reflects her dependence on Mandy as a pseudo mother substitute who she now relies on to help her process anxiety.

As Benjamin states, "If the clash of two wills is an inherent part of intersubjective relations, then no perfect environment can take the sting from the encounter from otherness" (1995, p. 47). For Tracey, her encounter with Mandy's 'otherness' has enabled her to

recognise Mandy as a 'like' subject, she has shared her feelings, learnt to feel love and has survived the destruction and repair of an intersubjective relationship. However, her relationship with Mandy suffers an irretrievable breakdown when Mandy stops writing for no defined reason. Mandy's absence parallels Tracey's understanding of her mother's death. Yet again, Tracey has been ostensibly abandoned by a mother/'like' subject and suffers the jarring effect of the death and/or absence of a loved one for no explainable reason.

Mandy's mysterious absence translates into the failure of intersubjective relatedness between the two girls and for Tracey triggers "kind of paranoid free-fall" (Benjamin, 1995, p. 93). Her unfulfilled desire for recognition from her 'like' subject results in "damage to the psyche" (Benjamin, 1995, p. 21). Tracey's desperation at being abandoned by Mandy is evident when she writes, "I don't know if I could stand it if you didn't want to write anymore" (p. 144). The breakdown of recognition means that Tracey experiences a "defensive process of internalization" (Benjamin, 1995, p. 40). In the absence of an outside other, her ego is overwhelmed by negativity that in turn results in a loss of psychic balance. Initially, her aggression is directed at Mandy when she writes, "Why'd you write to me in the first place?...You've really screwed me up now, just when I was starting to get somewhere. I'm so scared Manna" (p.

144). When her plea again goes unrecognised by Mandy, Tracey's mental state depreciates significantly.

When negativity is not dissolved with the help of an outside other, Tracey's reality shifts from "the domain of the intersubjective into the domain of the intrapsychic" (Benjamin, 1995, p. 40). Her ego is overwhelmed to the extent that she regresses to an infantile stage where she is unable to process the loss of her significant other and becomes almost totally introspective. Like a child, she loses the ability to articulate her feelings and ceases to function normally - "I don't do much, or say much. I like just sitting under my bed, watching things" (p. 146). Her retreat to confined places such as under her bed, further signify her regression. She is attempting to find comfort and solace in dark, womb-like spaces indicative of the maternal resonance she desires to connect with.

The loss of equilibrium between the intrapsychic and the intersubjective in Tracey's psyche indicates a further withdrawal into her self in an attempt to deal with the pain of separation from Mandy. Tracey's situation at the end of the narrative is notably more tragic than the outcomes experienced by Ruby/Miranda and Simone and reflects the generally dismal portrayal of the adolescent experience in the novel as a whole.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Benjamin's intersubjective theory reiterates the importance of maternal influence in early childhood development by situating the mother's subjectivity as the catalyst of her baby's primary identification processes. Benjamin's four stages of gender development and her conceptualisation of the 'third term', maintain that the ability to comfortably identify with multiple subject positions as a child sets a desirable precedent to be emulated in adult relationships.

Dead mothers undoubtedly have a significant impact on their daughter's simply by virtue of their absence. The lonely daughter must endeavour to fill the gap left by the absent mother by identifying with another *outside other* with which to engage in a reciprocal intersubjective relationship. As this thesis has proved, a successful intersubjective subject is more likely to recover from disruptions to their relationships than a subject who has difficulty in identifying with others as 'like'.

This thesis has therefore examined three female characters and their negotiation of intersubjective space with other 'like' subjects after the deaths of their respective mothers. Jessica Benjamin's theory of intersubjectivity underpins each analysis in an attempt to

apply a psychoanalytic theory, based in clinical psychology, to textual examples of human interaction and relationships. Intersubjective theory has been used to trace the process of subjects to initiate and negotiate intersubjective relationships through textual mediums.

In *Speaking to Miranda*, Ruby/Miranda goes on a quest to find her mother's roots based on actual textual signs such as photographs, momentos and memories. In identifying with her dead mother's past, Ruby becomes Miranda and achieves subject status.

In *Back on Track: Diary of a Street Kid*, Simone benefits from a textually based intersubjective relationship with her diary. Through the cathartic act of writing in her diary and receiving recognition back through the act of reading her script, Simone's future is ambiguous yet potentially optimistic.

Finally, in *Letters from the Inside*, Tracey initiates an intersubjective relationship through the writing and receiving of letters with her pen pal Mandy. Here the textual medium of the letter mimics the intersubjective medium of transitional space as accommodating the processing of tension via recognition and negation, giving and receiving. The breakdown in correspondence likewise signals the breakdown of intersubjective relatedness and the 'surviving' subject Tracey spirals into an infantile, intrapsychic existence.

Adolescence is characterised by an intense period of growth. The ability to negotiate relationships successfully during this time of development portends positively for similar behaviour in adulthood. In conclusion, I hoped to have demonstrated that experiencing healthy intersubjective relationships during childhood and adolescence increases the likelihood of evolving into a balanced adult subject. Furthermore, applying relational psychoanalytic techniques to the analysis of narrative texts enables one to examine the beneficial nature of intersubjective relatedness between characters in fiction targeted at adolescent readers.

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