The Negotiated Contract?
An Ethnography of Adolescent Reading and Ideology

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Abstract

The Negotiated Contract? An Ethnography of Adolescent Reading and Ideology investigates an intensely theorized and debated yet often elusive area of culture: adolescent reading. This thesis investigates how adolescents' attitudes towards the books they read, how they use those books and the nature of their reading performances. Ideology is fundamental to this understanding of young people's book culture. This thesis argues that adolescent reading is a site of ideological negotiation that is fundamentally ambivalent, a site where young adult readers are neither ideological dupes, nor autonomous actors. Through interviews conducted with twenty teenage girls in a comprehensive Catholic girls' high school in Sydney, Australia, this thesis examines three main aspects of this ideological dimension of reading: ideology and taste; ideology and meaning; and ideology and institutions. This thesis demonstrates that reading tastes in popular book series such as *Twilight*, *Vampire Academy* and *Harry Potter* are utilized by teenagers as part of a performance of ideologies of gender, sexuality and as a conduit for subcultural capital whereby they define themselves against an ideologically constructed mainstream. Textual meaning in these series is identified as a site of ideological struggle in which teenagers demonstrate that they read in highly complex, idiosyncratic, yet distinctively ideological ways. Finally, institutions such as school, Church and family also shape this ideological dimension of adolescent reading. In all of these areas, adolescent reading is as a domain where ideological negotiations are messy, inconsistent and fundamentally ambivalent.

Statement of Authenticity

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University. The presented thesis is an original piece of research that I have written. Any assistance that I have received during my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been appropriately acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used is indicated and acknowledged fully.

The Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee approved the research presented in this thesis on 6th June, 2010; reference number: 5201000720(D).

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To Nic: you know most acutely how fraught a process this project was. Thank you for your tolerance, your insight and intelligence, your organizational acumen (of which I should have taken more advantage), for your practical and emotional support. Most of all, thank you for your love. For all these things and more I am forever grateful.

Introduction: Reading, Ideology and the Negotiated Contract

> *From whatever school we choose, research results confirm the general observation elementary- and secondary-school pupils have not developed effective reading skills and habits, and that impossible reading demands are made upon hordes of children whose habits of work and mental hygiene become increasingly impaired as they are forced to adapt themselves to learning (in effect, memorizing) more and more unintelligible and meaningless materials. Moreover, studies of the leisure activities and preferences of reveal the low estate occupied by reading* (Witty 1938, p. 221).

A prominent educational psychologist delivered the observation above in a speech to the National Council of Teachers of English in the United States in 1937. In the present day, such commentary seems strikingly familiar. Articles concerning the supposed decline in the literacy and reading of children and adolescents appear almost weekly in the Australian press. Journalists warn that: 'A million Australian children are at risk of reading failure, with serious adverse consequences for their quality of life and the -progress of Australian society' (Buckingham 2016, para. 1). Some commentators claim this problem is linked to children spending too much time playing with computers, gaming consoles or watching television and suggest remedies: 'What would help would be if families read together. A half-hour reading period where every member of the family reads, sends a very positive message' (Bantick 2016, para. 16). These articles offer a consistent and familiar narrative of decline—a story about the decreasing significance of reading and a subsequent drop in reading standards and literacy. Such a drop in standards is seen as a threat to the critical capacities of young people and, ultimately, to society itself (see Gallagher 2009, p. 14; Piper 2012, p. xii).

Such apocalyptic narratives, however, do not stand up to any real scrutiny. One needs only observe the immense popularity of novel series such as *Twilight*, *Harry Potter* or *The Hunger Games* to recognize that reading remains a significant part of the lives of young people. Indeed, research conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics

(ABS) found that '77% of girls read for pleasure compared with 65% of boys' (ABS 2014, para. 22) and that 'reading was a favourite activity for 61% of people aged 15 years and over' (ABS 2014, para. 23). Moreover, studies have also found adolescent attitudes to reading in other parts of the world to be generally positive (see Broughton & Manuel 2012). Reading is an important part of what adolescents do at home, school and on public transport; it is a cultural activity that they discuss with friends and family; it is a part of what Clifford Geertz describes as the 'webs of significance' (1973, p. 5) that constitute culture.

While much of the social commentary concerned with the decline of adolescent and adult reading appears shrill and misguided, it does acknowledge an important fact: reading matters. This point was recognized explicitly in the speech delivered by Witty (1938), cited earlier. Witty was concerned about 'the typical adult' becoming 'a victim of designing minorities as well as of the shrewd advertising experts of our technological era' (1938, p. 222). The reading of fiction (and in particular silent reading) is prescribed by Witty to ameliorate this condition, as the activity is 'our most significant avenue for continued growth and understanding' (1938, p. 222). If we place to one side the highly dubious statement about 'designing minorities', Witty maintains that *what* people read is important; what people read has the potential to affect the manner in which they engage with social and political issues and the way they think about their world. Books present to their readers both explicit and implicit assumptions about the world itself, they comment on people and their relationships, on how they do and should comport themselves. Books comment on the institutions and power structures that implicate their readers. Books present a particular version of reality.

It is primarily because of their representation of a particular reality that reading and books have been the objects of ideological critique. Accordingly, this thesis investigates how adolescent readers engage with the ideologies proffered by the texts they read. Moreover, this thesis is concerned with a second dimension of reading that is

ideologically implicated: the relationships between reader, text and the broader social and cultural contexts—and purposes—of reading. As Barton and Hamilton suggest: 'Literacy does not just reside in people's heads as a set of skills to be learned, and it does not just reside on paper, captured as texts to be analyzed. Like all human activity, literacy is essentially social, and is located in the interaction between people' (2012, p. 3).

Subsequently, this thesis utilizes a qualitative ethnographic method in order to investigate these questions of reader, text, society, culture and ideology; it examines these relationships not through a text-based analysis, but rather by talking to adolescents about their reading. This study is based upon a series of group and individual interviews conducted in late 2010 with groups of Year 9 secondary school students who were 14 and 15 years of age. These students all attended a Catholic girls' school in the Eastern Suburbs of Sydney. The interviews were concerned with their reading: what they read, when they read, where they read and how they engage with and talk about their reading. I conducted these interviews because, as their English teacher, I was (and still am) interested in the role reading plays in their lives.

A number of theorists have conceived of the relationships between reader, text, context and ideology as 'a kind of contract between reader and author' (Iser 1993, p. 11). Jonathan Culler describes this contract as follows:

> *If the basic convention governing the novel is the expectation that readers will, through their contact with the text, be able to recognize a world which it produces or to which it refers, it ought to be possible to identify at least some elements of the text whose function it is to confirm this expectation and to assert the representational or mimetic orientation of fiction* (2002, p. 225).

Student responses in this study demonstrate this conception to be accurate. The reader *does* take up a contract with the texts they read and the ideologies they seek to propagate. This contract is not, however, simply imposed upon the reader; nor is it a contract constituted of terms and conditions determined solely by the reader themselves. The contract between reader and textual ideology that emerged in this study is

negotiated. This conception of reading as a negotiated contract is recognized by a variety of academics in the field of Young Adult (YA) and children's fictional studies as well as literary studies in general (Fairclough 1989; Greenblatt 1988; Hall 1980; McCallum 1999). Similarly, narratologists such as Bakhtin (1981) and Volosinov (1973) have described the process through which textual meaning in constructed as 'dialogical'. It is the primary purpose of this thesis to investigate the manner of this negotiation. This thesis argues that the negotiations between adolescent readers and ideology are fundamentally ambivalent. While readers possess and exercise considerable agency in their engagement with texts, this agency comes with significant constraints and complexities. Moreover, the relationship between reader and text is not the only area of important ideological negotiation: the social and cultural uses to which adolescents put their reading, the discourses they draw on to talk about their reading and the nature of students' interaction with the institutions that impact on their reading are also sites of ideological negotiation characterized primarily by ambivalence.

Chapter One of this thesis is a literature review. It discusses critically and defines the term ideology and surveys the significance of this term to philosophers, sociologists and practitioners of cultural and literary studies. The literature review also examines the ways ideology has been explored in the field of children's and YA literary studies and situates this thesis within that field. The literature review also outlines ethnographical studies that have investigated the reading of children and adolescents and contextualizes this thesis within that tradition. Finally, Chapter One summarizes the methodology of this thesis, outlining the fashion in which this qualitative ethnographical study was undertaken.

Chapter Two examines the relationship between reading, ideology and taste. It examines how students talk about books and reading, and the criteria that frame their reading preferences. Through the discourses students used in describing, advocating and sometimes defending their tastes, there emerged the first of a number of seemingly

antiquated ideologies: a binary distinction between fantasy and realist fiction in which realist fiction is privileged. The students' discussion of their tastes also revealed the role taste plays in creating and affirming distinctions as well as the way taste is used to accrue particular types of cultural capital and to perform dominant ideologies of gender and sexuality. This chapter argues that reading taste is a site of ambivalent student negotiation with generally conservative and mainstream ideologies. Moreover, these ambivalent ideological negotiations play an important part in the way teenagers construct and perform their identity.

Chapter Three of this thesis investigates the relationship between reading, textual meaning and ideology. This chapter examines the extent to which students engage with, discern and construct explicit and implicit meaning in the fiction they read. These processes are revealed to be ideological, and involve students engaging in an ambivalent negotiation with conservative ideologies of gender. These ideologies appear to be inescapable—even the repertoires used by adolescents to discern and critique ideology are constructed ideologically. This chapter also analyses a notion central to questions of textual meaning and ideology: the subject position in fiction. It investigates young readers' relationships with the subject positions offered by texts, arguing that such relationships are characterized by inconsistency and paradox. Furthermore, the cultural dynamic which is most prevalent as a consequence of the ambivalent nature of ideological negotiations of textual meaning is that of Gramsci's (1971) hegemony; while students often engage in conscious negotiations with overt textual ideologies, more covert ideologies still operate to naturalize and universalize dominant cultural assumptions.

Chapter Four then re-contextualizes these ideologies of taste and meaning by investigating the ideological role of the institutions implicated in the lives of young people. Firstly, it examines the multiple ways that the institution of the school influences student reading. It analyses the sometimes old and persistent ideologies that

emerged when students discussed their experience of reading at school, including ideologies of 'useful reading' and 'literature', finding the school to be a site of significant ideological clashes. This chapter also examines the way that students and teachers are both implicated in an ideological negotiation with the school institution. *Reading, Ideology and Institutions* then focuses on how teenagers negotiate with the ideologies propagated by two other dominant institutions: the family and the Church. These negotiations are revealed to be multifaceted, contentious, ambiguous and ambivalent.

It is evident in the varied and complex responses of students in this study that reading is an important part of the lives of young people. It is part of the fabric of their everyday interactions with their peers; it is an integral part of their school life; it is also a central and often treasured aspect of their private and personal engagement with culture. Ideology is very much implicated in this complex cultural practice. These young people are constantly being 'hailed' by ideology (Althusser 1971, p. 174), but respond to this hailing with a subsequent negotiation that is protracted, messy, inconsistent and contradictory. The way students utilize their agency in the face of this ideology—and the manner in which this agency is constrained—proves to be a dynamic that highlights the benefits of an ethnographic approach to reading, an approach that complements and enriches text-based studies of ideology.

Chapter One: Literature Review and Outline of Method

It was clear from students' discussion that reading was for them an important solitary and social act. Reading was also revealed to be a fundamentally ideological practice. Consequently, it is pertinent to provide a discussion of how the nebulous term 'ideology' has and can be defined. As Terry Eagleton suggests: 'Nobody has yet come up with a single adequate definition of ideology…because the term "ideology" has a whole range of useful meanings' (1990, p. 1). Accordingly, this chapter will begin by providing a critical discussion and definition of ideology. It will then survey the approach to ideology taken within the discipline that, more than any other, is concerned with the examination of ideology in what young people read—children's and YA literary studies. A primary aim of this section is to situate this thesis in that field. This chapter will then examine the methodological approaches ethnographies have taken when looking at reading both as a private practice as well as a cultural and social act. Finally, this chapter will outline the specific method used in this study.

Thinking About Ideology

Few terms in socio-cultural analysis are as contentious as 'ideology'. Eagleton, for instance, provides sixteen definitions of the word (1991, p. 1). A more recent survey suggests thirty-five definitions (Fagerholm 2016) and while other studies have not been quite so comprehensive as Eagleton's (1991) or Fagerholm's (2016), attempts to define the term in a concrete fashion remain problematic. James Decker (2004) seems reluctant to commit to a definition of ideology, as 'the term possesses a rich, contentious history' (2004, p. 3), and also because: 'Most modern theorists of ideology would agree that definitions of ideology typically – perhaps inevitably – risk manifesting the very phenomenon they seek to describe objectively' (2004, p. 6). Consequently, he

'tentatively' suggests a vague definition of ideology as 'a reciprocal process wherein subjective, institutional, and political ideas operate within a power web of both the intended and the unanticipated' (Decker 2004, p. 6).

The realization that 'there is no outside of ideology' (Downer & Toynbee 2016, p. 1264) has contributed to a recent unwillingness to define the term. Most recently, media academic John Corner characterized ideology as 'a term of critical analysis [which] promises a way into the exploration of the relationships between power, meaning and subjectivity, relationships with which the media are clearly quite centrally involved' (2016, p. 266). Corner, however, stops short of providing a concrete definition, other than to dispute conceptions of ideology as 'misrecognition' or 'false consciousness' (2016, p. 266). For similar reasons, Downey and Toynbee avoid a straightforward definition of ideology, eventually stating that what is important about the analysis of the concept is 'the extent to which a given account, explanation or narrative justifies (unjust) unreciprocal or unequal relationships between persons' (2016, p. 1265). In a similar way, this thesis will not assert any one, totalizing definition of ideology, but will, firstly, outline some of the major ways thinkers and theorists have conceived of ideology and, secondly, propose a definition of ideology that is both useful to studies of reading and culture, and one that is relative to and useful in examining what emerged from the interviews with the students whose comments constitute this study.

Ideology as 'False Consciousness'

The term ideology was coined in the late eighteenth century by the French Aristocrat Destutt de Tracy, who envisioned ideology as 'a superscience that would tie political, economic, and social issues together through the universal application of its insights into human behaviour' (Terrell 2009, p. i). This form of ideology accords roughly to what Raymond Geuss refers to as 'ideology in the purely descriptive sense'

(1981, p. 5). However, the most enduring conception of ideology is that of 'false consciousness'. Raymond Williams describes this classical Marxist notion of ideology as 'abstract and false thought' (1983, p. 155). This conception is derived largely from the argument of Marx and Engels that true consciousness provides 'accurate knowledge of the real conditions of life' (Hawkes 2003, p. 13) and that this knowledge is concealed or corrupted by false consciousness. Ideology, argue Marx and Engels, distorts reality, making 'men and their circumstances appear upside down as in a *camera obscura*' (Marx & Engels 2001, p. 768)[1]. Cain et.al describe Marx's position on ideology thus: 'It is the nature of ideology to conceal the reality of class struggle from our perception and consciousness; and insofar as working-class people unconsciously absorb bourgeois values, they are unwitting carriers of 'false consciousness' (2001, p. 762). David Hawkes maintains that this notion of ideology as false consciousness goes back much further than Marx[2]. He argues that ancient monotheistic and polytheistic religions criticized 'the attempt to establish an equivalence between the ideal and the material through the use of representation' (2003, p. 19). He then identifies the idea of false consciousness in a range of ancient and early modern philosophical traditions[3].

This definition of ideology does not, however, end with Marx. While later day members of the 'Frankfurt School', such as Jurgen Habermas, have moved away from this conception of ideology (see Geuss 1981, p. 9), early members still tended to view ideology as a type of false consciousness. Consider the following passage from the work of Horkheimer and Adorno, writing in the 1940s:

> *The defrauded masses today cling to the myth of success still more ardently than the successful. They, too, have their aspirations. They insist unwaveringly on the ideology by which they are enslaved. The pernicious love of the common people*

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[1] The actual phrase 'false consciousness' is first used by Engels in a letter to Franz Mehring in 1893. (See Eagleton 1991, p. 89).

[2] Incidentally, so does Karl Mannheim, who recognized the extensive lineage of the term as long ago as 1936 (see Mannheim 1936, p. 49).

[3] Hawkes argues that false consciousness, in one form or another, was a component of the work of Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Hume, Berkley, Milton, Hobbes, Locke, Hegel, Rousseau, Condillac, Helvetius and Holbach. See Hawkes 2003, pp. 19-66.

for the harm done to them outstrips even the cunning of the authorities (2002, p. 106).

Similarly, Herbert Marcuse's theory of 'repressive sublimation' from the 1960s invokes a false consciousness. He argues that 'advanced industrial culture is more ideological than its predecessor, inasmuch as today the ideology is in the process of production itself' (2001, p. 13); for Marcuse this process of production co-opts human sexual desire and uses it to distract the worker from the oppressive, dehumanizing nature of their labour (2002, p. 30). This theory, like many of those before it, conceives of a 'contradiction between ideology and reality' (Marcuse 2002, p. 68).

Although the notion of ideology as false consciousness is historically dominant, it is also problematic. The difficulty with viewing ideology as false consciousness is that it imagines such a thing as 'true consciousness'. Eagleton describes some of the epistemological issues evoked by this imagining. He argues that 'the assumption that some of our ideas "match" or "correspond" to the way things are, while others do not, is felt by some to be a naïve, discreditable theory of knowledge' (1991, p. 10). He also suggests that 'the idea of false consciousness can be taken as implying the possibility of some unequivocally correct way of viewing the world, which is today under deep suspicion' (1991, p. 10). Even Hawkes, who seems quite fond this definition of ideology, neatly summarizes arguments to the contrary:

> *The term 'ideology' usually refers to a systematically false consciousness. But if representation is the only reality, if truth is merely, as such precursors of postmodernism as Nietzsche claimed, a rhetorical device by which the powerful maintain their dominance, then how are we to distinguish between true and false modes of thought?* (2003, p. 7).

The question of precisely who represents the arbiter of such truth is the point at which this definition of ideology ultimately stumbles. As Corner recently suggested: 'The related matter of what (and who) is "outside" of ideology and how this external position is achieved and maintained as a basis for the activities of "unmasking" and of "critique" has long been an issue of dispute' (2016, p. 267). Furthermore, such a definition of

ideology is overly reductive and simplistic, ignoring the tensions and contradiction in ideologies. As Jan Rehmann states: "'Falseness' is…a highly generalizing and potentially totalizing notion, which tends to dissimulate the contradictory composition of ideologies' (2013, p. 6). Accordingly, it is one of the purposes of this study to demonstrate the notion that ideologies do not operate in a monolithic and deterministic fashion.

Although notions of ideology as false consciousness are contentious, there are a number of theories that emerge from this conception that hold immense value to studies of reading. While Georg Lukacs' idea of 'reification' seems in some ways to reinforce the idea of ideology as false consciousness[4], it is of significance when considering the purpose and function of ideology. For Lukacs, reification literally means a 'forgetting' of human relations (1968, p. 9). Martin Jay describes the primary argument (and victim) of reification as 'the incipiently universal class, the proletariat, whose labor—or sometimes more broadly, praxis—had made the social world [has their]…constitutive role in that making…obliterated.' (2008, p. 7). For Lukacs, the primary purpose (and effect) of this reification is to alienate the worker from the product of his or her labor. Human labour is thus commodified and the labourer exploited. This reification is so fundamental and so thorough that it involves a disruption even of the 'qualitative, variable, flowing nature' (Lukacs 1968, p. 90) of time itself; time 'freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable 'things'…in short, it becomes space' (Lukacs 1968, p. 90). This fragmentation and dislocation of human experience means that the proletariat is unable to attain class-consciousness and thus is unable to resist oppression.

While I recognize the problems with any false consciousness theory, it is important to acknowledge that it is from this concept of reification that we can observe

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[4] This is a matter of some contention. Eagleton views Lukacs' work as a departure from this definition of ideology (cf. 1991, p. 94-95); Hawkes maintains that Lukacs' work is a 'thoroughgoing' continuation of the theory of false consciousness (2003, p. 109).

a significant contribution to a theory of ideology that emphasizes its naturalizing and universalizing function. This naturalizing and universalizing function is the process by which culturally constructed ways of thinking—and of organizing society—become simple 'common sense'; that is, ideas which further the interests of particular group in society are seen as being a part of some natural reality rather than as historically contingent. As Eagleton argues: 'An important device by which an ideology achieves legitimacy is by universalizing and "eternalizing" itself. Values and interests which are in fact specific to a certain place and time are projected as the values and interests of all humanity' (1991, p. 56). Moreover, Eagleton goes on to suggest, 'naturalization is part of the dehistoricizing thrust of ideology, its tacit denial that ideas and beliefs are specific to a particular time, place and social group' (1991, p. 59). The implications of this function of ideology are made clear by Norman Fairclough, who insists that: 'Ideology is most effective when its workings are least visible' (1989, p. 85).

Ideology: Beyond False Consciousness

Another concept closely related to reification that is useful to an understanding of the way ideology operates is Antonio Gramsci's notion of 'hegemony'[5]. Gramsci defines hegemony as:

> *The 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production* (1971, p. 12).

Hegemony is the fashion in which ruling groups in society manufacture consent from subaltern groups of people; it is the vehicle used to compel the oppressed to adopt attitudes that are not necessarily in their best material interests. Williams describes how this is similar to reification: '[Hegemony] is seen to depend for its hold not only on its

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[5] As Raymond Williams points out, there are far older definitions of this term. Most of these definitions, however, bear only a tangential relationship with Gramsci's discussion of the concept (see Williams 1983, p. 144).

expression of the interests of a ruling class but also on its acceptance as "normal reality" or "commonsense" by those in practice subordinated to it' (1983, p. 145). Fairclough puts in another way, stating that ideologies, 'are a means of legitimizing existing social relations and differences of power, simply through the recurrence of ordinary, familiar ways of behaving which take these relations and power differences for granted' (1989, p. 2). Importantly, hegemony articulates the relationship between ideology and power in a manner that moves beyond the material determinism of classical Marxism. Whereas in classical Marxism the material 'base' determines the ideological 'superstructure', Gramsci's ideas give far greater emphasis to the power of ideas to transform society. Williams argues that hegemony performs an important function in 'societies in which electoral politics and public opinion are significant factors, and in which social practice is seen to depend on consent to certain dominant ideas which in fact express the needs of a dominant class' (1983, p. 145). Indeed, the work of British cultural theorists such as Williams (1977; 1981), Dick Hebdige (1979; 2001) and Stuart Hall (1980; 1994; 2005) have helped to develop further this notion of hegemony and in turn have broadened the scope of ideology and its significance, in particular by conceiving of ideology in a manner that does not view it as solely the product of material forces.

The adoption of a broader approach to ideology relates the concept to struggles that include—but go beyond—discussions of social class. This more inclusive vision of ideology is summarized by Cain et.al:

> *The existence of competing groups—organized not solely according to class, as traditional Marxism insists, but also according to such variables as ethnicity, race, gender, region, and religion—ensures that there are always various hegemonic visions in circulation, enjoying different degrees of consent among different groups* (2001, p. 2447).

This consideration allows for the ways in which modalities such as race, sexuality and (perhaps most importantly for this thesis) gender are also areas of cultural contestation and areas where power is exercised. Consequently, the work of theorists who focus on the significance of ideology to social modalities other than class is important to this

thesis.

As far back as the early second wave of feminism, Simone De Beauvoir recognized the importance of ideology to understanding the position of women in society. Her claim that: 'Legislators, priests, philosophers, writers, and scientists have striven to show that the subordinate position of woman is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth' (1953, p. 21), applies arguments about hegemony to matters of gender. Similarly, Kate Millett writes of the 'interior colonization' achieved by the patriarchy, a colonization she views as 'sturdier than any form of segregation, and more rigorous than class stratification, more uniform, certainly more enduring' (1969, p. 25); Toril Moi has written about the 'patriarchal ideology' of humanism (2002, p. 8; also see Cherland 2009) and Judith Butler (1993) has looked at how sex (she uses this term to describe the categories of male and female, rather than the copulative act) itself is a conception framed by cultural assumptions. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler states: 'Sexual difference…is never simply a function of material differences which are not in some way both marked and formed by discursive practices' (1993, p. 1). While more recently Butler has tended to use the term 'discourses' (2004, p. 25) and described 'enunciatory acts' (2016, p. 54) instead of 'ideology'[6], her argument that these discursive practices make sex 'a regulatory ideal whose materialization is compelled, and this materialization takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices' (1993, p. 1), implies that ideology is important in forming and legitimizing the social practice of sex and gender. This implication is of importance to this thesis, as it will in part examine the ideological dimension of reading and the performance of gender.

In a similar way to feminist thinkers, postcolonial writers have looked at the effect of ideological conceptions of race, ethnicity and 'otherness'. Edward Said (2003)

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[6] The implications of this distinction between 'ideology' and 'discourse' will be discussed in further detail when this chapter examines the ideas of Michel Foucault.

has examined how Western discursive representations of the 'Orient' have been used to both marginalize the Middle East and affirm the supremacy of Western ideology. The discourse of Orientalism, he argues, is an 'enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, socially, militarily, ideologically and scientifically during the post-Enlightenment period' (2003, p. 3). Similarly, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has examined colonial ideology in literature, conceived of as 'the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other' (1995, p. 24). Also of importance is the work of academics whose focus is on matters of sexuality such as Adrienne Rich (1980), Jonathan Dollimore (1991) and Alan Sinfield (1994), who have investigated how sexuality has been constructed ideologically—the ways in which heterosexuality has been normalized and homosexuality marginalized through ideology. As already stated, these theoretical approaches have been integral to the widening of the scope of ideology to include an understanding of the way ideology has been used to exercise power over a range of subjugated social groups.

Ideology, Culture and Language

Another component of the development of the conception of ideology that is important to this thesis is the role of signifying systems themselves in conveying ideology and establishing hegemony. While classical Marxism might have conceived of ideology as false consciousness, it did not really theorize *how* this consciousness was constituted and formed. A number of subsequent theorists have, however, examined the major signifying systems which manifest ideology: culture and language. The relationship between ideology and culture is a particular focus of Raymond Williams, who claims,

> ...'cultural practice' and 'cultural production'...are not simply derived from an otherwise constituted social order but are themselves major elements in its constitution...culture [is] the signifying system through which necessarily

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(through other means) a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored (1981, p. 12).

In a similar way American sociologist Clifford Geertz describes ideology as a 'social system' (1973, p. 193). Others, such as historian E. P. Thompson conceived of working class history and culture not as Williams had (and later revised) in the 1950s as 'a whole way of life' (1961, p. 18), but rather as 'a way of struggle' (Thompson 1959, p. 57). For Stuart Hall, culture is also conceived more as a site of ideological contestation. He argues,

> *…cultural struggle arises in its sharpest form just at the point where different, opposed traditions meet, intersect. They seek to detach a cultural form from its implantation in one tradition, and to give it a new cultural resonance and accent… Cultures conceived not as separate ways of life, but as 'ways of struggle', constantly intersect: the pertinent cultural struggles arise at points of intersection* (1994, p. 463).

This idea of ideological struggle within culture is especially pertinent for this thesis. Reading itself is not only a cultural practice that is part of the broader signifying system that is culture, but, as I will show, is one such site of struggle. As this thesis will demonstrate, it is one of those points where, as Hall writes, 'different, opposed traditions meet, intersect'; it is part of a constant battle of values, ideology and identity.

Hall's approach to ideology and culture is particularly important to this study as it focuses on the potential for interaction with ideology as *negotiated*. In his analysis of television discourses, Hall maintains that culture is 'sustained through the articulation of connected practices' (1980, p. 117) and argues that media discourses are both encoded by cultural production, as well as *decoded* by individuals who 'are themselves framed by structures of understanding, as well as being produced by social and economic relations, which shape their "realization" at the reception end of the chain and which permit the meanings signified in the discourse to be transposed into practice or consciousness' (1980, p. 119). There are, Hall suggests, three hypothetical positions from which decodings of a text are 'constructed'. First there is the *dominant-hegemonic position* whereby the text is decoded in a manner that aligns with the message and

values intended by the producer of the text, ideologies which 'have the institutional/political/ideological order imprinted in them and have themselves become institutionalized' (1980,p. 124). Second, Hall describes an *oppositional* approach whereby the text is decoded in a manner that resists the intended meaning (1980, p. 138). Most decoding, however, is conducted from a *negotiated* position, one which,

> *...contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements: it acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations (abstract), while, at a more restricted, situational (situated) level, it makes its own ground rules—it operates with exceptions to the rule* (Hall 1980, p. 127).

Thus Hall represents the process of decoding not as something passive, but rather as what Donna Alvermann describes as 'dialogical in nature' (2011, p. 542). The engagement of the reader with ideology is, therefore both 'shot through with contradictions' (Hall 1980, p. 127), as well as part of a process which is complex and contested.

Hall's approach is important not only for its examination of the role of individual agency in the engagement with ideology. It also provides a significant contribution towards an analysis of the way ideology is conveyed through language. Such analysis is linked with a study of cultural forms in general. As Fairclough argues: 'Ideologies are closely linked to language, because using language is the commonest form of social behaviour, and the form of social behaviour where we rely most on "common-sense" assumptions' (1989, p. 2). The importance of language to the study of ideology is not a recent phenomenon. As early as 1930 Volosinov claimed,

> *...the very foundations of a Marxist theory of ideologies...are closely bound up with problems of the philosophy of language...Everything ideological possesses meaning; it represents, depicts, or stands for something lying outside itself. In other words it is a sign. Without signs, there is no ideology* (1973, p. 9).

Accordingly, many theorists and schools of theorists focus on the way language is implicated at the most basic level in shaping our perception of the world; they argue that *discourses*—that is, 'stretches of language perceived to be meaningful, unified and purposeful' (Cook 1989, p. 156)—express and promote ideology. One of the most

influential of these theorists, Roland Barthes, argues that the fundamental character of discourse is 'myth': the ability of language to embody codes that implicitly enshrine basic assumptions about the nature of reality (1972, p. 115). Barthes, along with other theorists who might be termed 'structuralists' such as Mikhail Bakhtin (who was writing long before Barthes) have tended to analyze the internal workings of these discourses, examining how the structures of language and narrative encode this ideology (Bakhtin 1984). Moreover, like Hall (1980), Bakhtin's focus on the dialogic nature of discourses further brings to light the ways in which the relationship between language and the subject are negotiated. Theorists such as Jacques Lacan (1966) and Julia Kristeva (1980) have examined to relationship between ideology and language in quite a different way altogether—through the psychoanalytic ideas of Freud. For these theorists, language represents a 'symbolic order' into which the human subject is inducted 'by passing through the radical defile of speech' (Lacan 1966, p. 40).

One criticism of both structuralist and psychoanalytical approaches is that they can in some instances treat ideology as an exclusively textual phenomenon and do not attempt to examine how ideological discourses link to a wider culture and to real-world struggles for power. The British practitioners of cultural studies associated with the Birmingham School, generally writing from the 1960s to the 1980s, on the other hand, share this preoccupation with the importance of language to ideology. They, however, attempt to view it as part of the broader picture of a struggle over power and hegemony. As Hebdige argues: 'The struggle between different discourses, different definitions and meanings within ideology is therefore always, at the same time, a struggle within signification: a struggle for possession of the sign which extends to even the most mundane areas of everyday life' (2001, p. 2456). Likewise, Hall suggests:

> *Definitions of reality were sustained and produced through all those linguistic practices (in the broad sense) by means of which selective definitions of 'the real' were represented…It was a practice, a production, of meaning: what subsequently came to be defined as a 'signifying practice'* (2005, p. 60).

Subsequently, this thesis will examine both language and culture as sites for ideological contestation and negotiation. Reading is significant in this contestation because it is a cultural act which of itself carries ideological significance; the nature of that significance is in large part determined by context. Additionally, reading is significant because it is an act in which the reader engages with language, language that is imbued with ideology.

Also integral to an understanding of ideology have been studies of how institutions ordain and promote ideology. The work of Louis Althusser (1971) is central to this aspect of ideology in two main ways. Firstly, Althusser argues that we are 'interpellated' by ideology; that is, we are consistently 'hailed' by ideology and it is this through this hailing that ideology constructs a 'subject position.' It is through this interpellation that ideology '"recruits" subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or "transforms" the individuals into subjects' (Althusser 1971, p. 174). Eagleton suggests that this interpellation is important both because it 'constitute[s] human beings as social subjects' while also 'produc[ing] the lived relations by which such subjects are connected to the dominant relations of production in a society' (1991, p. 18). Althusser's work is also important insofar as it describes the institutional source of ideology— 'Ideological State Apparatuses' (ISA) (1971, p. 127). Althusser describes these apparatuses as 'a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions' and include – among other things – Churches, schools, the family and what he terms the 'cultural ISA': 'Literature, the Arts, sports etc.' (1971, p. 143). These ISA operate in conjunction with 'Repressive State Apparatuses' (RSA) – institutions that use physical coercion to exercise power, such as the police, army and prison system – in order to maintain the social order (Althusser 1971, p. 137).

This role played by social and cultural institutions in the exercising of power is also emphasized by Pierre Bourdieu (2010). Writing in the 1960s and 1970s, his work is

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important for this thesis firstly because of his conception of the *habitus*; that is, the 'non-discursive' patterns of social and cultural behavior through which norms are produced and power is legitimized (Bourdieu 2010, p. 95). This notion seems to parallel that of theorists who deal with hegemony insofar as it describes a process through which culturally constructed assumptions and ways of doing become normal and unconscious, effacing their origins and concealing their implications for power. Just as important for this thesis is Bourdieu's exploration of how expressions of cultural taste serve as ideology: how they are used to reproduce and reinforce power structures within society. Bourdieu argues: 'To the socially recognized hierarchy of the arts, and within each of them, of genres, schools or periods, corresponds a social hierarchy of consumers. This predisposes tastes to function as markers of "class"' (2010, p. xxv). Moreover, Bourdieu considers the role cultural institutions play in affirming and legitimizing these power structures. These assertions implicate reading taste as an important component of ideology, while also highlighting the significance of institutions in promoting and validating such ideology. Subsequently, the relationship between reading tastes, institutions and ideology will constitute a substantial focus of this thesis.

As the relationships between institutions, power and ideology are central to this thesis, it is important to also consider the work of Michel Foucault. Foucault examines the ways in which institutions construct and legitimize discourses, arguing that institutional discourses such as science have been used historically to marginalize and silence social groups such as the mentally ill (1961) and homosexuals (1976) and in turn create social and cultural norms. Furthermore, for Foucault these discourses represent the coming together of knowledge and power. 'What makes power hold good' exclaims Foucault, 'what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no; it also traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse' (2001a, p. 120). Foucault does not, however, simply

theorize this power as imposed from above. He explains, for example, that subjectivity is constructed in three general ways: discursively—through 'the production and exchange of signs' (Foucault 2001a, p. 338); through the 'dividing practices' of social institutions; and through agency—'the way a human being turns him- or herself into a subject' (Foucault 2001a, p. 327). Moreover, for Foucault, subjectivity is a site of struggle: a struggle over the definition and role of the individual in society, and a struggle, most importantly, over power (2001a, p. 330). This form of power 'applies itself to immediate everyday life, categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him that he must recognize and others have to recognize in him' (Foucault 2001a, p. 331). Like Hall (1980), Foucault posits the possibility of agency in the form of resistance. 'Resistance', he writes, provides a 'chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, find out their point of application and the methods used' (Foucault 2001a, p. 329).

Unlike a number of Marxist scholars, however, Foucault does not use of the term ideology to discuss the mechanisms through which such power is exercised, preferring to conceive, rather, of 'discursive formations' (2002, p. 34). Discursive formations are 'groups of statements' (or discourse) that define the conceptual parameters of 'all their associated domains' (Foucault 2002, p. 129). By utilizing this nomenclature Foucault is attempting to avoid using 'words that are already overladen with conditions and consequences, and in any case inadequate to the task of designating discursive formations such a dispersion, such as "science", "ideology", "theory", or "domain of objectivity"' (2002, p. 41). For Foucault the term ideology invokes the totalizing theories of history adhered to by structuralist Marxism; history itself is seen as constituting a discursive formation and is thus no more or less legitimate as an arbiter of truth (Foucault 2002, p. 11). Despite his definitional and epistemological problem with 'ideology', the actual practice of Foucault's work is most relevant to this thesis.

While Foucault may argue that history is a discursive formation, it does not prevent him from historicizing discourses themselves and demonstrating how they have been used to exercise institutional power in both societies of the past and in the (then) present day. It is with this practical aspect of Foucault's work that this study is aligned: the attempt to connect the institutionalized discourses people use when talking about their reading with the power structures of their society.

The Challenge to Ideology Critique

Foucault's rejection of the term 'ideology' became somewhat of a rallying point for theorists questioning of the validity of the very notion of ideology itself in the 1980s and 1990s. As Laclau and Mouffe suggested in the mid-1980s, 'the very wealth and plurality of contemporary social struggles has given rise to a theoretical crisis' (2001, p. 2). If knowledge was *so* contingent, if the only thing we knew for certain was that any position from which we spoke was constituted by discourse, then ideology critique that attempted to say *anything* summative about the relationship between people, culture and ideas seemed misguided. Correspondingly, many literary, media and culture theorists challenged the existence and usefulness of ideology itself. Thinkers such as Marshall McLuhan (1967), Deleuze and Guattari (1983) and Jean Baudrillard (1994) (as well as many others) suggested that the conditions of postmodernity had resulted in a complete decentralization of meaning; that our experience of reality was so thoroughly mediated that any substantial understanding of that reality was hopelessly compromised. Subsequently, studies of culture and media that deal with ideology went somewhat out of fashion. As Alvermann has pointed out, many studies in the fields of media and cultural studies focused largely on audiences' pleasures (2011, p. 542; see Fiske 1989).

Some scholars, however, refuted strenuously these objections to ideology critique. Terry Eagleton was particularly scathing of this move beyond ideology, arguing:

The case that advanced capitalism expunges all traces of 'deep' subjectivity, and thus all modes of ideology, is not so much false as drastically partial. In a homogenizing gesture ironically typical of a 'pluralistic' postmodernism, it fails to discriminate between different spheres of social existence, some of which are rather more open to this kind of analysis than others (1991, p. 38).

Slavoj Zizek also defended ideology critique, claiming that those critical of ideology, '(mis)perceive our late capitalist society as a new social formation no longer dominated by the dynamics of capitalism as it was described by Marx' (1994, p. 1). While he recognises that ideology is 'utterly ambiguous and elusive' (1994, p. 3), he objects to the 'the now pandemic repudiation of ideology critique' (Vighi & Feldner 2007, p. 142) that has legitimized a way of thinking that 'translates antagonism into difference' (Zizek 2004, para. 7). According to Zizek, such an attitude neglects the 'antagonistic nature of existing power relations' (Vighi & Feldner 2007, p. 142) as well as the 'peculiar logic of class struggle' (Zizek 2004, para. 7).

Eagleton also argues that the behavior of people in general, their engagement with their society and world at large, is evidence of the relevance of ideology. He writes that if the death of ideology were true, 'it would be hard to know why so many individuals in these societies still flock to church, wrangle over politics in the pubs, care about what their children are being taught in school and lose sleep over the steady erosion of the social services (1991, p. 42). Douglas Kellner (1995) also cautioned against abandoning ideological critique, arguing that 'celebrating the audience and the pleasures of the popular, neglecting social class…and failing to analyze…the politics of cultural texts [would] make cultural studies merely another academic subdivision, harmless and ultimately of benefit primarily to the culture industries themselves' (1995, p. 42). Moreover, it would seem that there is no statement more ideological than that which claims ideology does not exist. As Zizek suggests, 'the very gesture of stepping out of ideology pulls us back into it' (1994, p. 9). Such a claim effaces the relationships between language, cultural activity and power. As Linda Hutcheon opines, the challenge to ideology critique provided by postmodernism need not be disabling. She

argues that what this challenge does is 'underline the need for self-awareness, on one hand, and on the other, for an acknowledgement of that relationship…between the aesthetic and the political' (Hutcheon 1988, p. 200).

It is perhaps because of the enduring relevance of ideology that the concept is at the very centre of the writings of as prominent contemporary philosopher as Zizek. His ideas on ideology draw heavily on Lacan's psychoanalytic concept of 'the Real', and also adopt hegemony as an important tool for explaining how institutions exact loyalty and devotion from their subjects (see Zizek 2008). Indeed, Zizek's notion that any successful political ideology needs to be centred on a 'Sublime Object', such as God or The Party (Zizek 2008), shares similarities with Althusser, who stated, 'all ideology is centred, that the Absolute Subject occupies the unique place of the Centre, and interpellates around it the infinity of individuals into subjects in a double mirror-connexion such that it subjects the subjects to the Subject' (1971, p. 180). Moreover, like Stuart Hall (1980), Zizek views the role of ideology in constructing subjectivity as a negotiation; it is not entirely passive or active, but characterized rather by 'interpassivity' (Zizek 1997, p. 50). Similar discussion about the nature of hegemony and the way it constructs subject positions is still a preoccupation for contemporary thinkers such as Judith Butler (2000) and Chantal Mouffe (2013). Therefore, there seems to be some truth in Geertz's comment that: 'We may wait as long for the "end of ideology" as the positivists have waited for the end of religion' (1973, p. 199).

It is not within the scope of this thesis to provide a definitive defence of ideology, other than to say that its usefulness as a critical concept is far from outmoded. It is important to also note that it is not the intention of this study to interpret the responses of students through the lens of ideology in an *a priori* manner; it was, rather, the responses of the students themselves that suggested ideology was present in the way they talked about reading and in the way they performed culture. This thesis has tried to avoid what Raymond Williams warned against – that is, conducting an analysis of

culture that is grounded in a theory which seeks self-serving examples (1981, p. 33).

Instead I have deployed an understanding of ideology that illuminates the relationship

students in this study have with their reading and in turn provides insight into how this

practice is linked to their wider experience of culture and of society. With this aim in

mind, this thesis defines ideology as the underlying assumptions conveyed through a

signifying system such as language or cultural practice[7]. These assumptions directly or

indirectly serve the interests of a particular social group; this group is often, although

not necessarily, dominant. As Martin Seliger suggested as far back as the 1970s, the

discourses expressed by such groups is ideology 'irrespective of whether [their] action

aims to preserve, amend, uproot or rebuild a given social order' (Seliger 1976, p. 14).

The group whose interests are served by ideology can cohere around notions of class,

gender, race or sexuality. In the context of this study, ideology is a theoretical tool that

allows for a greater understanding of the cultural activities of young people. Ideology is

moreover an important and prevalent focus in the field of children's and YA fictional

studies, the significance of which shall be discussed below.

Ideology in Children's and Young Adult Fiction

Contrary to various trends in other fields, ideology has remained central to

academic approaches in the study of children's and YA fiction. Unlike in other fields,

however, there seems to be a general consensus as to what constitutes ideology. For

Charles Sarland, the term ideology refers to 'all espousal, assumption, consideration and

discussion of social and cultural values' (1999, p. 41); John Stephens views ideology as

being inscribed within both the story and significance of narrative discourse in

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[7] This corresponds roughly with Geuss' discussion of discursive and non-discursive elements of
ideology. Ideology can be observed both through language, but also through elements of culture such as
religion (1981, p. 7).

children's fiction (1992, p. 2), fiction that 'must be regarded as a special site for ideological effect, with a particularly powerful capacity for shaping audience attitudes' (1992, p. 3). Peter Hollindale goes further and describes three embodiments of ideology. The first of these is 'the explicit social, political or moral beliefs of the individual writer, and his wish to recommend them to children through the story' (2003, p. 27). This embodiment of ideology is seen as 'the most conspicuous element in the ideology of children's books, and the easiest to detect. Its presence is conscious, deliberate and in some measure "pointed"' (2003, p. 28). Secondly, ideology includes 'the individual writer's unexamined assumptions' (2003, p. 30), which Hollindale argues are far more pervasive as they remain unrecognized and implicit. Thirdly, ideology represents 'a climate of belief' (2003, p. 37), a climate created by the repetition of tropes and assumptions. Overall, what is central to these definitions is the notion that ideology encompasses the values and attitudes promoted both implicitly and explicitly in children's fiction.

The considerable and concerted focus on ideology in this field is also in part a consequence of the purpose and content of children's and YA literature itself. Not only can childhood itself can be viewed as an ideological construction (Halliday 1996, p. 20), but much writing for both children and adolescents is overtly didactic. As Stephen suggests, 'writing for children is usually purposeful, its intention being to foster in the child reader a positive apperception of some socio-cultural values which, it is assumed, are shared by author and audience' (1992, p. 3). Indeed, leading theorists (Trites 2000; McCallum 2006) argue that ideology itself is a key characteristic in the definition of both the children's fiction and YA fiction genres. Trites claims the distinguishing characteristic of YA literature 'is the issue of how social power is deployed during the course of the narrative' (2000, p. 3). 'In the adolescent novel', writes Trites, 'protagonists must learn about the social forces that have made them what they are. They learn to negotiate the levels of power that exist in the myriad social institutions

within which they must function' (2000, p. 3). Robyn McCallum also provides a definition of adolescent fiction that invokes ideology. She argues that the main features of the genre are, 'marginally taboo subject matter—sex, pregnancy, drug abuse, homosexuality, and so on', a predominantly didactic tone and socializing purpose, and themes such as (among other things) 'the establishment of a separate identity', 'the struggle between public and private concepts of self' and, most importantly, 'a recognition of the selfhood of others and movement out of solipsism' (2006, p. 216). Consequently, the discipline of children's and YA literary studies has much to say about the role of ideology in the lives of adolescents. Accordingly, it is the purpose of this section of the literature review to survey a number of these ideological approaches in analyses of children's and YA fiction and to determine where this thesis can be situated within that context.

Ideology, Class and Power in Children's and YA Fiction

Approaches to ideology in children's and YA fiction are just as diverse as the approaches in other areas of cultural analysis. They do, however, seem to begin rather more recently than for analyses of adult fiction. As Sarland points out, initial explorations of ideology in children's fiction were part of an effort to bring to light the white, middle-class, male prejudices in children's fiction in the 1970s (1999, p. 41). The work of Dixon (1974), Zimet (1976) and Leeson (1977) all examine the representation of race, class and gender in children's books and implore authors to redress imbalances in these areas, such as the prevalence of narratives with white, middle class boys in children's narratives. In the last thirty years however, perhaps the most prominent figure to investigate ideology in both fairytales and children's fiction is Jack Zipes (1979; 1997; 2001; 2006; 2015). His work from the late 1970s to the early 2000s argued that all fairytales are 'complex symbolic acts intended to reflect upon mores, norms and habits organized for the purpose of reinforcing a hierarchically arranged civilizing

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process in a particular society' (1997, p. 3). While he did not always frame his work explicitly in terms of ideological analysis, Zipes' Marxist critical approach examined the implications for class and power of folk tales and fairytales in relation to both the historical context in which they were composed and in which they have been appropriated. Furthermore, Zipes' claim that fairytales 'appear to be universal and natural stories of the way life should be while concealing their artistic constellations and their basic history and ideology' (2015, p. 68), demonstrates his consideration of the naturalizing and universalizing functions of ideology. Similarly, Zipes' study of children's literature deals with the ways in which 'books for the young…have always been used as weapons or instruments to train and cultivate taste, to help children to see distinctions and distinguish themselves' (2001, p. 66). Likewise, the work of Joseph Zornado (2001) and Christopher Parkes (2012) seeks to understand the ideologies promoted by children's literature and fairytales in relation to the power dynamics of their historical contexts.

Not only did Zipes' work historicize the ideology of fairytales and children's literature, but it also took aim at what he saw as the 'cultural homogenization of American children' (2001, p. 1). Such work clearly accords with notions of ideology as 'false consciousness', arguing that, 'we cultivate familial and institutional practices to make kids think and act in predictable ways' (2001, p. 2). According to Zipes,

> *…certain cultural practices play a role in homogenizing American children and send contradictory messages that are bound to undermine their capacity to develop a sense of morality and ethics and to recognizing their autonomy will be governed by prescribed market interests of corporations that have destroyed communities and the self determination of communities* (2001, p. 3).

He also contended that mass-marketing corporations socialized children in ways that limited their imaginations and creativity by producing children's and YA literature that is 'formulaic and banal' (2001: 7). In this way, Zipes' work echoes Horkheimer and Adorno's exclamation: 'Culture today is infecting everything with sameness' (2002, p.

94). The implications of corporatization on the agency of young people was also concern for Zipes, who claimed,

> *…the actions and agency of young people and adults who seek to resist this commercialization and commodification are constantly compromised by bureaucratic demands of social institutions, and political hypocrisy of our so called leaders, with the result that their struggle for freedom from cultural homogenization and their urges for more authenticity in life are turned against them* (2001, p. 3).

A significant target of Zipes' ire in this work was the *Harry Potter* series. Zipes argued that children were having these books and their ideology—their 'sexist and white patriarchal biases' (2001, p. 186)—imposed on them by both unwitting parents and all-too-witting marketers. A number of other critics concur with this criticism (Downes 2010; Nel 2005; Pennington 2002; Turner-Vorbeck 2003; Westman 2002); along with Zipes these authors object, with varying degrees of adamancy, to the 'hypercommercialisation' (Nell 2005, p. 261) of the *Harry Potter* series. I do not share Zipes' assumption that a specific set of relations govern the response of children to their culture, nor do I share the assumption that young people necessarily possess these seemingly innate 'urges for more authenticity' (2001, p. 4); I disagree with the overwrought claims of Turner-Vorbeck, for instance, that the imaginations of children need to be rescued from *Harry Potter* by literary criticism where, apparently, 'the true, aesthetic value of children's books can be critically considered' (2003, p. 21). Indeed, the primary argument of this thesis is that that ideology rarely operates in singular and crudely deterministic ways. While problematic, this aspect of the work of Zipes and others does, nevertheless, highlight the potential role of reading in propagating ideology, as well as the possible role of institutions and markets in influencing taste, attitudes and values.

Not only has ideology constituted a significant focus for scholars of fairytales and children's fiction such as Zipes, but it has also attracted the attention of academics dealing with YA fiction. While Zipes' work deals with ideology primarily by

implication, one of the seminal works in this field, Roberta Seelinger Trites' *Disturbing the Universe* (2000) does so more explicitly. Her claim: 'Books for adolescents have many ideologies. And they spend much time manipulating the reader' (2000, p. x) recognizes emphatically that texts convey a range of implicit cultural assumptions with which adolescent readers engage. While Trites' approach is predominantly Foucauldian, she uses the term ideology along with the notion of discursive formations to examine how power operates in texts written for young people. Of particular interest to this thesis is Trites' focus on 'institutional discourses' (2000, p. 21) in YA fiction. According to Trites:

> *Since institutions such as school, religion, church, identity politics, and family are invested in socializing adolescents, the depiction of these institutions in adolescent literature are logically implicated in the establishment of narrative authority and in the ideological manipulation of the reader* (2000, p. 142).

Crucially, Trites is also concerned with the extent of individual agency in the midst of these ideologies, tending to reject theoretical models of ideology that discount the possibility of individual agency and resistance to dominant ideologies (2000, p. 154). This dichotomy between ideologies and individual agency is a key concern for other academics in the field of YA fiction, particularly Robyn McCallum (1999), whose work will be discussed in more detail later in this section. As McCallum's definition of the genre cited earlier indicates, it seems that this concern with agency is in part a consequence of the extent to which adolescent agency is a central theme of YA fiction itself. Consequently, this thesis is concerned with both how young readers engage with this aspect of the texts they read, and the extent to which these same readers possess and exercise agency in the act of reading.

Ideologies of Sexuality, Gender and Ethnicity in Children's and YA Fiction

Commensurate with studies of ideology at large, theorists in the field of children's and YA literature have also turned their attention to the textual presence of

ideologies relating to sexuality, gender and ethnicity. Perhaps the most prominent domain of ideological analysis within this area is gender. In a similar way to the aforementioned works of Dixon (1974), Zimet (1976) and Leeson (1977), early studies of gender in children's fiction tended to focus on a disparity of gender representation in children's books, as well as stereotypical depictions of the role of women in these works (Hillman 1974; Key 1971; Pace Nilsen 1971; 1977). In children's fiction, it was argued, 'females are usually presented as passive, dependent, and displaying a constellation of traits not particularly valued in contemporary society' (Hillman 1974, p. 84). While these early criticisms were illuminating, Zipes argues that a number of the early approaches in this area 'deal only with a small selection of the tales and with surface features' (2012, p. 6). In 1986, however, Zipes offered a more comprehensive approach to this topic, arguing in his anthology of feminist fairy tales and feminist literary criticism that the contemporary stories and analysis showcased in the collection constituted a 'rethink both fairy tales as aesthetic compositions and the role they play in conditioning themselves and children' (2012, p. 14). Accordingly, the essays of Gilbert and Gubar (2012), as well as Karen Rowe (2012) contained within the anthology (but initially published in 1979) explore in more detail the ideological implications of representations of gender in fairytales and children's literature.

This tradition of examining representations of gender in fairytales, children's literature and YA fiction has been maintained in recent times. Christine Wilkie-Stibbs, for example, has looked at the construction of the feminine subject in children's literature (2002) and Victoria Flanagan has investigated the ideological implications of representations of cross-dressing in children's and YA fiction (2008). Flanagan's work argues against 'oppressive gender ideologies which cast masculinity and femininity as "natural" and inherently oppositional concepts' (2008, p. 255) and examines the possibility of textual strategies which promote more inclusive notions of femininity and masculinity. Jane Sunderland (2011) has argued for an approach to analyzing gender

ideology that utilizes linguistic theories. In addition, not only have (relatively) recent analyses dealt with the implications of gender ideology for girls, but a number of theorists have explored the ways in which fiction for young people represents masculinity. In Stephens' anthology *Ways of Being Male* (2002), prominent theorists such as Nodelman, McCallum, Reynolds, Mallan, Flanagan and Stephens examine the various ways in which fiction for young people conceive of masculinity. In addition, authors such as Wannamaker (2008) study 'texts written for children and adolescents as cultural artifacts that can make visible the ways we construct gendered children within cultural discourse' (2008, p. 10) largely from the perspective of masculine ideologies.

Others in the field of children's and YA fictional studies have also examined gender ideology from a Lacanian perspective. Wilkie-Stibbs (2002) borrows partially from this theoretical field, and in *Looking Glasses and Neverlands,* Karen Coats has also 'undertaken to read certain canonical children's [and YA] texts and genres in light of Lacan's theory of the subject' (2004, p. 5). Literature, according to Coats, 'present[s] images and worlds that the child reader takes as Lacanian mirror images' (2004, p. 6); that is, by using and re-using dominant tropes and stereotypes, children's books provide a signifying system in relation to which children construct both their identity and what Coats argues is a predominantly 'modernist' subjectivity. The perceived impact of children's texts is no more strongly exemplified than through Coats' claim that *Sesame Street* and *Dr. Seuss* have 'rendered it almost impossible for the contemporary American child to undertake a subject position that does not hint at some sort of postmodern irony or at least fluidity of representation within the Symbolic' (2004, p. 9).

The analysis of gender ideology in children's and YA fiction is also closely related to the analysis of ideology and sexuality. Trites (1997; 1998; 2000) is also foremost in this area of criticism, as she examines the relationship between sex and power in YA literature. According to Trites, much YA fiction is didactic in terms of the way it deals with adolescent sexual experience, stating that 'adolescent literature is

often an ideological tool used to curb teenagers' libido' (1998, p. 85). In exploring this trend, Trites claims that society deals with sex by 'at once glorifying and idealizing it while also stigmatizing and repressing it' (1998, p. 95). This tendency is examined not only in reference to heteronormative sexual discourses, but also with homosexual discourses in YA fiction. More recently, Michelle Abate (2011; 2012) and Lydia Kokkola (2013) have been prominent in providing analyses of heteronormative ideologies in children's fiction.

While analyses of ideologies of gender and sexuality are prevalent in this field, it was once argued that an 'awareness of postcolonialism is rare in children's literature criticism' (Hunt and Sands 2001, p. 49). The same, however, cannot be said today. Stephens (1999), Graham (2001), Wilson (2008), Pond (2011), Flanagan (2011; 2013), Johnston and Mangat (2012), Tagwirei (2013) and Sheeky Bird (2014) are a sample of the academic work written on postcolonial ideologies in children's and YA fiction both before and after Hunt and Sands' (2001) comment. Over the past 15 years there has been a considerable focus on the ways in which notions of race, ethnicity and nation are constructed ideologically in texts for young people. In addition, the work of Stephens (2011) has examined how the schemata and script in texts for children may be used to promote tolerant and inclusive social ideologies.

Ideology and the 'Transactional School'

While most of the theorists discussed above outline the *type* of ideologies expressed through children's and YA literature, there is also a considerable body of research in this field that examines *how* these ideologies themselves are constructed textually. Trites describes these theorists as being part of a 'Transactional School of Children's Literature Criticism' (2000a, p. 268), insofar as they draw on a number of aspects of reader response theory to illuminate their study of adolescent and children's literature. According to Trites, members of this school include Peter Hollindale (2003),

Lissa Paul (1998), Peter Hunt (2005), Jill May (1995), Maria Nikolajeva (1995), Perry Nodelman (1996) and John Stephens (1992). Trites argues that these writers 'acknowledge the importance of the child's multiple interpretations as a component of the fluid complexity involved in reading children's texts' (2000a, p. 268). Below I will discuss two Australian examples of this school, John Stephens and Robyn McCallum and evaluate their work in the context of this study.

John Stephens' *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction* makes the initial claim that 'children's fiction belongs firmly within the domain of cultural practices which exist for the purpose of socializing their target audience' (1992, p. 8). The socializing purpose of these texts is evident mainly through the way they propagate ideology. Central to this propagation is the construction of subject positions from which children and adolescents are compelled to read. These subject positions are formed largely through the manner in which texts are focalized, with children being 'encouraged to situate themselves inside the text by identifying with a principal character and its construction and experience of the world' (1992, p. 4). The effect of this focalization is accentuated through the use of linguistic devices such as proximal deictics and emotive inquit tags that narrow the gap between narrator and narratee and allow for a more intense conveyance of attitude (Stephens 1992, pp. 27-29). Stephens' work differs from some theorists previously discussed in this chapter both through its exploration of how discourses in children's fiction are constructed, as well as through its heightened awareness of the active role the reader plays in the construction of meaning. According to Stephens, young readers use a combination of macro-discoursal ('top-down') and micro-discoursal ('bottom-up') reading processes to construct meaning from texts. 'Top-down' reading 'draws on higher order knowledge to help make a text intelligible and so has recourse to world knowledge and prior knowledge of content areas, of genres, of narrative codes, and of conventions that make discourse coherent, such as conversational principles' (1992, p. 29). 'Bottom-up' reading on the

other hand 'begins with words in small stretches of language, that is with lexis, semantics and syntax, and works upwards from there to "meaning"' (Stephens 1992, p. 29). Like the work of Bakhtin (1984) and Hall (1980), Stephens' analysis reveals language and the way it is utilized as essential in both the construction and *reception* of ideology.

This is an approach shared by Robyn McCallum in *Ideologies of Identity in Young Adult Fiction* (1999). In her analysis of YA fiction, McCallum draws not on Iser's conception of the implied reader (see Iser 1974), but rather on Bakhtin's (1984). McCallum argues that Iser's implied reader itself suggests that 'readers occupy passive and disempowered positions' (1999, p. 16). Bakhtin, on the other hand, 'envisages a much broader range of narrative techniques, reading positions and interpretative strategies than that of Iser' (1999, p. 16). Like Stephens, McCallum considers the active role readers potentially play in the construction of meaning and identity through their engagement with fiction. Using this Bakhtinian model of the implied reader, McCallum argues that many YA texts and their readership engage in a dialogic construction of identity with their implied reader; that reading is part of a two-way interaction of young people with their culture through which they construct their identity.

While this dialogic construction of identity is considered from the position of the text, McCallum's study recognizes an important gap between implied and actual readers. 'Implied reading positions', McCallum argues, 'may influence the positions that actual readers adopt in relation to a text and the kind of meanings that readers infer, but they do not determine either of these aspects' (1999, pp. 8-9). It is in this gap implied by the 'may' proposed by McCallum that this thesis is intending to situate itself. To what extent *may* the implied reading position of a text influence the position 'actual readers adopt'? McCallum suggests that these ways may vary. She argues that this Bakhtinian approach allows for the recognition of 'a reader who refuses the subject position of a text, but who in choosing to read against a text arrives at equally valid

readings, and texts which construct multiple reading positions and thereby deny readers a stable interpretative position' (1999, p. 16). Indeed, by examining the dialogical nature of the relationship between reader and text, both McCallum and Stephens suggest the ways in which the relationship between young people and ideology are also part of a broader negotiation implicating readers, texts, ideologies and institutions. It is, however, the argument of this thesis that the position actual readers adopt is most definitely 'transactional' or 'negotiated', but that such agency operates in ways that are not as neat as the terms transaction and negotiation connote. Adolescent negotiations with the ideologies at the site of reading prove instead to be messy, inconsistent, contradictory and ambivalent.

Ethnography and Children's and YA Fictional Studies

A number of the theorists discussed in this section (Stephens 1992; Trites 2000) *have* recognized the significant gap between the dynamics at play within text and the fashion in which readers engage with and make use of those dynamics. One of the most remarkable features of the work of textual scholars in the field of children's and YA literary criticism is their recognition of the need for student-based studies in their area. The final chapter of *Disturbing the Universe* (2000) is, for instance, typical of this tendency. In it, Trites lauds student-centred pedagogy and criticism that 'recognize[s] the primacy of understanding the relationship between the adolescent reader and the text' (2000, p. 147). In the 1990s some writers *did* recognize this relationship by integrating ethnographic components into their work.

In *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction* (1992), Stephens cites ethnographic research (conducted by himself and Susan Taylor) to augment his textual analysis. This research is outlined briefly in *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction* but explored more thoroughly in the paper, 'No Innocent Texts: The Representation of Marriage in Two Picture-book Versions of the Seal Wife Legend'

(1992). In this study, Stephens and Taylor deal with two picture-book retellings of an old story that they summarize as follows:

> *…a man steals and hides the skin of a seal-woman, or selkie, thereby gaining power over her and compelling her to become his wife. She bears him children, but after several years one of these children discovers where the man has hidden the skin, and reveals this to the selkie, who takes it an immediately returns to the sea* (Stephens & Taylor 1992, p. 99)

This study asked the question: 'What ideological position will be reflected in a retelling of this story, for young audiences, in the 1980s, when cultural attitudes have generally shifted a long way from the attitudes inscribed in earlier folk and literary versions of the legend?' (1992, p. 100). This question was approached in two ways. Firstly, 'the texts were analyzed to determine the ideological positions which they implied or sought to inculcate and the crucial components of the narrative within which these positions became evident.' Secondly, 'the books were read to 174 children at three Sydney schools to gauge their reactions to the values and attitudes expressed in the text' (Stephens & Taylor 1992, p. 100). This second component itself involved two processes: the reading groups were structured to allow for students to 'express their spontaneous thoughts and reactions' (Stephens & Taylor 1992, p. 100) and; 'The children were finally invited to offer some written responses and asked to 'rewrite the story' they had heard from the point at which the relevant child discovered the hiding-place of the sealskin' (Stephens 1992, p. 100). The students were from 11-17 years of age and came from a range of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

Among other things, Stephens and Taylor determined from the two versions of the story that 'the texts are essentially about a marriage doomed because of the irreconcilably conflicting desires of the male and female protagonists (1992, p. 101). Subsequently, 'the remarks of the participating children were analyzed to determine whether particular responses were linked to gender' (Stephens & Taylor 1992, p. 101). The rewritings especially 'revealed a striking divergence between male and female participants' (Stephens & Taylor 1992, p. 116). Female participants tended to favour an

ending which 'strengthened the motif of mother-child bonding', whereas a number of male participants imagined a 'startingly [sic] violent' conclusion (Stephens & Taylor 1992, p. 116). This study indicates, above all else, the significance of gender in influencing response to fiction, as well as the importance of assessing both written as well as verbal responses to fiction.

A second study from this era that incorporates an ethnographic element is Roderick McGillis' *The Nimble Reader* (1996). This work provides an overview of a number of dominant critical approaches to Children's literature and in doing so examines both reader response and reception theory. McGillis's chapter on these theories seems unique in that it focuses on the actual responses both of his University students, rather than the implied or assumed reader (McGillis 1996, p. 191). These responses take the form of 'response papers' and are used to characterize how readers may respond to texts as well as to demonstrate a number of aspects of reader response theory. The most prominent areas explored by McGillis are those of reading as 'bibliotherapy' and, most importantly for this thesis, how reading is conducted in and framed by institutions (McGillis 1996, p. 189). Importantly, McGillis's claims about student reading are not made *a priori,* but rather as part of an examination of what both he and his students have written.

Admittedly, McGillis only refers to a handful of student responses and his method is unsystematic due largely to the purpose of the book being to provide an overview of a range of approaches to children's texts, rather than constituting a comprehensive ethnographical study. In addition, McGillis asked students to respond to texts where they were not the implied or the assumed reader, but instead were reading as part of a university course. While this approach may seem problematic, it serves to highlight the institutional contexts in which people read texts and also the ways they *re-read* texts. Most students whose responses were showcased by McGillis had read the books to which they were asked to respond as children. Unsurprisingly, the way these

students interacted with these texts, which included *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *Charlotte's Web* and *Alice in Wonderland*, had changed dramatically, with their response being framed not only by their institutional context, but by their psychological makeup, their experiences, their knowledge and, perhaps most interestingly, how they remembered reading the text as children (McGillis 1996, p. 189). This aspect of McGillis's study indicates the importance of both the reader's institutional context and their reading history to how they respond to texts. Similarly, this thesis will examine the way adolescents read in an institutional setting, but in a way that is a little more comprehensive and systematic. I will address how adolescent readers respond to texts they read of their own accord, as well as texts they read as part of an institution. I will investigate how the ways adolescents engage with 'popular texts' and compare this with how they engage with required school texts and are framed by the ideologies and approach of their teacher and curriculum.

Most importantly, the works of both Stephens and Taylor (1992) and McGillis (1996) demonstrate that studies of YA and children's fiction can benefit from a consideration of the actual reader to supplement its predominantly text-based analysis. Such an approach allows for an examination of the extent to which both the ideology and strategies employed by the text resonate with the experiences of real adolescent readers. It is this approach that this study builds upon and seeks to make more comprehensive and systematic. Therefore, this study is part of an interdisciplinary approach Stephens calls for when he states: 'We might thus seek to promote investigations that bring together text-based approaches, media studies, ethnography, classroom practice, studies in the social construction of the reading subject, and studies in the production of ideology' (1996, p. 165). Stephens is not alone in calling for this approach. More recently a collection of essays predominantly by Irish academics was published which examined ideology and children's fiction (Keyes & McGillicuddy 2014). This collection did, like the work of many other theorists in the field of

children's and YA literary studies, investigate the range of ideologies promulgated by children's texts, including a focus on gender (Keyes 2014; Rana 2014). In her review of this volume, Angela Hubler (2016) commended Marion Rana's closing essay about sexualized violence in texts such as *Twilight* and *The Vampire Diaries*, but in doing so, stated:

> *The editors of this collection begin by observing that children's literature is commonly thought to be even more ideological in character than literature for adults. Given the persuasive argument of this last essay—about fiction commonly read both by children and by adults, and reflecting ideologies that are uncritically embraced—one wonders if that is actually so* (2016, p. 266).

Here Hubler recognises the gap that exists between textual ideologies and the actual readers of the text. Indeed, it is the intention of this thesis to address the question as to whether or not the ideologies described by writers such as Rana (2014) are in fact 'uncritically embraced'.

This recent recognition of the gap between text and reader has helped to facilitate the seemingly ubiquitous application of theories of cognitive narratology and 'theories of mind' to children's and YA literature. David Herman defines cognitive narratology as 'the study of mind-relevant aspects of storytelling practices, wherever—and by whatever means—those practices occur' (2009, p. 30). This field of literary analysis involves 'the design and interpretation of narratives…the processes by means of which interpreters make sense of the narrative worlds (or 'storyworlds') evoked by narrative representations or artifacts, and the cognitive states and dispositions of characters in those storyworlds' (Herman 2009, p. 30). Some of the most prominent theorists in the field, such as Zipes (2006), Stephens (2015; 2011), Trites (2014; 2012), Coats (2013) and Nikolajeva (2014), have subsequently published work in this area. This tendency may constitute a move away from ideological analysis; it is, after all, a significant admission for Jack Zipes to argue:

> *To my mind it is not sufficient now to argue as I have done in the past that the classical tales have been consciously and subconsciously reproduced largely in print by a cultural industry that favors patriarchal and reactionary notions of*

gender, ethnicity, behavior, and social class (2006, p. 2).

What this current focus seems to represent, however, is the need to supplement textual approaches to ideology in text with these more empirical methods of analyzing text and reading. Crucially, Trites argues: 'The study of children's and adolescent literature shares with cognitive narratology a focus on the intersection between physical embodiment and cultural construction' (2012, p. 64). This statement is significant in two ways. Firstly, it equates the study of children's and adolescent literature itself with an analysis of 'cultural construction'. It also envisions the application of recent cognitive theories as complimentary to a text-based analysis. It is in precisely this way that this thesis will at times draw on some of this recent work in cognitive narratology, particularly on the use of schemata and scripts in YA fiction: not as a replacement for ideological analysis, but rather as a tool to enable a furthered understanding of the way in which young people engage with their reading. Moreover, I would argue that approaches which use cognitive narratology benefit from the insights of more ethnographic components.

Indeed, there has been of late an attempt to reconcile the approaches of ethnography and cognitive narratology in children's and YA fiction. Margaret Mackey's *Narrative Pleasures in Young Adult Novels, Films and Video Games* (2011) presents the experiences of twelve young people as they read a novel, watch a film and play a video game from beginning to end. Mackey interprets the responses of her participants in light of both reader response theory and cognitive narratology, examining the way 'the mind experiences its own reworking of the narrative data on offer in the text itself' (2011, p. 228). Some of the concepts featured in this type of analyses will be drawn on in this thesis, as the ways in which students employ cognitive processes and build upon existing schemata certainly possesses implications when examining ideology and fiction.

While Mackey's study looks at the way her respondents (and even Mackey herself) 'perform the text' (2011, p. 231), her work tends to focus almost purely on internal cognitive processes. What this type of work does potentially is abstract these processes from the social worlds of cultural participants. What this thesis purports to do in this context is twofold: on one level it seeks insight into some of the ways students make sense of what they read, but it also looks to interpret these processes in light of the ways reading is linked to the broader social and cultural connections that are a part of the lives of the respondents. Moreover, this study will examine the ideological implications of these links between books, their readers and their culture and society. This thesis will build upon the work of those researchers in the field of children's and young adult literature who have given expression to the many ways in which ideology is present in text and in so doing look to bridge further that often articulated gap between the ideology in text and the ways in which readers engage with that ideology.

Methodology: Ethnographies of Reading

Mackey's (2011) use of a qualitative ethnographic method represents an attempt to reconcile some of the theoretical approaches in children's and YA literary studies with the way young people engage with cultural forms. Similarly, other children's and YA scholars have conducted ethnographical studies in recent times. Fiona Maine and Alison Waller (2011), for example, tested some of the elements of reader-response theory against the written and spoken responses of child and adult readers and Coats and Trites (2013) interviewed teachers about how they engage with feminist frameworks in the classroom. Most recently, Mackey (2016) utilized auto-ethnography in an attempt to understand the highly complex processes and significances that are implicated in reading for children and adolescents. These works represent the realization of a remark by Jonathan Boyarin who, as far back as 1993, remarked that

ethnography had the potential to build 'needed bridges between cultural anthropology and literary studies' (1993, p. 2). As mentioned previously, it is one of the primary intentions of my thesis to augment—and where relevant, challenge—some of the observations made about fiction and ideology in children's and YA literary studies with qualitative ethnography. Subsequently, it is the purpose of this section of the literature review to survey a number of the ways that reading, both of adults as well as children and adolescents, has been investigated using qualitative ethnographic studies and in so doing outline some of the methodological approaches of my own work.

Ethnographic Studies of Adult Reading

Ethnographic studies of adult reading have tended to challenge the notion that reading is a solitary, cognitive practice. This conception of reading as solitary was partly a consequence of reader response theories that emphasized the private, mental processes that were assumed to take place during reading (see Iser 1974; Jauss 1982). In fact Elizabeth Long argues that the idea of the solitary reader begins far earlier: it is inscribed in early Christian art and in the late twentieth century was enshrined further in reader response theory (2003, p. 2). Conversely, according to a number of ethnographic studies that will be discussed in this section of the literature review, reading is a practice that is both explicitly and implicitly social. While not all of the studies deal with ideology in an overt manner, by recognizing that that the activity of reading is connected to broader social structures and power relations, these studies all implicitly deal with issues of ideology.

Perhaps the most prominent ethnography that examines some of the broader social implications of reading is Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* (1984). Radway's study is significant in relation to this thesis firstly because of its examination of the response of actual rather than ideal or implied readers; she surveyed 42 readers of romance fiction in the town of Smithton in the Midwest of the United States. *Reading*

the Romance also examines some of the ideological implications of romance fiction for these readers, particularly the patriarchal ideologies that are embedded in much of that genre. Radway is concerned initially with institutional dimensions of the popularity and of dissemination of romance fiction. Indeed, the multiple ways in which ways in which institutions of various kinds promote and frame ideology is a concern both of cultural theorists such as Althusser (1971) and Bourdieu (2010) and becomes a subsequent area of focus for a number of studies of reading and culture (Bennett et.al 2009; Fowler 1991; Long 2003). Radway concentrates this component of her analysis on the publishing industry in general, claiming: 'Publishers and the profit motive must be given their due in any effort to explain the popularity of the romance or to understand its significance as a historical or social phenomenon' (1984, p. 45).

Most importantly, Radway's work highlighted the 'complicated, polysemic' (1984, p. 209) ambivalent and ultimately paradoxical nature of the reading of romance fiction. On one hand the *act* of reading itself was for the Smithton women ideologically subversive: it represented time away from domestic duties and thus could be seen as a form of rebellion against the patriarchy. Radway argues: 'In effect [women readers] are insisting that they be permitted the same leisure, extravagance and opportunities for immediate gratification that they help their husbands and children to realize' (1984, p. 118). On the other hand, the informants in Radway's study also justified their reading by arguing that romance fiction was 'edifying' and 'a kind of productive labor' and thus, according to Radway, they affirm 'a traditional value system that enshrines hard work, performance of duty, and thrift (1984, p. 118). Moreover, the discourses of the novels themselves so often reinforced patriarchal ideology; not only do these texts 'create a simulacrum of the [reader's] limited social world within a more glamorous fiction' (1984, p. 214), but the genre 'continues to justify the social placement of women that has led to the very discontent that is the source of their desire to read romances' (1984, p. 217).

This tension between the ideological consequences of romance reading as an *act* and the ideological discourses imbedded in romance fiction texts is one of the key significances of Radway's study. This distinction is also shared by Bridget Fowler's *The Alienated Reader* (1991), a study of the reading habits of working class women in the west of Scotland. Similar to Radway, the informants in Fowler's study were implicated in the patriarchal tropes of romance fiction, while also reading romance fiction as a means to escape unfulfilling domestic and social conditions. Importantly, Fowler's study draws upon Bourdieu's work, in particular his argument that culture is a way of reinforcing class-relations. Moreover, Fowler conceives of reading as a domain that is part of an ideological 'battle for hearts and minds' (1991, p. 173) and finds a correlation in her study between taste and ideological impact, 'between women's political or social worldview and their usual choice of literature' (1991, p. 173). '[F]ormulaic fiction', argues Fowler, 'partly locks these women into collusion with dominant ideas—economic, patriarchal, racist—or, less strongly, it increases their lack of systematized resistance to them' (1991, p. 173). Indeed, one of the purposes of this thesis is to examine the ideological implications of adolescent taste.

A particular focus of reading research for some ethnographers has been the phenomenon of books clubs. It is when considering reading in light of a deliberately contrived social context that researchers have been able to further examine the implications of reading as a social act. This notion of reading as a social act was primarily the focus of the work of Elizabeth Long (2003). In *Book Clubs: Women and the Uses of Reading in Everyday Life*, Long takes aim at what she terms 'the ideology of the solitary reader' (2003, p. 11); this ideology 'suppresses recognition of the infrastructure of literacy and the social determinants of what is available to read, what is '"worth reading" and how to read it' (Long 2003, p. 11). She argues instead that 'literacy and the practices of reading can never be divorced from questions of power, privilege, exclusion, and social distinction' (2003, p. 16). Like Radway, she also

considers the institutional dimensions of reading, claiming that the act 'lies in the shadow of the institutional order' (Long 2003, p. 16) and like both Radway and Fowler, Long draws on Bourdieu's idea that culture is deeply implicated in the 'reproduction of social inequality' (2003, p. 22). Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Long's ethnography was, however, the ways in which her informants – white, educated, middle-class, female book club members – used the discussion of fiction as a way of making meaning of and to converse about their own lives (2003, p. 145). Thus for these informants, *talking* about reading is a vehicle for the exploration and public performance of identity.

Similarly to Long, a study conducted by Adam Reed (2002) in which he interviewed members of the 'Henry Williamson literary society' in England also explored the relationship between reading and identity. Reed stated that a study of male reading was necessary because, at that point in time: 'Discussions of the links between gender and reading tend[ed] to be concerned with the experience and situation of women readers' (2002, p. 182). Accordingly, Reed's work focuses on gendered aspects of reading, professing to 'concentrate on [his informants'] accounts of what happens to them *as men* during the time of solitary reading' (2002, p. 181, original emphasis). Like Radway's and Fowler's readers, Reed's informants also used reading as a means of escape, demonstrating that this function of reading is certainly not specific to women or readers of romance fiction. The nature of this escape is, however, quite different. Reed argues that: 'While Radway's women readers start from a position of disempowerment, too little agency in a patriarchal home, and use reading to recover a space and time for themselves', the members of the Henry Williamson literary society 'claim to suffer from too much agency, the constraints on men to act and assert themselves, and therefore seek relief in reading' (2002, p. 187). This 'relief' comes in the form of readers occupying the dominant subject position offered to them by what they read. The escape provided by reading becomes problematic for Reed's readers, however, when

they are 'forced to deal with the flaws in the author's character, in particular, the question of his [sic] politics' (2002, p. 197). In a way resonant with Long's informants, these dilemmas compel readers to deal with questions of self and identity. According to Reed: 'Faced with such questions, members feel the pressure to reassert their public position as men who act and think for themselves' (2002, p. 197). Thus reading becomes an act linked to dominant masculine ideologies. While he tends to emphasize the importance of reading as a solitary act in his study, arguing for the need for an 'ethnography of the solitary reader' (2003, p. 183), Reed's work ultimately relates the responses of his informants to broader gender ideology and suggests: 'Ethnography can demonstrate that fiction reading is a culturally embedded practice' (2002, p. 198).

The extraordinary cultural and social implications of reading are explored more comprehensively in an Australian ethnographic study, Ian Collinson's *Everyday Readers* (2009). In this work, Collinson conducted semi-structured interviews with 21 adult readers of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* in order to examine, 'what "ordinary" readers actually do with their books…the reading of fiction as it occurs, almost unnoticed in living and bedrooms, in parks, on the beach and on public transport; a popular reading culture distinct from that of scholars and print professionals' (2003, p. 6). Like ethnographers before him, for Collinson reading is a fundamentally social act, one which is framed by and takes place within what he terms 'three interdependent socio-cultural economies: economies of time and space; of the social; and of the text' (2009, p. 8). Collinson builds on Radway's conception of reading as a 'spatially constituted act' (Collinson 2009, p. 39), while also examining reading within the commodified temporal space of the modern world (2009, p. 37). Collinson's social economy of reading takes the form of his informants revealing sharing books and giving books as gifts to be an act which reinforces bonds between friends, providing a social 'index of intimacy' (2009, p. 57). In also examining the 'repertoires' or 'interpretative resources' (2009, p. 89) his readers used to make sense of what they read, Collinson is not only

examining reading as a social act, but is also demonstrating how the solitary act of reading and meaning-making is linked to broader cultural discourses. Thus, while Collinson's work does not address ideology in an explicit manner, by examining the ways in which everyday practices of reading are linked to society, I would suggest that he implies that both the solitary and social components of reading are ideological.

This relationship between reading (and other forms of cultural consumption) and broader cultural and ideological frameworks is investigated most ambitiously and comprehensively by a prolific study conducted by a team of researchers headed by Tony Bennett entitled *Culture, Class, Distinction* (2009). This study compared Bourdieu's findings on cultural taste in France in the 1960s (see Bourdieu 2010) with cultural tastes in Great Britain in the early 2000s and complements the previous ethnographic work of Bennett and John Frow (1999) on cultural taste. Rather than simply providing a quantitative ethnography, Bennett et.al utilize a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, surveying what they call a 'cloud of individuals' (2009, p. 44). The study firstly conducted a written survey of cultural tastes and subjected the findings to 'multiple correspondence analysis' which 'involves patient attention to, and careful construction of, that which is to be explained – the distribution of cultural practices in the population' (2009, p. 45). This involved 'mapping the distribution of cultural preferences in their study. They then cross-referenced their quantitative findings with qualitative interviews to ensure a 'rich dialogue between quantitative and qualitative data' (2009, p. 44).

While the findings of the study are varied, they confirm in part the ideological relationship Bourdieu (2010) posited between taste and social class. They suggest, '…class matters. Whatever social advantage might arise from heavy engagement in cultural activities will accrue to those who are highly educated, who occupy higher occupational class positions, and who have backgrounds within higher social classes' (Bennett et.al 2009, p. 52). Bennett et.al also examine the way taste relates to other

social modalities in modern Britain, emphasizing that, despite the importance of class, 'other socio-demographic factors are primarily responsible for affecting cultural consumption' (Bennett et.al 2009, p. 53). Age and gender in particular are cited as most important in determining cultural preferences (Bennett et.al 2009, p. 53). In addition, Bennett et.al note the ideological importance of the rise of 'cultural omnivorousness' among the middle class in Great Britain: the notion that cultural eclecticism is an important marker of status (2009, p. 57).

On reading specifically, Bennett et.al reiterate the importance of class in influencing taste, with 'modern literature' being read predominantly by educated elites (2009, p. 111). They argue also that 'cultural omnivorousness' has resulted in 'an altered hierarchy of literary value' in which 'engagement with "the literary" in its canonical or modern incarnations may be one element of an omnivorous portfolio for the professional middle classes' (Bennett et.al 2009, p. 111). Just as some of the studies previously discussed in this literature review argue that reading is a gendered activity, so too are reading tastes influenced by gender. Bennett et.al claim that: 'Different reading preferences contribute to the generation of different forms of capital'. These different forms, such as 'emotional' and 'technical' capital 'appear differently accessible to women and men, and might also have different value when converted to other forms of capital' (2009, p. 111). They also found that in general the reading of newspapers and magazines were far more important to readers' expression of identity than was any other form of reading (Bennett et.al 2009, p. 106). They consider their 'most significant finding' in relation to reading was that it was an act constantly being mediated by film and television and vice versa; not only was reading (particularly of biographies and autobiographies) '"mediating" other fields of cultural production, be it sport, film or television' (Bennett et.al 2009, p. 100), but 'film and television adaptations [were important] to opening up the knowledge of the literary, and of newspapers and magazine cultures too' (2009, p. 111).

The notion that book reading can be a means of mediating between various cultural fields and the assertion that technical reading is the preserve predominantly of males are explored at certain points throughout my study. The primary significance of the work of Bennett et.al (2009) for my own work is, however, that it represents a contemporary ethnographic assessment of Bourdieu's ideas, ideas that are at the heart of the claim that reading and culture in general is an activity that relates to the power structures of society in general and in which ideology is unavoidably implicated. While ideology has often been a more implicit feature of some of the studies discussed above, it has been present in the way reading has been conceived of as part of broader cultural and social frameworks. This focus on ideology has not, however, always been as pronounced an aspect of research in children's an adolescent reading, which will be discussed in further detail below.

Ethnographic Studies of Children's and Adolescent Reading

While there is a significant tradition of ethnographic studies of adult reading, such research on the reading of children and adolescents has proved considerably more prolific. The number of studies in this field can partly be explained by the perception of children's and adolescent reading as being bound up in debates and anxieties about education; reading is not just considered something children and adolescents *do*, it is something important to their formation as people and citizens. As Kamil et.al have pointed out, the nature of this research has often been driven and shaped by government funding priorities (2011, p. xvi). Consequently, in recent times more empirical, quantitative studies of functional literacy have been favoured over qualitative ethnography in the United States in particular (Kamil et.al 2011, p. xv; for an example, see Hall & Coles 1999). Nevertheless there is an important tradition of qualitative ethnographic studies of children's and adolescent reading. As in other areas of cultural inquiry, questions of ideology have been at times considered of great importance in this

field; at other times ideology has seemed unfashionable and irrelevant. As this discussion will show, ideology has again become a concern for ethnographic researchers of children's and adolescent reading more recently.

Almost thirty years ago Elizabeth Frazer (1987) conducted a study that ostensibly bears considerable significance for my own. In 'Teenage Girls reading Jackie', Frazer conducted group discussions with seven groups of teenage girls in and around London about their reading of the magazine *Jackie*. The purpose of this study was to 'underpin an argument about the use of the concept of "ideology" in social theory and research' (Frazer 1987, p. 407) and was partly a response to cultural analysis that had 'paid attention to texts which are said to be bearers of the ideology of feminine sexuality' and in the course of their analysis had 'commit[ed] the fallacy of reading "the" meaning of a text and inferring the ideological effect the text "must" have on the readers' (Frazer 1987, p. 411). This purpose is similar to my own approach that argues textual analysis can be successfully and rewardingly enhanced by ethnographic work. Similar to my work is also Frazer's implicit evaluation of the extent of teenage readers' agency in the face of ideology. She suggests that young readers exercise considerable agency in their negotiations with the meanings offered by the texts they read; they are 'freer of the text than much theory implies' (1987, p. 417).

It is, however, the fashion in which Frazer conceives of ideology that is problematic. She uses her findings primarily to dispute the validity of the concept of ideology itself, arguing that 'the kinds of meanings which are encoded in text and which we might want to call ideological, fail to get a grip on readers in the way ideology generally suggests' (1987, p. 419). Frazer instead suggests 'an alternative formulation to the concept of ideology' (1987, p. 419), a 'discourse register', which she 'take[s] roughly as an institutionalized, culturally familiar, public, way of talking' (1987, p. 420). There are a number of problems with Frazer's approach to this issue. Firstly, her argument infers that ideology *is* ideology only if it is utterly irresistible. Just because

her readers resist the subject position they are being offered by a text does not mean that ideology is not operating in this scenario; the conceptual and linguistic frameworks being used to critique *Jackie* are, in themselves, potentially ideological. While Eagleton points out in defining ideology that 'any word which covers everything loses its cutting edge and dwindles to an empty sound' (1991, p. 7), Frazer's main problem is that she has defined ideology in far too limited a way. As outlined previously in this literature review, most pertinent definitions of ideology from Lukacs onward consider the implicit, indirect manner of ideology—the way it naturalizes and universalizes beliefs through repetition, making culturally constructed assumptions seem like 'common sense'. By entirely ignoring this aspect of ideology, any claims Frazer makes about the impact (or not) of ideology on her readers are likely to be similarly constrained.

While many of Frazer's conclusions are contentious, her work implies the difficulties inherent in pinning down the 'ethereal' (Frazer 1987, p. 423) nature of ideology. Attempting to gauge both the presence of overt ideology in the responses of students, as well as the implicit ideological dimensions of their engagement with text are some of the most significant challenges inherent in this thesis. It is perhaps because of the challenges posed by the notion of ideology that subsequent researchers to Frazer were wary of invoking the concept. The approach of analyzing the impact of ideology was criticized by Gemma Moss (1993), who took exception to Frazer's study on the grounds that it treated reading 'as primarily a mental phenomenon, something which happens in the interior space of the mind, rather than in the social space of everyday transactions' (1993, p. 120). Moss's ethnographical study examines how four girls in their early teens read romance fiction also views reading as primarily a social act and concludes that literature is used as part of the formation and expression of a gendered identity.

The most prominent aspect of Moss' methodology was her close focus on the 'reading history' of her informants. According to Moss, these reading histories

demonstrate that books 'are read through and against a social history of encounters with other texts at other times' (1993, p. 120) and that this understanding,

> *...allows us to differentiate between levels of engagement and to build that into analysis without prejudging the nature of the relationship with the text. It also enables us to focus on reading as a social activity—something which takes place at particular moments in time, in particular social settings, involving particular participants* (1993, p. 120).

Moss draws a number of conclusions that relate to this thesis. These include the observation that home environment and parental attitudes were important in shaping the respondents' attitude to books. Such attitudes helped to form a hierarchy of textual value: in the minds of the parents, for instance, reading is privileged over television, but only certain types of reading; romance books are not seen by some of the parents as being as worthwhile as 'adult books' (Moss 1993, p. 125). Perhaps unsurprisingly, some of Moss' other conclusions emphasize the diverse nature of the responses of her informants, as each student's engagement with their reading was shaped by different reading histories. Not only does this focus on parental attitudes and reading histories allow for an understanding of how institutions such as the family frame reading, but also seeks to discern some of the ways in which students contextualize their reading. After all, if we accept that repetition is a condition under which ideology is proffered, if ideology is about creating a 'climate of belief' (Hunt 2003, p. 37), then 'reading histories' would seem important.

Another ethnographic study that focuses on reading as a social and cultural act is that of Meredith Cherland (1994). This study of the reading practices of pre-teen girls in a school in Canada used interviews, letters students had written to Cherland about their reading as well as recorded 'response groups' where students spoke to each other about what they read. These response groups—which included boys as well as girls—in particular allowed Cherland to examine reading as part of a cultural *performance* to an even greater extent than Moss' study (1993). The title of Cherland's work, *Private Practices* is ironic in that it argues that: 'Private reading practices are *publicly*

constructed' (1994, p. 212; original emphasis). This public construction explored by Cherland seemed largely to be one of gender. She observed that, 'the Oak Town girls, on the one hand, and the Oak Town boys on the other approached literature in quite distinct, gendered ways' (Cherland 1994, p. 155). The girls, it seemed, 'were receiving, through literature, an education in human feeling that the boys were not' (Cherland 1994, p. 155). In addition, 'girls were becoming more fluent readers as a result of constant reading practice and 'were not only learning the value of belonging to a community of readers; they were also experiencing the joys of a shared literary experience' (Cherland 1994, p. 155). Such observations demonstrate the usefulness of a multi-faceted approach that examines the many ways in which young people express themselves; it is not only useful to examine how students talk about their reading, but also to investigate how the students talk with each other.

While the methodology employed by this thesis is similar to that of Cherland, there are a number of important differences between the two studies. The first and most obvious is that Cherland examines the reading of pre-pubescent students, whereas this thesis will focus on adolescent reading. The second is that Cherland's study concentrates almost solely on gender. This focus is made very clear when she describes her study as follows: 'This is a book about gender and reading. It is about gender as a cultural construction, and about the reading of fiction as it happens within cultures. It is about the social negotiation of gender, and about the reading of fiction as a social practice' (Cherland 1994, p. 2). While Cherland asserts: 'The process of constructing a "subjectivity" is not a neat and straightforward one…And certainly, this process…is also influenced by that person's gender, race and social class' (1994, p. 158), these areas of race and social class are not explored throughout her study. This is apparently due to the nature of the community at the centre of the study: 'The influences of race and class are harder to see at work in homogenous groups such as that group found at Oak Town, but they surely are there…They were, in a sense, members of the North

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American culture, familiar to so many' (1994, p. 192). While this limitation is not shared with my study, which is conducted in a girl's school with a broad, diverse socio-economic demographic, there are other factors that make a comprehensive consideration of social class problematic. These factors are discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

Similarly to Moss (1993) and Cherland (1994), Margaret Finders' (1996) examination of younger adolescent girls' engagement with 'teen zines' also looked primarily at the social dimensions of reading. After conducting a year-long observation of four young secondary school students and their reading discussions, Finders found that teen magazines possessed three main functions. Not only did reading them constitute a 'rite of passage' (Finders 1996, p. 74) for young girls, but it was essential to their 'sense of shared identity' (Finders 1996, p. 73). Like the adult ethnographies of Radway (1984), Fowler (1991) and Reed (2002), as well as ethnographies of literacy practices in general (see Barton and Hamilton 2012, p. 140), these texts once again provided a form of escape for informants. The studies by Moss (1993), Cherland (1994) and Finders (1996) suggest that an analysis of child or adolescent reading focused solely on ideological affect would divorce reading and readers from the cultural and historical context of which it and they are a part. It could be argued, however, that a study that deals *solely* with reading as a practice and performance creates a false dichotomy between reading as an individual mental pursuit and reading as an act with cultural and collective implications. While it is important not to disproportionately privilege texts in the processes of 'making meaning', studies which examine only the social practice of reading discount the essential role that the books themselves have in contributing to the act of reading. Moreover, both the reader engagement with text *and* the social and cultural practices of reading are potentially implicated in ideology. As theorists such as Williams (1981), Hall (2005), Geertz (1973) and Eagleton (1991) have demonstrated, the rituals of culture are signifying processes that are, by their nature, ideological. It would seem essential, therefore, to consider the roles of the text, the

individual *and* culture in the reading process; it is important to view these elements as simultaneous contributors to a complex, elusive and even fluid part of everyday life. As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, ethnographies of girls' and adolescent reading may benefit from the insights gleaned from critical studies of YA and children's texts as much as these critical studies could benefit from considering how young people interact with texts.

A study that considers further the way individual children interact with texts as well as their social and cultural context was conducted by Mary Elizabeth Riordan-Karlsson (1997). This qualitative ethnographic study examined how eight primary-school aged children constructed textual meaning within an educational setting. Riordan-Karlsson found that the textual meaning constructed by the children was influenced heavily by peer interactions; the way students perceived each other's tastes, attitudes and aptitudes affected a student's willingness to participate in what Riordan-Karlsson called a 'literacy event' at school (1997, p. 164). Importantly, Riordan drew on the work of Bakhtin, Volosinov and Vygotsky in classifying these interactions as *negotiations*. Riordan-Karlsson did not, however, consider the construction of meaning outside of this institutional context. More significantly, in examining the relationship between reader, text and society, she did not consider the role ideology might play in the shaping of textual meaning or the construction of the 'self' students in her study presented to peers. This omission is in keeping with some of the studies mentioned above which conceive of reading as a 'cultural event' or 'performance' and in so doing efface the part ideology plays in framing textual meaning and social interactions. As I have already pointed out, such effacement itself would appear ideological.

The role of ideology in the social dimension of reading was, however, considered by Anne Reeves (2004). Reeves undertook a qualitative ethnographical study focusing primarily on six adolescents from a comprehensive secondary school in the mid-western United States. The study examined the adolescents' relationship with

reading, asking: 'Why do so many adolescents resist reading? Why do some books engage teenage readers but not others? What can teachers learn from listening to students talk about their reading?'(2004, p. 11). The work explores the conditions under which students engage with and use what they read and conversely, the conditions under which they resist reading. The answers provided to these questions supplied by both the students and researcher tended to have an educational focus. Reeves stressed the importance of the way reading is taught, emphasizing the significance of texts chosen by teachers and schools for study (2004, p. 258), as well as the importance of reading instruction in secondary schools (2004, p. 259). This aspect of Reeves' study differs from my work. While Reeves draws on reader response theory throughout her study, the majority of her observations seem to be couched in terms of what is done and what should be done, in schools. While I am a trained and active teacher – the teacher of the informants of this study – the primary purpose of this thesis is not educational. As was intimated in the above paragraph, approaching an ethnographical study with an overtly pedagogical agenda can be limiting and risks determining too greatly the findings of the study. The assumption seems built into Reeves' study that there is some sort of disconnection between students and their schooling, that schools are doing something wrong in how they approach issues of literacy and reading and this assumption frames not only the questions she asks, but also the findings she presents. That Reeves examines, however, the role the institution of the school—and the role of individual teachers within that institution—*is* significant to my work. Indeed, this thesis will investigate the fashion in which both students and teachers negotiate with the ideologies presented by educational institutions.

Along with avoiding an overtly educational focus, this study shall adopt a significantly different methodology to Reeves' work. Reeves presents her findings in the form of 'a series of fine-grained portraits that reveal, within their cultural settings, the intellectual, social and psychological uses to which these young people put reading'

(2004, p. 24). Each of these 'portraits' provides an extensive outline of the interests, aptitudes and reading history of each adolescent. This is extremely useful, as it contextualizes the adolescent's reading experience, treating them as a complex, multifaceted social actor. The major problem with Reeves's approach, however, is in her *selection* of students to participate in the study. While she surveys and briefly details the interests and aptitudes of 25 students, she only chooses five to constitute her case studies. In deciding which five to include, Reeves 'looked for students who would be in some ways typical of the interviewees, but who in other ways were particularly well suited to the purposes of this study' (2004, p. 31). This suitability was in part due to their race and gender, as well as their 'willing[ness] to make the journey into their own experiences and desires and talk about what they found there' (2004, p. 31). While this willingness to talk openly is obviously of great assistance to an ethnographer and a qualitative study such as Reeves's needs to limit its scope in order to provide 'fine-grained portraits', such a selection of students still seems problematic. In only including responses 'typical of the interviewees', Reeves undermines the very purpose of providing such detailed case-studies. If she is looking to showcase the unique and context-specific concerns of individual adolescent readers, then the atypical response is as important as the typical. The study then risks becoming *a priori*; the theoretical and methodological approach becomes more likely to determine the results of the study, rather than the equally weighed responses of individuals.

It is worth noting that the tendency to anticipate and predetermine the results of an ethnographic study is not unique to Reeves (2004). Naidoo (1992) presents findings in much the same way. Naidoo conducted an ethnographical study in a predominantly white, middle-class English secondary school in South Africa that investigated the relationship between reading and adolescents' perceptions of race. This largely involved her observing English classes in the school at which she was not a teacher. While Naidoo made a number of important observations, her findings were limited

predominantly because of the assumptions it made and, perhaps more importantly, by an *a priori* approach to social research. Naidoo's study relied, firstly, on the assumption that she would be working with a particular type of teacher, but was disappointed as,

> *…his personal teaching style...remained largely didactic and authority centred. It appeared that he was generally accustomed to conducting discussions in an adversarial question-and-answer mode in which the teacher - quite often subconsciously - sets up the perceptual frame of reference through which students are encouraged to view the text* (1992, p. 30).

Naidoo found herself 'fundamentally alienated from his way of relating to students' (1992, p. 30) and this seemed to affect her research. Consequently, her findings consist mostly of a list of remediation measures to challenge racism in the classroom. While these suggestions appear sound, there is no real link between these recommendations and the results of the ethnographical research conducted. The research seems almost an addendum to an already formulated social agenda (see Naidoo 1992, p. 141).

Similarly, an Australian study in the reading habits of teenagers conducted by Jack Thomson (1987) is constrained both by its predominantly pedagogical focus and by its *a priori* assumptions. Thomson's work was both quantitative and qualitative; it analyzed a written questionnaire administered to 1007 secondary school students living in Bathurst in rural NSW in the late 1970s and early 1980s (1987, p. 17) and interviews were held with five percent of those students. The primary problem Thomson intended to investigate was made evident in the opening lines of the study:

> *You don't have to be a research investigator of reading habits in our society to know that the reading of literature is not central to the lives of most people. Few people read at school or when they have left…only a minority read what school syllabuses have tried to make them value as good literature. Mills and Boon sell better than Patrick White and Martin Boyd…Who or what is to blame, then, for this failure of literary education?* (1987, p. 10).

Given the tenor of this declaration, it is unsurprising that Thomson's surveys found that 'teenagers spend a lot of time watching television and video' and that 'mental passivity is the characteristic feature of all the leisure pursuits of the majority' (1987, p. 17); whether or not it was coincidence, Thomson's 'narrative of decline' of teenage reading

and his Leavisite cultural assumptions (see Q. D. Leavis 1978) were neatly affirmed by his results. Thomson's interviews produced more profound findings, as they attempted to illuminate how informants' responded to what they read. Like Radway (1984), Thomson found many of his readers engaged in 'wish-fulfillment' – although he rather patronizingly described this use of fiction as ' unreflective' and 'a kind of daydreaming' (1987, p. 185). Other readers were engaged and empathetic (Thomson 1987, p. 183); like Collinson (2009), Thomson found that readers drew on a number of repertoires to make sense of their reading (1987, p. 208); like Moss (1993), he found that the response of some students is framed by their reading history (Thomson 1987, p. 212). That Thomson views these observations almost solely within a pedagogical framework— following them with a detailed outline of recommended teaching strategies—constrains the findings of the study as it does not allow for an analysis of the ways in which cultural actors engage with texts of their own choosing in social and cultural spheres other than that of the school setting. Again, such a study also runs the risk of finding illustrative instances to fit theoretical and ideological assumptions. My study, like that of Reeves (2004), Naidoo (1992) and Thomson (1987) possesses implications for educational practice, but these concerns will not constitute the dominant theoretical framework of this study.

Another limitation of Reeves's (2004) and Thomson's (1987) methodology is that it does not allow them to examine the ways in which adolescents talk about what they read *to each other*. While both studies shows how adolescents talk about their reading to an adult researcher, they do not demonstrate how they use reading socially and culturally among their peer group. To supplement her interviews, Reeves interviewed one of the parents and spoke informally to teachers about the progress and personality of the adolescents in her study, but this mainly aided her pedagogical recommendations, rather than providing a more expansive picture of student response.

Ultimately, the major area that is left largely unexplored in these ethnographical studies that follow Frazer (1987) is that of the impact of ideology in specific YA texts on child or adolescent readers. In many ways this absence is commensurate with a general move away from ideological analyses of culture around this time (see Sholle 1988). Reeves does not deal specifically with ideology; Cherland does provide some relatively brief observations on the type of texts read by the children in her study, focusing in particular on romance fiction and 'girl's series books' (1994, pp. 163-176). While Cherland examines the way these texts deal with female agency and how this affects the girl readers in Oak Town, this analysis, however, deals solely with gender and seems almost cursory, with the overwhelming focus still being on reading as an 'event' or performance.

More recently there has been a renewed tendency to analyze reading almost solely as a cognitive act. This is evident in some of the trends discussed above in the fields of children's and YA literature research, along with the work of researchers such as Mackey (2011). This approach was also evident in studies by Shaywitz et.al (2000), Goswami (2000) and Nagi and Scott (2000). Conducted within an educational—and at times medical—context (see Shaywitz et.al 2000), this research emphasized reading as a cognitive, neurological process, something that 'happened inside the black box we call the mind' (Kamil et.al 2011, p. xiii). A tradition of literacy research in education that has emphasized the social context of these activities and processes has operated alongside and in reaction to these cognitive approaches. This tradition has derived predominantly from two related schools of literary study: those of 'new literary studies' and 'classroom ethnography'. Not only has much of this work focused on the relationship between literacy and ideology, and much like the work of Bennett et.al (2009), it draws on the social and cultural theories of Bourdieu, along with other theorists such as Bakhtin and Vygotsky, to interpret ethnographic data.

Drawing on the work of Geertz (1973, p. 3), David Bloome defines classroom ethnography as a 'research practice for generating "thick descriptions"…of what is happening in a classroom with an emphasis on social and cultural processes' (2012, p. 7). It is a practice which 'seeks a holistic, cultural description of the multiple dimensions, aspects, domains, institutions, activities, practices and settings' (Bloome 2012, p. 9) of students in an educational context. Bloome further emphasizes the importance of research in this field viewing the classroom as 'embedded in 'social groups and structures' (2012, p. 10). In practice, this type of approach can take many forms, including interviews and classroom observation. The related field of 'New Literacy Studies' (NLS) was originally conceived as a response to approaches to literacy research that focused on what Brian Street calls 'the cognitive consequences of literacy acquisition' (2013, p. 1). Instead, researchers such as Street (1984) and Gee (1990) envisioned literacy not as one, unified skill, but rather as a field of multiple and varied practices and events. Many of the studies within the field of NLS have focused on the way in which the literacies of both young people and adults are influenced by and interact with contemporary multimedia technologies (Gee 2003; 2007; Hobbs 2007; Hagood 2008; Kress 2003; New London Group 1996). Moreover, theorists in this field seek to develop a 'model of literacy situated within the larger ideology of language' (Street 2013, p. 127).

Ingrid Johnston's *Re-mapping Literary Worlds* (2003) is an ethnographic study of reading and education that, like studies in the fields of classroom ethnography and NLS, examines reading in a cultural, institutional and ideological context. Much like some of the work of children's and YA literary scholars (Stephens & McCallum 2009; Bigger & Webb 2010), Johnston recognizes the potential of YA literature to encourage young people to consider important social issues. Rather than examining this potential from a text-based perspective, Johnston observed as five classes in a Canadian secondary school (Grades 10-12) were taught postcolonial fiction with 'teaching

strategies that might enable students to critically examine literary representations and ideologies' (2003, p. 12). Johnston's observation was augmented by student interviews and these were analysed to determine whether these texts and strategies had encouraged and enabled them to think about a range of issues central to postcolonialism; to 'consider the significance of their cultural and historical pasts in helping to shape their lives, and from there to look outwards and to see ambivalences in their own cultural heritages and intersections between their own lives and those of others' (Johnston 2003, p. 83). Johnston determined that these texts and teaching strategies worked well, with students from both migrant and mainstream backgrounds benefiting from the experience. Many students were, for example, compelled to 'challenge essentialist notions of racial identity' (Johnston 2003, p. 139) and successfully 'interrogate point of view in texts and to see the limitations of viewing the world through one particular lens' (2003, p. 140).

Most importantly for my study, Johnston assesses the ability of the postcolonial ideologies of some texts—as well as how these texts are taught—to allow adolescents to challenge culturally dominant ways of thinking. Thus reading is viewed not as an isolated 'event', but rather as an act possessing implications for 'how social power operates in cultural and ideological practices in schools and how we call attention to complex relationships between culture, knowledge, and power' (2003, p. 28). Although like Naidoo (1992) her study provides recommendations for teachers, these are not overly prescriptive, nor are they determined by and limited to a pre-conceived agenda. Moreover, these recommendations are accompanied by a frank assessment of the shortcomings of the study and the challenges that teachers face when attempting to teach using a 'postcolonial pedagogical practice' (Johnston 2003, pp. 141-145). This assessment represents one of the key advantages of a qualitative ethnographic method discussed further in the section outlining my method—the ability for qualitative ethnography to allow for self-reflection.

A more recent example of ethnographic research in literacy and reading with implications for this thesis is that of Janet Maybin (2013). Maybin is interested in 'what…English national assessment systems leave out, that is, the living detail of how meanings are constructed through interactions between children around texts of various kinds' (2013, p. 60). Consequently, she conducted 'a linguistic ethnographic study of 10 and 11-year-olds' uses of language and literacy in school which focused on ongoing talk and interactions among the children themselves' (2013, p. 61). This study, along with more recent examples of Maybin's work (2014), is important in the context of my own because it examines the way children talk to each other about books. It also focuses on literacy as a social and cultural practice that is shaped in part by institutions; by drawing upon the work of theorists such as Bakhtin and ethnographers such as Street who have concentrated on the ideological and discursive dimensions of literacy and language (Maybin 2013, p. 60) it typifies, along with Johnston's (2003) work, the return to reading as an act with ideological implications. Most importantly, what Maybin emphasizes in her study is the prevalence of 'unofficial literacy', something she characterizes as 'an intense emotional, moral and humorous engagement with texts. This engagement drives their response, which includes a critical sensitivity to language and form' (2013, p. 65).

It is one of the major aims of this thesis to examine the nexus of 'official reading', which takes place in an educational context, and 'unofficial reading', the way students talk about the texts they read of their own choice and on their own time. Furthermore, this thesis will examine some of the ideological implications of the intersection of these types of reading while also considering the ideological nature of the texts that students read. Just as this thesis argues that studies of children's and YA fiction could benefit from ethnographic work, so to might much of this ethnographic work (Johnston (2003) aside) be ameliorated through a consideration of the ideologies propagated by the texts with which young readers engage. It is the contention of this

thesis that it is worth examining not only the readers and their social networks, but how specific texts and their ideologies work together to produce meanings and significances.

Method: The Benefits and Challenges of 'Grounded Imaginings'

As the discussion above suggests, the reading of young people has been explored from a variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives. My thesis employs what Kenway and Bullen describe as 'theoretical promiscuity' (2001, p. 3): it draws upon different features of a number of these studies, ethnographic and otherwise, in order to investigate adolescent reading in both an educational context as well as in the domain of 'popular reading.' My study conceives of reading not simply as a solitary practice, or as a social and cultural performance, but rather as both of these acts. Consequently, I attempt to capture insights into both of these realms; my thesis asks:

1) What texts do my students read both as a part of their personal and social life as well as at school?

2) How repertoires do students draw on to make sense of these texts?

3) What discourses do students uses to talk about their reading with me and with their peers?

4) What are the ideological implications of these aspects of students' reading?

The opportunities and limitations presented through my approach are discussed below.

Why Qualitative Ethnography?

When examining a cultural activity such as reading it is important to recognize that there is no one method that can provide a totalizing account of the act and its manifold significances. As Gray et.al claim: 'Any method of inquiry that can enrich researchers' insight into the social life they are observing, and in which they may be

participating, is appropriate' (2007, p. 182). Accordingly, a qualitative ethnographic method is most appropriate for this research. Ethnography itself is a broad church of instruments and approaches; as Willis and Trodman suggest, it is 'a method that draws on a family of methods involving sustained contact with agents, and on richly writing up the encounter, respecting, recording, representing, *at least partly in its own terms*, the irreducibility of human experience' (2000, p.6; emphasis in original). Whether or not the primary method used in this study—the extended interview—constitutes this sustained contact sought by ethnographers has been the subject of some debate. Researchers such as Becker and Geer (1960) as well as Potter and Hepburn (2005) have suggested that the contrived and solicited nature of the interview meant that it was inferior to the apparently 'spontaneous' accounts provided by participant observation (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007, p. 101). As Hammersley and Atkinson suggest, however, such interviews are valuable to the ethnographer as they 'can be read to tell us about the phenomena to which they refer' and 'we can analyse them in terms of the perspectives they imply, the discursive strategies they employ, and even the psychological dynamics they suggest (2007, p. 97). Johnathon Skinner suggests further that we should view the interview 'as *a part* of participant observation and not *apart from* participant observation' (2012, p. 35). Indeed, not only do the personal and group interviews conducted in this study provide considerable contact with participants, but they are also contextualized in part by my sustained contact with them as a teacher. In this context interviews enable the researcher to gather 'rich detailed data from the participants in the social worlds under study' (Heyl 2001, p. 369).

This type of ethnographical approach possesses further advantages and limitations. Some of these advantages and limitations are implicit in the following statement by Paul Willis:

> *Experience and the everyday are the bread and butter of ethnography, but they are also the grounds whereupon and the stake for how grander theories must*

test and justify themselves. They should not be self-referenced imaginings, but grounded imaginings (2000, p. viii).

The primary strength of qualitative ethnography lies in the 'grounded' nature of its research; it does not simply accept claims made by academics about the subjects and activities it describes, it tests them against the responses of actual people. Its advantages are perhaps best encapsulated in Christine Geraghy's suggestion: 'If you want to find out about audiences, ask them' (1998, p. 143). Collinson further outlines the advantage of this method when compared to text-based and theoretical research, stating: 'Ethnographic accounts of cultural practices differ from those based on textual analysis because they often…exchange overt theoretical sophistication for richly rendered accounts of complex cultural lives' (2009, p. 14). Rather than relying solely on the postulations of researchers, ethnography formulates its accounts and arguments by considering primarily the words and practices of the informants whose lives they are seeking to understand.

It is important to note that ethnographers are not free of theoretical assumptions of their own. As Jensen has pointed out: 'Too often in communication studies it appears that the methodological choices have been made long before the issues and ends of enquiry have been posed, so that the methodologies become solutions in search of problems' (1991, p. 6). An ethnographic method does, however, provide an opportunity for researchers to challenge their own theoretical assumptions. As Paul Willis argued, the potential for 'surprise' in ethnography allows researchers to depart from their original theoretical paradigm (1990, p. 90). This self-reflexivity (Collinson 2009; Gray 1997) means that ethnography is perhaps less constrained by its theoretical approach than text-based methodologies. This is not to say that ethnographers are without an agenda, but rather that by letting 'the material drive the analysis' (Hildenbrand 2004, p. 19), ethnographies reduce the extent to which *a priori* theories determine the findings of their social inquiry.

Another advantage of the grounded nature of qualitative ethnography is the contextualized nature of the data. As Jensen points out, 'where quantitative analysis would focus on the concrete, delimited products of the media's meaning production, qualitative approaches examines not only meaning production as a process which is contextualized and inextricably integrated with wider social and cultural practices' (1991, p. 4; also see Larsen, 1991, p. 122). Furthermore, ethnography is not limited to the examination of 'meaning production', but also investigates the affect and uses of texts and cultural practices. Accordingly, this study examines the act of reading in a way that does not abstract the cultural actors themselves from their various cultural and social contexts; their reading takes place in 'spatio-temporal' and social contexts (Collinson 2009), as well as the institutional context in which the student interviews take place. It is within these contexts that the ideological implications of reading can be most effectively understood.

While the 'grounded imaginings' of qualitative ethnography allow for grand theories to be tested, perhaps the most significant limitation of this method is that it does not allow for the assertion of any totalizing claims itself. The fact that my study, like most qualitative research, surveys such a limited number of informants means that it is not in a position to make overarching statements about adolescent reading in general. It is therefore imperative that this study recognizes the contingent nature of its findings: it is effectively a 'snap-shot' of student responses in one particular cultural setting at point in time and while it will challenge some of the academic assumptions that have been proposed about adolescent reading and affirm others, its grounds for making monolithic claims about such reading is limited.

The Readers

The readers in this study were all students in Year Nine at a Secondary school in Sydney, Australia in late 2010. The College is a comprehensive Catholic girls' school that is administered by Sydney Catholic Schools (formerly the Catholic Education Office, Sydney). Being a comprehensive school, the students are from a range of cultural backgrounds and the suburbs from which the college draws its students are home to a mixture of both the middle class and working class. The twenty students themselves are of between thirteen and fifteen years of age, and are members of two Year 9 English Classes. Fifteen of these students came from a 'high literacy' group; that is, a class of students who have been identified as demonstrating an above average proficiency in standardized testing of functional literacy. Five students came from a 'mixed ability' group; while members of this class did not demonstrate the same proficiency in the standardized testing, the class itself is not 'streamed' or graded like the high-literacy group. The students themselves are not representative of any one social class or ethnic/cultural group. Some of the students are from an Anglo-Australian or Irish-Australian background, others are of North American, Chinese, Indonesian, Malaysian, Greek, Italian, Philippino, Fijian, Tongan, Turkish, Lebanese and Iraqi descent. Despite the presence of a number of Indigenous students in this year group, none chose to participate in this study. The professional background of students' parents is similarly diverse: parental occupations include engineers, construction managers, secretaries, stay-at-home parents, pilots, IT professionals, builders, accountants, bankers, council workers, financial advisers, renderers, cleaners, product developers, nurses, jewelers, full-time carers, youth workers, real estate agents, marketers and teachers.

Teacher as Researcher

One of the chief characteristics of this study is that the primary researcher, the person charged with conducting discussions and interviews and with interpreting data is their English teacher. The interviews were conducted approximately three quarters of the way through the 2010 school year. I had been the English teacher responsible for the high literacy class for the whole of the year up until that point. The mixed ability class had another teacher for one quarter of the year before she left the profession. I was their subsequent English teacher for the remainder of that year. Consequently, I managed to develop a rapport with both of these classes by the time the primary research for this study was conducted. This student-teacher relationship possessed a number of advantages and disadvantages.

Perhaps the most significant potential limitation of the teacher-student interview is inherent in Kincheloe's assertion that: 'So often researchers fail to obtain authentic responses from interviewees out of their fear of reprisal from hierarchical superiors, avoidance of disapproval, concern with appearing stupid, distrust of the researchers, discomfort with the situation, and many other factors' (2003, p. 185). It has long been posited that the observation of an act changes the nature of the act itself (see Goffman 1956; Landsberger 1958); thus interviews unavoidably affect student response due to their contrived and observable nature. The fact also that these students were interviewed by their teacher will no doubt have exacerbated this effect. In a range of ways a teacher occupies a position of power over students. This power is partly a consequence of the institutional nature of the role of teacher as well as the all-too-often one-way nature of didacticism. This power dynamic is likely to affect the nature of student response. Tim Rowse (1985), for example, proposed that in circumstances such as interviews, individuals can operate under a 'curve of deference' whereby they may wish to impress their interviewer by seeming to participate in a cultural activity more frequently (1985, p. 42). In the case of my interviews it is possible some students may have sought to appear to read more often—and read particular types of texts they perceived to possess

more cultural capital—in order to create a favourable impression on their English teacher. While I did not sense any 'curve of deference' operating during the interviews, there was the odd example of a student being reluctant to respond to questions because I was their teacher; such responses tended to begin with a phrase like 'No offense, but….' Most of the time, however, it seemed as though the primary fashion in which a student's response was affected was through Kincheloe's 'concern with appearing stupid'. It is, however, possible that this situation might have presented a problem in any interview scenario where an academic researcher is engaging with a self-conscious student (see Willis 1977). This effect, it would seem, is exaggerated by having their teacher as interviewer. In addition, the modes of address and expression I used to direct both the group discussion and student interviews occasionally and even unconsciously drew upon the modes of expression used primarily by teachers within an institutional context. Imperative phrases that are perhaps an unavoidable part of classroom teaching such as 'Talk one at a time please' are indicative of the power relationship that exists between teacher and student that would potentially affect the nature of student response.

Despite these concerns, the role of teacher-as-researcher does possess some significant advantages. While it is important that the interviewer establish a rapport with informants, a relationship between the interviewer and participant that is too familiar can prove problematic. This problem has been recognized as an aspect of social research for many decades; education researcher Graham Peeke described such concerns as 'affinity difficulties' (1984, p. 25), Nisbett and Wilson (1977) argued that such a rapport could produce a 'halo effect', whereby the informant's abiding perception of the appearance and personality of the interviewer has the potential to shape their response (1977, p. 250). Similarly, Seidman recommends: 'The rapport an interviewer must build in an interviewing relationship needs to be controlled. Too much or too little rapport can lead to distortion of what the participant reconstructs in the interview' (2006, p. 97). It would, however, seem that there is no way to circumvent the

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fact that the nature of the interview will affect the nature of the response. Consequently, it is problematic to conceive of such influence as Seidman does, as a 'distortion', because it implies that there could ever be such a thing as an 'undistorted' response. The idea that qualitative ethnographies could ever be entirely objective and 'uncontaminated' has been contested strongly by ethnographers since the 1970s (see Johnson 1975, pp. 1-12; Heyl 2001, p. 372). It could be argued, regardless, that the professional manner of the relationship between teacher and students provides an appropriate level of detachment for the interviewer to ask questions without too much fear that the close nature of the relationship will impact upon participant response.

Moreover, teachers possess an ability to contextualize the responses of students in a way that may be difficult for an outside researcher. In the words of Kincheloe, they have 'the special knowledge of those who actually do the everyday work in an organization' (2003, p. 2). Accordingly, teachers 'possess a tacit knowledge that can be drawn upon to make sense of social and educational situations. Such tacit, intuitive knowledge guides researchers as they conduct interviews, observations, document analyses, and so on' (Kincheloe 2003, p. 51). Considering that one of the primary advantages of a qualitative method is that it allows for the contextualization of data, the teacher is in a unique position to situate their research within not only the macro-environment of the educational institution, but also enjoys an understanding of (and a modicum of control over) the micro-environment of the specific classroom in which the students are taught English and the ways in which this subject is taught.

The Interviews

This study is based on two sets of interviews: I conducted whole group discussions with the high-literacy class and the mixed-ability class as well as individual interviews with each student. Both sets of discussion were semi-structured; that is, while I used a set of general questions as a guide for the interviews, I did not adhere

strictly to these questions. Rather, I allowed the responses of students to guide many of the subsequent questions I asked. The semi-structured interview was chosen primarily because of its flexibility. As Seidman suggests: 'Interviewers working with an interview guide must allow for the possibility that what may interest them or other participants may be of little interest to the person being interviewed. Interview guides can be useful but must be used with caution' (2006, p. 92). The semi-structured interview and class discussion allows for the direction of the interview to be determined in part by both the interests and the responses of the informant. As Barbara Sherman Heyl argues, the strength of the semi-structured interview lies in it 'empowering interviewees to shape, according to their world-views, the questions being asked and possibly even the focus of the research study' (2001, p. 369).

The group discussions were held in school classrooms during students' regular English lessons. Non-participants in the study were given other reading and work while participants engaged in the discussion. Consequently, these discussions contained much of the ebb and flow of a normal, rambunctious classroom; students occasionally interrupted each other, some students—often non-participants—needed to be reprimanded occasionally for mildly disrespectful or disruptive behavior. The responses from the high literacy class proved considerably more effusive than those of the mixed ability group. This could in part be attributed to many more students in the high literacy group choosing to be involved in this study, but it also highlights an important initial argument to be made about reading: those students who were identified—and those students who *self-identified*—as being avid and proficient readers were far less reluctant to talk about their reading both in individual and group discussions. As a result, I held two group discussions with the high literacy group as we did not cover nearly as much ground as I would have liked in approximately 50 minutes of classroom discussion, such was the wide-ranging and unexpected nature of the conversation. The group discussion with the mixed ability group was far more difficult, as some students were

either reluctant or unable to talk about their reading at length in front of their peers. For this group, one discussion seemed sufficient.

I used questions of taste to begin the first discussion with both groups. Student responses dictated that most of the discourse in the first discussion with the high literacy group (and the only discussion with the mixed ability group) dealt with notions of taste, along with their experience of reading at school. The discussions—particularly the second discussion with the high literacy group—also dealt with novels and issues of sexism. The individual interviews in this study were conducted in the school's designated 'interview room' and were recorded using a computer application. As only the interviewer and participant were involved in each interview (and thus there was less overall discussion), considerably more questions were asked. The general areas of questioning are outlined below:

1) Reading history and tastes

- What do you like reading and why?

- What / where / when do you read?

- What did you enjoy reading when you were younger?

2) Popular reading

- Specific focus on texts that students have read of their own accord. Discussion of Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* if read by participant.

- Discussion of characters, setting, language, underlying assumptions and various episodes in the text.

- Discussion of protagonist, in particular their likability.

- Discussion of perceived sexism in *Twilight.*

- Discussion of perceived sexism in *Harry Potter.*

3) Institutional Reading

- What / when / where do you read at school?

- Discussion of general experience of reading at school and of English in particular.

- Further discussion of the novel *Will* by Maria Boyd. This involves again looking at characters, setting, language, underlying assumptions and various episodes in the text in order to explore the concerns of area two.

- Do you talk to friends or family about your reading?

- Discussion of reading and multimedia such as magazines, newspapers and online reading.

Students were also asked towards the end of their interview whether there was anything they would like to share about their reading that I might find interesting. Initially I asked participants to keep a 'reading journal' as a component of this study. Students were instructed to provide a written account of what they were reading and to record any observations they made about these texts. Despite agreeing, most students were quite reluctant or unable to keep this journal. For some it was merely a matter of laziness and others continually forgot to complete the activity. A number of others, however, seemed genuinely concerned that their writing about their reading would not be deemed intelligent or articulate enough. Consequently, this thesis only provides an analysis of the group and individual interviews.

Representing the Data

In providing recommendations for prospective qualitative researchers, Irving Seidman highlights the immense difference between written and spoken English. 'Participants', states Seidman, 'do not speak in paragraphs or always clearly indicate the end of a sentence by voice inflection' (2006, p. 116). Subsequently, the fashion in

which the responses of participants are represented is important. 'The interviewer', Seidman further suggests, 'must realize that decisions about where to punctuate the transcripts are significant' (2006, p. 116). In this study I have attempted to represent the speech of students in as unedited a manner as possible. Where students have used an incidental colloquial phrase such as 'like' (this happens often), I have attempted to include it where possible. Occasionally students used words or phrases that do not correspond to the conventions of formal written English. I have attempted to replicate these phrases. The somewhat casual nature of the group discussions and interviews also led to reactions from students such as laughter or gasping. Any comments on these reactions and on the atmosphere of the room are represented within square brackets. Occasionally the enthusiastic nature of the group discussions made it impossible to decipher exactly who was speaking. Thus a question mark is used when this has occurred.

My most significant concern when representing student responses in this study was to ensure that these responses constituted a substantial component of each chapter. I wished to avoid using overly brief extracts of participant conversation followed by many pages of *my* analysis. To do so would be to contradict the central aim of this study: to better understand how students themselves engage with and talk about their reading. Consequently, this study has tried to avoid displacing the opinions and attitudes of the adolescents involved with the words of academics and doctoral students. In doing so I have attempted to place what adolescents have to say about their reading at the centre of this study. One of the most prominent aspects of reading about which students had plenty to say in both group and individual interviews was the importance of taste, which will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter Two: Reading, Ideology and Taste

This chapter examines the ways in which the adolescents in this study talk about and perform their tastes. These tastes constitute an important facet of how students construct their identity in relation to their peers and society in general. Moreover, the expression of taste is a site of ideological negotiation: students engage with a range of what Raymond William's calls dominant, residual and emergent ideologies (1977, p. 122) in their attempts to define, construct and express elements of their identity[8]. They utilize these tastes in an ambivalent manner. Taste facilitates belonging to particular subcultures or taste-cultures; simultaneously students use taste to distinguish themselves from others and from a constructed mainstream. It is also used to perform gender ideologies that are generally conservative in nature. Ultimately, the readers' negotiations with ideologies of taste are revealed to be inconsistent, contradictory and ambivalent.

Bourdieu argued famously that cultural taste was not simply about the autonomous and arbitrary choices of the individual, but rather that it helps both to create and to maintain the stratification of society; that '[t]aste classifies and it classifies the classifier' (Bourdieu 2010, p. xxix). Taste classifies insofar as it creates both bonds and divisions between those who 'like' certain texts and those who do not. As Bennett, Emmerson and Frow suggest: 'Cultural choice positions us: it tells us and others who we are, and it defines for us and for others who we are not' (1999, p. 8). In Bourdieu's France of the 1960s, these divisions were drawn largely along class lines. Those exhibiting 'high or 'legitimate' cultural tastes frequented museums and concert halls

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[8] Williams' tripartite conception of cultural forms is in many ways chronological. A 'dominant' cultural form is one that is hegemonic at a particular point in time (Williams 1977, p. 122). A residual cultural form resembles aspects of a culture that may seem archaic, but have 'been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present' (Williams 1977, p. 122). An emergent cultural form refers to 'new meanings and values' (Williams 1977, p. 123).

and read canonical literature were of the middle and upper classes; 'popular culture' was the domain of the working class. In this system, cultural preference constituted 'cultural capital' that could be converted indirectly to economic capital (Bullen & Kenway 2005, p. 58). As Bennett et.al explain: 'Cultural capital works rather like property: those with it can gain at the expense of those without' (2009, p. 11). This conception of taste was enforced and reinforced by the relevant 'institutions of cultural capital' (Frow 1995, p. 130): museum and galleries, newspapers, magazines and, perhaps most importantly, schools and universities.

Most recently this understanding of aesthetic taste and its social significance has been confirmed by Bennett and Gayo (2016). Like Bourdieu's work, their survey of cultural preferences in Australia linked taste to class and level of education. Other studies have, however, at once both challenged and broadened Bourdieu's ideas considerably (Bellavance 2008; Bennett et.al 2009; Bennett et.al 1999; Frow 1995; Purhonen et.al 2010; Purhonen et.al 2011; Ollivier 2010; Peterson 2005; Storey 2015; van Eijk 2000; Zaviska 2005). Not only did Bourdieu neglect to consider taste in relation to modalities other than class, such as race, age and gender, but the assumptions that underpin Bourdieu's understanding of social stratification have also been questioned. John Frow argued in the 1990s, for instance, that:

> *Two forms of essentialism operate in [Bourdieu's] argument. The first involves positing a single class 'experience' common to the sociologically quite distinct groups Bourdieu includes in the dominant class. The second posits a single aesthetic logic which corresponds to this experience. Together they suggest that there is an intrinsic logic of cultural practices which matches the intrinsic logic of a unitary ruling-class structure* (1995, p. 31).

Frow also suggests that 'there is no longer a stable hierarchy of value (even an inverted one) running from "high" culture to "low" culture, and that "high" and "low" culture can [no longer] be neatly correlated with a hierarchy of social classes' (1995, p. 1). Conceptions of what constitutes high or low culture have changed dramatically since Bourdieu's study. Cultural theory (in its many embodiments) has proved important in

demonstrating the constructed nature of the high-culture/low-culture binary distinction and postmodernism (in its many forms) has also blurred the boundaries between what would have once been classified as high and low culture. As John Storey points out, a consequence of this 'postmodern sensibility' is that 'the distinction between 'high' and 'low' culture seems less and less meaningful' (Storey 2015, p. 194).

It does seem that the significances of cultural taste in contemporary societies are more varied and more complex than Bourdieu's model. Quantitative ethnographic work conducted by Bennett, Emmerson and Frow (1999) argues that issues of gender are in fact more prominent than class when examining the cultural significances of reading taste in Australia, stating that: 'compared with many other areas of cultural choice…the effects of gender on the organization of reading practices are often clearer and more pronounced' (1999, p. 147)[9]. Moreover, a number of other studies have emphasized the rise of 'cultural omnivorousness' as constituting a new form of cultural capital (Bellavance 2008; Bennett et.al 2009; Peterson 2005; Purhonen et.al 2010; Purhonen et.al 2011; Ollivier 2010; van Eijk 2000; Zaviska 2005). Many of these studies argue that an eclecticism of tastes which often traverses the boundaries between high and low culture across a number of fields is now desirable for the middle-classes in western, industrialized nations.

A number of reasons have been suggested for what Bellavance calls 'a deflection of, a shift in, and/or a reconfiguration of the traditional markers of cultural legitimacy' (2005, p. 190). As long ago as 1992, Peterson suggested a range of explanations for the shifting of boundaries, sighting a widespread disillusionment with aspects of humanism, the rise of both liberal and technical education and increasing commercialization as potential reasons for the rise of the cultural omnivore (1992, p. 255). Ollivier suggests instead that: 'What is most highly regarded…is willingness and

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[9] A comprehensive qualitative and quantitative ethnography conducted by Bennett et.al (2009) confirms that this is also the case in Great Britain (See Bennett et.al 2009, p. 96)

ability to choose, expressed in relation to valued cultural domains' (2010, p. 144); that is, the demonstration of cultural agency by educated middle-class individuals with 'the right kind of material and symbolic resources' (2010, p. 144) affirms their privileged position in the social hierarchy.

Choices in aesthetic taste are an important component of identity formation and reformation for the individual as well as the constitution and expression of a social hierarchy. As Prier and Savage point out, 'even if the concept of cultural capital does not have the same content as in Bourdieu's (1984) *Distinction*, it can be meaningfully used in analyses of contemporary societies—if used with care and accuracy' (2011, p. 567). The focus of this chapter is on these complex issues of taste and their place in the lives of adolescent readers. In many instances, the first question I asked of students throughout this study was: 'What do you like to read?' It seemed the most fundamental of questions with which to begin a semi-structured interview, primarily because so many of the conversations I have had with friends, family and colleagues about books were centred on notions of taste. Indeed, most students talked relatively freely about their reading tastes, and as the interviews progressed it emerged that reading tastes—and the discussion of these tastes with peers—related closely to issues of personal and group identity. The conception of identity deployed by this study is largely informed by the work of Anthony Giddens (1991), who views the construction of the self as a 'reflexive project' whereby 'an individual must find her or his identity amid the strategies and options provided by abstract systems' (1991, p. 124). My aim here is to identify ways in which the young people in this study utilized expressions of reading taste (as well as viewing taste) as one of these 'strategies and options' to actively construct and perform identity. I argue in this chapter both that such constructions and performances of identity are ideological and that this process constitutes the negotiation with a number of ideologies, many of which seem old or antiquated. As Bennett, Emmerson and Frow suggest, this negotiation has 'everything to do with the

organization of the social' and 'that the sorting, the grouping, is done by us as we shape and elaborate a social place that is partly given and partly chosen in the open-ended formation of our lives' (Bennett, Emmerson & Frow 1999, p. 8).

Moreover, it is important to recognize not only that the tastes themselves of social actors are important in constructing and performing of identity, but also that *how* these distinctions are discussed is also significant. As Frow suggests, taste operates as a part of discourse: 'The problem with tying an utterance to social position or social 'identity' is that the latter tends to act as…something fully external to discourse…But position and identity are discursively realized and imagined; they are shifting and multiple' (Frow 1995, p. 164). In a similar way, Brita Ytre-Arne states: 'While it is problematic to think of identity as something that can be observed directly in research, it is possible to study how people reflect upon and express themselves about identities' (2012, p. 3). Both researchers emphasize the discursive nature of identity-work; is it essential both to examine people's tastes in and of themselves, as well as how they *talk* about their taste. Elizabeth Frazer (1989) also argues that an analysis of discourse is one of the most effective ways in which we can make sense of adolescent identity, claiming that, 'girls' experience of gender, race, class, their personal-social identity, can only be expressed and understood through the categories and concepts available to them in discourse' (1989, p. 282). Accordingly, this chapter will suggest ways in which discourses of individual taste constitute a part of the identity formation of young people. These discourses demonstrate, firstly, how the domain of taste is a site of ideological negotiation. As Tony Bennett argues:

> *The field of popular culture is structured by the attempt of the ruling class to win hegemony and by forms of opposition to this endeavour. As such, it consists not simply of an imposed mass culture that is coincident with dominant ideology, nor simply of spontaneously oppositional cultures, but is rather an area of negotiation between the two within which – in different particular types of popular culture – dominant, subordinate and oppositional cultural and ideological values and elements are 'mixed' in different permutations* (2009, p. 96).

Secondly, the discourses used by student reveal that the negotiation of ideologies of taste in a number of areas is messy, inconsistent, contradictory and ambivalent. These areas include the longstanding ideological distinction between fantasy and realist fiction, ideologies of heteronormative femininity, and the ideological relationship between student reading tastes, commercialization and cultural capital.

Fantasy, Realism and Adolescent Reading

One of the key findings of contemporary studies of cultural capital in modern societies is that many people invoke oppositions when articulating their cultural tastes (Bennett, et.al 2009; Prieur et.al 2008; Prieur & Savage 2011). These studies show that one of the primary oppositions utilized is that between the 'abstract' and the 'concrete' (Prieur & Savage 2011, p. 573). The reading tastes of the students participating in this study were, similarly, in a very general sense divided into two main constituents: those who enjoyed reading what they described as fantasy texts and those who preferred texts based 'in reality.' A persistent theme in both the individual interviews and the group discussions with the high literacy class was the dichotomy between fantasy (relating entirely to fiction texts) and realism (both in relation to fiction and non-fiction texts), categories that are difficult to define. While Maria Nikolajeva states: 'Although all studies of fantasy for children have attempted to define the scope of texts encompassed by this term, no totally satisfactory and comprehensive definition has been established' (2006, n.p.), she argues that fantasy is characterized by components such as 'the presence of magic, or any other form of the supernatural, in an otherwise realistic, recognizable [fictional] world' (2006, n.p.). Vanessa Joosen provides a partial definition of realism in fiction as: 'Realistic literature [that] seeks to offer an adequate, truthful representation of reality' (2006, n.p.). This definition is, however, vague and

epistemologically problematic; it ignores the fundamental question of who is the arbiter of 'adequate' or 'truthful'. Stephens' definition of realist fiction is more thorough, stating that this mode is 'characterized by its creation of an illusion of verisimilitude, by a commitment to closure…and by its depiction of characters with inner mental processes' (1992, p. 289). This distinction between these two modes of writing, fantasy and realism, was not targeted explicitly by the interview questions but rather was raised often very early in the interview by the students themselves. The way students distinguished between fantasy and realism equated roughly to the characterization of fantasy and realism by Nikolajeva (2006) and Joosen (2006) respectively [10].

The Fantasy/Realist Divide, Twilight and Moral Panics

This fantasy/realist divide was first encountered in an extensive exchange in the group discussion with the high-literacy class. Despite the rambling nature of the conversation, the following extract represents a number of issues dealt with in more detail throughout the individual interviews:

> *Lisa: Well the vampire stuff is fabulous, but I think what's really ruined it for me personally is that everything nowadays is about vampires. And it's so over the top; all the books that attract adolescent women are about vampires and...*
> *[Comments, laughter]*
> *I appreciate it 'cause I've read it, but there was a time when I did enjoy it, but I'm not over-the-top obsessed about the books, about the movies and stuff and I'm really concerned for this generation, I really am, 'cause the topic and the vampires, the bloodsucking, the romance, it really concerns me.*
>
> *M: What about that concerns you, Lisa?*
>
> *Lisa: The mental health of this generation.*
> *[Laughter]*

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[10] In his study *Everyday Readers* (2009), Ian Collinson discusses 'magical realism' with some of his interview subjects. He reflects that, 'In retrospect I am surprised that, at no stage, did I ask the readers to define what I meant by magical-realism' (2009: 113). I likewise think it may have proved interesting to ask my students explicitly to offer a definition of 'fantasy.'

It's just, like, unrealistic and people fall in love with these fictional characters and it's great. I mean, Depplikov here...

[Laughter]

M: Does anyone think Lisa's concerns are well-founded, does anyone agree?

Depplikov: No, I understand her: the next thing you know, people will be sucking each other's necks in the street. There's that whole thing, like, we already live in reality, why do you want to read about reality? When I read, that's when I escape. That's why I read Vampire Fiction.

Lisa: It's good. I'm happy that you enjoy it, like, to see these books and how much people love it, it's great, it just concerns me.

M: What do you think Rebecca?

Rebecca: I went to Borders and in the teenage section there was like a wall of vampire books and I was like 'Is there any other type of variety here!' I don't want to read just vampires! There's nothing at all except vampire books for teenagers.

?: There's 14.

Rebecca: That wasn't even there. [Garbled discussion]

M: Depplikov said that 'I read fiction to kind of escape, I don't need to read about reality'. Is that why you think these vampire books are popular, or are there other reasons? Why do you think these vampire books are so incredibly popular? Kandy?

Kandy: Yeah, we live in reality, but we don't want to have to read about it as well.

?: I do.

Chrysanthemum: It gets just boring.

Rebecca: I hate a book where...

Tash: Yeah, 'I went to the grocery store'; well, so did I, doesn't mean I'm gonna write a book about it.

Apple: Some books have mythical creatures and stuff to make the book interesting.

Depplikov: Imagine writing a book about my life! Would you read it?
Apple: No.

M: One at a time please.

Depplikov: It's really boring. It's just really boring.
 [Barely audible Depplikov mentions books about adoption being 'just boring']

Tash: Unless Jodi Picoult writes about it.

Depplikov: The only good human author is Nora Roberts.

M: The only good human author is Nora Roberts?
[Laughter]
Depplikov: She writes good stories, Nora Roberts.

Chrysanthemum: Jodie Picoult is so amazing.

Tash: She's so amazing.

?: I can't read her books fast.

Rebecca: Have you read Dear John? I like the books, I don't like the movie.
[Inaudible argument, many participants]

Depplikov: We're all humans now, just to let you know.

One of the most striking aspects of this conversation is Lisa's portrayal of vampire fiction as a moral problem. Moreover, while she takes issue initially with 'the topic and the vampires, the bloodsucking, the romance', it is Lisa's pejorative characterization of vampire fiction as 'unrealistic' that indicates a broader concern with fantasy fiction in general. This sentiment is primarily ideological. Lisa aligns fantasy fiction with moral

decline and in doing so echoes critics of the gothic novel in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who saw the genre as morally depraved and politically dangerous (Gamer 2000, p. 31). In many ways Lisa is negotiating with an ideology that constitutes Williams' 'residual cultural form' (1977, p. 122). Lisa is engaging with and reproducing ideologies that appear antiquated, but actively utilizes them to distinguish herself from many of her peers.

In her individual interview Lisa's elaboration on why she fears 'for the mental health of this generation' is further evidence of her negotiation with residual ideologies:

> L: Yeah, just the things that they report about in magazines, they're like they do whatever they can to sell the magazine and I find being more sincere and honest and reporting about real issues and real things are more important and will benefit the next generation. I feel like this generation, like, I'm just...I'm really worried about this generation. I'm really worried.

> M: What worries you about this generation?

> L: Besides that everyone's obsessed with vampires?

> M: Yep. Why do you see that as a problem?

> L: I just think it's, like with any popular obsession, it just goes over the top. It goes too far and you know then you lose that...you forget why you fell in love with it in the first place and it's the rareness of the vampires wears off. 'Cause it's being, as I said, it's being repeated over and over again. It's, you know, you just get bored of it eventually.

> M: What about aside from the obsession with vampires? What worries you about this generation?

> L: That no one takes environmental issues and politics and business seriously. Everybody in this generation is either worried about body image, beauty, what's going on in the life of celebrities and I might be just very stereotypical right now, but I just feel like...especially because like I, you know, I'm surrounded by other adolescents of course, and you just hear what they talk about and it's like no one talks about important things anymore. The only things that matter are like Hollywood and celebrities and reality shows and what's on television tonight and it's like I'm just worried because we are going to take over and we're going to be adults and we're going to be the ones eventually running this country. You know, the person you sit next to in class could be the President and you just worry that it's just not being taken seriously and people don't understand the importance of what you're learning at school and like real things anymore because it's all like just gossip and celebrities and Hollywood. Nowadays that's all that matters.

Not only is Lisa worried about the 'popular obsession' with vampire fiction, but views the genre as symptomatic of a greater problem: superficial, narcissistic, self-obsessed teenagers who will be (perhaps not as 'President') eventually 'running this country.' These comments reflect a common criticism of the contemporary adolescent: that they are self-absorbed exhibitionists preoccupied with documenting and flaunting the details of their lives on social media. Journalists in particular tend to bemoan that 'the self-love cult spun out of control and is now rampaging through [western] culture like Godzilla through Tokyo' (Brooks 2016, n.p); some are concerned that 'there are millions of young people obsessed by Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and the rest. Daily, even hourly, they post of photos of themselves and their whereabouts, as if the world has taken sudden interest in the minutia of their everyday life' (Diller 2015, n.p.). Such negative commentary aimed at teenagers is not limited to contemporary polemics. As far back as the Fifteenth Century, St Bernardo of Siena exclaimed to a recalcitrant youth:

> *You, young man, I want to start with you. When you go about wearing tight hose on your legs, with laces all around it, with your leg exposed, and your hose undone and broken, and your little doublet riding up to your belly, with this behaviour you clearly show what you are...You, young man, don't you care about anything? Know that God does not like it when you when you wear hose, or the way you wear it, with the leg open or cut up, and with your little doublet so short that it nearly shows* (cited in Sebregondi 2002, p. 31).

This discourse of the unruly and misguided youth appears to be another residual ideology with which Lisa is negotiating, again using it to distinguish herself from other adolescents. Evidence from the group discussion quoted earlier in this chapter would, however, suggest that Lisa and these social commentators are being unfair towards at least this group of teenagers. Depplikov, after all, exclaims: 'Imagine writing a book about my life! Would you read it? It's just boring, boring.' This comment contradicts such a pejorative characterization of adolescents: Depplikov is reflective and self-deprecating in evaluating her daily life.

Lisa's concerns are also remarkably consistent with other moral panics about fantasy fiction, as well as with children's literature and YA literature in general. As Hunt and Lenz have suggested: 'Fantasy literature is either taken seriously (and enthusiastically), or seriously rejected' and is seen as by its critics as 'regressive, and associated with self-indulgent catharsis on the part of the writers; or it is linked to a ritualistic epic, de-humanised world of predetermination and out of touch with post-romantic sensibility; or it symbolises the random world of the postmodern' (2001, p. 2). The origins of this prejudice against fantasy fiction reach back as far as the 1890s to debates about the social and aesthetic role of the novel. Felicity Hughes points out that 'the novel was engaged in a struggle to live down the stigma of being a "low" form, not art but entertainment' (1978, p. 543); this privileging of realism over fantasy was part of an effort by literary figures such as Henry James to assert the legitimacy of the novel itself. James claimed that: 'It goes without saying…that you will not write a good novel unless you possess the sense of reality' (James cited in Hughes 1978, p. 545) and even went so far as to declare:

> *The high prosperity of our fiction has marched very directly, with another 'sign of the times', the demoralisation, the vulgarisation of literature in general, the increasing familiarity of all such methods of communication, the making itself supremely felt, as it were, of the presence of the ladies and children-by whom I mean, in other words, the reader irreflective* [sic] *and uncritical* (James cited in Hughes 1978, p. 547).

The assumption that the 'huge popularity [of fantasy fiction] is a sad reflection on the state of contemporary culture' (Hunt & Lenz 2001, p. 2) and that it is a genre best left to 'uncritical' women and children neatly summarizes Lisa's position. The fact that in more recent times, Ann Swinfen (1984) and Colin Manlove (2003) saw the need—nineteen years apart—to compose extensive formalist and historical accounts of the genre simply in order to demonstrate its academic legitimacy, further demonstrates the longstanding and persistent nature of an ideology that degrades fantasy fiction.

Other criticisms Lisa had of *Twilight* in her individual interview not only resemble ideological objections made towards fantasy fiction by some academics, but also demonstrate that her replication of these discourses can be contradictory. Take the passage below for instance:

M: And what did you think of Bella?

L: I thought Bella was a pretty average character as well and I think that's why a lot of people can relate to her. She's not the most intriguing character because you know, we're human and we already know a lot about our species, so I think what's intriguing about the books is that we want to know more about vampires and the author's opinion on vampires and how she looks at it and it's really weird because vampires don't exist. They're fictional. Like, and all of a sudden the whole human race is like obsessed with these books and it's like it's been done before in Buffy and stuff, but I think that was more of like last generation's kind of obsession when it comes to sci-fi and fiction and this generation's is Twilight and it's really interesting how it can be repeated. Like, the same obsession can be repeated for future generations, but at the same time it's different and you know, you're still getting the same joy out of these creatures and reading these books and vampires, you know, you wouldn't necessarily think they're creatures that you'd want to read about.

In *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction*, John Stephens (1992) takes aim at critic Dennis Quinn who, in deriding C. S. Lewis' *Narnia* series, claims that many fantasy texts should be rejected as they lack 'verisimilitude'. Quinn attempts to justify his position by suggesting that the portrayal of simians by writers such as Burroughs and Kipling is superior to Lewis because, 'one can learn something about simians by reading Kipling and Burroughs, one cannot by reading Lewis' (Stephens 1992, p. 245). Stephens retorts: 'Apart from the obvious point that simians in all three are anthropomorphised to varying degrees, and all three books are in fact varieties of fantasy, one would have to ask why a reader *should* learn something about simians from any of them' (1992, p. 245). Likewise, it seems extraordinary that while Lisa recognizes vampires as 'fictional' creatures, she contradictorily suggests that part of the widespread appeal (and purpose) of *Twilight* is 'that we want to know more about vampires and the author's opinion on vampires and how she looks at it.' As a consequence, Bella is 'not the most intriguing' character as 'we already know a lot about our [human] species.'

Inherent in this comment is the assumption that all fictional texts, be they fantasy or not, should endeavour to teach us something concrete about our world. This notion connects to an ideology that is discussed in more detail later in this thesis: that of 'useful' reading. The ideology of useful reading declares that in order for the act of reading to be of value, it must possess a certain instrumentality, it is important insofar as it is a means toward an altogether different and desirable end. This ideology is historically most closely associated with the attitude of boys towards reading. Elaine Millard (1997) defines this gendered approach as follows: 'This view characterises girls' reading as domestic, private and individualistic, and boys' reading, whose preferred genres reflect their interests in computers, football and other hobbies, as efferent, transactional and above all public (1997, p. 39; see also Bull 2006; Moss 1993; 2007; Smith & Wilhelm 2002). In this instance, the use of fiction for Lisa lies in what it can allow us to 'know' about species other than our own, be they fictional or otherwise. Lisa's comment may also imply a reason for the attraction of vampire fiction for some adolescents: for her the vampire represents an exotic other, juxtaposed with a more quotidian representation of human experience in Bella.

Similarly, further ideological negotiations that emerge from Lisa's discussion of whether or not she likes *Twilight* are inconsistent and ambivalent. Despite her objections to the *Twilight* series, there is evidence in Lisa's comments that she enjoyed it when she was younger. [11] She has an obvious knowledge of the series, and demonstrates competence and insight in drawing connections between texts. When asked to elaborate on her assessment of vampires in the series she states:

> *They're gruesome. Traditionally they're meant to be evil and nasty and things*
> *that suck our blood and we're not meant to like them and be afraid of them and*

---

[11] The preference of readers for fantasy and realism are not static. A study by Bridget Fowler into the reading tastes of Scottish women in the 1980s showed one respondent who, when interviewed a number of times about her reading tastes, expressed conflicting opinions:

> *Initially she was part of the formulaic romance group as a Mills and Boon aficionada, at the second interview she distanced herself, commenting on their loss of allure for her; finally . . . she became a convert to realism, emphatically disdaining the fantasies of the romantic writers she had once enjoyed* (1991, p. 122).

> *with Twilight, Stephanie Meyer the author has kind of shown a different side to them and that's made us more able to connect with them in a human sense and be able to just appreciate them in a different way, in a different light too.*

Here Lisa recognizes potential textual strategies that enable readers to identify with the supernatural characters in *Twilight*. She is also able to make a cross-genre comparison that recognizes vampires part of a tradition of adaptation and appropriation which includes *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, an obsession belonging to 'last generation.' Lisa shows a clear affection for *Twilight*, commending Meyer for showing 'a different side' to fictional creatures that are usually portrayed as 'evil and nasty.' These comments demonstrate not only that Lisa's tastes are inconsistent and ambivalent, but that her negotiation with the ideologies that allow her to distinguish herself from her peers are also protean.

Harry Potter and the Realist Hegemony

While Lisa was alone in her outright moral condemnation of *Twilight*, she was not the only student to express distaste for fantasy. Most students who disliked the genre mirrored Lisa's classification of such fiction as 'unrealistic'. Rose, for instance, stated: 'I find with fantasy novels, like it's not like I have anything against them, but I don't find reading them that interesting. 'Cause they're not real.' Abbey too was 'not big on the whole fantasy thing' and preferred novels about 'stuff in like the real world, or reality, or whatever. And like yeah, like everything that teenagers have and everything, like their problems.' Jocelyn stated: 'I cannot stand books that, like *Harry Potter* where you go to another world and there's all like these creatures and everything. I like it to be, like, here, something I can relate to and on earth.' Daisy also disliked fantasy 'because it's fake and full of really weird things. Like *Harry Potter*.' Trites claims that the *Harry Potter* series is successful because it utilizes 'the most essential ingredients of children's literature', while also 'participat[ing] in the traditions of adolescent literature' (2001, p. 472). These students' comments suggest, however, that

the fantasy components of the series make it difficult for these young readers to engage with the aspects of the text that participate in 'the traditions of adolescent literature'. Thus the ideological prejudice against fantasy affects the fashion in which students read and evaluate the entire series.

Given the ardent nature of the comments of some students towards fantasy fiction, it is surprising that *Harry Potter* was the only example of the genre mentioned. Daisy and Abbey had not read any of the *Harry Potter* novels and the exchange below indicates that Rose's definition of and experience with the genre was limited:

> *M: What would you class as a fantasy novel?*
>
> *Daisy: Well I read, like, Harry Potter once. I read The Half Blood Prince one and I got really bored 'cause it seemed like there were all these characters that weren't real and it got kind of scary and I didn't like it after that.*
>
> *M: Okay. So it was partly about the characters that weren't real. Were there any particular characters that you could remember that you thought, you know, didn't ring true?*
>
> *D: I don't know. Some of the animals were just really weird and maybe it's probably because I get really scared reading things. 'Cause I, like, I just, it plays out in my mind and then I get scared and I can't get to bed. And usually fantasy novels, they get a bit scary, so I don't really read them that much.*

There is an inclination here to view *Harry Potter* as emblematic of the fantasy genre and, as a corollary, to characterize fantasy as consisting merely of ridiculous imaginary creatures. As Hunt and Lenz have pointed out, some elements of fantasy writing are overused:

> *Fantasy seems to have, like the folk tales from which it sprang, a restricted number of recurrent motifs and elements: there are young, questing heroes, wise controlling sages, irredeemably evil monsters and (although, mercifully fewer these days) damsels in distress* (2001, p. 2).

The *Harry Potter* series contains all these elements to varying degrees, yet it is only the 'weird creatures' that seem to be problematic for Rose and Daisy. Their issue in this instance lies not with convention or cliché, but rather the unfamiliar and unreal features of the series.

Rose's objections to fantasy may, however, go beyond these 'weird creatures' and her perception of the novels as 'scary'. When asked how her reading tastes have changed since she was a child, Rose stated:

> *Maybe I've felt that the fairytales aren't really that real. I'd like to read about something that's, like, you know...life isn't a fairytale, you're not always going to get the prince in the end. You're not gonna, like, live all the time. So reading about other things, it's sort of like, toughens you up for real life. 'Cause you don't want to go through life thinking 'oh, oh okay, I can't do that. It's okay 'cause I'll just, like, it'll work out in the end. I won't have to do anything.'*

While they deal foremost with fairytales, Rose's comments closely resemble another criticism leveled at both fairytales and the closely related fantasy genre: that they are primarily a form of escapism. As Stephens notes: 'The worst things fantasy and realism can be accused of are that the former can be merely "escapist" and the latter bleakly pessimistic' (1992, p. 289; see also Hunt & Lenz, 2001, p. 2). For Rose, one purpose of fiction seems to be that it 'toughens you up for real life'; by extension, fairytales are seen as idealistic and (again) unrealistic. Here students recognize explicitly the socializing role of fiction; it is seen as enabling entry into the real world and providing preparation for life as a 'grown-up'. Again, this perception represents another negotiation with the ideology of useful reading. By viewing valuable reading as only that which is orientated toward some pragmatic end, Rose is showing the pervasive nature of this ideology. Additionally, she is defying again the assertion that this way of thinking is confined to boys' perception of reading.

Rose and Daisy's comments also reveal something of the cultural status of *Harry Potter* in the eyes of some students. In the group interview with the high-literacy group, the first mention of the *Harry Potter* series produced a giggle from some members of the group and the following conversation ensued:

> *M: Now, I just want to ask, the Harry Potter response got sort of a giggle. Why was there a giggle around...?*

> *?: Because Tash said it...[imitates] "it's magic"*

M: Alright, so it's the way Tash spoke about Harry Potter? Was there anything about the Harry Potter series that prompted that kind of reaction?

Kandy: Maybe Harry Potter's seen as a bit, like, dorky.

M: Okay...

[laughter]

Kandy: I'm saying that and I read Harry Potter.

M: Is that an assumption that you agree with: the idea that Harry Potter is dorky?

Depplikov: Well, there's fantasy and then there's Harry Potter, that has its own genre. It's just little hairy warlocks...I don't know...

Apple: There are no warlocks in Harry Potter.

Tash: They're more boyish than girlish.

While some participants in this conversation seemed to enjoy the *Harry Potter* series, the books are (as suggested by the self-confessed fan Kandy) 'seen as a bit…dorky.' Tash, also a fan, attributed this to the perceived gender appeal of the novels. Depplikov made the distinction between *Harry Potter* and the fantasy genre (perhaps portraying the series as almost a sub-genre of fantasy), but then (wrongly) equated *Harry Potter* with 'little hairy warlocks.' It seems that the *Harry Potter* series, when compared with, say, *Twilight*, is 'uncool' and childish. This is perhaps unsurprising as most students who had read the *Harry Potter* novels did so firstly either in primary school, or at the very beginning of high-school. Importantly, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* was, at the time of the interviews, over thirteen years old, and the final book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows,* was published in 2007, when these students were still in primary school. This chronology is important because students' comments can here be interpreted in light of Sarah Thornton's (1995) concept of 'subcultural capital.' Subcultural capital is similar to Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital', with the main exception being that it is a 'subspecies of capital operating

within other less privileged domains' (1995, p. 11). While it may seem strange to consider reading one of these 'less privileged domains' (Thornton's work is based on the British dance music scene in the mid-1990s), it is important to note that the reading and viewing being discussed by students is not predominantly of texts prescribed in the classroom, but rather of novels and films experienced and discussed by students within their own social groups. It is arguable that this type of cultural consumption would once—and may still be— coloured by the broad brushstroke of the term 'popular'. As Bourdieu's studies affirm (along with others, such as Storey (2015)) culture pejoratively referred to as popular has traditionally been seen as less legitimate and privileged. Like cultural capital, subcultural capital is used to negotiate and affirm social positioning and status. Thornton describes this feature in the following way:

> *Subcultural capital confers status on its owner in the eyes of the relevant beholder. In many ways it affects the standing of the young like its adult equivalent. Subcultural capital can be objectified or embodied. Just as books and paintings display cultural capital in the family home, so subcultural capital is personified in the form of fashionable haircuts and well-assembled record collections…just as cultural capital is personified in 'good' manners and urbane conversation, so subcultural capital is embodied in the form of being 'in the know', using (but not overusing) current slang and looking as if you were born to perform the latest dance styles.* (1995, p. 12)

As a number of media and cultural scholars have pointed out, for a cultural form to possess subcultural capital, it needs to seem new and, most significantly, differentiated from the 'mainstream' (Hills 2015; Jancovich 2002; Thornton 1995). Not only did the *Harry Potter* series share with the fantasy genre the ignominy of being equated with childishness, the relative age of the series alone meant that the subcultural capital it may once have had was entirely exhausted.

The Value of Fantasy

Student engagement with this particular ideology of taste was, however, variable. The hegemony of realism was in some cases resisted by the student readers. Whereas fantasy is in some quarters was attacked for being 'escapist', in the interviews the genre was defended by its advocates primarily for this same reason. As Depplikov stated in her exchange with Lisa: 'When I read, that's when I escape. That's why I read vampire fiction.' A number of others agreed, including Kandy who exclaimed: 'Yeah, we live in reality, but we don't want to have to read about it as well.' This sentiment was shared by Tash who, when asked in her individual interview what she enjoyed about reading, replied:

> *I find it really interesting and, like, 'cause we already live in reality, we can go somewhere else. Like, I spend hours and I don't even realize. Like, I'll be reading and it'll be like 4 am and I'll like have to get up in two hours so then I go to sleep. It's just really interesting.*

The tendency of these students was to regard realism in fiction as 'boring' (Chrysanthemum) because it of its perceived verisimilitude. Just as fantasy fiction was associated with 'hairy warlocks', so too was fictional realism summarily dismissed by Tash in her exchange with Lisa and Depplikov. She characterized realism as: '"I went to the grocery store." Well, so did I, doesn't mean I'm gonna write a book about it.' Implicit here are the assumptions that the everyday is in itself boring, and also that good fiction *should* be concerned with the exceptional or fantastical.

Moreover, advocates of fantasy fiction viewed the function of these texts almost exclusively as providing escape. This inclination is hinted at in the group discussion when Apple states: 'Some books have mythical creatures and stuff to make the book interesting.' At no point does Apple consider the potential metaphorical or allegorical function of these creatures. When Depplikov was asked in her individual interview whether or not the *Vampire Academy* series has a lesson or a message for its readers, she responded: 'Well really, you can't really relate to these books 'cause they're totally fiction.' Depplikov quickly reconsidered her position, claiming that the series is about

'sacrifice for the people you love and stuff.' Her immediate response, however, was similar to that of Rose: to view fantasy (and perhaps even fiction itself) as not having any relationship with the 'real world.' Although she is an avid reader and defender of fantasy texts in the group discussion, Depplikov shares some of the same underlying ideological assumptions about fantasy with those who were openly hostile toward the genre.

In some ways this positive perception of series such as *Twilight* and *Vampire Academy* may not relate simply to their status and function as fantasy texts, but rather their role as *romance* novels. Accordingly, Radway (1984) and Fowler (1991) have both argued that romance fiction provides for the women in their studies a means of escaping disenchantment and alienation. While it would not appear at face value that students such as Depplikov or Kandy are particularly disenchanted or alienated, 'reality' is seen as something from which escape is in some respects desirable. The function of romance as a vehicle for this escape and for the performance of a very specific type of femininity will be the focus of the next section of this chapter.

Just as advocates of realism and of fantasy both view fantasy as separate from the real world, so too do both groups of students see realism in fiction (in a variety of guises) as replicating an unquestioned normative reality. Stephens points out the extent to which even fictional realism is remote from the material world because: 'A verbal sign already exists at two removes from its referent, the object-in-the-world to which it refers' (1992, p. 246). It is perhaps to be expected that students of fourteen or fifteen years of age may not have yet developed the conceptual frameworks to allow explicit epistemological questioning and the presiding assumption among many of the students interviewed was that fictional realism unproblematically reflects an unproblematic reality. This assumption suggests that many of these students do not always see such fiction as a *representation* of the world. Elizabeth Long, who observed a similar trait in

her ethnography of an adult women's book club in Texas in the 1980s, outlined the potential implications of this approach:

> *[The readers'] tenacious adherence to a vaguely defined 'realism' obscures the provenance of the text, and confers on it a false innocence. These readers may be indulging in what Lyotard calls 'fantasies of realism', which leave unquestioned the received rules of narrative and genre, and the limits of representation itself: if the text is somehow congruent with the world, its biases; distortions, and silences remain unnoticed* (Long 1986, p. 609).

Long's 'false innocence' appears to constitute a vehicle for hegemony (Gramsci 1971); it is one means by which ideology is naturalized: assumptions that are culturally and historically constructed and represented through fiction are made to seem as though they are simply the way the world exists and has always existed. Whether or not these students are yet to develop the ability to recognize the constructed and conventional nature of realist texts, or that they lack the critical discourses that might enable them to articulate this idea, there exists the potential for these readers to accept the ideology of realist texts in a relatively uncritical or unknowing manner. Moreover, notions of what constitutes 'reality' for these students are constructed ideologically in part through their reading.

The prevalence of the fantasy/realism dichotomy possesses a number of significances. It demonstrates the potential for fiction to constitute an important component of how a student such as Lisa identifies with and, more importantly, how she *fails* to identify with her peers. Her relationship with *Twilight* is part of her performance of self: it allows her to differentiate herself from the mainstream. This performance does, however, reveal moments of flux, paradox and ambivalence. Likewise, other students positioned themselves in relation to novels such as *Harry Potter* and the performance of identity was very much a component of the group discussion of the high literacy class. Significant in this performance was the utilization of residual ideologies and discourses by the students that resemble those in the wider academic world.

It is of importance to note also that these debates over fantasy and realism occurred almost entirely among students in the high literacy class. The only exception to this was Maree, who expressed a preference for realism in her individual interview, stating that: 'It's more real, so you know it actually happened, whereas the other one's your imagination.' In the group discussion with the mixed ability class, however, this subject was not touched on at all. There may be a few reasons for this. It may be because those in the high literacy group were generally more avid readers and they certainly were more conscious of the concept of genre itself. Significantly, students in the high-literacy group seemed more confident talking about their reading, and were more readily engaged in conversation about reading and books with both parents and peers.

In some ways this phenomenon relates to Bourdieu's (2010) work. Bourdieu suggests that the ability to discern and discuss form—to adopt what he calls 'the aesthetic disposition' (2010, p. 20)—correlates with notions of 'educational capital' (2010, p. 46); that is, the more highly educated the respondent, the more likely they were to engage in discourses of artistic form (Bourdieu 2010, p. 47). While it would be going too far to suggest that the social distinctions that existed in Bourdieu's France of the 1960s were being reproduced in the classrooms of this particular study, it is significant that educational gradations and distinctions seem to create discursive distinctions between the manner in which the high literacy group and mixed ability group discuss reading tastes in this study. Moreover, for Bourdieu these sorts of discourses possess very explicit ideological implications. 'The aesthetic disposition', Bourdieu argues, '…can only be constituted within an experience of the world freed from urgency and the practice of activities which are an end in themselves' (2010, p. 47); this 'distance from necessity' (Bourdieu 2010, p. 46), is seen as an exclusively bourgeois liberty. While it is difficult to align this discourse with notions of class

among the students in this study, it would again appear to represent the emergence of residual ideologies of taste.

The emergence of these ideologies, along with the fact that discourses concerned with fantasy and realism which were involved more acutely in the identity-work of the high literacy class rather than that of the mixed ability class is significant. While much work has been conducted on the effect of grouping classes on the basis of ability (Kelly 1969; Ireson & Hallam 2001; 2009; Ireson et.al 2002), this aspect of this study raises further questions about the effect of ability grouping both on how students use reading as part of their identity-work. It certainly appears from this study that ability grouping possessed considerable ideological implications—students from the high-literacy group more closely constitute a community of readers, and seemingly outmoded ideas relating to fantasy, realism and form were a far more firmly entrenched component of how they talked about their reading.

Romance Fiction and the Performance of Feminine Tastes

Where students situated their reading tastes in relation to the fantasy/realist binary opposition gave some insight into how reading tastes, and the expression of those tastes, are constructed sometimes by quite old, persistent ideologies. Of more significance, however, were the ways in which students expressed their attitudes towards series such as *Twilight*. While it was anticipated that a discussion of the *Twilight* series would constitute a significant proportion of this study, it was a subject raised frequently by the students themselves. Whether or not students liked these books seemed to matter a great deal and in the high literacy group class discussions especially, the subject of the *Twilight* series prompted the most heated debates. These debates extended beyond invoking the fantasy/realism binary opposition. Nor were they concerned simply with the merits of the books themselves. For those students who were

avid readers of the series, these discussions constituted a performance of both femininity and heteronormative sexuality, demonstrating a further link between reading tastes and ideologies of gender. The expression and performance of these dominant ideologies is, again, characterized by inconsistency, contradiction and ambivalence.

Twilight, Wish-Fulfillment and Heteronormative Femininity

The *Twilight* novels do not fit easily into any one genre in particular and seem to be emblematic of Baudrillard's genre 'implosion' (1994, p. 55). Anthea Taylor describes them as 'generic hybrids of romance, Gothic and the *Bildungsroman*' (2011, p. 32). While some students classified the novels as part of the fantasy genre, *Twilight* was most readily spoken about as romance fiction. This classification possesses some important ideological implications. Over the past thirty years many studies have examined the role of romance fiction in the lives of both adult and adolescent women (Radway 1984; Long 1986; Fowler 1991; Moss 1993). This role has been perceived as negative at worst and, at best, ambivalent. This negativity is partly a consequence of the perceived ideological affect of traditional patriarchal discourses expressed through many romance novels. Gilbert and Taylor write of Romance novels:

> *They do not grow out of discourses which serve women well. They grow out of consumer-oriented discourses which have vested interests in constructing groups of women as identifiable and therefore commercially marketable; and they grow out of patriarchal discourses which depend upon the continuation of unequal heterosexual couplings and domestic labor* (1991, p. 103).

More recently, Lisa Fletcher has emphasized the potential of romance fiction as a site of ideological impact, arguing that 'in order to enjoy reading romance, in order to read it properly, we must "surrender" to its demands by accepting first and foremost the fictional world it compels us to inhabit' (2008, p. 2).

The ambivalent relationship between romance fiction and its adult readers was posited by Radway (1984). She argued that reading romance novels allowed women to momentarily circumvent the conditions of patriarchal modernity—to temporarily escape

the roles of mother and housewife imposed upon them. Romance literature is described by Radway as 'combative and compensatory' because:

> *In picking up a book…[readers] refuse temporarily their family's otherwise constant demands that they attend to the wants of others even as they act deliberately to do something for their own private pleasure. Their activity then, is compensatory, in that it permits them to focus on themselves and to carve out a solitary space within an area where their self-interest is usually identified with the interests of others and where they are defined as a public resource to be mined at will by the family* (1984, p. 211).

Such reading did, however, also represent an ambivalent negotiation with textual ideology, as it required an acceptance of the patriarchal ideology underpinning the novels themselves. Romance reading therefore 'justifies as natural the very conditions and their emotional consequences to which [the readers'] reading activity is a response' (Radway 1984, p. 214). Bridget Fowler found a similar dynamic between reader and text in her study of the reading practices of women in Scotland, claiming:

> *The specific use-value of the romance lies in its interweaving of images of 'civilisation' and women's discontents, with the miraculous suspension of these alienating conditions. Enjoyment of the genre depends on acceptance – however brief – of its conventions, hence the abandonment of the disenchanted, secularised perspective of modernity in the pursuit of a 'magical garden'* (1991, p. 1).

Ian Collinson attributes this ambivalence partly to a tension between the 'instrumental' use-value and 'expressive' use-value of romance fiction (2009, p. 63). Drawing on the work of Paul Willis (1990), Collinson describes instrumental use-value as 'the property of a cultural text or object that allows a goal to be reached or undertaken' (2009, p. 63). Expressive use-value is defined as 'an object or text's capacity to signify something to both the self and to others' (2009, p. 63). Both the group discussions and individual discussions in my study suggest that while for these adolescent women the use-value of reading *Twilight* is both instrumental and expressive in nature, it is the expressive use-value of the series that is of greater significance.

Scott McCracken has suggested that the most prominent instrumental use-value of romance fiction is that it provides a type of 'wish-fulfillment.' He argues that 'the

only clear element that unites all romance narratives is their concern with desire and the prospect of its satisfaction' (1998, p. 76). Moreover, as far back as 1975, McRobbie and Garber also saw this romantic wish-fulfillment as a primary role of what they call 'teenybopper subcultures' which 'could be interpreted as ways of buying time, within the cultural mainstream, from the real world of sexual encounters while at the same time imagining these encounters, with the help of the images and commodities supplied by the commercial mainstream' (1997, p. 120). The ambivalent relationship between teenagers and sexual ideology highlighted by McRobbie and Garber is affirmed by the commentary of students in this study. In her individual interview, Chrysanthemum highlighted this desire as the primary reason for her preference for the *Twilight* series:

> C: *I kind of like maybe, you know the really, really, like, handsome, perfect guy, falling for like a normal, boring kind of human being . . . I think it's sweet. I'm into the kind of corny things and I think it's really cute how the guy saves the girl. Like, if I was Bella I'd probably see the same thing happening to me. Like, I believe in equal rights between male and female, but I still think it's really sweet, like, I like it.*

> M: *You still want a bit of old fashioned romance?*

> C: *Yeah! [Laughter]I want to be like the one who gets in trouble and is like 'Help me!' and the guy just comes and, 'Knight in Shining Armour'. I like that!*

Chrysanthemum's comments demonstrate how wish-fulfillment helps to produce the ambivalence that characterizes so many ideological negotiations for students in this study. Chrysanthemum was aware of the potential issues of sexism and inequality relating to this desire, yet was not ashamed of the pleasure she received from such vicarious wish-fulfillment. While Chrysanthemum might proclaim to 'believe in equal rights between male and female', this position is overwhelmed by her desire to be rescued by the 'Knight in Shining Armour'. Thus the ambivalence created by the use-value of wish-fulfillment helps the dominant ideology to prevail: Chrysanthemum's inclination is not to rebel against such sexism and inequality, but rather to reproduce the heterosexual, patriarchal norm.

Like Chrysanthemum, Jocelyn was asked to describe what she liked about romance fiction in particular and despite having some difficulty justifying her taste, stated:

> *J: It's hard to say. Maybe 'cause, arr, I really don't know. It makes you feel good. I don't know, something, I don't know whether it's like something to look forward to, I don't know, but I can't explain it.*
>
> *M: So you look forward to reading the book, you look forward to what's happening next, is that it?*
>
> *J: No, no, no. What's in the book, happening to me.*

This tendency to imagine 'what's in the book, happening to me' was echoed by Tash in the initial group discussion for the high literacy class. She explained her interest in the *Twilight* novels in the following way:

> *Tash: If I was Bella, dude, it would like love my life. 'Cause like, yeah, hot guys and it's really interesting and yeah […] One thing I love is like the teenage angst and the jealousy and the guys fighting over, like, I'm totally jealous. Love that. Um, yeah I don't know it's just, I've always wanted stuff like that. Like, it's not like I sit around going "I want guys to want me", but if that was happening to me I'd really like it. So, like, I semi can relate to her, semi can't, but I wish I could, you know.*

The prevalence of this wish-fulfillment is further supported by the expectation a number of students had regarding the physical intimacy between the female protagonist, Bella Swan and her vampiric love interest, Edward. Edward is driven mad by the smell of Bella's blood and also possesses a super-human strength that poses great danger to Bella. As a consequence these characters have great difficulty engaging in physically intimate activity. After much trepidation, they kiss midway through the first novel and they do not have sex until the final novel in the series.

For Daisy this lack of physical contact is enough to provoke antipathy towards the series, with her stating in the group discussion: 'I don't like *Twilight* and things 'cause they can never like kiss or anything because he's like so obsessed with her blood.' Rose, who claimed to enjoy the series, expressed incredulity: 'And when they do kiss he has to like smash into her car to stop him from eating her!' Depplikov was

frustrated that '[Edward] can't even put his hand around her!' These responses contradict Lydia Kokkola's claim that: 'It is presumed that readers of Stephenie Meyer's "Twilight" enjoy the sexual tension between Bella and Edward; a tension that remains unresolved until the couple are married' (2011, p. 165). These responses also affirm the instrumental use-value of romance fiction for these students as intimate wish-fulfillment. By not going far enough, *Twilight* is clearly not fulfilling satisfactorily the need for displays of physical intimacy demanded by Daisy and Depplikov. Moreover, by rejecting this feature of the series, these students are rejecting this tacit conservative sexual ideology.

Not all students in the discussion disliked the lack of sexual contact between the two central characters in the novels. While Anne Helen Petersen claims that 'the text is imbued with the romance and tension that attend abstinence: yearning and unfulfilled passion far more exciting than any amount of raw pornography' (2012, p. 57), this was not the primary reason some students enjoyed this aspect of the series. Tash liked that, for the most part, the intimacy enjoyed by Edward and Bella is not strictly physical:

> *I think though the fact that they just like intimacy like more than just the physical way...wow that sounds quite...I mean like you know they get to talk and they really know each other and stuff. I mean it shows that you don't need that stuff to like have a relationship with someone.*

Chrysanthemum also referred to this aspect of the series as 'sweet'. In her individual interview, Aff Roe found the fact that they eventually had sex disappointing, giving this as the primary reason she did not enjoy the final novel in the series, *Breaking Dawn* (2008):

> *It was just about how, well, throughout this series she can't like, have sex with Edward, 'cause they're scared that he might like hurt her, break her and stuff. Then the last one's all the build-up and then they finally have it and then they have a baby and that causes more trouble and stuff.*

Contrary to notions that adolescent readers are interested in *Twilight* primarily because of the salacious relationships Bella shares with male characters, it was the discussion of the level of physical intimacy between Bella and Edward that prompted some students

in this group to express objections to Bella and Edward's relationship in general. Kandy found their relationship 'boring' and, more importantly, bemoaned Bella's overt and desperate desire in scenes that promised physical intimacy, stating: 'Plus it's all about Bella—[imitates] "I want him so bad!"' For Kandy, this desperation portrays Bella in an unacceptably submissive light and she later characterises Bella's pursuit of Edward as tantamount to 'begging.' Depplikov disapproved of Edward's role in this dynamic, claiming: 'The vampire has to be the seductive one, you know what I mean? But he's really not. He's really corny and sickening…I don't know what he says – "You're my existence?"' These comments, made in the group discussion, suggest that the instrumental use-value of *Twilight* as wish-fulfilment is limited. Indeed, the very idea of a text providing wish-fulfilment implies that desire is to some extent uniform, that it is *shared*. While the level of intimacy in Bella and Edward's relationship may roughly equate to Chrysanthemum's and Tash's wishes, it does not play-out in a way that is satisfactory for Daisy, Kandy or even Rose and Depplikov. Considering that desire seems to be, to some extent, constructed ideologically, these comments demonstrate that desire is another site of both ideological contestation and negotiation.

Furthermore, that Rose and Depplikov can criticize this aspect of *Twilight* and still proclaim to be devoted fans of the series implies that this particular instrumental use-value is not as important as the *expressive* use-value of *Twilight*—the taste preference itself is not as important as the expression of that taste. The group discussions of the series made it clear that the primary expressive use-value of *Twilight* for readers in the high-literacy group was ideological: it was used to signify and perform a dominant form of heteronormative femininity. Many in this group engaged in energetic discussion about the relative attractiveness of male characters in the series. The following exchange is quite typical of much of the conversation that took place:

?: Jacob. I was team Edward all the way!

[No way, nah!! etc.]

Candy: Jacob's way hotter anyway.

Chrysanthemum: ...Edward's hotter...

Tash: Has everyone seen that guy who looks like Taylor Lautner at Bondi Junction?

[Laughter]

Like, go check him out. Do you remember the male model at Ballee?

Chrysanthemum: He was so hot, oh my God!

Depplikov: I like my man tanned...

[...]

Tash: I like reading about how hot he is, over and over.

Chrysanthemum: ...put some tanning lotion on him or something. [Laughter]

Depplikov: Imagine him with a fake tan!

The passage above is unable to aptly convey the loud and fevered nature of these exchanges. These comments do, however, show the primary expressive use value of *Twilight* as being a very *overt* performance of heteronormative femininity.

In some respects this performance of gender and sexuality may be of no great surprise; romance fiction is, after all, known for its promotion of heterosexual norms. Lisa Fletcher writes that historical romance fictions, 'participate in the establishment and maintenance of prevailing ideas about the links between sex, gender and sexuality' (2008, p. 15). Correspondingly, Donnelly argues that *Twilight* promotes a limited and traditional view of gender and sexuality:

> *By constructing the world of Forks and the relationships in the series as she has, Meyer is perpetuating an exclusively heteronormative, patriarchal worldview that relies not only on the continued (some may say renewed) oppression of the female gender and femininity in general, but also by equating difference with "evil", has insinuated that those who do not conform to such social norms are not only labeled as Other, but are denied eternal salvation* (2011, p. 191).

Diamond also suggests that, 'Meyer's text rehearses many of the key aspects of the classic romance that disempower women and merely reinforce the heteronormative vision of desire' (2011, p. 47). It seems that the role of *Twilight* in propagating these

norms is potentially twofold: the content of its narrative conveys heteronormative ideology, and, more importantly, students use it as a vehicle to actively *perform* sexual identity in social situations. Correspondingly, there were strong indications that these discussions about *Twilight* were more or less replicated by the students in their friendship groups and that these conversations were important components of students' social interaction and identification. In her individual interview Rebecca stated:

> *The only thing I liked about Twilight was that people did discuss it. Like, that's only what people discuss, like, so it was the only time people found it cool to read I reckon. Like, through my adolescence, it's been the only time and when I was in like Year 6 and the last Harry Potter book came out, everyone thought it was cool to read that as well, but other than that everyone thinks reading is, like, lame.*

While books can serve as 'intermediaries' in friendships by both supporting and constituting interaction between social actors (Collinson 2009, p. 62), Rebecca's comment indicates that for most of her adolescence books have not occupied this role in her friendship groups. The intermittent occasions where books and reading were seen as 'cool' – with the popularity of the *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* series – provided an expressive use-value for Rebecca: in affirming reading as a valued practice, such occasions seemed to affirm Rebecca's identification of herself as a confident and avid reader.

Rebecca's identification of herself in this way is significant. Christine Hardy refers to this type of identification as a 'reading construct', a term which describes a person's self-conception of themselves as an able and avid reader (2008, n.p.). According to Hardy this reading construct constitutes 'a core construct that remains stable throughout life and forms part of an individual's self-concept; it influences a woman's perception of her reading behaviour and skills' (2008, n.p.). The significance of the self-concept Hardy describes reaches beyond readers' perception of themselves as capable, engaged readers. Such readers possess an idea of themselves as embodying the

auxiliary 'attributes of a reader', which include: 'a wide vocabulary; more advanced literacy skills; more general and cultural knowledge; better concentration and attention; a good memory; more education, either formally or informally' (Hardy 2008, n.p.). In addition such identification affirms Rebecca's membership of a proto-community (Willis 1990) that implicitly values these attributes.

Body Image, Schemata and Scripts

An important corollary of the discussion of 'hot guys' was what some students had to say about the relationship between reading, viewing and body-image. The exchange below details how Tash, Rose and Kandy's reading and viewing tastes are partly directed by the perceived attractiveness of characters:

> *M: And you think, Tash, that...that sort of...*[the *Twilight* series is] *constructed to encourage teenage girls to read it?*
>
> *Tash: It's like they're all hot and like yeah...*
>
> *Rose: I don't think you'd want to read about ugly though...[laughter]...NO OFFENSE, no, no offence, but in TV shows all the people are hot, like Gossip Girl...*
> *[yeah etc.]*
> *...it's nicer to watch, you know...*
>
> *?: Hot people!*
>
> *M: But what you just said was when you WATCH the show they're all "hot"...*
>
> *Kandy: Yeah but when you read about it you don't want to read about, like, some guy with a massive boil kissing some girl with like...*

Not only does Tash believe that the physical attractiveness of characters is what compels adolescents to read *Twilight*, but Rose conflates a television show such as *Gossip Girl* with *Twilight* because she perceives characters on the show to be physically appealing.

Rose's conflation here demonstrates the importance of schemata to the relationship between reading and ideology. Schemata are defined by John Stephen as 'knowledge structures, or patterns, which provide the framework for understanding. They shape our knowledge of all concepts, from the very small to the very large, from the material to the abstract' (2011, p. 13). While it is a series that is read, rather than viewed, the schema Rose draws on to visualize characters in *Twilight* seems partly influenced by these other texts intended for teenage audiences. In turn, *Twilight*'s Edward and Jacob build upon that schema and are used to define and contextualize male attractiveness. Tash used these characters in a previous discussion to describe an employee at a local clothing store, the 'male model at Ballee' and much of the discussion of male attractiveness divided the group into a 'Team Edward' and 'Team Jacob' dichotomy. Importantly, both characters draw heavily on dominant, conventional archetypes. It has been pointed out that Edward is in many ways the embodiment of the brooding, mysterious, anti-hero featured in gothic romance novels (Deffenbacher & Zagoria-Moffet 2011, p. 32; Diamond 2011, p. 51; Hagberg 2011). Conversely Jacob, according to Taylor, is 'doubly Othered…both an indigenous American *and* a werewolf (not to mention working-class)' (2011, p. 41). While being 'othered', his character represents exotic, muscular, working class masculinity in contrast to Edward's urbanity. Conversely, 'ugliness' was: 'A guy with some massive boil kissing a girl.'[12]

The importance of the way these schemata operate in relation to the perceived physical attractiveness of characters is demonstrated not only in the group discussion, but also in Rose's individual discussion about the novel *Will* which they had been studying in class:

Rose: *I really like Will.*

M: *Yeah? What do you like about Will?*

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[12] Interestingly, Rose was concerned that her comments might cause offence (particularly to me). Whether or not their English teacher embodied any of the traits associated with perceived ugliness remained an unexplored area of potential discussion.

R: The guy sounds hot.

M: There's a lot of discussion about that in the group discussion we had the other day. Is that something that influences your choice of books, when you hear that there's a hot guy in a book?

R: Yeah. Well you don't...it helps through the interest of it 'cause like you don't really want to read about an ugly guy. Or if they don't have any description of the guy you're going to have to make it up in your head and it's kind of difficult, so yeah.

M: Alright. So you think Will is potentially hot. What forms your impression of Will being hot? What gives you that idea?

R: All the people he hangs around with.

M: Yep.

R: He plays the guitar. Um, I don't know, just his personality. He sounds like, you know, good.

M: Alright.

R: I don't know how to explain it. It's just in my head that you make up an image of some guy who hangs around with those people and plays guitar and is part of like that group is hot.

Here Rose affirms her preference for physically attractive characters, and also provides some indication of what constitutes this attractiveness. Her perception of Will's physical attributes depends on a number of vague elements: his 'personality', the characters with which he spends time and the fact that he plays guitar.

The vagueness of these descriptions owe much to the fact that *Will* provides little explicit physical description of most of the main characters in the novel. Will, as narrator, provides the following depiction of himself:

I'm not ugly either. I mean, I don't look in the mirror and think, Man, you should lock yourself up you're so damn ugly. I reckon I'm pretty average. Lots of brown happening: brown hair, brown eyes, brown skin…Suppose I'm fairly tall, tall but not huge. Mum reckons I've got dreamy brown eyes, but that's what mums are like (Boyd 2006, p. 48).

Will's love interest, Elizabeth, is described in slightly more detail and in a more evaluative manner:

She was hot…She had brown hair that was long, past her shoulders. She wasn't that tall but she wasn't short either. She fit together with all the right parts so that everything was in exactly the right spot and in exactly the right proportions. Not super skinny, just, I don't know, like she was meant to be how she was.
But it was her face that really blew me away. All I could see was these bright, deep brown eyes, like they were always ready to have some fun. And her mouth looked like it was molded into a permanent smile (Boyd 2006, p. 94).

While the description of Elizabeth provides a prototype of feminine beauty, it speaks most clearly to Will's physical preferences. There is also a brief portrait of supposed male unattractiveness when a younger, 'nerdy' character, Zach, is described as 'the poster boy for geek…He had a deadset bowl cut, what could only be Kmart jeans that fell to his ankles and school socks worn with ugly white sneakers' (2006, p. 51).

While Rose is unable to give much of a description of what it is about Will's personality that makes him attractive, Stephens (2011) suggests that these vague elements provide enough of the default values of a schema for 'hot' or 'good' to allow readers to substantiate a positive physical conception of Will. He states that:

As we read a verbal text, or look at a picture book, the data matches part of a schema in the memory and activates it. Generally, a schema consists of a network of constituent parts, and the stimulus evokes the network and its interrelations, especially what is normal and typical about that network (Stephens 2011, p. 14).

According to Stephens, the use of schema and script—which is defined as a dynamic, rather than static, component of a text that 'expresses how a sequence of events or actions is expected to unfold' (Stephens, 2011: 14)—allow readers to 'join the dots' in imagining characters and scenarios. Elizabeth Freund describes this process slightly differently:

What transforms the text into an experience for the reader is a process of ideation (the formation of ideas in the mind) regulated by an active interweaving of anticipation and retrospection by which we gather—as in real life—the impressions that result in something we call experience. (1987, p. 146)

It is precisely *how* readers fill in the blanks in this novel that would seem significant here. Rather than *Will* strictly prescribing an image of male physical attractiveness for its readers, the relative absence of such description allowed the female readers in this

study to superimpose their own physical tastes upon the text. The novel then has the capacity to act as a vehicle both for the public expression of physical taste, and for a personal mental projection of desire for these readers. That these images of desire are fairly conventional implies the role of ideology in this process: some students draw upon schemata built up partly by a repetition of hegemonic depictions of masculine and feminine beauty to determine the attractiveness of characters. The fact, however, that the manner in which students fill these gaps is not uniform indicates the centrality of agency to this process and accounts partly for the often inconsistent and ambivalent nature of student ideological negotiations.

Amy Shields Dobson writes that: 'There is a concern that in post-feminist popular culture traditional gender roles are becoming even more entrenched, with femininity increasingly defined around notions of (hyper, hetero-normative) "sexiness"' (2012, p. 1). Rosalind Gill explains that ambivalence lies at the heart of the entrenchment of this ideological development: 'On the one hand, young women are hailed through a discourse of 'can-do' girl power, yet on the other their bodies are powerfully re-inscribed as sexual objects' (2007, p. 162). For the participants in this study, these statements are prescient. While some students challenged the images of sexiness and relationships presented to them in texts such as *Twilight*, many of these same students not only bought into these images, but through expressing their like or dislike for such images, used them to perform their own developing gender and sexual identity. Such performances affirm the observations of ethnographer A. J. Allan (2009), who suggested in her study of primary school girls' attitudes to behaviour and sexuality that such performances are even more significant in a single-sex educational setting. Girls in her study, 'felt even more pressured to present themselves as heterosexual so

that they could not be (mis)recognized as lesbians' (Allan 2009, p. 152)[13]. Tastes in romance fiction such as the *Twilight* series held an instrumental use-value for many participants in the way it provided wish-fulfillment and this wish-fulfillment produced an ambivalence that in turn helped to reproduce dominant patriarchal ideologies. *Twilight* also possessed a far more prevalent expressive use-value that reinforced this ideology: it allowed students to express their reading tastes as well as a taste in male characters that signified a 'hyper, hetero-normative sexiness' to their peers.

Adolescent Reading Tastes, Subcultural Capital and the 'Mainstream'

While the *Twilight* series prompted the most ardent discussion in both group and individual interviews, that discussion was characterized by ambivalence. Even devoted fans of the series were critical in their evaluations. As mentioned above, some of this criticism was directed at the content of the novels. So many of the reservations students had about the series were, however, not directed simply at the novels, but rather at the 'hype' that seemed to surround them. This hype referred to a combination of three elements: the release of the *Twilight* films—which at that stage included *Twilight* (2008), *New Moon* (2009) and *Eclipse* (2010); the advertising and marketing of both the *Twilight* novels and the *Twilight* films; and the prevalence of peer discussion of the novels, the films and the characters in the texts. These reservations highlight the ambivalent relationship between readers and the mass marketing of their books, as well as the ambivalent relationship between reading and the notion of the cultural 'mainstream.' This ambivalence possesses implications both for the how young readers negotiate with the ideologies of contemporary consumer capitalism, as well as the

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[13] It is important to note that Allan herself points out that this finding conflicts with a number of other studies that suggest the pressure to appear heterosexual is lessened in a single-sex environment (see Griffiths 1997).

extent to which what students read how they talk about that reading embodies Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital.'

The relationship between children's and adolescent's reading and the contemporary marketplace has been the subject of previous analysis (Kenway & Bullen 2001; Steinberg & Kincheloe 1998). While Kenway and Bullen (2001) argue that young people exercise considerable agency in their engagement with 'consumer-media culture' (2001, p. 2), other analyses have conveyed the influence of advertisers and mass-marketers as unequivocally pejorative. Collections such as Steinberg and Kincheloe's *Kinderculture: The Corporate Construction of Childhood* (1998) have focused on the negative impact of the mass-media on the social and psychological lives of young children. More recent analyses have dealt with the rise of immensely popular novels for adolescents and children such as the *Harry Potter* series (Pennington 2002; Westman 2002; Turner-Vorbeck 2003; Nel 2005; Downes 2010). These researchers argue that texts written for young people impose upon them the ideologies of the commercial, capitalist world. Tammy Turner-Vorbeck, for instance, argues that 'corporate consumerism's mass-marketing' is 'exercising control over the imaginations of children' (2003, p. 19) and subsequently fears that 'when children are no longer able to sit with a book and create its images, sounds, voices, smells, and sensations from their own act of reading, they have been robbed of the free use of their own minds' (2003, p. 19). While Turner-Vorbeck admits the possibility of interactive reading in the face of this assault, this capability for reader resistance is not solely in the possession of the adolescent or child reader. It is to be found, rather, 'within literary criticism [where] the true, aesthetic value of children's books can be critically considered' (2003, p. 21).

The problems with this particular approach are manifold. Not only does this perspective invoke incorrectly a time when children's literature was somehow free of ideology, but it also assumes that this ideology has an automatic and uniform effect on the imaginations of children and that this effect turns them into passive consumers. As

this thesis argues, young people do not respond to such ideologies in a deterministic manner. Moreover, in the course of Turner-Vorbeck's musings, the only reference provided to any real reader was to the author's own eight-year old daughter who was, apparently, bored by the *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. While Turner-Vorbeck does consider the capacity of readers to engage critically with the novels, *they* are clearly not able to do so unassisted. Instead, it is the enlightened critic, not the reader, who can assess, most ironically, the 'true aesthetic value' of these books by 'creat[ing] the necessary space between the people and their real artifact of culture and the artificially manufactured phenomena of Pottermania' (2003, p. 23). Irrespective of whether or not a distinction can and should be made between 'real' and 'manufactured' culture, this approach disempowers the reader, re-inscribing the critic, the social researcher, the academic, as the sole arbiter of meaning and cultural value. Turner-Vorbeck's view, however, is shared in part by Jack Zipes (2001), who bemoaned the 'cultural homogenization' of American children. Like Turner-Vorbeck, Zipes argued that by producing children's and YA literature that is 'formulaic and banal' (2001, p. 7), mass-marketing corporations were socializing children in ways that limited their imaginations and creativity (2001, pp. 1-24). Like Turner-Vorbeck, Zipes discussed the fetishization of the Harry Potter series, stating:

> *Phenomena such as the Harry Potter books are driven by commodity consumption that at the same time sets the parameters of reading and aesthetic taste. Today the experience of reading for the young is mediated through the mass media so that the pleasure and meaning of a book will often be prescribed or dictated by convention* (2001, p. 172).

Despite the above comment, Zipes does believe that readers possess some control over the interpretation of texts, claiming: 'Young people are constantly reacting against and defining themselves against a culture of institutionalized relations of production that foster sameness and conformity to corporate systematized beliefs and values' (2001, p. 3). The comments of students in this study indicate that Zipes' assessment is, to some extent, correct: some students resist this corporatized homogeneity. This does not occur,

however, as a consequence of what Zipes describes as young people's 'urges for more authenticity' (2001, p. 3), nor is it the consequence of outright and explicit resistance to explicit ideologies that students have imposed upon them. As Kenway and Bullen suggest, young people are not 'passive objects' being acted upon by the evil forces of consumerism (2001, p. 4). It is rather through a process of negotiating their cultural identities whereby students are interacting with the ideologies offered to them through these texts. This interaction is often characterized by inconsistency and ambivalence. Moreover, it is primarily through an often contradictory negotiation with notions of a cultural mainstream that students are seeking to utilize and perform their tastes and in turn forge these cultural identities.

Twilight, Commercialization and the 'Mainstream'

It is clear that a number of these young people sought to resist the 'commercialization and commodification' of novels that were dear to them. Rebecca, for instance, said of the *Twilight* phenomenon:

> *Everybody loves it, now everybody hates it. It's just the way it happens, because if everybody knows about it then someone...it just, I don't know why, but I was the same. When I first, when everybody loved Twilight I thought 'what a load of rubbish' and so I don't think at the moment it's that popular, but I reckon when the new movie comes out it will be. But the reason it's popular, I think, is because of very clever marketing, because it's become popular by some people and then marketers have taken a grab on it and have produced merchandise, movies, you know, songs and if it's always in your face, It's just going to become so, it's going to become recognized and everyone's going to know about it and it's like what I would call a 'blitz campaign' 'cause I'm using that for my commerce assignment and a blitz campaign means everyone, like, you see it everywhere and everything, like, all the time. 'Cause I didn't want to read Twilight, 'cause I'd seen it all the time everywhere I just though 'well maybe it's alright' and I read it. I think that's why it's become so well-known. Because people have seen other people reading it and how popular it is and, like, that makes them want to read it because they want to be like everybody else. It's kind of like peer pressure.*

Rebecca was aware that the popularity of a text could be fickle. More significantly, she was aware that such popularity is broadly political: that people read novels in part due to 'peer pressure'. This awareness represents Rebecca's basic acknowledgement of the

concept of cultural capital and the link between reading and identity: some adolescents want to read the novels in order to 'be like everybody else.' More importantly, Rebecca is acutely aware of the corporate machinery and marketing that helped to foster this popularity. Ironically, she drew upon discourses learned in her commerce class in order to critique this relationship between cultural popularity and the market. This demonstrates Rebecca's ability to think critically and self-reflexively about her and her peers' consumption of culture. It also reveals the potential of an educational institution to help facilitate this critical assessment of taste and cultural dynamics.

While most students did not express the same social awareness as Rebecca, many other interviewees also objected to the 'hype' surrounding *Twilight*. The following exchange with Depplikov demonstrates some of the reasons for this objection:

> *M: Do you like that [Twilight] series?*
>
> *D: I did before all the hype about it, but now that people, like, you know, scream and jump for it I don't really. They've turned me off it a bit.*
>
> *M: What did you like initially about it?*
>
> *D: I liked the whole, I liked the Edward and Bella love story. I liked Twilight, it was my favourite book. Just the fact that, like, Charlie, Bella's father didn't know about them and no one really liked the idea of Edward and Bella and yet they still, like, pursued, like, them too. Yeah. It was about sacrifice and stuff.*
>
> *M: You say the hype ruined Twilight for you. Why is that do you think?*
>
> *D: Well, no one, ever knew about Edward or Jacob and like all of a sudden, now that the movies are out, they're like, 'oh my God, I love Edward!'. I sort of have a claim over them, if you know what I mean.*
>
> *M: Yeah I do.*
>
> *D: It sounds really childish, but, like, they didn't know who Edward was. I knew him first! [Laughter]. But yeah, I don't know, they just, they just went over the top with it and especially the movies really ruined the books. They didn't do them justice.*

The hype surrounding the series is for Depplikov linked clearly to the release of the films. The films were problematic for many students in part because they 'didn't do [the

novels] justice'. According to Depplikov, there were a number of problems with the films, including: 'First of all, the characters: I didn't really imagine them like that. The acting's not too good. And the setting, it's quite, I don't know, just dull. It's just really dull.' Similarly, Jocelyn stated bluntly: 'I hate [the films]. The book is always better. It's always better.' Implicit in this statement is the ideological assumption that literature is superior to film, an assumption that recalls Q. D. Leavis' description of popular films as 'masturbatory' (1978, p. 165). While there has been an apparent break down of the high-culture/low-culture binary distinctions and although popular cinema 'is now the preserve of academics and film clubs' (Storey 2015, p. 6), it is telling that Jocelyn invokes a residual ideology of value.

Conversely, Jocelyn's main problem with the content of *Twilight* films themselves was that they portrayed Bella in a manner different to how she was depicted in the novels. This concern was shared by Aff Roe:

> *Like, you always see like the actors' faces and stuff and I don't know, like, I watched the first movie and it wasn't as good as I thought it would be and I didn't want to watch the rest…Well Bella, at first when I saw her I was like 'this isn't her', but then when I actually think about it, it actually suits her. And with Edward, yeah, he suits him, but Jacob, I imagine him different. Maybe a bit yeah, it was just different and oh, it was just boring.*

There was for these students a disconnection between how they imagined each character. Additionally, the repetition of phrases such as 'dull' and 'boring' indicates that the prosaic nature of the films did not match the vibrancy of these students' imagination at work. This finding echoes Turner-Vorbeck's claim that these mass-produced and marketed representations of the novels risk inhibiting the imaginations of children (2003, p. 23). Importantly though, none of these interviewees seem to 'have been robbed of the free use of their own minds'; these students have not simply accepted the films' representation of these characters and narrative, but rather are able to critically evaluate these depictions, thereby negotiating with these representations and their ideologies.

The most common complaint about the films was not that they had appropriated characters and narratives that were important to them, but rather that the hype created around and by the films meant *other adolescents* had invested in characters and storylines that seemed to be exclusively and rightfully 'theirs'. Just as Depplikov 'had a claim' over *Twilight* and its characters before they became well-known, Rebecca took exception to 'some people who are like really into it, posters all over their walls. You know, they're all over the websites and stuff, dedicated to them'. Kandy claimed that 'little girls going around with "I Love Jacob" shirts and things, it just kind of wrecked the whole book, you know' and Aff Roe argued that: 'the hype killed it 'cause they were just, it was more obsessed over the movies than the books', suggesting that the films were a distraction from the 'real' *Twilight*, the series of novels. If we put aside for a moment that the *Twilight* series of novels is itself an exercise in the marketing and mass-dissemination of culture, these students are again demonstrating a resistance to the disenfranchising effects of marketing on 'their' novels.

This resistance was born primarily from an urge for students to distinguish their own reading tastes from the mainstream. In this way, how these students talked about this aspect of *Twilight* invokes not so much Bourdieu's theories of cultural capital, but again draws on Sarah Thornton's (1995) notion of subcultural capital. The most prominent feature of subcultural capital exhibited by students' discussion of *Twilight* is the importance of cultural taste being differentiated from a constructed mainstream. Thornton argues: 'Nothing depletes capital more than the sight of someone trying too hard (1995, p. 12). She also states:

> *Youthful clubber and raver ideologies are almost as anti-mass culture as the discourses of the art world. Both criticize the mainstream / masses for being derivative, superficial and femme (Heysen 1986). Both conspicuously admire innovative artists, but show distain for those who have too high a profile as being charlatans or overrated media sluts (1995, p. 5).*

It would appear that comments from Rebecca, Kandy and Aff Roe about the hype surrounding *Twilight* demonstrate how important it is for them to distinguish their

reading tastes from the 'derivative, superficial' mainstream. It seems it was that this notion of subcultural capital that compelled students such as Jocelyn to be embarrassed that they still enjoyed the *Twilight* novels.

In a similar way to Rebecca, Kandy and Aff Roe, Jocelyn bemoaned the hype surrounding the series:

J: Yr7, I had this obsession with it for a while, but...no more.

M: What brought an end to the obsession?

J: When everyone else started liking it. I don't like it, when it gets too big and it kind of gets really lame 'cause everyone...nah, I just don't like it.

In the course of the discussion, however, Jocelyn admitted that she had re-read the novels 'four or five times' and that 'this sounds bad 'cause no one likes *Twilight* anymore.' This statement seems at first contradictory: her reason for abandoning her obsession with *Twilight* was that 'everyone else started liking it'; however, she also claimed that 'no-one likes *Twilight* anymore.' It would appear that the 'no-one' to which Jocelyn refers is her peer-group; the 'everyone' she mentions is her perception of the wider community who discovered *Twilight* after the hype and rendered it 'lame'. While Jocelyn is interested in distinguishing her tastes from the mainstream, she still wishes to conform to the tastes of her immediate peers. If we accept Sarah Thornton's claim that '"Community" is perhaps the label whose referent is closest to subculture' (1997, p. 2), then this group of peers, this small reading community—a reading community insofar as they talk about books such as *Twilight* among themselves—constitutes, if not a subculture, then at least a 'taste culture' that entails the accrual of (sub)cultural capital.[14] The cache (or lack thereof) of *Twilight* here certainly seems to resemble subcultural capital: not only has mainstream approval provided the novels

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[14] The usefulness of the term 'subculture' is a subject of dispute, with Herbert Gans (1974) coining the term 'taste cultures' instead. It has been argued that: 'Although subcultures in some sense could constitute taste cultures, the difference would be that "subculture" is a more encompassing term' (Michelsen 2015, p. 213). A 'subculture' tends to denote a whole lifestyle, whereas 'taste cultures' are more contained (see White 1999).

with what Thornton calls 'the subcultural kiss of death' (1995, p. 6), but whether or not these students like them is not determined by anything to do with the perceived quality of the novels, but rather their popularity and 'hype'. Indeed, these comments represent another example of ambivalent adolescent negotiation: student tastes are being constantly negotiated between a constructed mainstream that they both detest and to which they seek to some extent to conform. They are also negotiating with the inconsistent expectations of peers and their own attempts to mould and remould their cultural identity.

What is also of interest here is that these students for whom reading was a marker of subcultural status were all members of the high literacy class. The relationship between the *Twilight* novels and films was viewed differently by the mixed ability class (and by a few members of the high-literacy group such as Abbey). Rather than detracting from the appeal of the novels, the films were thought to be both entertaining and useful by members of this group. Lorretta liked the emotional verisimilitude of the films, stating:

> *I liked how she had to like work it out, that he was a vampire and that he'd like go away from her and like he would...and I don't know, I liked the...in the second one I liked how she had to have an adrenaline rush to see him, 'cause that's like, if you like see a guy that you like you kinda get like that: you get an adrenaline rush. And it was like realistic-ish, kind of.*

More important than the perceived quality of the films, however, was the relatively passive and accessible nature of film watching. Loretta likes the films 'because you don't have to do work; you don't have to actually read it. You just have to watch it and sit there.' This is seen as an immense advantage as the novels are 'too thick.' Jacqui expressed a similar preference in the following exchange:

> *M: What did you think of the films?*
>
> *J: They were okay. I think they were better than the book because you didn't have to sit there and read it the whole time.*

The *Twilight* novels were too long for many in the mixed-ability group and the language proved prohibitive. The following exchange with Lorretta, for instance, indicates that while Lorretta wanted to read *Twilight*, she was discouraged by the perceived difficulty of the language:

> *M: So you've never actually read a vampire book yourself?*
>
> *L: Nup, I tried to read Twilight, the Twilight saga.*
>
> *M: How far into Twilight did you get?*
>
> *L: Like 3 pages.*
>
> *M: And why didn't you go beyond the 3 pages?*
>
> *L: It was boring and I already watched the movie and it had too many big words in it. I sound really dumb. [Laughter]*

The fact that Lorretta had seen the film adaptation of *Twilight* meant that she had been able to have some knowledge of the *Twilight* narrative and characters without having to persist with a novel she found difficult to read. Although Lorretta's immediately self-conscious comment that she 'sound[s] really dumb' may demonstrate how she views herself as a less than competent reader, she also commented that this perceived wordiness detracts from the verisimilitude of the novel: 'And then like it was really intellectual and they spoke, like, teenagers don't speak like that. Like they don't say words like that.' So while Lorretta's response speaks partly to her self-perceived competency as a reader, it also shows a critical approach to a text with language she is having difficulty understanding.

Absent from this discussion of the *Twilight* novels and films are the references to 'hype' that were so prevalent with the high literacy group. This difference in attitude between the classes is significant. It suggests, firstly, that reading does not possess cultural or subcultural capital for most members of the mixed ability group in the same way it does for some members in the high-literacy group. Rennie and Patterson (2008) have argued that a student's own assessment of their reading competency will affect

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what they read and how often they read (2008, p. 54). The comments of students in this study possess a further addendum to this finding: levels of reading competency and *perceptions* of reading competency led to the formation of different proto-communities each of which valued reading quite differently. In the case of the high-literacy group, students talked often about *Twilight* and subsequently students' relationship with that series of novels, its characters and related films, was an important part of their cultural identity.

For the mixed-ability class the *Twilight* films represented a certain democratization of *Twilight* in that they allowed the students access to a cultural artifact with which they may otherwise have been disinclined to engage. It was, however, this very inclusiveness that contributed to the students in the high-literacy class denigrating the films and the mainstream that supposedly appropriated *Twilight.* It is this very type of dynamic that was confirmed by Bourdieu's (2010) original inquiry into the distinctions of cultural taste. While it would be difficult to argue that *Twilight* qualifies under most definitions of 'high-culture', it is clear that it possessed for the students in the high literary group at one time subcultural capital that had been eroded through wide-spread appeal. While traditional distinctions between a high-culture and low-culture—and in Bourdieu's case, a middle-culture as well (Bourdieu 2010, p.321)—may not always be directly applicable to these discussions of adolescent reading and cultural consumption, many of the same dynamics and ideologies are still prevalent. Moreover, both groups of students appear to be speaking from their *habitus* (Bourdieu 2010, p. 95)—the deeply engrained aptitudes, ways of doing and ways of seeing that are a consequence of their position in both the micro-society of their school and society at large. The struggle over the cultural 'ownership' of *Twilight* is a therefore a struggle over both subcultural capital *and* educational capital; it is a struggle over definitions of self as well as a struggle for a certain amount of power to define and classify culture.

The responses of those in the high-literacy class hold much in common with seemingly antiquated critiques of 'mass culture'. The claims of Horkheimer and Adorno that 'Culture is infecting everything with sameness' (2002, p. 94) and that 'films and radio no longer need to present themselves as art. The truth that they are nothing but business is used as an ideology to legitimize the trash they intentionally produce' (2002, p. 95), are particularly resonant. Similar to proponents of mass-cultural critique, students in this high literacy group sought to protect cultural domains they consider to be under attack from outside. As Herbert Gans suggested over forty years ago, 'The mass culture critique is an attack by one element in society against another: by the cultured against the uncultured, the educated against the uneducated, the sophisticated against the unsophisticated, the more affluent against the less afluent, and the cultural experts against the laity' (1974, p. 4). By drawing on this residual ideology, students are participating in the ideological act of constructing and defending hierarchies of culture and preserving 'their' subcultural capital.

Vampire Academy and the Replenishment of Subcultural Capital

One of the consequences of subcultural capital being diminished through its relationship with the mainstream is that adolescents must continually modify their tastes in order to replenish this spent commodity. As *Twilight* had lost some of its subcultural capital with many in the high literacy class, something else was required to fill that absence. The *Vampire Academy* (2007) series by Richelle Mead provided this substitute. These novels narrate the story of Rose, a half-vampire, half-human protagonist who attends St Vladimir's Vampire Academy. Rose is in training to become a 'guardian', a particular class of half-vampire. The role of these guardians is to protect the aristocratic 'Moroi' vampires, a largely benign class of vampire from the physically superior but malevolent and destructive 'Strigoi' vampires. Rose is charged with

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protecting Lissa, a Moroi princess and is romantically involved with two male characters, her tutor Dimitri and a contemporary named Adrian.

Many aspects of the way students talk about this series are similar to *Twilight*. *Vampire Academy* possessed much the same expressive use-value as *Twilight;* it again allowed for the performance of heteronormative femininity. This expression was perhaps even more vigorous than with *Twilight,* as evidenced by the following discussion:

M: What other stuff do you like?

?: Um, Vampire Academy.

[Yeah! Oh My God! etc.]

Depplikov: I love Vampire Academy!

M: Who writes Vampire Academy? I've never heard of that.

Many: Richelle Mead

Tash: I take credit for introducing it to three of them in this room...I'm just saying...keep going...

[Laughter]

Sorry...

M: That's alright! What do you like about Vampire Academy?

?: What's there not to like!?

Chrysanthemum: Hot guys

Rose: Just...yeah.

?: They're just all so hot!

[Laughter]

Tash: Hot guys in novels, like, attract teenage girls [much agreement]... I've got that mental image and you just want to go back into the book...

An indicator that the series possesses subcultural capital is embodied most clearly in Tash's comment: 'I take credit for introducing it to three of them in this room.' This subcultural status seems to further enable the capacity of *Vampire Academy* to serve as a vehicle for both wish-fulfillment and the performance of heteronormative femininity among the group. In other group discussions the phrase 'hot guys' is repeated many times and in both group and individual interviews, the "love triangle" of Rose, Dimitri and Adrian is mentioned by many students as a reason for the attraction of the novels. Accordingly, aspects of the first novel in the series would seem to affirm a patriarchal, heterosexual norm. The main love-interest, Dimitri, is considered a 'god' (2007, p. 64) and at one point Rose exclaims: 'The only thing better than imagining Dimitri carrying me in his arms was imagining him shirtless while carrying me in his arms'. There is even a rejection of same-sex relationships, when Rose states: 'Lissa and I hadn't had sex, of course, but we'd both known what others would think of me feeding her' (2007, p. 62). *Vampire Academy* can thus be viewed as a subcultural substitute for *Twilight* that possesses an ambivalent ideological function: it simultaneously allows students to perform a normative heterosexual femininity while also differentiating themselves from a discursively constructed mainstream.

The ambivalent and sometimes even paradoxical ideological negotiations of students with *Vampire Academy* are exemplified further through the manner in which the series provided this instrument to project ideologies of normativity, while also constituting a means for students to challenge the dominant construction of femininity drawn on by *Twilight*. This challenge occurred mainly through a consideration of the protagonist, Rose and is depicted below in the high-literacy group discussion:

> M: So you're mentioning these other sort of derivative stuff that's all very similar to Twilight, how is Vampire Academy different?

> Depplikov: It is very different.

Tash: It's totally...

Depplikov: Because in Vampire Academy, you live in the world of them, but whereas with this, it's all secrecy with vampires. But with Vampire Academy all is' about - you live in a vampire world.

Apple: The main character's like half vampire, so you sort of see that.

Depplikov: It's not different from society. Everyone knows about it - but not humans, 'cause they can be compelled.

M: So that completely changes the way you engage with it? [yeah, etc.]

Depplikov: And Rose is like a completely different female character. Like, that's why I actually really liked it, 'cause of Rose.

Tash: Yeah.

M: What distinguishes Rose from Bella?

Depplikov: Because she's just, she's reckless and she does things that...
[Agreement, words like 'fiery' and 'feisty' thrown around]
She has a bad temper and everything.

Tash: And she gets all the guys.

Depplikov: She's flirtatious - she's nothing like the other girl.

Like Bella in *Twilight,* Rose represents heteronormativity; she is admired partly because 'she gets all the guys.' It is, however, her 'fiery' and 'feisty' demeanour that is discussed most vigourously by the group. This tension is suggestive of the ideological ambivalence central to Radway's (1984) critique of romance fiction: it simultaneously subverts and reinscribes traditional modes of femininity (1984, p. 213). A similar ambivalence can also be observed in the discussion below:

M: So Rose is flirtatious, she's...

Tash :She's tough as well.

Depplikov: She's tough, fiery, she's reckless as well. She does things before thinking. Like, she can be like really sweet - she cares for others...

Chrysanthemum: And she's really smart as well.

Depplikov: And she's really sarcastic! Her sarcasm is the best! The one thing I look for in a character is sarcasm - that is the best. Especially on a male.

M: Why is sarcasm important to you in books?

Depplikov: Because it shows that, you know in males especially, like, I love that whole 'I don't care' attitude sort of thing. Like, 'I don't look up to no authority.' And sarcasm really shows   that. Like, I don't know, I just love it.
M: So you like that in female lead characters as well?

Depplikov: Yeah, but more males.

M: So if Rose is identified with all these other things, is Bella a character that you connect with? Or is Bella a character that you...

Tash: I think Bella is the character we relate to and Rose is the character we wish we were. Like, I don't think I could do the things she does. Like, she kills people.

Depplikov: Obviously not stuff like that, just the simple things like she gets angry at her mother a lot. Like she doesn't have...I'm not saying I don't, but her relationship with her mother is always like it would be rocky. Like it's something we can relate to from time to time, I think.

Intelligence and defiance of authority are seen as reasons for Rose's popularity. While Rose is admired for her sarcasm, this defiance of authority is seen as being even more desirable in male characters than female characters. These girls are accepting and coveting a relatively normative romance stereotype of the rebellious young male character, but they are also offered in Rose a challenge to the more traditional submissive, passive femininity represented by Bella. In their individual interviews Tash

and Depplikov in particular were excited by this alternative femininity. Tash describes Rose as 'such a strong, independent woman and like, she's really cool and kicks people's asses and yeah, saves people's lives.' Depplikov is even more emphatic, stating:

> *Rose is actually my favourite female character. She's awesome. She's very loud, she's out there, she does things before she thinks and she's just, yeah. She has a bad temper, she's not afraid to do things or say what she thinks and she's completely different from other female characters.*

Consuela also attributes the appeal of *Vampire Academy* largely to the appeal of Rose herself. She stated in her individual interview that: 'I liked the beginning books because, for one, it was a bit like *Twilight*, but it wasn't sexist. I mean, the main girl character, she's, her name's Rose, she's full-on out there, kicking ass kind of stuff.' She goes on to state that 'I think it's okay because Rose, she does admit that she, like, she's happy with her body. She's not like always full-on dragging herself down.' Rose's body image does seem to react against the ultra-slim images that are often a feature of the fashion world. At one point Rose describes her own features: 'Here among the slim and small-chested Moroi girls, certain features – meaning my larger breasts and more defined hips – stood out. I knew I was pretty: it was sexy in a risqué way' (2007, p. 5).

This alternative presentation of attitude and body image is in some ways problematic. Rose's physical features are given significance through their subjection to the (supernatural) male gaze. In the same passage in which she describes her physical virtues, she also states that 'Dhampirs were an exotic conquest, a novelty all Moroi guys wanted to "try"' (2007, p. 5). While Rose is sexually aware and sexually assertive, she is also made to embody elements of the dominant and pervasive female stereotype of the temptress. Elements of her image and behaviour conform to what Angela McRobbie terms the 'phallic girl', someone whose,

> *…activities appear to transgress all the boundaries of feminine docility…her active pursuit of sexual pleasure, remains not just thoroughly subjected to patriarchal authority and judgment, but is also completely compatible with the*

requirements of a re-adjusted and seemingly liberalised heterosexual matrix (McRobbie 2009, p. 87).

It can be argued that while Rose represents a different type of femininity to Bella, she still helps to reinscribe, in a more clandestine fashion, ideologies of normative heterosexual femininity.

Vampire Academy is the type of novel that attracts criticism relating to the mass marketing of texts for children and adolescents. At the time of the interviews the series could be found in bookstore sections entirely devoted to vampire fiction for young adults. The first novel appears to have been released to capitalize on the 'vampire craze' ushered in by the success of the *Twilight* novels[15]. Yet students were not invested in this series solely because marketers or peers have told them they should be; that would, after all, deliver Thornton's (1995) 'subcultural kiss-of-death'. Importantly, students preferred *Vampire Academy* to *Twilight* largely because of their taste for a more assertive female protagonist. On one level this could be seen not as identification, but as wish-fulfillment; indeed, Tash describes Rose as 'the character we wish we were.' While not entirely unconventional or unproblematic, this wish-fulfillment does at least recognize that *Twilight's* Bella is an insufficient and deficient heroine. Although students use *Vampire Academy* in much the same way as *Twilight*—to perform heterosexual femininity—it also provides some textual alternative to the insipid vision of adolescent femininity provided by *Twilight.*

The use of *Vampire Academy* by students to replenish their stocks of subcultural capital is, however, endowed with further ideological ramifications. The assumption that young people constantly require something new and different to consume in order to retain their subcultural status aligns with imperatives of consumer capitalism (Hawkes 2003, p.12; see also Frank 1997; Klein 2000; Pountain & Robins 2000; Wu

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[15] The novel seems to have been edited hastily. There are prepositional errors such as 'I do like her, but she's incompetent about certain things' (Mead 2007 p.102) , as well as tense inconsistencies and subject-verb disagreements: 'I'd never met anyone else who took being a guardian so seriously who understand all the life-and-death consequences'(Mead 2007, p. 235).

2001). Frank writes of the fashion in which contemporary businesses and marketers engendered 'co-optation' - the 'process by which they make rebel subcultures their own' (1997, p. 9) to make money. Not only does this phenomenon possess material consequences—young people are compelled to consume more books, or movie tickets, or bandwidth—but it also requires the tacit acceptance of ideologies of consumption. As Dick Hebdige suggests: 'Youth cultural styles may begin by issuing symbolic challenges, but they must end by establishing new sets of conventions; by creating new commodities, new industries or rejuvenating old ones' (1979, p. 96). There are plenty of ways in which students in this study exercise agency in their engagement with dominant ideologies of taste and subcultural capital. The fashion in which dominant ideologies of consumption are naturalized is, however, an example of ideology clandestinely imposed upon adolescents; it is an example that demonstrates that not all ideologies are negotiated with equally.

Conclusion

The relationships with ideology revealed by students in this study in their discussion of reading tastes were certainly varied. It was not simply the case that distinctions in taste aligned neatly with clearly marked and reinforced social divisions. It was clear, though, that students' tastes and how they talked about them possessed important ideological implications. Most striking was the ways in which these tastes revealed the persistence of well-established cultural ideologies. These ideologies were present firstly through the division between fantasy texts and fictional realism that not only privileged realist texts, but also invoked moral panics about youth culture in general. Perhaps these discourses demonstrate that ideologies that may have fallen out

of favour in academic circles, or debates that from which humanities scholars have moved on, remain as part of the general public domain.

Most significant among these residual ideologies was that of mass-cultural critique. Students' interaction with the *Twilight* series showed the ownership some readers felt they had over certain texts and characters. That this sense of ownership was seemingly compromised by the mass-popularity of *Twilight* sheds some light on the relationship adolescent reading has with commodification and marketing. In this sense reading resembled not Bourdieu's (2010) conception of cultural capital, but rather Thornton's (1995) notion of subcultural capital, with students modifying their reading tastes to react against a vaguely conceived and constructed 'mainstream'. Furthermore, students defended their cultural domain against a perceived assault from outsiders. This ownership was a particular issue for the high-literacy group, the group who had the most to lose from the democratization of 'their' culture. The presence of this ideological relic in the discourse of twenty-first century adolescence reveals not simply that these ideas are still a residual part of debates and disputes over culture, but rather that the cultural dynamics that compelled Leavis (1978) or Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) to rail against 'mass-culture' are still operating: there are still boundaries that need to be defended—cultural taste is still a site of intense ideological contestation, contestation that instills and reinforces hierarchies that make distinction possible. That these same students who feared for the commercialization of their culture also remained uncritical of consumer ideology in general is a tension that typifies the inconsistent and ambivalent nature of the negotiation with ideologies of taste.

The ways in which students reacted against the supposed cultural mainstream revealed further contradictions and ambivalences. Students exercised considerable agency over their tastes, yet their reading was partly determined by the attitudes of their peers and, it seems by marketing. More significantly, student tastes were part of a performance of identity, a performance that utilized dominant forms of heteronormative

ideology. Contradictorily, students also expressed a preference for, in the case of *Vampire Academy*, an assertive female protagonist. While this preference was not entirely unproblematic, it showed, along with many of the ways these students negotiated with ideologies of taste and gender, that these young readers were not dupes, but were actively engaged in in a constant process of making and remaking themselves. Nor were these students entirely unfettered and unshaped by these same ideologies. It is perhaps because of the dynamic, interactive and constant nature of the negotiations between adolescent agency and ideologies of taste that they proved so often to be complex and contradictory.

Chapter Three: Reading, Ideology and Meaning

This chapter examines the ideological negotiations that take place between textual meaning and adolescent readers. It analyses the fashion in which young readers engage with both the implicit and explicit ideologies propagated by novel series such as *Twilight*, *Vampire Academy*, *Harry Potter* and novels such as *Will*. It also investigates the ideological implications of reader engagement with the subject position of the novels they read. Textual meaning proves to be a site of significant, but messy, ideological negotiation. Not only do students engage, again, with a number of residual ideologies, but the nature of this engagement is characterized by inconsistency between readers and *within* readers, by students taking positions that are sometimes contradictory and often ambivalent.

In the previous chapter I stated that 'What do you like to read?' seemed the most obvious and natural of questions with which to begin an interview. This was largely because questions of taste are central to the social dimension of reading and the interview, while between a student and teacher, was still a social interaction between two people talking about books. If questions of taste seemed the most obvious starting point in an interview about reading, then questions meaning appeared to be almost as natural to ask. This is primarily because one of the most fundamental roles books play—especially within educational institutions—is that of meaning-making entities. Teachers and academics in particular frame novels as media that impart specific meanings and significances to their readership. This role of the novel is emphasized by the NSW English syllabus from the time of the interviews in this study, when it states: 'Meaning is central to the study of English' (2010, p. 7).

Accordingly, the question of whom 'owns' textual meaning has been among the most vigorously debated in literary criticism. New Critics and Leavisite scholars argued

that the arbiter of literary meaning was the text itself (see Eliot 1964; Richards 2001; Leavis 1948); reader-response critics and reception theorists claimed that the reader was responsible for meaning (see Iser 1974; Jauss 1982); historicists of various guises have argued that the vast impersonal forces of history remain the referent which determines the ultimate meaning of a text (see Greenblatt 1980; White 1987). These claims over the location of meaning are intensely and unavoidably ideological, primarily because books provide a way of organizing, presenting and legitimating a particular 'reality' to readers. Questions about textual meaning are, therefore, never just about books, but rather about who can and should control representations and knowledge of the world. Consequently, sociologist John B. Thompson argued that 'ideology, broadly speaking, is *meaning in the service of power*' (1990, p. 6, original emphasis).

Recent academic approaches in the study of children's and YA fiction have recognized and explored extensively this relationship between fiction, ideology and textual or narrative meaning. The thorough nature of this exploration is perhaps a consequence of such literature tending to be didactic (Stephens 1992, p. 3). This focus on ideology, meaning and power invokes a diverse range of theoretical approaches. These include the use of Marxist (see Zipes 2001), feminist (see Wilkie-Stibbs 2002), psychoanalytical (see Coats 2004), postcolonial (see McGillis 2000) and queer theory (see Trites 1998) frameworks. These frameworks have brought to light the many ways in which, as Trites argues: 'Books for adolescents have many ideologies. And they spend much time manipulating the reader…They can all be linked to issues of power' (2000, p. x). Entailed in these studies is an awareness of the potential for these ideologies to affect their young audience. The explicit 'messages' or 'lessons' intended by didactic fiction potentially constitute an important socializing influence on young, impressionable readers. The narrative strategies employed in texts for children and adolescents possess the capacity to shape the sense young readers have of who they are in relation to others, and to the world around them.

In discussing how novels convey meaning to their audience, these analyses have tended to focus on the implied reader—that is, the reader constructed by and though the narrative strategies employed by the text[16]. Mike Cadden (2010) suggests that this focus on the implied reader is more intense in analyses of fiction written for young people partly because: 'It is the reader alone for whom the genre is defined' (2010, p. xiv). This implied reading position constructs subject positions for the reader, that is, positions from which readers are encouraged to engage with the text. McCallum and Stephens highlight the importance of the subject position, stating:

> *The concept of subject positions implied within texts is of crucial importance for reading and especially for examining a text's possible ideological impact, because what such positions inevitably seek is reader alignment with or against the social attitudes and relationships which constitute the narrative* (2010, p. 362).

Norman Fairclough argues that whether or not texts have some sort of ideological impact is dependent on whether 'readers generally fall into the subject position of the ideal reader or not' (1989, p. 52). Crucially, Fairclough suggests that 'actual viewers or listeners or readers have to negotiate a relationship with the ideal subject' (1989, p. 49).

As this thesis has previously argued, this characterization of the process by which a reader engages with the subject position/s offered by a text as a negotiation is important as it implies a degree of agency that readers have in determining meaning from the text. One of the purposes of this chapter is to determine the extent of that agency and the way it is practiced. McCallum outlines the second implication of this negotiation:

> *Insofar as childhood, adolescence and adulthood are culturally constructed categories, the relations between which are primarily determined by processes of education, enculturation and maturation, then the implicit audience positions inscribed in literature for children and adolescents will be informed by wider cultural assumptions about what constitutes these cultural categories and the*

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[16] The implied reader is by no means the only construction of the reader in this field. Elizabeth Freund has compiled an exhaustive list of these (in many ways related) reading positions which includes: the ideal reader; the mock reader; the model reader; the super reader; the inscribed or encoded reader; the narratee; the literent; the informed reader or the interpretive community; and finally, the actual reader (Freund 1987, p. 7).

processes involved in moving between them (1999, p. 9).

These 'wider cultural assumptions'—what Eagleton calls 'preunderstandings' (1996, p. 67)—inform how students construct meaning with and through their texts. As Michael Benton suggests, 'the reader is not a *tabula rasa* but brings idiosyncratic knowledge and personal style to the act of reading' (1999, p. 84). As Benton also argues, an understanding of this 'idiosyncratic knowledge and personal style' needs to be balanced by 'the awareness that interpretation is socially, historically and culturally formed' (1999, p. 84).

While such a construction of the reader recognizes the significant role the reader plays in determining textual meaning, this approach still 'has its roots in the text' (Freund 1987, p. 135). Accordingly, McCallum writes about a 'distinction between an actual reader and an implied reader' (1999, p. 8). As I outlined in the literature review, it is perhaps because of this distinction between the implied reader and the actual reader that a number of seminal academics in children's and YA fictional studies have included ethnographical components in some of their formalist and theoretical studies (Stephens 1992; McGillis 1996; Zipes 2001). Indeed, it is this potential gap between the implied reader and the actual reader that this chapter investigates, ascertaining the extent to which the implied reading position of a text—its explicit and implicit messages, the characters with which it asks young readers to identify—influences the position actual readers adopt. It asks: to what extent are the explicit and implicit meanings of a text perceptible to young readers and what are the ideological implications of student engagement with these meanings?

The first way this chapter will investigate these questions is by analyzing student engagement with the explicit meaning of the novels they read. Peter Hollindale (2003) identifies this notion of explicit meaning as an important aspect of ideology, describing it as 'the explicit social, political or moral beliefs of the individual writer, and his wish to recommend them to children through the story' (2003, p. 27). This articulation of

ideology is seen as 'the most conspicuous element in the ideology of children's books, and the easiest to detect. Its presence is conscious, deliberate and in some measure "pointed"' (2003, p. 28). Accordingly, this chapter will examine whether or not the explicit 'meaning' of such novels—what Stephens describes as a text's 'theme, moral, insight into behaviour' (1992, p. 2)—is discerned and articulated by readers.

The second way this chapter investigates the relationship between reading, meaning and ideology is by asking students about the implicit ideology in texts they read, what Hollindale describes as 'the individual writer's unexamined assumptions' (2003, p. 30). Hollindale argues that these assumptions are far more pervasive than explicit ideology as they remain unrecognized. It is this form of ideology, writes Hollindale, that creates a 'climate of belief (2003, p. 37). For Gramsci (1971) too, this implicit ideology contributed most profoundly to the dynamics of hegemony; that is, it is the way in which ruling classes maintain dominance by naturalizing cultural assumptions. Implicit ideology is also implicated in subjectivities of gender. Toril Moi, for example, argues that while 'the [feminine] subject has the capacity to act and make choices', those 'choices and acts…are always overdetermined, that is to say deeply influenced by unconscious ideological allegiances' (2002, p. 177). Accordingly, this chapter will investigate the students' engagement with the implicit gender-based ideology in some of the novels they read.

The final area that is central to the construction and function of subject positions and the promotion of ideology in fiction that will be examined here is identification. Jonathan Culler argues that 'poems and novels address us in ways that demand identification, and identification works to create identity: we become who we are by identifying with figures we read about' (1997, p. 113). Indeed, Stephens has suggested that one of the most effective ways fictional texts written for children 'exert control over readers' is through the construction of subject positions that encourage reader identification (1992, p. 22). McCallum also (1999) argues that novels for teenage

readers are characterized by 'ideologies of identity' and recent work in the field of cognitive narratology has further emphasized the importance of identification in fiction. Suzanne Keen, for example, suggests that narrative identification contributes to the ability of a reader to develop empathy (2006, p. 214); Liza Sunshine argues that the very practice of reading fiction is about readers seeking to subconsciously 'read the minds' and gauge the mental states of fictional characters (2006, p. 17; 2012, p. 23). Similarly, Trites relates the tendency for adolescent fiction to utilize recognizable 'scripts of growth' (2014 p. 147) to cognitive behavior. These 'cognitive readings', Trites, argues, 'allow us to examine the role language and conceptualization play in creating larger cultural narratives that influence the epistemology and ontology of youth' (2014, p. 147).

Trites, however, points out that notions of subject position and identification in YA fiction are often contradictory. 'Adolescent literature', Trites claims, 'is the only genre written with the subversive ideological intent of undermining the reader's subject position' (2014, p. 1). Trites suggests that YA fiction is subversive as it represents adolescence as a stage of life that must be overcome, by constructing teenage protagonists who must either 'mature or die' (2014, p. 1) and subsequently asks adolescents to accept a transitory selfhood. Not only does Trites' observation highlight an important feature of YA fiction—that the primary subject position offered by YA texts is that of the adolescent as a subject-in-the-making—but it is also emblematic of the contradiction and inconsistency that characterizes the adolescent negotiation with textual meaning. This chapter will investigate this relationship between identification, the subject position and ideology, arguing that this relationship is again one of ambivalent negotiation.

Ultimately, this chapter does not only theorize ideology from the perspective of the text. Rather, I will examine manner in which ideology shapes the response of students to their reading. As Paul Smith suggests: 'ideology must lodge itself in the

subject/individual in order to function as ideology. Evidently, the notion that the text acts as a privileged display of ideological processes ought to allow for a discussion of exactly its consumption and not only its production' (1988, p. 29). Hall put it more succinctly: 'If no "meaning" is taken, there can be no "consumption". If the meaning is not articulated in practice, it has no effect' (1980, p. 117). Accordingly, this chapter compares some of the assumptions made by professional readers about meaning and ideological impact with how adolescent readers respond to texts. As I will demonstrate, this comparison reveals the complex and often contradictory nature of ideological impact on subjectivity. A number of students responded to questions of explicit and implicit meaning and to questions concerning reader identification and subject position in important and varied ways. They often took up 'possibilities of agency, resistance and transgression' (McCallum 1999, p. 104). These responses also indicate, however, that even in the act of critiquing or even resisting the position offered by the text, students often draw upon dominant discourses in order to make sense of what they read. Thus reading for young people seems to constitute—as is implied by so many academic works on YA and children's fiction—a site of negotiation with competing and conflicting ideologies that remains contradictory and inconsistent.

Reading and Explicit Meaning

Much of the fiction young people read, both for pleasure and as part of school curricula, teaches explicitly some kind of lesson. Accordingly, questions of meaning are one of the most significant focal points of textual analysis at both academic and secondary school forums. Hall (1980) argues that this aspect of media discourse is distinctly ideological, stating: 'the denotative or "literal" meaning is [not] outside ideology. Indeed, we could say that its ideological value is strongly fixed—because it

has become so fully universal and "natural"' (1980, p. 122). Much of the work conducted in this area has been both text-based and theory-based (see Coats 2004; 2013; Inglis 1983; McCallum 1999; Trites 2000; Zipes 1979); the meaning imparted by the text is inferred by providing an analysis of the ideas, forms and conventions in the novels as identified usually by 'professional readers' such as academics, teachers and reviewers. These elements of the text are often interpreted through a range of theoretical or historical frameworks. Researchers, however, have long identified a potential gap between what professional readers see as the meaning of novels and the ways in which young readers engage with fiction (McCallum 1999, p. 14; Protherough 1983, p. 10).

Explicit Meaning and Twilight

In an attempting to analyze this gap between the implied and actual readers of adolescent texts, this section surveys some of the critical responses to *Twilight* and a number of other fictional texts read by students in this study and compare these readings with the responses of students to these texts in the interviews. In some ways a comparison of the responses of secondary school students with those of professional readers is limited; as McCallum points out, the targeted readership of adolescent and children's fiction is not always 'able to articulate at the level of implication' the 'complex and subtle issues which narratively work upon readers' (1999, p. 8). Despite these limitations, it is useful to compare how students in this study respond to questions of explicit meaning in *Twilight* and other novels they read with those of professional readers. Such comparisons reveal whether or not students engage with texts in the manner assumed by theorists; they reveal the extent to which students engage with and discern meaning as it is presented in fiction; they also provide an indication as to whether or not students adopt the subject position of the implied or ideal reader. While not all students responded substantially to questions of explicit meaning, many students engaged with fiction in insightful and compelling ways. Furthermore, the ways in which

students respond to questions of explicit meaning in fiction provides some insight into how ideologies interact with their subjectivity, and it also shows that students are negotiating with a range of both dominant and subversive ideologies—in a fashion that is often inconsistent and ambivalent—to make sense of what they read.

Academic readings of *Twilight* are diverse enough that the academic discourse surrounding the series is a significant site of ideological contestation. As Bernard Beck has suggested: 'Almost as popular as the vampire tale itself has been the indoor sport of finding a metaphorical, deeply buried social meaning of the tale' (2011, p. 92). Consequently, precisely what constitutes explicit meaning in the series is problematic. Many commentators, however, view *Twilight* as promoting Stephanie Meyer's Mormon beliefs on sexual abstinence. Tammy Dietz's argument resembles a number of such critiques. She claims:

> *First and foremost, Meyer promotes the notion of chastity in the Twilight series with a flourish. It is fair to say that Twilight succeeds largely because Bella is chaste and Edward abstains—for a very long time. The primary conflict in the lean and simple plot of the first three books rests squarely on the sexual tension between withholding lovers. This tension is emphasized further by the nature of vampire bloodlust. Edward wants Bella in an even more potent (and threatening) way than typical human sexual desire, and Bella's power to tempt Edward is more than ordinary magnetism* (2011, p.100).

Similarly, Anthea Taylor argues that in the narrative 'pre-marital sex is rendered dangerous and the links between eroticism and death are made explicit' (2012, p. 32). Sara Day goes so far as to describe the series as 'abstinence porn', drawing on the tension between the books 'work[ing] within an established cultural framework upholding the importance of chastity and saving sex until marriage' and 'the titillating, voyeuristic nature of the novels, especially the relationship between Bella and Edward' (2014, p. 44). The series' depiction of both female sexuality and the sex act in general would seem to conform to a 'power/repression' model of sex and sexuality which involves society both 'simultaneously repressing and liberating sexuality' (Trites 1998, p. 143). It appears most professional interpretations of sex in the *Twilight* series reveal it to

be at once taboo and titillating, forbidden, yet irresistibly attractive.

While this ideology is perhaps the most prevalent for academic readers' analysis of *Twilight*, it is not recognized consistently at a conscious level by the students in this study. Nevertheless, some of the observations made by students correspond with other academics insights into *Twilight* and about YA fiction in general. Perhaps the most substantial response to questions of explicit meaning in *Twilight* came from Rebecca, who stated:

> *It's all about Bella. Her happy ending is getting Edward. I mean, I think in the end her character does develop, like in the last book I think she does become to realize, you know, there's more to life than just becoming a vampire and all that, but, and I think she learns, like, from her family that she, um, she appreciates things in the end which I like. I think that's a good ending—that she, like, she appreciates what she has, so I think that that kind of has a good lesson at the end, but through the other books, not really 'cause it's all about her obsession with the vampires and Edward.*

This answer has much in common with the work of Leisha Jones (2011), who argues that *Twilight* resembles a *bildungsroman*. She states: 'The saturation of the Twilight novels among girl readers is due in no small part to the categorical specificities and resonances of the female bildungsroman for the twenty-first-century girl' (2011, p. 440). She describes the series as a 'bildungsroman proper' because,

> *...the story arc encompasses an individual's arduous, conflicted growth through and into a social order, initiated by loss and extrafamiliar bonding. Bella, the protagonist, faces not only the typical struggles of a girl grappling with the constraints and pleasures of her inevitable womanhood, including the passion and heartbreak of heterosexual love relations, she also takes on the seemingly impenetrable domain of the vampire, having to assimilate conventional gendered societal mores while negotiating the rules of the undead world* (2011, p. 440).

This description accords with the characterization of the *bildungsroman* by Abel, Hirsch and Langland, who suggest that the female *bildungsroman* typically ends with the heroine's marriage – that female 'achievement' is a union with the male love interest (1983, p. 10). Tash also recognizes this as a feature of *Twilight,* stating: '[Twilight's] a lot about love conquering all I guess. It ends happy, I know that, but they have to go through a lot to get there I guess, so maybe it's, I don't know, you've got to stick on the

journey even if it gets rough and it'll end well.' In responding to a question about what she liked about *Twilight*, Depplikov explained that she viewed 'sacrifice' as the central concept in the series and that the novels were also predominantly about Edward and Bella's relationship triumphing over significant obstacles. These comments by Rebecca, Tash and Depplikov demonstrate that they link dominant cultural discourses about overcoming adversity and 'love conquering all' with the fiction they read. This seems to not only confirm the conservative gender ideology of the Twilight series—in that marriage is the ultimate outcome for young girls—but it also demonstrates that this explicit ideology is one recognized by young readers.

That some students identify character development and self-improvement as a part of the series, a cornerstone of the traditional *bildungsroman* (Trites 2000, p. 11), possesses further ideological ramifications. Trites (2014) has suggested that the 'hegemony of growth metaphors' (2014, p. 123) in adolescent literature possesses 'epistemological implications' (2014, p.133) implications that I would argue are also fundamentally ideological. For Trites, the first implication is that: 'The temporary nature of childhood makes it an easy target for dismissal, as in such formulations as "she'll outgrow her immaturity" or "it's just a phase"…childhood contrasts nicely in many metaphors with the putative fixity of adulthood, when we are ostensibly "mature" and "stable"' (2014, p. 134). She also argues:

> *Alternatively, those metaphors of growth that focus more on the child's epistemology than on her or his ontological status imply not only that learning affects growth but also that learning even effects growth. Children grow because they learn, or even only when they learn. Whether the metaphor assumes childhood weakness and stupidity…or innocence…this model of growth values knowledge (or 'innocence', which is the lack thereof) more than any other factor. Ultimately, various metaphors of growth imply that childhood and youth are temporary, and children and adolescents must learn in a model that privileges the learning mind over the biophysically evolving body* (Trites 2014, p. 134).

These ideas echo those of Kenway and Bullen (2001), who claim that notions of developmentalism characterize discourses of childhood and that such ideas imply 'that

the movement from childhood to adulthood involves a linear progression from the simple to the complex and from the irrational to the rational (2001, p. 3). The ideological implications of these tropes of growth and development, it seems to me, extend even further. By promoting a belief in the inevitability and desirability of growth, such texts link ideologically to any of the range of philosophies that are teleological in nature; that is, they profess a belief in the inexorable and positive nature of 'progress'. These metanarratives include classical Marxism, scientific positivism or, most presciently, the ideals of contemporary capitalism, which tends to lionize growth not simply as positive, but necessary. Moreover, the *bildungsroman* also suggests to adolescents that the injustices or difficulties they face are a natural part of what it means to be a teenager and in so doing naturalizes a particular understanding of social forces. By implying that these forces are something with which teenagers must come to terms—rather than rebel against—the *bildungsroman* further implicates adolescents in a range of ideological assumptions from which students may not necessarily free themselves by recognizing tropes of growth in the fiction they read.

Despite the responses of Rebecca, Tash and Depplikov, some students were unable to articulate any explicit meaning in *Twilight*. Leonnie claimed that she,

> *…couldn't get a message from it 'cause it was more like the vampires and werewolves, stuff that wasn't really relevant to anything we have to do in our lives, but yeah, I don't know, I suppose about doing the right thing, or like, he was a vampire and had to, like, would naturally drink blood, but chose to do the opposite and be more, like, human, more, yeah.*

Similarly, Chrysanthemum stated: 'I can't really see a message' and Kandy claimed that: 'It's hard to tell when they're like in different worlds to us, you know.' This reaction corresponds with the discussion in the previous chapter about prejudices towards the fantasy genre: it was perceived not as serious fiction, but rather as just 'a bit of fun'. Some responded with intentionally flippant remarks such as 'don't fall in love with a vampires' (Aff Roe) and 'don't be afraid to date vampires' (Daisy). Maree's view of value and meaning in the series was concerned primarily with the fact that she found

it challenging to read, stating: 'the words are really really hard, like big.' Consequently, this student from the mixed ability class believed the series 'Just teaches you words, I guess.' It may be that these students were unable to articulate their ideas on the explicit meaning of *Twilight* given the immediacy of the interview format. Nevertheless, the limited nature of these responses to questions of explicit meaning poses a few questions: if students are unable to identify the explicit ideology of a text, does this render them more susceptible to its ideological influence? Are the series' assumptions about relationships, sex, gender and growth—essentially the subject position proffered by the novel—more likely to be adopted if young readers do not immediately recognize them? Furthermore, is it the nature of the *Twilight* series itself that elicits such reactions, or has it something to do with the way these students engage with texts in general?

Explicit Meaning and Vampire Academy

An examination of the students' responses to questions of explicit meaning in the *Vampire Academy* series demonstrates that overtly didactic texts tend to evoke more cogent responses to questions about meaning. As with *Twilight,* Rebecca again offered the most substantial response, focusing predominantly on the central character Rose:

> *Well, Rose's, like, confidence, her like ability to not care about what other people think of her, I think that's good for, it's a good lesson to teach 'cause she's very much her, she bes [sic] herself. She doesn't try to be someone different and I think that's a good lesson to teach, like, you know, people my age. Like, you don't have to give in to peer pressure 'cause like she doesn't do that kind of thing. She explains in the book that she used to but she doesn't anymore.*

Rebecca was able to identify Rose's independence and strength as the cornerstone of meaning in the novel. Not only does this demonstrate Rebecca's ability to assess the moral value of female strength and independence, but she also draws on liberal feminist discourses to discuss the novel.

This capacity to perceive and discuss the explicit meaning of texts is obviously an aptitude Rebecca possesses. Other students, however, were more able to ascribe

meaning to *Vampire Academy* than they were to *Twilight*. Aff Roe's responses to being asked if *Twilight* had something to teach its readers were flippant; *Vampire Academy*, on the other hand, taught its readership 'to be brave and stuff and women can do what men can do and stuff like that.' Like Rebecca, Aff Roe draws upon liberal feminist discourses to make sense of the series, and in so doing demonstrates the inconsistent manner in which such critical discourses are used to negotiate with explicit textual ideology. Similarly, Depplikov provided insubstantial responses to questions of explicit meaning in *Twilight*, but said of *Vampire Academy*: '...well I guess it can, it has a lot of, like, things that we can relate to like love and sacrifice for the people who you love and stuff. So in a way, I guess it can.'

The immediate and confident way these students were able to ascribe meaning to *Vampire Academy* seems to have much to do with the nature and content of the novels themselves. To date there has been very little academic work dedicated to the *Vampire Academy* series (Whateley 2010; Wright 2016), however, it would seem to me that these novels are more intentionally and explicitly metonymic and didactic than the *Twilight* series; they are 'an isomorph of events in the actual world' (Stephens 1992, p. 2). The series adopts a metonymic and didactic approach to a range of issues, including: teenage sexuality[17]; sexual taboo[18]; female body image[19]; drug abuse[20]; and adolescent self-

[17] The protagonist, Rose, is initially more sexually active and aware than her counterpart, Bella. In the first novel in the series she reveals that she has 'done things' with boys and that she enjoys flirting (Mead 2007, p. 50).

[18] The most illicit act in the text is allowing a vampire to suck blood from your neck – which in the novel has a narcotic effect on the person being bitten - while also having sex. This act is seen as particularly 'dirty' (Mead 2007, p. 62) and female proponents of this act become known as 'Blood-whores', with Rose claiming that: 'In fact, one of the kinkiest, practically pornographic things a dhampir could do was let a Moroi drink blood during sex' (Mead 2007, p.62). The novel is therefore similar to *Twilight* in that it explicitly seeks to stigmatise some sexual behaviours.

[19] Bella is aware of her sexual attractiveness, at one point stating: 'Here among the slim and small-chested Moroi girls, certain features – meaning my larger breasts and more defined hips – stood out. I knew I was pretty: it was sexy in a risque way' (Mead 2007, p. 51). Implicit in this line too is a certain didacticism; it seems to react against the model of feminine beauty so often discussed in contemporary Western society – that of the slender, waif-like, infantilised girl and presents a more voluptuous image of feminine sexuality.

[20] Not only does the series use the narcotic effect of 'feeding' as a way of examining issues of drug-use, but also characters such as Adrian become 'spirit users' whose access to certain types of magic also resembles aspects of narcotic and alcohol abuse.

harm[21]. In this sense, *Vampire Academy* shares much in common with adolescent 'problem novels' which McCallum describes as,

> *...usually realist in mode, [they] purport to focus on the 'real' personal, family, and social problems and issues that are thought to affect young people. They typically deal with marginally taboo subject matter—sex, pregnancy, drug abuse, homosexuality, and so on—and usually deal with these issues in a manner that is instructive* (2006, p. 216).

It could be argued that by resembling a more traditional YA novel, rather than a romance novel, *Vampire Academy* evokes a more immediate and clear response from students to questions about its overt meaning.

While the *Vampire Academy* series differs from *Twilight* in the way it deals with social issues, it also presents its reader with an alternate fictional world. The vampires in *Twilight* exist in a fictional representation of the 'real world'; the story is set predominantly in the actual town of Forks in Oregon USA and Edward drives a Volvo. *Vampire Academy*, on the other hand, presents a vampiric world that is almost entirely separate from the 'real' world of humans. Vampires and their guardians attend a discrete 'Vampire Academy' and almost all of the action of the first novel takes place within these boundaries and within the boundaries of this 'vampire world'. Some students cited this aspect of the series as a reason why they preferred the *Vampire Academy* series to *Twilight*. Depplikov, for instance, liked that 'in *Vampire Academy*, you live in the world of them, but whereas with this [*Twilight*], it's all secrecy with Vampires. But with *Vampire Academy* all is about—you live in a vampire world.'

J. R. R. Tolkien famously insisted that in order for such created fictional worlds to work artistically, they needed to apply a consistent internal logic (1983, p. 144). The fictional world created in *Vampire Academy* seems to apply this 'consistent internal

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[21] Lissa engages in this activity to the point where for Rose determined: 'It was time to tell someone' (Mead 2007, p. 261). As a consequence of Rose speaking up about Lissa's self-harm, the problem is neatly and satisfactorily resolved:

> *Lissa did no more cutting. The doctor prescribed her something – an anti-depressant or anti-anxiety drug, I couldn't remember which – that made her feel better. I'd never really known anything about those kinds of pills. I thought they made people silly and happy. But it was a pill like any other, meant to fix something, and mostly it kept her normal and feeling stable* (Mead 2007, p. 325).

logic'; the hierarchies and mores of the 'Vampire Academy' itself, as well as those of the 'human world' that parallel it are articulated and maintained clearly throughout the novel. Moreover, *Vampire Academy* presents verisimilitudinous and (as stated above) metonymic aspects of the 'real world' to readers. This world is replete with a social hierarchy that allows the novels to comment on issues of class and privilege and is a world in which adolescent characters swear and curse like their non-fictional counterparts.

Jackie Horne (2012) argues, however, that it is not so much the consistency and verisimilitude of such fictional worlds that determine the ideological impact of fantasy texts upon their readers. She contends, rather, that the 'creation of a convincing secondary world' in these texts is less important than this secondary world 'appeal[ing] to readers' desires, desires unmet in realistic fictions' (Horne 2012, p. 31). In the case of the participants in this study and their response to *Vampire Academy*, it appears that while *both* components of the series influence the popularity of the text, it is primarily the didactic and metonymic aspects of the series that allow students to identify explicit meaning more readily. While McCracken (1998), Radway (1984) and Fowler (1991) all argue that the generic conventions and context of romance fiction engender certain ideological responses, the way students in this study identify explicit meaning in *Vampire Academy* suggests that uneven ideological effects can be entrained within the same genre; while *Twilight* and *Vampire Academy* adhere to many of the same conventions, the differences how each novel is constructed means that they engage differently with this aspect of textual ideology.

Explicit Meaning and Harry Potter

Students' responses to the *Harry Potter* series also suggested a link between more didactic, metonymic novels and the ability of their readers to discuss explicit meaning. This is a series which, according to some critics, possesses a 'narrative story,

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images, and lessons…[which are] infiltrating the lives and imaginations of readers and consumers of related products' (Heilman 2009, p. 2). Not only does the Harry Potter story present the reader with a *bildungsroman* where 'a young man is led by a collection of hands higher than he is aware of toward his destiny' (Appelbaum 2009, p. 85), but it also deals explicitly with a range of issues facing contemporary adolescents in a didactic fashion. As Sheltrown argues: 'Rowling's work speaks directly to a number of problems we face in the non-magical world' (2009, p. 47). The issues identified by critics are multitudinous and may include dealing with the pangs of desire (Piippo 2009, p. 65; Gupta 2009, p. 127), family and identity (Kornfeld & Prothro 2009, p. 122), racism and discrimination (Gupta 2009, p. 112), issues of mental health, knowledge and power (Birch 2009, p. 103) and class (Gupta 2009, p. 121).

Similar to both Twilight and *Vampire* Academy, some readers in this study believed there was no underlying meaning inherent in the *Harry Potter* novels. Candy stated 'I never really thought of it as having a message, I just read it for the fun of it' and Maree expressed similar sentiments. Others, however, were able to identify significant components of the traditional *bildungsroman*. Consuela, for instance, believed that the major thematic concern of the series was: 'Don't give up. Don't let life hold you back. Don't live in the past, live in the moment or the future—unless you're doing a History exam, then live in the past. Basically keep moving forward, don't look back too often.' Lorretta thought that that the series encouraged readers to, 'believe in yourself, 'cause [Harry] doesn't have anyone. He makes friends and then he like fights everything and he like wins, 'cause he believed in himself.' Here Lorretta, a student in the mixed ability group, linked *Harry Potter* to the heroic paradigm, in turn making connections with socially desirable forms of masculine behavior. Chrysanthemum claimed that the series:

> *…sends out the message that we have to be careful 'cause Harry...and like he was tempted. He was drawn into this like chamber and we have to, like, I guess we have to go exploring as well, like, in our world. Like we have to - in order to*

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answer questions we have to figure out, like, the mountain ourselves.

This response highlights some of the general ideological features of a *bildungsroman* such as notions of self-discovery and the overcoming of adversity; Chrysanthemum articulates clearly the notion that agency is acquired after personal struggle, that identity-formation is a fraught process. Rebecca went into even more detail:

> *Well Harry was very much the poor kid, you know, and what I liked about Harry Potter, like a lot of books and especially on television, it's all about being, like, beautiful and Harry Potter isn't described that way. Like, even like, say, Cinderella, she came from like ashes to be this princess, but she was described as the pretty one and Harry's got like, he's this like nerdy kid with glasses - I call my brother Harry Potter - but he's this nerdy kid with glasses and is kind of like skinny and wimpy and he becomes the hero. And I just, I really like that 'cause, and also he worked for it. Like in all seven books he worked extremely hard to get to where he was. Like, it didn't come naturally to him and that to me was really, like, something, like, if you really work hard for something, you can get there and a lot of books, especially fantasy and fairytales, they make it sound so easy and in Harry Potter they didn't. Like, he worked really hard through all those books to, you know, get where he was in the end, which was to defeat, you know, Voldemort.*

While these responses suggest the importance of more explicit metonymy and didacticism in allowing students to respond to questions of explicit meaning, they also reveal, perhaps more importantly, the extent to which students draw upon already existing schemata to make sense of what they read. The responses of Consuela and Loretta to the *Harry Potter* series were likely drawing upon the schemata – and in turn the *discourses* – of Hollywood films and television series in order to make sense of the novels. Chrysanthemum and Rebecca, on the other hand were able to draw more easily on their experience of tropes such as the *bildungsroman* when discussing *Twilight*. As Collinson argues, 'readers use their limited interpretative resources, or "repertoires"... to make sense of a particular narrative within the field of everyday cultural consumption' (2009, p. 89) and it is clear from the responses of Chrysanthemum and Rebecca that the *bildungsroman* was one of the repertoires available to them.

What is again clear from Rebecca's responses in particular that these schemata are formed ideologically. It was very important to Rebecca that Harry Potter 'worked

extremely hard to get where he was.' It is a seen as desirable for Rebecca that Harry's magical abilities did not 'come naturally to him.' This notion aligns neatly with one of the one most pervasive of post-renaissance ideologies: the protestant work ethic (Weber 1978, p. 135). While Mary Kingsbury pointed out long ago that some children's fiction tends to react against this ideology (1975, p. 975), the notion that a character should strive to achieve their dreams or goals remains a significant aspect not only of some adolescent fiction, but also mainstream film and fiction in general. Thus, paradoxically, students' ability to recognize explicit meaning in series such as *Harry Potter* might mean that they are in a position to critique its overt ideology, however, in doing so they are utilizing ideologically constructed repertoires.

Explicit Meaning and Will

The ways in which students responded to questions on the novel *Will* suggests that some of these repertoires that enable students to discuss explicit meaning are developed in school. This novel is a relatively straightforward *bildungsroman* about a seventeen-year-old boy who is negotiating his relationships with his friends, teachers, mother and girlfriend while also coming to terms with the death of his father. The way this novel is taught emphasizes the 'coming of age' aspects of the text. The teaching program for this unit of work, entitled 'Just a Teenager', concentrates most closely on the theme of teenagers overcoming adversity and maturing. Perhaps unsurprisingly, students such as Lisa responded effusively to questions of explicit meaning in this novel:

> *Yeah, because it's very much a book about the coming of age, isn't it and it deals with different things that adolescents have to go through. Like, some adolescents are confused about their feelings in relationships. The character Mark, he's gay and so some teenagers are gonna be gay and they're going to, you know, they're going to need that help and that inspiration to push them on and I think Mark was an inspiring character. So I think there are little messages in there to help...'cause it's different for everybody, your experience is different for everybody. I mean it's not easy 'cause you know you're always dealing with a situation or an issue that gets to you and upsets you like with body image and*

relationships and you know there's always something that bothers you as you grow up, but you overcome it and you learn how to deal with it and with Will, his situation was more a family situation. Like, about dealing with death and family and how you move past that and so if...I think everybody has dealt with that before, has lost somebody they love. So that really helps relate to Will, but it also really helps adolescents who are going through that to move on.

In this response, Lisa identifies Will's struggle with his family situation and Mark's ability to overcome adversity as key aspects of the novel. Perhaps more importantly, she relates Will's 'family situation' to the broader notion of adolescent problems in general, such as 'body image and relationships' and discerns the socializing imperative of the novel to encourage teenagers 'who are going through that to move on.' As Depplikov argued more succinctly: 'I reckon the message is that everything gets better after the rollercoaster of the adolescent journey. 'Cause everything does work out for him in the end.' Again, this response identifies the didactic imperative of the novel to teach adolescents about the difficulties supposedly inherent in moments of transition and intuits Trites' claim that, 'in the adolescent novel, protagonists must learn about the social forces that have made them what they are' (2000, p. 3). As I suggested earlier in this chapter, the way the *bildungsroman* represents such difficulties possesses a naturalizing ideological function.

Like with other novels, some students were still unable or unwilling to engage fully with questions of explicit meaning in *Will*. Sometimes this was simply the result of them not having read the novel. Abbey, for instance, '[hadn't] read much of [*Will*] yet' and subsequently claimed, 'It doesn't seem like one of those books that teaches some cliché message or something.' That Abbey knows she should be looking for a 'cliché message' demonstrates that she recognizes the didactic nature of this genre. Accordingly, a significantly greater number of students were able to recognize explicit meaning in *Will* than in any other novel. The fact that it is a work of fictional realism may be significant in assessing why this is the case, as literary realism tends to be more transparent overall as a genre (Stephens 1992, p. 249). Indeed, *Will* did not need to

contend with any residual prejudices against fantasy fiction; while the sentiment 'it's just fiction' was leveled by various students at fantasy texts, no such epithet was given to *Will* by any student. It seems that the combination of genre, the ostensible didacticism of the novel and that students were provided with a more explicit interpretive framework meant that they were better equipped to identify explicit meaning in this text, as they were allowed to use different reading repertoires.

Whether or not students are able to identify the explicit meaning of a novel possesses ideological implications. On one hand it could be argued that if a student is unable to discern the explicit ideological thrust of text, this aspect of ideology can have no effect. If a novel such as *Twilight* represents nothing to a student but characters experiencing a series of events eliciting no specific meaning and for no real didactic purpose, then it could be argued that the lessons of the novel have not been imparted successfully to its young readership. Alternatively, it could also be argued that it is the ideology that remains *unrecognized* that is more important, as it is this ideology that allows assumptions to become naturalized and universalized. Perhaps, as Althusser suggests, 'ideology never says "I am ideological"' (1971, p. 175). In this sense, *Twilight* is possibly a more potent ideological text than more didactic series such as *Vampire Academy* and *Harry Potter*. In these series students are more aware of what the novels are attempting to 'teach' them and can therefore be more critical of these perspectives. Students were able to be *most* aware and critical of the explicit ideologies in *Will*, not only because of the overt didacticism of the novel, but also because of the overtly didactic practices of their school. It is clear, however, that whether or not students are aware of the explicit ideologies of a novel, ideology is inescapable; in engaging with questions of explicit meaning, students are always, paradoxically, drawing upon schemata or registers that are ideologically constituted.

Reading and Implicit Meaning

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While questions of the ideological impact of overt meaning in a novel remain ambiguous, it seems the more significant component or function of ideology is the way in which it *implicitly* promotes beliefs, values and paradigms. As I have argued above, ideology is all the more pervasive when it is *concealed* within a text. Stephens states that the kind of book that promotes this type of ideology 'can be the more powerful vehicle for an ideology because implicit, and therefore invisible, ideological positions are invested with legitimacy through the implication that they are simply "so"' (1992, p. 9). Furthermore, Hall (1980) claims that it is in this level of meaning, at this articulation of ideology, that clashes and contestation can be most acutely observed:

> *...it is at the connotative level of the sign that situational ideologies alter and transform signification. At this level we can see more clearly the active intervention of ideologies in and on discourse: here, the sign is open to new accentuations and, in Vološinov's terms, enters fully into the struggle over meanings—the class struggle in language'* (1980, p. 122).

As Hall suggests, the comments of students in this study to questions of implicit meaning reveal this to be a site of more fervently contested ideological negotiation.

Because it is not always easily detected in verbal responses of students to explicit questions, the effect of implicit ideology is difficult to discern. One area of questioning directed at students in an attempt to gauge the impact of implicit ideology focused on portrayals of gender in novels they had read, particularly in the *Twilight* and *Harry Potter* series. Critics have regularly accused these two series in particular of both overt and implicit sexism. Accordingly, students who had read these series were asked whether or not they concurred with the view that these novels series are sexist.

Gender Ideology and Twilight

Many early reviewers of *Twilight* concluded that the series represents gender in a conservative and sexist manner (Miller 2008; Seifert 2008). A number of more recent academic analyses concur with this sentiment (Bode 2010; Happel & Esposito 2010;

Morey 2012; Platt 2010; Taylor 2011). The traditionally gendered attitudes and passive demeanor of the protagonist Bella are at the centre of these assessments. She is considered to be 'a dupe of false consciousness, a supernatural Marabel Morgan-style "Total Woman" ready to cook, clean, and bear children until her transformation into a vampire renders these activities beside the point' (Morey 2012, p. 1). Bode suggests that 'Bella's submissiveness and passivity chafes against established ideas of how heroines, in the wake of feminism, should behave in contemporary fiction' (2010, p. 708). The extent of Bella's perceived disempowerment and banality is summed up by Taylor, who states:

> *As part of this emphasis on her immense lack of power, much narrative space is given to establishing Bella's discomfort in occupying an adolescent feminine body. Her incompetence simply being in the world is underscored throughout; she is profoundly clumsy, utterly useless in gym class, constantly injuring herself and, by implication, in need of her supernatural guardians. Edward's physical prowess, grace and ease of movement contrast patently with her own corporeal discomfort, representing a further means through which his 'protection' is legitimized. However, this exaggerated sense of her somatic limitations can also be seen as a product of how she is positioned as a teenage female body, hyper-visible and subject to the male gaze* (2011, p. 35).

Bella is entirely reliant on the strong, independent and dominant Edward for her physical and emotional wellbeing. Happel and Esposito exclaim: 'Bella is tough and smart when she is not in danger, but when her life is in jeopardy, Edward intervenes on multiple occasions for the classic masculine rescue' (2010, p. 530). Taylor suggests further that: 'Bella's masochistic desires and dependence on Edward for her physical and psychic stability help to ensure her subordination' (Taylor 2011, p. 34; see also Platt 2010). Melissa Ames suggests further that these traditionally gendered tropes place *Twilight* in a long tradition of conservative representations of gender and sexuality in vampire fiction (2008, p. 51).

As a consequence of its portrayal of gender, the *Twilight* series is considered by a number of critics as postfeminist (Levine 2010; Moruzi 2012; Peterson 2011; Taylor 2011). Postfeminism itself has been characterized in differing ways. Susan Faludi

discusses the term as constituting a backlash 'reviling the feminist movement' (2006, p. 11). Angela McRobbie describes it as 'a young women's neo-liberal feminism which is fluid, individualised and consumer-focused' (2009, p. 158). Similarly, Diane Negra's description of postfeminism concurs with McRobbie's and adds further that the movement is also concerned with the re-establishment a feminine identity aligned with matrimonial and maternal values (2009, p. 47), while Patricia Mann identifies postfeminist discourses preoccupied with 'agency and individualism' (1994, p. 32). It is worth noting that postfeminism is not universally represented in a negative fashion; while Faludi, McRobbie and Negra view these developments as retrograde and alarming, others portray postfeminism as 'compelling and provocative' (Genz & Brabon 2009, p. 2).

Accordingly, the purported postfeminist tropes in *Twilight* provoke a varied response from academics and critics. Taylor is particularly scathing, lamenting that 'the *Twilight* narratives align with broader shifts towards postfeminism in popular culture, particularly in its mobilization of fantasies of atemporal selfhood and reliance upon limited models of female subjectivity that centre on the matrimonial and the maternal' (2011, p. 44). Similarly, Levine argues that the 'post-feminism fantasy' provided by *Twilight* manages to 'bend the notion of feminist empowerment so that it becomes feminine devotion' (2010, p. 283). While Taylor and Levine see the series' postfeminist traits as negative and retrograde, not all commentary views this aspect of the series pejoratively. Moruzi argues that Bella's sexual and social agency problematizes the characterization of *Twilight* as socially conservative. She suggests, 'Bella's agency invites us to reconsider her position with regard to patriarchal and heterosexual norms' (2012, p. 62) and claims:

> *Reading only for the conservatism of the series, we miss vital opportunities to situate Meyer's fantasy 'within the lives of post-feminist era youth' (Levine, 281). Just as the postfeminist era is complex – incorporating paradoxical positions about sexuality, gender and desire – so too can this series embody myriad contradictions. By examining these contradictions, the series destabilizes*

feminine and feminist conventions to provide a more nuanced understanding of this postfeminist age (2012, p. 49).

Likewise, Catherine Coker claims that the series exhibits a 'feminist ethic of choice' (2011, p. 9). Fleur Diamond also views the series in a positive fashion, contending that *Twilight* helps young women readers to reclaim a 'missing discourse of desire' (2011, p. 52). Others such as Lydia Kokkola argue that *Twilight*'s depiction of gender is more ambivalent, that the series 'valorises certain beliefs which run counter to both those promoted by conservative Christian activists and those endorsed by the liberal, feminist left' (2010, p. 165). These varying responses demonstrate both that there is no universal scholarly consensus as to whether or not the *Twilight* series is sexist in and of itself and, again, that the academic response to the series is itself a site of ideological dispute. Accordingly, student responses to questions of gender revealed not only interesting similarities to and divergences from critical opinion, but they also represented a clash of gendered ideologies; Student responses also demonstrated that they take up a range of ideologically divergent reading positions when engaging with the *Twilight* series.

As was the case in Chapter Two, some of the most interesting student responses to questions on *Twilight* and sexism were expressed in whole-group discussions in the high literacy group. The discourses the girls drew on to publically discuss these issues and the nature of these discourses are typified in the extended passage below:

> *M: What do you guys think about that claim – the idea that Twilight might be a sexist book or series of books?*
>
> *Consuela: Completely agree.*
>
> *M: How so?*
>
> *Consuela: She's always biologically the weaker one. She is...*
>
> *M: By she, do you mean...*
>
> *Consuela: Bella, the protagonist. She's always being saved by the vampires. She's never really doing anything. She's just being saved, she's always talking about how she's fragile, how she's clumsy, how she never does anything right...WHAT? It's true! It is!*

Apple: You've only read it once.

Consuela: She's always being saved – she's the damsel in distress. Always.

M: Any other ideas? Do you agree with that?

Various: Yeah.

M: You are shaking your head, Depplikov.

Depplikov: I'll just say that I don't agree with that point.

Consuela: Why?

M: Of course you can. Why?

Depplikov: Because there are...okay, Bella may be the one that's always getting saved, but there's always the male and female villain that's in that book. Like, there's like Victoria who's the villain, there's Alice, Edward's sister, who's the heroine, pretty much.

Tash: This is coming from a person who's only read it once. I've read this five times.

Consuela: I've read it more than once actually – I used to be obsessed with it.

Depplikov: That's really funny. Anyway, yeah, I just don't think it's sexist in the way Ciara is explaining it.

M: Alright, so can you go into more detail? Like, you were talking about the fact that there are good and bad male characters and you were saying female characters as well.

Depplikov: Yeah, like, you have your fair share of female villains and heroes and like, same as males. It's pretty much balanced out and I don't think that there's any, like, males weighing out females in that...it's just balanced out. And even if it is a bit sexist, I think the author meant that intentionally.

M: Okay. Any other ideas? So who agrees with Consuela, that it is in fact a sexist book? Alright Rebecca, what do you think?

AG: Thank you. I agree with both of them though, because...no, I do. It's true, there's like lots of female villains, and then there's Alice, but Bella treats herself as if she is just this idiot girl who has nothing going for her.

Depplikov: She is but.

AG: Yeah, but...

Depplikov: And she's an idiot, she's not smart. She's just an idiot – that's it.

AG: The way she talks about herself and Edward is sexist. The rest of the book, it's not that sexist, but...

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Consuela: It's just badly written.

AG: She's just 'Oh, I need him to protect me, please, blah blah blah. Oh if he's not with me I'm going to fall apart and kill myself!' It's like 'get a life'!

[Laughter]

M: Alright, anyone else got any opinions?

Apple: I don't think we like Bella too much!

[Laughter]

Consuela: She's faceless and she's written so that you, so that pre-teens can project their own personality on to her.

Candy: She's so dependent on Edward it's sickening. Like, seriously, vampires or not, be a bit fun.

[Inaudible discussion – interruption etc.]

M: Can I ask you this about Twilight: there are a number of you who clearly think it's a sexist book or a sexist series, does that matter? Does that affect your enjoyment of the book? Do you think it matters in a broader sense?

Depplikov: I think it does matter. Like, I like the way how Bella is the vulnerable one, 'cause if it's the guy who's the vulnerable one, and the girl's protecting him, then it'd be a bit weird. Like, you always imaging the guy to be the protector.

Consuela: You do.

Candy: Yeah but I think we just want Bella to be able to protect herself. To like stand up for herself, not go 'Edward save me' all the time.

Depplikov: But think about it: if it was the guy in the other shoes, we'd always be considering his point of view about how beautiful Bella is. I don't care about how beautiful Bella is.

Consuela: So you care about how beautiful Edward is?

Depplikov: Of course I do!

Consuela: Why?!

Depplikov: Because then that leads on to Jacob, her point of view of Jacob. I want to hear about the friend.

CG: The friend who has no shirt apparently.

[…]

M: So it doesn't matter that it's a sexist book at all?

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Consuela: Yes it does.

M: In what sense?

Consuela: It sends the wrong ideas to all the pre-teens, I think. Like, they think that 'Oh my God, unless I find a guy who never jokes around and is completely silent unless I ask him a direct question and who will always control me...'

[Laughter – much inaudible discussion]

Depplikov: What are you talking about!? He doesn't control Bella!

Consuela: He tells her that she cannot go and she Jacob...

Depplikov: And she's like whhchhhh [whip noise]. He's [Jacob]whipped, trust me. Bella's the one that controls. She's the dominant one.

Consuela: He's a dog.

Depplikov: Edward would do anything for Bella. If she says 'go jump off a cliff' he'd do it.

Consuela: He's like her father when he's telling her to stay at home and not play with the dogs.

Depplikov: She's the one in control in that relationship.

AG: 'Edward slap me. I need you!'.

Consuela: 'Oh there's liquid gold in your eyes!'

[Laughter]

That's what it says in the book. She talks about his eyes for a whole chapter.

The first and most vehement response in this discussion belongs to Consuela, whose view demonstrates that students do not always accept the gender ideology offered by the novel without question. She immediately exclaims that the series is sexist and provides a variety of reasons for her opinion. She identifies Bella as 'biologically the weaker one' who is '[always] being saved, she's always talking about how she's fragile, how she's clumsy, how she never does anything right.' Consuela draws on the trope of the 'damsel in distress' to explain Bella's archetypal and stereotypical qualities. Consuela said much the same of Bella in her individual interview, although she included this

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addendum:

> *And oh the only way she can actually help with anything is when she becomes a vampire, which is when she becomes perfect skinned, beautiful, fast - everything every woman is supposed to be. The only way she will be accepted is if she becomes perfect. Not good values for our future.*

These arguments concur with a number of academic critiques of *Twilight*, particularly those of Miller (2008), Seifert (2008), Taylor (2011) and Levine (2010) detailed earlier in this chapter.

Perhaps most interestingly, Consuela identifies the use of a particular narrative strategy employed in *Twilight*. She claims that Bella is 'faceless' and that 'she's written so that you, so that pre-teens, can project their own personality onto her.' Consuela confirmed this sentiment further in her individual interview, stating:

> *Bella was just kind of a blank canvas. She had no real personality. She was a blank canvas that the reader-girl who's probably going to be a teenager was going to project her own personality on so that she can get the amazing vampire boyfriend. [Sarcasm] Oh and then there's the love triangle between the werewolf and the dead guy. So she gets to choose between bestiality and necrophilia.*
>
> *[Laughter]*
>
> *Great values!*

Not only does Consuela demonstrate her awareness of how narrative strategies can be used to manipulate particular responses in readers, but her characterization of Bella as a 'blank canvas' is markedly consistent with the analysis of Rachel DuBois (2012). DuBois suggests that Bella is intentionally written as 'necessarily incomplete' to readers 'fill the gaps' in her character with their own presuppositions and desires (2012, p. 132). As a consequence, 'readers quickly establish a connection to Bella and a way to situate themselves within the story' (2012, p. 133). According to DuBois:

> *Meyer neatly facilitates this process for readers since the lack of detail about Bella's past, her interests, and any goals unrelated to Edward makes it easy for readers to live through her vicariously. In short…Bella functions as a 'Mary Sue', a proxy for the reader. The Mary Sue model serves as a vehicle for wish-fulfillment and author/reader insertion into the fictional world. Identifying with the all too perfect Mary Sue feeds expectations of a happy ending since the Mary Sue character naturally achieves and receives everything that she sets out to get*

(2012, p. 133).

The term 'Mary Sue' originates from internet fan-fiction and originally involved a fan inserting an 'idealized authorial representation in a popular work' (Chander and Sunder 2007, p. 597). Remarkably, this is a term that Consuela later uses to describe characters in other fictional works that she sees as insufficiently whole. It would therefore seem that Consuela's ability to identify and critique the use of narrative techniques to position readers comes not simply from an innate insightfulness, but from these strategies, tropes and nomenclature existing as part of the schemata she draws upon to make sense of fiction. There is little evidence from the interviews to suggest that any other students possessed the inclination to critique *Twilight* in a similar way. In her individual interview Lisa also identifies the use of the damsel in distress archetype, but Consuela is the only respondent who articulates an awareness of 'Mary Sue' type characters and is able to use this understanding to critique *Twilight*.

The 'Mary Sue' archetype was not the only aspect of *Twilight* that Consuela criticized for the use of a contrived narrative strategy. Consider the following exchange:

> *Consuela: I didn't like any of them. Oh then there's the future-seeing vampire who's a plot device: 'Ooooh!!! Now we need to go run away because the scary vampires who are evil are coming!' She was a plot device.*
>
> *M: What do you mean when you say she was a plot device?*
>
> *C: I mean it was just so convenient when she saw what was coming, how things would play out. 'Oh but add in some drama, she can't see the werewolves'. But that in itself is a way of seeing it because she can't see them, so if the future's disappeared, she can still see what happened...anyway, I used to be very into it, but now I can't stand it at all.*

Consuela seems to regard this character of Alice Cullen, a vampire who can see into the future as a crude narrative vehicle that allows the main characters to escape from difficult situations.

Not only does Consuela object to a number of narrative strategies in the series, but she also affirms the work of a number of critics by identifying Edward's obsessive

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behavior as aberrant. In her individual interview she describes him as a 'stalker' and this characterization fits with the work of academics that view Edward similarly (Collins & Carmody 2011; Franiuk & Scherr 2013; Merskin 2011; Rana 2014). Debra Merskin describes him as a 'compensated psychopath', a character 'who approaches the psychological extreme of psychopathy but is able to pass for functional in society' (2011, p. 171). Likewise, Collins and Carmody (2011) argue that a content analysis of Twilight shows 'evidence of behaviors and attitudes that are conducive to dating violence' (2011, p. 382). Indeed, Franiuk and Scherr have accused contemporary vampire fiction of 'romanticizing…characteristics predictive of partner abuse and the link between sex and violence' (2013, p. 14).

It would seem that a knowledge and understanding of how narratives seek to position their readers is a potential precondition for the ability to critique the implicit ideology projected by *Twilight* and, as Frazer argues, 'critical knowledge of discourse and how it works, how subjectivity is constructed, is empowering' (1989, p. 282). Just as important, however, is a student's emotional attachment to the series, or, more accurately, the extent to which the student's relationship with the text possesses implications for their identity. Consuela is what Goletz calls the '*Twilight* anti-fan' whose 'primary interaction with the text is detailing all the reasons they despise it' (2012, p.160). This notion of the 'anti-fan' originates with Jonathan Gray (2003), who highlighted the irony of anti-fans and non-fans of series such as *The Simpsons* seeming to possess a comprehensive knowledge of the text they were openly criticizing (2003, p. 65). Gray's implication is that being an anti-fan is primarily about identity. Accordingly, Consuela actively expressed her dislike for the series so often that it was clear that these opinions constituted an important part of her identity as a reader. She interjected with comments such as 'It's just badly written' even when such a comment bared little relevance to the topic of conversation. As Gray also suggests, Consuela required an intimate enough knowledge of the series to criticize it a meaningful and informed

manner; despite the fact that she clearly objects to so many aspects of the novels, she still read the entire series and admits to once being 'obsessed with it'. While some students still viewed Consuela as somewhat of an interloper (both Apple and Tash suggested this by stating: 'You've only read [the series] once'), she demonstrates another seeming contradiction in the adolescent negotiation with reading and textual ideology.

Consuela's critique of *Twilight* also seems to be a point at which ideological issues of textual meaning intersect with those of taste. Whereas Consuela's vocal dislike of the series allows her to be more critical of its representation of gender and aware of its narrative strategies, the students who profess an emotional attachment to *Twilight* were less likely to consider the possibility of it promoting sexist ideology. These students were more inclined to take up the position of the implied reader, whereas Consuela, in contrast, adopted a more resistant reading position (Hall 1980). Tash's disagreement with Consuela is, for instance, supported only by the proclamation that she has read the series five times. Depplikov provides more detail as to why she does not consider the series sexist and her responses provide a further explanation of why some students were unwilling or unable to locate supposedly sexist ideology in the series. Depplikov's claims rest largely on a notion of 'balance', that avoiding sexism is about having 'your fair share of female villains and heroes and like, same as males.' Maree expressed a similar sentiment. She replied to questions about sexism in *Twilight* by stating: 'But there's three main characters in *Twilight*!' Depplikov and Maree's idea of what constitutes sexism in a novel is limited to gender representation across the series, an approach that Heilman and Donaldson term 'gender by the numbers' (2009, p. 141).

Maree's responses in her individual interview indicate more clearly than any of the other students the role of ideology in naturalizing dominant conceptions of gender. During the course of our discussion on sexism in *Twilight*, I began to summarize for her

some of the arguments that view the series as sexist, stating: 'Yeah, and what they basically argue is Bella's a character who is always needing to be rescued, she's...the damsel in distress, you know, gets herself into silly situations and Edward has to…' Maree then interjected: 'But all girls do that!' Her assumption is that the sexist representations in *Twilight* are simply a reflection of reality, that girls are and should be damsels in distress. This trope has become so much a part of representations of the world for Maree that she does not see it as a cultural and ideological construct, but rather as just the way thing are. This shows precisely the role unrecognized, implicit ideology plays in the process of hegemony (Gramsci 1971). As McCallum and Stephens suggest, 'a book which seems to a reader to be apparently ideology-free will be a book closely aligned to that reader's own unselfconscious assumptions, and the identification of such ideologies will often require sophisticated reading of the text's language and narrative discourse' (2010, p. 360). Moreover, so fundamental are these naturalized assumptions about gender that they contribute to a student's sense of who they are in relation to others. While this sexist ideology can be identified and resisted by a student with the conceptual tools to do so—such as Consuela—a student with limited repertoires such as Maree is more likely to accept this 'reality' without question.

There were other students who seemed initially to reject notions of *Twilight* being sexist, only to reconsider on reflection. This tendency is shown through Kandy's remarks:

> *I don't really see how it's sexist in the Twilight one. Well...oh...it might be because Bella's a bit, she's portrayed as a bit weak, like, really weak. I guess, yeah, and Edward's the...all the men are the people who are really strong and who can look after her and things. Yeah I think that could be it.*

While Kandy arrived at this conclusion herself, Daisy asked me to clarify some of the arguments of critics of the series. Upon considering these viewpoints, Daisy reluctantly admitted: 'I guess it kind of portrays the male as the strong one, but I don't really notice that.' These responses show that some students require only a cursory knowledge of

some of the elements of ideology in a novel – or else, as in Kandy's case, simply an *opportunity* to consider the presence of ideology in a novel – in order to be aware of or critique its underlying assumptions.

Perhaps even more interesting was the response of Chrysanthemum, who said of the *Twilight* novels:

> *I don't think they're sexist. I don't think so. I don't see how. Oh...is it the kind of like girl who always gets [inaudible], who always gets hurt and it's always the guy as a hero who comes and saves the girl? Nah I don't think it's sexist. I think it's sweet . . . I think it's sweet. I'm into the kind of corny things and I think it's really cute how the guy saves the girl. Like, if I was Bella I'd probably see the same thing happening to me. Like, I believe in equal rights between male and female, but I still think it's really sweet, like, I like it.*

Like Kandy and Daisy she does not initially view the series as sexist, only to reconsider upon a brief reflection. While she may consider some of the tropes in the series sexist, this is not seen as being necessarily pejorative. These tropes are conceived of as romantic, rather than inequitable, as 'sweet' rather than demeaning. This comment demonstrates, firstly, that while Chrysanthemum possesses the necessary schema to enable her to *detect* sexism in a text – she was able identify sexism in *Twilight* rather quickly – she may be unaware of the full implications of that sexism. This comment also represents the ambivalence and contradiction that lies at the heart of so many ideological negotiations. Chrysanthemum may 'believe in equal rights', but she also finds the convention of 'the guy as a hero who saves the girl' to be 'sweet' and 'cute.' For Chrysanthemum, the feminist ideology that allows her to detect sexism in *Twilight* is a position that is held partially, inconsistently and ambivalently; rather than displacing more traditional conceptions of gender roles, Chrysanthemum appears to believe aspects of both positions concurrently.

The partial, contingent and ambivalent nature of Chrysanthemum's feminism is reflected in the responses of other students who demonstrate the influence of the ideology of postfeminism. These students see feminism as an ideological framework that is no more or less valid than any other; feminism and sexual conservatism are

perceived as competing and more or less equivalent ideologies. Take, for instance, Lisa's response to questions about *Twilight* and sexism:

> *M: [...] Some people have said that the Twilight series is sexist. Is that a claim that you would agree with?*
>
> *Lisa: It depends on the opinion of the person. It's sexist in the way that it's not showing female independence and, you know, the female's always seen as the damsel in distress kind of character. So sexist in that sense. But it depends on if you're a feminist or not.*
>
> *M: How so?*
>
> *L: I think, well feminists are always fighting for, you know, female independence and you know we can do whatever we want to do, we can do the same thing as men, like, equality and you don't really get that in the book but I think if you're not a feminist, you're gonna like the book because it's you know, the characters and the vampires, they're just, you know...*
>
> *M: So you wouldn't describe yourself as a feminist?*
>
> *L: [Long pause] yeah I'd say I'm not full-on feminist, but, you know, I can just sit back and relax and just, you know, be comfortable reading it even though...'cause it's fiction to me. It's not important to me whether this character is, like, her situation, it's not going to really affect the role of women in society. It's not going to change it. It's fiction to me so I just can sit back and appreciate it's fiction and not take it so seriously. But yeah, I would say, like, I'm a feminist, but I do enjoy, you know, letting boys be boys and like traditionally I do think that guys should open the car door and pay on the first date and stuff like that 'cause I think that's just polite. So I'm not a full-on feminist, but I do stand up for myself. I definitely stand up for myself.*
>
> *[Laughter]*
>
> *M: Terrific. You highlighted romance as being a particular genre that interests you.*
>
> *L: Yeah I think it's a particular genre that interests most women, some men.*
>
> *M: Why do you think that is?*
>
> *L: Because I guess it's something that we all want, isn't it? And it's a different experience for everybody. It's kinda like the closest thing you have to magic, isn't it. Like, love and...so you want to know more about it and you want to kind of have the same thing and be in the same situations 'cause those feelings that you feel when you're in love, they're very strong feelings and they can change your life.*

Like Kandy, Daisy and Chrysanthemum, Lisa recognizes the dominant trope of the damsel in distress. Like Chrysanthemum, Lisa expresses considerable ambivalence in

her negotiation with this trope. Its potential implications, firstly, are offset by the fact that *Twilight* is only a work of fiction. This again quite obviously draws on the ideology that views fiction in general and fantasy fiction more specifically as 'just a bit of fun'; the fact that it is fiction means that it is 'not going to affect the position of women in society'. Lisa's ambivalence is most clearly captured in her comments that she is a feminist, yet still believes in 'letting boys be boys and like traditionally I do think that guys should open the car door and pay on the first date and stuff like that.' Furthermore, Lisa opines that sexism in literature is something you care about only if you are a feminist. This comment indicates that how adolescent girls position negotiate with feminist ideologies are an important component of their identity. Lisa's statement that she is not a 'full-on feminist' indicates not only that for Lisa feminism is an ideology that one can take or leave depending on their prevailing value system, but it also suggests that feminism still carries a significant social stigma. This stigma accords with the 'fear and loathing of feminism' identified by Faludi (2006, p. 10) and embodies McRobbie's characterization of postfeminism as an ideology based on the illusion of 'choice' and 'empowerment' (2009, p. 1).

The ideological ambivalence of Chrysanthemum and Lisa is not limited the domain of adolescent reading. Their comments resemble those of academic Helen Anne Petersen, who says of the *Twilight* series:

> *Like several feminist media critics before me, I find myself troubled by a 'dirty' pleasure: I love Twilight. I fully recognize the numerous feminist objections to this particular text, yet I was completely swallowed by the four books one summer, devouring all 2,500 pages in a period of two weeks… Conservative, regressive, decidedly postfeminist values are espoused throughout. Yet I love it. Indeed, I lose myself to the story with a depth of feeling last experienced in middle school* (2012, p. 51).

Chrysanthemum and Lisa may be, like Petersen, willing to 'turn a blind eye' to the sexism in the series because they enjoy reading the novels. Lisa in particular seems to abstract herself from the components of romantic fiction that she finds ideologically troubling. This abstraction implies that she is, on some level at least, aware of sexist

elements of the genre. She remains, however, ambivalent, partly because she does not agree with all of the ideological tenets of feminism and also, because she enjoys reading romantic fiction.

Lisa's ambivalence resembles the results of an ethnographical study conducted by Elizabeth Frazer (1989). Frazer suggested that certain discourses of femininity correlated loosely with notions of class: her seventeen-year-old 'working class' informants tended to express feminist discourses, while her 'middle-class' respondents expressed more conservative, anti-feminist and postfeminist discourses (1989, p. 283). These discourses were, however, employed inconsistently and sometimes contradictorily. Consequently, Frazer concluded:

> *The discourses of gender clash and in talk, a construal, an understanding, an experience of, say, 'femininity' is negotiated or struggled with. Further, as gendered subjects, we live clashing and competing 'femininities'—there is an intra-subjective clash and competition. Clash and competition occur both within and between subjects* (1989, p. 283).

Similarly, the ideologies expressed by Lisa not only clashed with those of other students, but they revealed a clash of ideologies within the self. Frazer partially explains this clash by arguing that 'traditional and naturalistic discourses of femininity batter young women at every turn, and girls have to negotiate contexts and operate in registers which are incompatible with feminist talk' (1989, p. 290). It would appear that these 'traditional and naturalistic discourses' continue to be something with which students must negotiate more than twenty years after Frazer's work. This negotiation is not, however, conducted in the same way by all students: Lisa and Chrysanthemum's postfeminist ideologies clash with the views of students such as Consuela, whose feminism in turn contrasts with the more conservative ideas of Depplikov and Maree, demonstrating reading and gender to be a significant site of ideological dispute and inconsistency.

Gender Ideology and Harry Potter

While the academic assessment of gender ideologies in *Twilight* is a site of significant dispute there is more consensus among researchers about representations of gender in the *Harry Potter* series. The series has been labeled sexist by a number of academics and critics. The most prominent of these is Jack Zipes, who claims the novels are sexist in the way they **'**celebrate male dominance' (2001, p. 183). Meredith Cherland (2009) argues that the series employs a range of gendered discourses common to the humanist tradition. These include the portrayal of female characters such as Ginny Weasley and Fleur Delacour as 'sirens' and the employment of 'a discourse of rationality to mark male characters as reasonable and a discourse of irrationality to mark female characters as foolish' (2009, p. 275). The character of Hermione Granger is said to embody this irrationality, as Harry imagines her as 'shrill and panicky' (Cherland 2009, p. 278). In addition, Hermione is said to occupy the conflicting subject positions of 'Hermione the giggler' 'Hermione the helpful and capable', 'Hermione the emotionally expressive and Hermione the clever' (Cherland 2009, p. 278). Cherland suggests that, 'these positions all draw on discourses and story lines that work to constitute girlhood in Western culture and that offer subject positions that girls can take up' (2009, p. 278). Heilman and Donaldson provide some contrast with this dominant position, arguing that 'Harry Potter is a long and complex series with much going on and with multiple, contradictory, and even transgressive representations of gender' (2009, p. 139). They do maintain, however, that 'the Harry Potter books…reinforce gender stereotypes' and feature 'females in secondary positions of power and authority' (Heilman & Donaldson 2009, p. 139). They ultimately conclude that 'while the last three books showcase richer roles and more powerful females, we find that women are still marginalized, stereotyped, and even mocked' (Heilman & Donaldson 2009, p. 140). While she argues that the novels 'often depict gender in nuanced, layered, and contradictory ways' (Wannamaker 2008, p. 125), Wannamaker levels similar criticisms at the series as Heilman and Donaldson, stating: 'portrayals of gender roles in the Harry

Potter novels are not ideal and sometimes do border on the stereotypical' (2008, p. 124).

While academic analysis of *Harry Potter* is largely uniform in its identification of sexist gender ideologies, the series was for students a site of ambivalent ideological negotiation in a fashion similar to *Twilight*. A number of student reactions to claims that *Harry Potter* was sexist were mirrored their responses to the similar claims leveled against *Twilight*. Again, these reactions are presented most strikingly in whole group discussion:

M: Another text, a very, very popular series that most of you have read, Harry Potter, has also been described as sexist. What do you think about that idea?

Depplikov: I don't know anything about it.

Kandy: I don't think it's sexist.

Aff Roe: I don't think it's sexist because of Hermione. She's pretty good.
[All talking at once.]

[...]

No, because Hermione, she like knows all the spells and stuff and she helps Harry.

Consuela: And she's like a plot device.

M: In what sense, Consuela?

Consuela: She's the one who knows all the spells and she's like the whole full...she's like the little 'Clippy' you get in Microsoft word.

[Laughter]

M: What is that?

Consuela: You can get a wizard too. It's the wizard in Microsoft word [others talking too]. You clip him and he goes 'Hi' – cause he's annoying! It fits!

M: How is Hermione the "Clippy" in Windows?

Consuela: Well Clippy is always suggesting 'It looks like you're trying to write a letter' or something like that and... [Inaudible laughter and talk]

M: Ah I get you!

Depplikov: [To Consuela] This is what you do on your Friday nights!

Consuela: I chat to Clippy, that's what I do.

M: So she's always suggesting things...

Consuela: Yes, but she does it annoyingly, just like Clippy. She'll pop up at random times, just like Clippy does.

Depplikov: You're right, [inaudible]

M: Alright, she's always making suggestions, 'she's smart and they need her', that's from Kandy...

Kandy: There's also like other characters as well, like Tonks and...

?: I like Tonks!

Kandy: Professor McGonagall...[Inaudible talk]

Apple: It is a bit sexist I think , 'cause like the whole second book is based around Harry saving Ginny.

Consuela: She's possessed

Depplikov: That's because she's possessed!

Apple: But why can't it be a guy who's possessed?

Chrysanthemum: It's better if it's Ginny because it adds up to all the plots. At the end, when they get...

M: So you're saying that the second book you reckon is sexist?

Apple: Yeah, because like Ginny gets possessed by Voldemort and then Harry has to save her; Harry is the only one that can do it. Not even Ron...

Consuela: Her brother comes along...

Apple: No he doesn't. He gets stuck behind the rubble with that guy with the broken watch [?] who turns himself into a...

Rebecca: But Apple, Apple...

Apple: Yes

Rebecca: ...he saves someone in every book. Every book he's doing something to save and stop Voldemort, not just Ginny and I can't really...

Apple: I can't remember, so who does he save in the first book? He only tells someone.

Kandy: He saves himself.

Apple: He saves himself, okay.

Kandy: He saved the magical population.

[Lots of laughter and inaudible conversation]

A number of students in this discussion show a marked ability to critique the gender portrayals in the series, albeit in different ways. Aff Roe and Kandy argued that the series is not sexist. Aff Roe perceived Hermione in particular as capable and knowledgeable; she affirmed this in her individual interview, stating:

> *I don't know, I think she plays a big role; she's one of the main characters. She's Harry's, like, friend and she finds a love interest and she works out spells and stuff and ways to get them out of danger. I think she's good. She's, yeah, she's smart and yeah, I think she's a good friend.*

Kandy cites the prevalence of other strong and competent female characters such as Tonks and Professor McGonagall to rebut claims of sexism. Other students, however, agreed with the assessment of the series as sexist. In the above extract, Apple implicitly recognizes the damsel in distress trope and suggests that Harry saving the character of Ginny is a sexist feature of one of the novels. In her individual interview, Chrysanthemum again reveals her ambivalence; she is reluctant to deem the series sexist, but quick to suggest the ways in which the *Harry Potter* series may be interpreted as such:

> *Like, [Hermione is] the nerd and she's the one who's always sits back studying saying to the...oh yeah that's actually really kinda true. I'd never thought of it that way! Oh yeah! Hermione's always the one who's going 'be careful!' and welcoming them back and Harry and Ron are like going...yeah it kind of is sexist. The girl should go as well. Except sometimes the girls...I don't know, it depends. I don't think it's that sexist. I don't think so. Except I would like to see more girl action in there as well ...I think that Hermione should get like an even bigger part. Like she should like instead of having always, always the one who's like 'stop, don't do this', and 'oh, I'll look up potions for you', she should be like go out exploring more; be the one who says 'come', like, dragging the guys to go. You know, making the plans. Yeah, I think that should have happened.*

While Chrysanthemum recognizes potentially sexist aspects of Hermione's role in the series, she also suggests ways the series may have been able to overcome this sexism. Each of these students argues something different to the other and sometimes argues something different to critics of the series, demonstrating that *Harry Potter* is, again, a

location of inconsistent ideological negotiation. Here ideologies are certainly not reproduced unthinkingly; these students have all demonstrated the capacity to engage with issues of gender in the text from an informed perspective. When asked about gender they immediately considered the actions and personality of female characters in the series, or the subject position/s occupied by some of those characters, or else the centrality of the male hero in the novel. This engagement demonstrates that the ideological position articulated by readers is, again, negotiated between reader, text and the discourses available to readers.

As has been the case throughout much of this chapter, Consuela's response to *Harry Potter* was most emblematic of a conscious negotiation with the ideological position offered by the series. Again, she demonstrates an ability to recognize dominant tropes and archetypes in fiction. Firstly, she refers to Hermione as a 'plot device', which is consistent with a number of other observations she has made about characters and texts. Most notable, however, is her comparison of Hermione with 'Clippy', a character in the *Microsoft Office* computer programme ('Clippy' materializes to offer help and tips to users of the programme who appear as though they need assistance. Significantly, Clippy is often derided as annoying by elements of the online community. Consuela's comparison is important in a number of ways. Firstly, Consuela's characterization accords with some of the subject positions identified by Cherland (2009): those of 'Hermione the clever' and also of the Hermione who is annoyingly 'shrill and panicky'. This again demonstrates Consuela's ability to identify dominant archetypes and tropes. That she would compare Hermione to a character in a software programme represents the extraordinary, idiosyncratic way in which students may interpret what they read. Consuela's identification of archetypes obviously has much to do with it forming the schemata she draws upon to make sense of texts, but the comparison with Clippy shows the highly individual ways in which those schemata may be modified and personalized. This seems to represent the 'idiosyncratic knowledge and

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personal style' that Benton argued readers bring to their engagement with text (1999, p. 86).

While Consuela's response to the *Harry Potter* series in the group discussion reveals her recognition of and negotiation with sexist ideology in the novels, comments she made during the individual interviews reveal that she too has an ambivalent relationship with issues of gender and sexism. When asked about whether or not she thought the *Harry Potter* series was sexist, she responded:

> *What do you mean by sexist? Oh the fact that it was always Harry saving the day? Well he was the main character from day one! You always knew that he was going to save the day. Well, you didn't know he was going to, but you know he was going to be the one trying. I don't think it was sexist. I mean, if you look back in the books, Hermione was always - I always thought of Hermione as a plot device. She was always the smart one who knew these kind of things, so she was always the one giving the answers, giving advice on how to beat the spider. I don't think it was sexist. It's true that guys are stronger than girls (well some of them - I mean there are those freaky bodybuilder girls) but I don't think it was sexist. There were times it could have been, but that happens in life anyway.*

Like a number of other students, Consuela was initially unable to see how the text might be sexist. In keeping with her perceptive, critical readings of texts, she was able to identify very quickly the components of the series that may be construed as sexist. Her conception of Hermione as a 'plot device' is in keeping with her frequent attempts to discern the use of narrative strategy in novels. In arguing, however, that the novel is not sexist, Consuela reveals that despite the agentic and critical manner in which she has engaged with many texts, despite the considerable agency she has proven to exercise through her reading, she is still influenced by gendered ideology. Her comments are similar to Maree, who stated:

> *I don't think [the Harry Potter series is] sexist. I think it's because the male is always the one who's always, you know, out there all the time, always wanting to be the leader and the girl's always trying to keep them back. Like the girl's more, they think more before they do something, whereas males, they just do it.*

Maree's response is similar to other statements she made about *Twilight* and again affirms the role ideology plays in naturalizing cultural assumptions. Consuela's comparable belief that 'guys are stronger than girls' and her insistence that a male hero

saving the day 'happens in life anyway' indicates that even with a reader as critical and aware as Consuela, ideology also works to make cultural assumptions about gender seem self-evident and, in Althusser's terms, 'obvious' (1971, p. 173). It does not seem to matter that Consuela was in the high literacy group (whereas Maree was in the mixed ability class), or that she was able to identify (and object to) the sexist aspects of *Twilight,* or identify a range of ways in which texts attempt to position and manipulate readers: her attitudes are still molded in part by dominant gender ideology.

Ultimately, Consuela's responses to questions of sexism in the *Harry Potter* series indicate the multifaceted nature of ideology and how it works on young readers: on one level implicit ideology can be recognized and resisted in texts by readers who possess the requisite repertoires to do so; almost contradictorily, however, not only does ideology shape these repertoires, but it is also responsible for normalizing the very cultural assumptions some students seem equipped to critique. Consuela's comments in particular affirm Fairclough's argument that 'Naturalization…is the most formidable weapon in the armoury of power, and therefore a significant focus of struggle' (1989, p. 105). It is this naturalization process that allows for the reproduction of the dominant social order through texts in a way that remains unrecognized by even the most capable and reflexive students.

Reading, Ideology and Identification

Identification is purported to be a key aspect of ideology by a number of theorists (Althusser 1971; Culler 1997; Fairclough 1989; Lacan 1966; McCallum 1999; Stephens 1992). Althusser states that 'the structure of all ideology is speculary' (1971, p. 180); likewise, a Lacanian construction of the self relies upon the subject identifying

with the other (1966, p. 75); more recently (and more empirically) Lisa Zunshine (2012) has intimated that simply reading about a character committing an action may activate 'mirror neurons' in a reader's brain that replicates the neural activity that would occur if the reader were actually executing the textual action themselves. She argues: 'At least on some level your brain does not seem to distinguish between your doing something and another person's (whom you observe) doing it' (2012, p. 3). The notion that a reader may recognize—or indeed misrecognize (Culler 1997, p. 116)—aspects of their own conception of self is an important component of examining the way people read fiction and the potential ideological impact of that fiction. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Stephens has suggested that the covert means by which novels encourage reader identification 'construct a model for exerting control over readers at a narrative level deeper than that of the implied reader' (1992, p. 22). Hence it is worth examining the extent to which issues of identification affect the way readers interact with text and the degree to which identification possesses implications for the fashion in which readers interact with questions of textual meaning and the ideologies propagated by the novels they read.

Harry Potter and Identification

As a starting point for this discussion it is worth considering further why Consuela could be so scathing of *Twilight*'s apparent sexism and yet so reluctant to label the *Harry Potter* series as such. It appears on some level that it had something to do with taste: Consuela was less likely to ascribe something as negative as sexism to a series she liked to read. Upon closer consideration, however, this incongruity seems partly attributable to issues of reader identification. While Consuela lambasted *Twilight's* Bella Swan as a 'blank canvas', Consuela was far more empathetic toward *Harry Potter*'s Hermione Granger:

> *[Hermione] always made me laugh. She kind of reminds me of Rebecca*

[another student in this study], the way she always does the right thing.

[Laughter]

I always liked Hermione 'cause she was like, she was the only girl in this three-way with guys - she's got two guy best friends. I always felt sorry for her too because, well, she didn't really have that many girlfriends. I think she had one. She mostly hung around with Ginny when Harry was with Ron. I liked her though. She was very kind of, you don't usually see the popular kid being friends with the bookworm, so that was what I liked about her most. And she was funny sometimes.

Consuela identifies with Hermione in a number of ways: with the structure of her friendship networks, with her sense of humour and bookishness; Hermione even reminds Consuela of a friend of hers. Interestingly, Consuela expressed a slightly more mixed attitude towards the central protagonist of the series, Harry Potter:

K: I did think that he was a little bit 'Mary Sue', or 'Garry Sue' or whatever the term is for guys.

M: What do you mean by that?

K: He was very kind of valiant, he was...he didn't get good school grades, but he was 'the boy who lived' he was the popular one except for there's always someone who hates the popular person. Apart from...he just kind of seemed like a bit...in most books that you read these days, the kid's an orphan or they have lost a parent just to add that little bit of drama or like they've got a step-parent that they don't like, so I did think he was a little bit...that's the only word I can think of: 'Garry Sue' kind of.

M: Do you mean he's sort of...he fit a particular archetype?

K: I'm trying to remember what it means...it means kind of like...

M: Is he a clichéd character?

K: Cliché! That's it: clichéd. That's it— I was looking for that word. He's kind of clichéd, he's got...he's fantastic at a sport— the only sport they really have— he's got two best friends, he has a second family 'cause he's own family is horrible. It's just...he seems clichéd, so you sympathize with him because he's got no parents, brothers, sisters, any family, living relatives...oh and then his...this did annoy me: Sirius died. That annoyed me. His one connection to his parents died. That sucked.

M: So did that mean you sort of like him, or...

K: Oh I did like him, I just didn't like the way he was very clichéd. I did think he was like a very good character and he did sometimes break out of his 'Garry Sueness', his clicheness. At the beginning he was very clichéd, in the first book.

As has often been the case with Consuela in this study, she objects to what she perceives as contrived or clichéd components of the narrative. She exhibits more of her remarkable, idiosyncratic approach to textual strategies—her notion of 'Garry-Sueness' seeming quite extraordinary. While Consuela is not entirely enamoured of Harry, she still considers him a 'very good character' (perhaps in a moral sense) and likes it when he least resembles what she sees as cliché. It seems that this partial affection for Harry and clear identification with Hermione allows for Consuela to be emotionally invested in the narrative. This emotional investment may mean that Consuela is less likely to be overly critical of the series overall and less inclined to critique its ideological significance. Indeed, Consuela's attitudes very closely resembled those of two students in the mixed ability class. Maree said of Hermione: 'I guess it's better because I'm a girl and she's a girl, so I can relate to her more than what I can to Harry 'cause he's just boring. But Hermione's like awesome 'cause she's the only girl in the whole thing.' Lorretta stated: 'I love her 'cause she's like a know-it-all and she knows she's a know-it-all and like yeah.' Like Consuela, neither of these students viewed the *Harry Potter* series as sexist.

Twilight and Identification

These students were not alone in demonstrating a correlation between identification with main characters in a novel and the willingness or ability to critique its ideological approach. In the previous chapter I dealt briefly with the attitude of students to *Twilight*'s Bella; many students viewed her as a heroine with which they failed to relate. In addition to Lisa's opinions that were showcased previously, a number of other students did not identify with Bella. Aff Roe stated: 'Oo she's really like plain and dull and depressing. Like, she's really ordinary and there's nothing really special about her. She's just not interesting.' Jacqui described her as 'annoying' because 'she was always depressed and crying.' Most tellingly, Rebecca said of the main characters*:*

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I think Edward was [likeable], and Jacob, I like those characters, but I don't like Bella. I wish it was, like, written from their perspective, rather than hers, but in the fourth book it was written partly from Jacob and I like reading it from his perspective more than from Bella's 'cause she's such a downer…Well, she's always talking about, like, bad things that have happened and she puts, the way she treats her two boyfriends annoys me. Because she's always complaining about these two boys liking her and it's like why would you complain? Like, I don't actually, I don't understand, I know Bella, she only talks about his appearance. The entire book, it's all about his face. I don't think her love is as deep as they say it is, 'cause all she talks about is his face and, you know, how good he looks and she doesn't talk about his personality at all and like, she says she falls in love with him before she even gets to know him. Like, she doesn't even know him when she claims to be in love with him.

Most prominent in Rebecca's response is her indifference towards Bella; she is seen as depressing and superficial. Rebecca seems, however, to identify more strongly with male characters Edward and Jacob. She recognizes that part of the narrative of the series was told from Jacob's perspective (in the fourth novel) and she wishes that more of the story were narrated from his perspective. She in effect resists the monological nature of much of the *Twilight* series largely because she rejects the perspective of the main character to which she is unable to relate. Like most other students who disliked Bella, Rebecca was far more inclined to be critical of the series itself and to detect sexism in the narrative.

Rebecca was, however, also in a position to detect sexism in the series because she had access to the repertoires that enabled her to do so. At one point in her individual interview Rebecca commented spontaneously on fairytales, stating:

The princess is always very pretty, you know, she's always, the end of the story she always meets her Prince Charming. It's like is that, like, why does that always have to be the happy ending that it's the 'Prince Charming' at the end that gets the happy ending? It doesn't always need to be like that. I don't think it's like a good lesson to teach children, that, especially little girls, that for their happy ending they have to, you know, find their Prince Charming and that's in every single, like, fairytale I think, like, ever written.

It is clear from this comment that Rebecca possesses the schema that allows her to critique the sexism in 'every single…fairytale…ever written' and can transfer that capacity to *Twilight*. Most significantly, it is this capacity, combined with her lack of identification with Bella, that allows Rebecca to reject the primary subject position she

is offered—that of the passive *subject*—in favour of a more assertive perspective. Rebecca's attitude certainly affirms Bullen and Kenway's claim that: 'Contemporary culture no longer universally celebrates passive dependent femininities' (2005, p. 56).

While such passive femininities may not be *universally* celebrated, they still proved hegemonic. Consequently, there were other students in this study who did identify with Bella. While one student, Hana, viewed Bella as 'interesting', it was Bella's ordinariness that appealed to most of these respondents. Jocelyn stated:

> *I kind of don't think she's anything special, but maybe that's what Stephanie Meyer wanted her to be, so that people could relate to her…She's not boring, she just, like, not that she's uninteresting either, she's just kind of dull, I don't know, she's nothing exciting, really, she's not, like, good at one thing. Like, she's not brilliant at music, or she's not great at Maths. I don't know, she doesn't have something, she's just...do you know what I mean?*

Like Consuela, Jocelyn recognizes Bella's quotidian nature as a textual strategy. While Consuela objected to this feature of the narrative, Jocelyn found it appealing (although unlike Bella, Jocelyn is an exceptional music student). Jocelyn did not seem to have a particularly strong opinion whether or not *Twilight* was sexist. Tash, however, was one of the most prominent in arguing that the series was not sexist. Accordingly, Tash seemed to identify strongly with the character of Bella claiming:

> *Well [Bella]'s pretty normal. Like, well they say she's not super beautiful and stuff and she's like plain. Well, she likes to read, I like to read. Um, I don't know, she just does normal stuff like I do, like, she has stuff about brushing her teeth. I'm like 'cool, I brush my teeth' and like, yeah. It's just, I can relate.*

Tash, however, also expressed a general preference for female protagonists who are 'really strong and independent, but they can still rely on guys and stuff. Like, they juggle all this stuff and they do it really well.' Bella only partly fit this archetype for Tash. When asked whether or not Bella possesses any of these characteristics, she stated:

> *Well, she sort of doesn't, she semi does. Like, she like risks her life to save other people and she's really selfless, but she still, in those books everyone is like super-human except her. She's just sort of pathetically human, like, not in a bad way. But she can't step up and, you know, kill everybody 'cause she's the prey and they're all super-cool, like, yeah. But she still, like, tries and stuff. She has*

some of the traits, yeah, but she doesn't have the abilities too.

So while Bella is not quite the ideal protagonist for Tash, her 'pathetically human' features made her a character in which Tash is able to emotionally invest, demonstrating that Tash's ambivalent negotiation with one of the main subject positions offered by *Twilight*.

While there may appear to be a correlation between reader identification with Bella in *Twilight* and ideological the impact of the series, Depplikov proves to be an exception. Along with Tash, Depplikov is the student most vehemently opposed to the notion that *Twilight* is sexist. She does, however, dislike Bella. She is also emphatic about her enjoyment of the series itself. Bella, Depplikov explained,

> *...has good and bad traits to her. She's ready to protect anything she loves, like Edward or Jacob or her father, but she can be really boring and like when— 'cause the book is from her perspective—and when she starts talking about this and that you semi tune out 'cause she's very, she worries a lot and she's just very boring. Like, really boring. And yeah, I don't really like Bella.*

Not only does Depplikov see Edward and Bella's relationship as the nucleus of the series, but she also gives two more significant reasons for her love of the series. Firstly, Depplikov is far more interested in the male characters of Edward and Jacob than Bella. Her infatuation with these characters is so great that at one point in the group discussion when Apple exclaims that Edward and Jacob are mythical creatures, Depplikov, while pointing to her head declares: 'Not up here they're not!' This apparent contradiction indicates that genre again affects the nature of identification with the text; while *Twilight* may intersect with multiple genres, Depplikov reads it primarily as a *romance* text. Subsequently it is not as important for her to identify strongly with the character of Bella, but rather seek the vicarious wish-fulfillment discussed in more detail in the previous chapter. Moreover, Depplikov's most conspicuous attachment to the series was through the value of its subcultural capital. As explored in the previous chapter, Depplikov conceived of *Twilight* as a series over which she held considerable ownership: she 'discovered' the series before many of her peers; she exclaimed that

Edward and Jacob 'were mine first!' This suggests that identification alone is not a necessary prerequisite for readers to accept the ideological position/s of a novel or series; indeed, any other factor that may lead to a reader emotionally or culturally investing in the text can assist to make them perhaps not the ideal reader but at least a more amenable one.

Depplikov also exemplifies another ambivalent feature of student negotiations with subject positions: that a student may read and enjoy a text while failing to identify—or even engage with—key characters and aspects of the narrative. If she is unable to identify sufficiently with aspects of character or storyline, she is willing to ignore the parts of the narrative she dislikes and embellish those with which she connects. Consider the following exchange in her individual interview:

> *M: Okay. Does the fact that you don't really like Bella change the way you read it; do you think you read it differently to say Vampire Academy?*
>
> *D: I enjoy Vampire Academy more because, like, if I don't like something in a book I'll change it around. But with Vampire Academy I won't change anything 'cause I love everything: I like the characters, I like the setting, I like everything. But with Bella, again, I kinda ignore her until the boys come into it. So yeah.*
>
> *M: What do you mean...what do you mean, first of all when you 'change things around'?*
>
> *D: Well, for example in this series I'm reading - it's called the Mortal Instruments - the guy in it, he's described as blond, but I don't really like that so I make him brunette!*
>
> *M: Really? That's fantastic! Do you do that often when you read?*
>
> *D: No, because pretty much all the authors, like, they know what I like, so I don't need to.*
>
> *M: What do you mean when you say you ignore Bella?*
>
> *D: Like I just, I wouldn't pay attention to her if, if there's like a situation in the book and they mention her I wouldn't really pay attention to her. Like I'd focus on anything else but Bella.*
>
> *M: Do you still read that section?*
>
> *D: Oh yeah, I do.*
>
> *M: But what, you don't sort of focus on...like, what's happening in your head*

when you sort of ignore Bella but you're still reading?

D: Well, again I paint a different picture for Bella. Like if it's just her and Edward, I just focus on Edward. Yeah, it's hard to explain.

This conversation demonstrates, perhaps more profoundly than any other in this chapter, the extent of the agency some students exercise while reading. Here Depplikov is able to actively and consciously change elements of narrative and characterization to fulfill her own wishes and desires. Such agency possesses implications for the way students negotiate with ideology. If Depplikov is in control of the reading position she adopts—if she is able to willfully *construct* elements of the narrative—then it is possible that her engagement with its ideologies is also idiosyncratic. As this chapter has already argued, such ideological negotiations are likely to be inconsistent with those of other students. That Depplikov's wishes and desires are, however, constructed ideologically again suggests that such agency has limits.

Will and Identification

It is not only with novels that they read of their own accord that students negotiate with the reading position implied by the text. Negotiation is also evident in the students' discussion of the main characters in *Will*. This discussion revealed further insights into the way identification shapes student responses to characters and story lines. Most significantly, the protagonist and narrator of the novel is a seventeen-year-old boy. Wannamaker suggests:

> *The fictional boy portrayed in a text is the subject…interpellated by, but also simultaneously marginalized by, reading, resisting and negotiating dominant ideology. The fictional boy is also the implied reader of a literary or cultural text, the boy who we, or the author, imagine that reader to be* (2008, p. 17).

The extent to which the students in this study adopt the implied reading position of the 'fictional boy', that is, Will, reveals some important ways in which the reading position adopted by the student affects the way they negotiate with gender ideologies in the text.

The dominant student attitudes towards the character of Will can be observed in

the following group discussion with the mixed-ability group:

> *Josephine: I really like Will.*
>
> *Maree: I like it.*
>
> *M: What do you like about it?*
>
> *Jacqui: It's relatable....*
>
> *Maree: It's realistic.*
>
> *Josephine: It's relatable because we're teenagers now.*
>
> *Lorretta: We see it from a boy's point of view...*
>
> *Maree: Which we don't usually get, 'cause we're at an all-girls school.*
>
> *M: Okay, so you enjoy that male perspective on things. Do you think it's a particularly accurate depiction of the male experience?*
>
> *Maree: It's very intriguing because we don't know what guys think and how they go to school and what they do in school compared to what we do. 'Cause we seem to be more - what is it - not laid back, but...*
>
> *Josephine: Like they're really strict, but no it's more relaxed here.*
>
> *Maree: Yeah! At a guy's school, you've gotta be all that all the time. Head of attention. That makes sense?*

Not only is the perspective provided by the text 'relatable' and 'realistic', but it also provides the students with a point-of-view to which they are not generally accustomed. While *Will* was written by a female author, Maria Boyd, there is a sense in which the male perspective provided by the novel seems authentic to the students. For Maree it provides a window into 'what guys think'. In her individual interview, Maree affirmed why this aspect of the novel piqued her interest: 'Because I'm at an all-girls school, it's hard to know what the guys do at their school. Like I have brothers, but it's not the same. It's like spending a day at a boys' school within a book.' Lorretta too thought Will's narration authentic, and referred to Will's propensity to clown around with his friends as evidence of the realistic nature of his persona:

> *I think he's like most teenage boys, 'cause they're like stupid and don't think before they act. That's what I think and yeah and then he, like, he never admits to it. He is just like 'No, I didn't do it!' or 'They dared me to do it!' or like...I do*

it too, like blame other people for it. But yeah, he's like most teenage people. Yeah.

This opinion of Will as both realistic and likeable was shared by the high literacy group. Tess 'liked that he was like our age and we could relate to it and all.' Daisy 'thought he was funny and, like, witty. Rebellious.' Leonnie liked that the novel 'was funny but serious and it semi-related to the school kids and how we dealt with problems and stuff' and thought Will was 'naughty and didn't care what anyone thought, but he did care and wanted to please everyone and do the right thing.' Consuela liked that he was different from protagonists such as Bella Swan and Harry Potter, 'because he wasn't "Mary Sue", he had emotions, basically.' Depplikov found both the character and his situation identifiable, claiming: 'I really liked Will because, like, I actually understood him, if you know what I mean. Even though he's the opposite sex, different age, I actually understood him and yeah.' When asked what it was about Will that made him easy to understand, Depplikov suggested:

> *Just like the little quirks he makes, like the 'Sunday night feeling'. Like, I understood that. When he got in trouble from school and he couldn't talk to his mother about it and he felt so guilty every time he talked about it, just things like that. It's, yeah, I think every teenager goes through that sort of thing.*

Rose likes that 'he seems, like, sort of sensitive-ish. I don't know. He, well he's like insecure. It sort of shows you that boys can be insecure too. 'Cause usually it's just the girls that are in novels. 'Cause I usually read about girls.' Rose liked this insecurity in a character and linked this character trait to the *bildungsroman*:

> *Yeah, 'cause usually they go from like, it shows, it gives them more of a journey. 'Cause if they're just secure about themselves then...well they might be secure in the beginning then they get insecure. But in almost every novel they'll be insecure at some point, then there'll be like a highlight where they're, like, better. But, yeah, if they're just secure the whole time it doesn't give any oomph into the novel.*

Rebecca was the only student to recognize the author of the novel as female, but still appreciated the perspective it provided. Like Rose, she too observed that, 'he didn't present very much confidence and stuff.' She also stated:

Well, Will, I think, I just find it interesting to kind...even though it's not really a boy's, like, brain that's written it, it's really interesting to hear the way a boy talks and stuff and just that's why I read it. I like to read it 'cause it was interesting to read it from a teenage boy's, like, perspective. ' Cause most of the books I read are from a girl's perspective, except Harry Potter. And so that was good about I, Will's character.

When Rebecca was asked what it is about Will's perspective that is different to that of the female protagonists from whose point-of-view she is used to reading, that Rebecca revealed something of the way dominant gender ideologies influence reader identification and engagement with prominent characters in *Will*:

I thought he was much more easygoing than any, like, book that I've read from a female's perspective. He was very much easy going and relaxed and stuff, which, it was just like refreshing to read something like that. Like, and the way he talks and stuff is, you know he's like just very, you know, relaxed and easy going with what he's saying. And the way he talks to his mates though is totally put on. It's how my bother acts around his mates, just, you can tell it's not really who he is, he has to just, he feels he has to put on this act to be with his mates, 'cause otherwise he seems lame.

Rebecca's response is significant for two reasons. Firstly, it suggests that Will is a character she (and seemingly most other students in this study) likes because it presents a laid-back, easy-going representation of masculinity. This phlegmatic nature, coupled with his relative sensitivity and, as highlighted by Rose's comments in particular, occasional insecurity, represents a masculinity that is quite far removed from culturally dominant hyper-masculine, rigidly drawn male archetypes (Wannamaker 2008, p. 126). Indeed, students chastise Will at times in the novel when he demonstrates attitudes commensurate with the hyper-masculine, such as homophobia. Aff Roe, for instance, stated: 'I didn't like the way he treated [Mark] after [he found out that Mark was homosexual]…like and then Will started thinking HE was gay, like, I was like 'what's wrong with you?' The second significance of Rebecca's comment involves the implications it has for the female protagonists about which the students are used to reading. Rebecca identified a tendency for girl narrators and focalizing characters to be the antithesis of Will's easy-going masculinity; they are stressed, worrisome and fraught, to an extent resembling some of the subject positions Cherland (2009)

identified as being occupied by Hermione Granger in the *Harry Potter* series.

It was these subject positions that were rejected by many students in this study. While most students identified closely with Will and his situation, they felt considerable antipathy towards Will's main love-interest, Elizabeth. Daisy and Tash were the only students who liked her. Tash opined:

> *Well, a lot of people are saying that they don't like her, but I think she sounds pretty cool. Yeah, I think she sounds pretty awesome . . . she sounds compassionate, but she won't let people walk over her and she stands up for what she believes in without getting in people's faces. She's there for Will without smothering him and the right balance.*

Every other student asked about Elizabeth expressed a dislike for this character. Rose's response was the most restrained, as she considered the character a non-entity: 'Well, she was like comforted and stuff and really pretty and...I don't know. I didn't really think much of her. She was sort of just a side character to me. It was mostly about Will and Zac and Chris to me.' Tess 'didn't really relate to her that much' and Lorretta described her as 'a real bitch'. Lisa stated:

> *I thought she was alright, but I kinda got the impression that she was an overachiever and that kinda put me off a bit because I don't think...she was more like a very perfect character and I like to be realistic and I like to have characters that you can relate to and don't make you feel yourself that you're not as perfect. you know, it really puts you off because you want to be able to relate to the characters and be able to feel that you know it's okay to not be that perfect and I just got the impression that she was very like too perfect and very [inaudible] and kind of...it just puts you off, doesn't it. It makes you feel like 'what can I achieve that's this good?'*

Aff Roe stated: 'I didn't like Elizabeth. She's a bit stuck up. Yeah…When I was younger I thought Elizabeth was like a goody two shoes girl. Like, she, I don't know, she was...but now I see her as a more stuck- up person, I think, 'I'm better than everyone else' kinda girl.' Other comments seemed go echo those of Aff Roe. Maree opined:

> *I reckon she's really high maintenance and I think Will is that good to her, but I like that in the end he's like toned it down a bit, to her level...she reminds me of one of those stuck-up girls, that you know 'I'm so good', too hot for you, just leave me alone. One of those girls. But in the end, she actually brings herself*

low enough for Will to...she brings herself down for Will.

Apple exclaimed: 'I don't really like her. I think she's stuck up and she's like "I'm the best" and she's like, you know, in your face sort of, and she's just like, OTT…Over The Top.' Depplikov was more ambivalent:

> *I tried to warm up to her, but I couldn't. She's just very overconfident and like especially towards a delicate guy, Will, what he goes through. She was very, like, abrupt sort of thing. I don't know, I just didn't like her. There was something about her I couldn't put my finger on.*

Consuela did not approve of Elizabeth's behavior in a fight she had with Will:

> *Well, I don't know, the bit where they had the fight, she was all very presumptuous. So was he, they were both kind of at fault in the fight and she was kind of like 'this is all your fault. If you hadn't have gone into that fight, blah blah blah blah blah'. She was very kind of not even trying to be understanding about that and I just thought that she...I didn't like her temper too much. That's about it.*

These responses range from faint disinterest to outright vitriol, but the general objections to Elizabeth's character tended to see her as arrogant and demanding. These readings contrast with the way the implied reader might view Elizabeth's character. Samuel Goodwin, the author of a *Teaching Support Kit* for *Will* states: 'For Will, Elizabeth epitomises what he lacks – confidence and happiness – while her feisty and fiery nature encourages a respect for strong, independent women, a feeling Will subconsciously feels for his mother' (2008, p. 8). Elizabeth is intended as assertive and reasonable as well as romantically desirable. She rolls her eyes at Will's more puerile antics towards the beginning of the novel (Boyd 2008, p. 8), but proves a considerable source of support and empathy for Will as he struggles to come of age. She is a character for which Will has enormous respect, typified by his comment that, 'she doesn't spend any time thinking about what other people think. She is who she is without any crap' (Boyd 2008, p. 143).

While it would be tempting to suggest simply that they objected to the portrayal of a strong, assertive female character, these students demonstrated elsewhere a preference for assertive female protagonists; Rose from *Vampire Academy* was almost

universally liked by those who read the series, whereas the insipid Bella Swan was generally maligned. One potential explanation for this ambivalence could be that Elizabeth is a character whose motives and motivations are not described or explained as thoroughly as those of Will. Will is, after all, the chief protagonist and narrator—he is the character with which readers are asked first and foremost to identify. Elizabeth instead seemed to resemble more of a shallow archetype. Thus this rejection of Elizabeth potentially represents a rejection of female subject positions with which students do not identify and the gender ideology responsible for constructing shallow archetype.

Another possibility is that these responses reveal one of the few examples of an overtly class-based ideology in this study. Class is not addressed explicitly in *Will*, however, the character of Elizabeth is implicitly ascribed a socio-economic class. While she does not attend a private school (Lakeside Girls is described as 'one of the best state schools'), Elizabeth's mother attended a private school and 'really wanted [her] to go to one too' (Boyd 2008, p. 189). Goodwin argues that:

> *She comes from a home with clear boundaries and high expectations where there is a strong work ethic and an insistence on honouring the family name. Elizabeth's mother wants her to go to Sydney University and there is pressure to perform to consolidate the family's efforts to have her educated at a prestigious school* (2008, p. 8).

Will on the other hand attends a comprehensive, Catholic systemic secondary school similar in socio-economic standing to the school attended by students in this study. The author, Maria Boyd, is a teacher with considerable experience teaching in Catholic systemic schools in Sydney and it would seem that the details of Will's school environment share significant similarities with other Catholic Systemic Schools[22]. By referring to Elizabeth as 'stuck-up', a number of students are alluding to Elizabeth's

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[22] At the time of writing Maria Boyd is an English teacher at a Catholic boys' school in Sydney. The 'Acknowledgements' section of *Will* indicates that she drew on her teaching experiences at Holy Cross College, Ryde, Cathedral College, Sydney, as well as the school that is the subject of this thesis, in composing the novel.

perceived membership of an elevated socio-economic group.

Class is one area of inquiry that is traditionally prominent in discussions of ideology, but is not pronounced in this study. While students were not asked about class specifically, there was, however, scope in the questions about explicit meaning for them to talk about issues relating to class. Class is an implicit theme in the *Vampire Academy* and *Harry Potter* series. As outlined earlier in this chapter, *Vampire Academy* presents its readers with a highly stratified society and issues of class are addressed metonymically throughout the series. *Harry Potter* presents a storyline—most prevalent in the third and fourth novels of the series—which deals with Hermione's campaign for the exploited character of Dobby the House-Elf to acquire something resembling workers' rights. Rather than critiquing notions of class, *Twilight* on the other hand has been accused of creating 'a layering between the text, audience, and capitalist ideology' (Goebel 2012, p. 169). Goebel states further that the novels,

> *...embody a new conception of quintessential masculinity and femininity based on the acquisition of material wealth that, in Meyer's texts, quickly translates to ideas of beauty, as well as social and economic class. The author reveals this by directly depicting consumption as a means to achieve idealized beauty* (2012, p. 169).

The consumerism in the novel is overt at times; Edward's brand of car is, for instance, mentioned fifteen times in the first *Twilight* novel. The propagation of such capitalist ideology is potentially significant. As Elizabeth Bullen argues: 'Texts for children and young adults are a major technology of socialization; it thus follows that the hybridization of narrative and advertising strategy [in adolescent novels]…functions to promote a particular developmental path of the reading audience into consumer adulthood' (2009, p. 506).

When talking about the novels, students discussed none of the issues outlined above. There are a number of potential reasons for this absence. Firstly, I did not ask any direct questions about the portrayal of class in the novels in the same way that I did about gender. I neglected to ask such questions, as I was not confident that students

would understand what I meant. This neglect represents a missed opportunity and prompts the further question: do these students have any conceptions of class and, if so, what are these conceptions? Undoubtedly I was guilty of underestimating many of these remarkable students, but it also seems to say something about the scant prevalence of discussions of class in contemporary Australia that I thought students would not have either the discursive framework or nomenclature to know what was meant by class. While these interviews took place in 2010, Australia under the Liberal (conservative) Howard Government had experienced, from 1996 to 2007, over a decade of political discourse that attempted to conceive of the middle-class rather than the working-class as economically marginalized. This discourse of 'Howard's battlers' was essentially a 'rhetorical sleight of hand' (Dyrenfurth 2007, p. 217) and had the effect of concealing or effacing notions of class in Australian political discussion. Subsequent governments have done little to change this trend. A general lack of any meaningful or widespread discussion of class has been observed in other nations as well. Bennett et.al states,

> *…the language of class has rarely been so muted, particularly in Britain, where…it has been replaced in the political lexicon of New Labour by neologisms like social exclusion, which have helped to sweep the uncomfortable realities of entrenched inequalities into the placatory discursive registers of the Third Way* (2009, p. 2).

As a number of other writers have pointed out, these types of discourses render social distinctions such as class and race invisible and in so doing conceal systems of privilege and of discrimination (Andersen 2001; McDonald & Wingfield 2008; Whitman 2013). Indeed, Lampert, Burnett and Lebhers (2016) observe that schools are not immune to this cultural trend, stating, '…socio-economic status is undoubtedly an important factor influencing student achievement and progression in schooling, yet despite this clear correlation, socio-economic status is often missing in the discourse of the everyday functions of schooling and of teachers' (2016, p. 36).

Whether students' rejection of the subject position offered by Elizabeth is a consequence of a negotiation with ideologies of gender or ideologies of class (or both),

it is nevertheless another moment where students actively participated in the construction of textual meaning. Paradoxically, however, this agency always possesses further ideological implications: by rejecting one subject position, students are always implicitly preferring a another; students exercise choice in their negotiation with subject positions, but such choices are always framed and understood ideologically. This irony typifies, again, the tensions and contradictions that characterize adolescent negotiations with ideology at the site of textual meaning.

Conclusion

Students in this study demonstrate significant agency and diversity in the ways they engage with the explicit and implicit meaning of novels. They read texts in ways that are insightful, subversive and idiosyncratic. These readings affirm Paul Smith's assertion that: 'A person is not simply the *actor* who follows ideological scripts, but is also an *agent* who reads them in order to insert him/herself into them – or not' (1988, p. xxxv). Smith further argues that,

> *…there is a distinction to be made between the subject-position prescribed by a text and the actual human agent who engages with that text and thus with the subject-position it offers. Clearly, any given text is not empowered to force the reader to adhere to the discursive positions it offers…Furthermore, a cinematic or literary text is never addressed at a reader it knows and thus can never articulate itself with its reader in a predictable fashion. It can, of course, offer preferred positions, but these are by no means the conditions with which a reader must comply if he/she wishes to read a text. And that is because what always stands between the text's potential or preferred effect and an actualized effect is a reader who has a history of his/her own* (1988: 34).

As Smith suggests, students possess and exercise the capacity to reject subject positions which they do not identify or to which they object. Nor do they necessarily adopt the ideological position proffered by the work of fiction they are reading.

There are, however, some significant caveats to these observations. The ways in which students engage with the ideological positions of novels are influenced by a

number of contingencies. It is clear that the conceptual frameworks upon which students draw in order to make sense of their reading are formed ideologically. This was most evident when we consider students' attitude toward the representation of gender in novels. Moreover, Gramsci's (1971) notion of hegemony is apparent in many student responses; ideology works above all else to naturalize assumptions that are culturally constructed. The embodiment of this ideology depends partly on the novel and genre itself and on the student herself—the particular repertoires upon which she draws and the cultural and subcultural capital she has invested in the novels. Ideology, however, remains a ubiquitous and inexorable part of the lives of students and their reading. This would certainly seem to affirm many of the observations of academics who argue as to the importance of ideology in Children's and YA fiction (McCallum 1999; Stephens 1992; Trites 2000; 2014).

So it is important to conceive of ideology not simply as something imposed by texts upon unsuspecting and vulnerable adolescents; nor are the subject positions offered by texts taken up in a wholesale fashion by readers who have no choice but to do so. The ideological position offered by a text is not, however, something that is without consequence: it impacts upon the way students read and also helps to create a 'climate of belief' (Hollindale 2003, p. 37) that continues to affect the way they engage with texts and the way they think about the world. The nature of this ideology itself is not, however, clear and neat and the nature of the ideological negotiations adolescents enter into are ambiguous and contradictory. As Henry Jenkins suggests: 'Children's culture is not the result of purely top-down forces of ideological and institutional control, nor is it a free space of individual expression. Children's culture is a site of conflicting values, goals, and expectations' (1998, p. 4). It is through examining the negotiation between the 'top-down' ideological control texts attempt to exert and how that ideology is accepted, refused, appropriated—and above all, negotiated—by

students that we can work towards a more nuanced understanding of the way fiction contributes to the attitudes, values and beliefs of young people.

Chapter Four: Reading, Ideology and Institutions

At one point in her individual interview, Consuela was asked to describe her reading tastes. She replied:

> *Well I still love fantasy as I did in Year 7, but actually right now I'm reading a non-fantasy book. It's kinda set in...it's called Finding Cassie Crazy. It's all about this girl and how her dad's just died and how she's coping with it and that's Cassie and then they've got this project thing where they're writing letters to people from another school and yeah it's incorporating this girl getting over dramatic stuff in her life, going to a therapist, all that kinda stuff. So that's a bit of a change for me.*

While this comment would not seem to directly implicate the school in bringing about Consuela's change of attitude towards fictional realism, I, in my role as her English teacher, am directly implicated in this 'change'. I taught Consuela English in Year 7 and at the time she was a voracious reader of fantasy fiction. In an effort to broaden the scope of her reading, I encouraged her to read a number of novels that were more typical of fictional realism. While it was not at all my intention to discourage her from reading fantasy, it is very possible I unknowingly and unintentionally imposed a hierarchy upon her reading tastes, a hierarchy that implicitly privileges realism over fantasy. This moment exemplifies one way institutions affect the everyday reading lives of young people. In this instance *I* functioned as the institution; I leant my authority to a particular mode of fiction and in doing so legitimized one form of text at the expense of another. The fact that my intervention was unwitting and the consequences unintended, demonstrates the power of ideology to normalize assumptions and to influence behavior. This example also demonstrates how institutional authority works: it ordains some discourses, ideologies and modalities as hegemonic, while others are delegitimized and even silenced.

Indeed, the role of institutions in the dynamics of ideology has been a fundamental component of the way ideology has been theorized. Subsequently, it is the

purpose of this chapter to extend the analysis of taste, meaning and ideology with a consideration of the role institutions play in the ideological negotiations of adolescent readers. This chapter argues that the institutions of school, family and church are crucial in propagating and framing the ideologies that emerge at the site of adolescent reading. In most cases, these three institutions propagate and reinforce similar ideological tropes, overlapping in their implicit attempts to socialize young people. In other instances the ideological functions and efficacy of these institutions are quite different. As the other chapters in this thesis argue, adolescent negotiations ideology is neither neat nor uniform. Students' dialogue with institutional ideologies is similarly messy and inconsistent.

The role institutions play in the propagation and naturalization of ideology has long been central to analyses of culture. Althusser (1971) argued that ideology was propagated primarily through 'Ideological State Apparatuses' (ISA), which he defined as 'a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions' (1971, p. 143). For Althusser these ISA are distinct from (but operate in conjunction with) Repressive States Apparatuses (RSA), which refer to the openly violent, physical means by which the ruling classes retain and exercise power. Among the most prominent cultural institutions responsible for the propagation of ideology, according to Althusser, were schools, the Church and the family. However, 'the Church' claimed Althusser, 'has been replaced today [the 1960s] in its role as the dominant Ideological State Apparatus by the School. It is coupled with the Family just as the Church was once coupled with the Family' (1971, p. 157). Althusser argued that these institutions work together to promote, justify and naturalize the interests of the status quo.

A number of other prominent theorists highlighted the importance of institutions to the propagation of ideology and the maintenance of the social order. Gramsci argued that institutions were controlled by hegemonic classes and used to serve their interests.

Schools, along with family and the Church were an integral part of the creation of the group of 'intellectuals' who justified the interests of the ruling class (Gramsci 1971, p. 10). Horkheimer and Adorno also wrote of 'the tangled mass of cliques and institutions which ensures the indefinite continuation of the status quo' (2002, p. 30) and argued that texts themselves (and certain genres of film in particular) could act as an institution 'of moral correction' (2002, p. 123). While he eschews the term ideology, Foucault (1990; 2001; 2001a; 2002) was perhaps the most prominent academic to deal with the social and cultural role of institutions. He argued that institutions have been used historically to marginalize groups such as the mentally ill and homosexual. Furthermore, he suggested that institutions helped to shape the discursive formations that denoted normality and difference throughout western societies (Foucault 2002). Bourdieu (2010) meanwhile demonstrated that in a similar way institutions influenced taste. Not only do tastes, writes Bourdieu, 'function as markers of "class"' (2010, p. xxv), but these markers are legitimized by cultural institutions such as schools (2010, p. 15) and museums (2010, p. 22). Bennett and Gayo (2016) confirm that these institutions continue to legitimize and concretize class systems in contemporary Australia.

YA literary scholars have also recognized the role of institutions in producing and promoting ideology. Stephens and McCallum (1998) recognize the role of institutions in the ideological function of fiction, suggesting that the way stories are told and retold is connected to the way ideology and institutions maintain the social order. They argue that:

> *The major narrative domains which involve retold stories all…have the function of maintaining conformity to social determined and approved patterns of behavior, which they do by offering positive role models, proscribing undesirable behavior, and affirming the culture's ideologies, systems and institutions* (McCallum & Stephens 1998, p. 4).

McCallum argues further that institutions are implicated in YA fiction's construction of adolescents' subjectivities, stating, 'individual subjects are simultaneously constrained and empowered by the social and cultural discourses and institutions in and through

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which they are constituted' (1999, p. 119). Similarly, Trites examines both the fashion in which institutions promote ideologies that implicate adolescents as well as how this dynamic is explored in YA fiction. She states: 'As institutions with clearly defined goals of training children and adolescents, both schools and religion serve as sites of empowerment and repression for many adolescents' (Trites 2000, p. 22). She claims that, consequently, 'the depiction of these institutions in adolescent literature are logically implicated in the establishment of narrative authority and in the ideological manipulation of the reader' (Trites 2000, p. 142) and that many examples of YA fiction feature adolescents rebelling simultaneously against school, church and family (Trites 2000, p. 142). Accordingly, this chapter will examine the ideological influence that school, family and the Church have on young readers. Althusser argued that these institutions are 'not only the stake, but also the site of class struggle, and often of bitter forms of class struggle' (1971, p. 147). Ultimately, I will argue that while it is difficult to neatly align the ideologies that emerge in this study with class interests, ideologies of class, as well as race and gender constitute a significant part of ideological negotiations that take place within and in relation to institutions such as school, family and church.

Reading, Ideology and School

Academics as diverse as educationalist A. S. Neill (1969) and ethnographer Paul Willis (1977) have argued that schools are sites for the induction of young people into ideological frameworks that serve to reinforce the social status quo. At a time when schools could be draconian in their enforcement of discipline, Neill argued that: 'By compelling our students' attention to subjects which hold no interest for them, we, in effect, condition them for jobs they will not enjoy' (1969, p. 164). Willis, on the other hand, suggested an altogether different dynamic in explaining the role of schools in

prescribing the working futures and socio-economic roles of working class adolescents in the UK. He argued that it was not the dominant ideologies propagated within educational institutions that legitimized the subordinate position of the working class, but rather the counter-cultural 'penetrations' that arose in response to school authority. It was an anti-authoritarian response to these dominant ideologies that resulted in working class men in particular accepting a working life that consisted of manual labour. For both Neill and Willis, schools are identified as sites for the socialization of children in such a way that young people are influenced to accept specifically defined roles as a part of their later working life. More recently, Michael Apple has put forward a similar argument:

> *Educational institutions provide one of the major mechanisms through which power is maintained and challenged. These institutions and the manner in which they are organized and controlled are integrally related to the ways in which specific people get access to economic and cultural resources and power* (2004, p. vii).

Accordingly, schools are one of the most significant institutions that have an overt ideological impact on the reading lives of children. Not only are schools sites of unapologetic didacticism, but they are also places in which students are required to read a variety of both fiction and non-fiction texts and where reading choices are prescribed and proscribed. Moreover, as Madan Sarup suggests, 'no other ideological state apparatus has the obligatory and free audience of children in the capitalist formation, eight hours a day for five days a week' (2012, p. 17). It is worth noting that the methodological basis of this study—the interviews themselves—would not be possible if not for the institution of the school; it is this institution that gave me the opportunity to interview my students. This same institution also provides the spatial, temporal and discursive context for these questions, answers and discussions. Therefore, it is unsurprising that a number of ideologies emerged from the sections of the individual interviews that dealt explicitly with reading within a school setting. Most significantly, two ideologies emerged which seem to conflict. The first emphasized the

instrumentality of reading: the ideology of 'useful reading'. The second, conflicting ideology reinforced and legitimized accepted hierarchies of value: an ideology of the aesthetic value of reading. The manifestation of both these ideologies in the discourse of students possesses further implications for the spatio-temporal economy of reading (Collinson 2009), as well as the influence and agency of individual teachers on the reading attitudes of students.

School, the Ideology of Useful Reading and the Hierarchies of Use

The most coherent ideology to emerge from the way students discussed their experience of reading at school was that of instrumentality, of 'useful reading.' As I stated in the earlier chapter, *Reading, Ideology and Taste,* this ideology posits that for reading to be valuable it must have some practical use; reading must be part of a means to achieve a separate and altogether desirable end. The origins of this ideology lie in the nineteenth century and were tied up in debates about the legitimacy of fiction (see Hughes 1978). As I also described earlier, the ideology of useful reading has emerged in other ethnographical studies (see Bull 2006; Millard 1997; Moss 1993; 2007; Smith & Willhelm 2002). Their research suggests that this instrumental approach to reading is more characteristic of boys in both educational and social settings. The most profound consequence of this ideology is its reduction of reading to a commodity; reading is seen as an activity that develops skills and knowledge that is valuable insofar as it can be parlayed into future economic gain. This general ideology of utility has been identified as a component of capitalism since the mid-nineteenth century (Marx 2007, p. 42). In a contemporary context this ideology coexists with 'a vision of education that has been critiqued,' according to Lucinda McKnight, for 'pursuing a limited neoliberal agenda defining students as future capital for labour markets' (2016, p. 475) and operating in a 'political environment in which neoliberal imperatives such as governmentality, instrumentality and meritocracy are dominant' (McKnight 2016, p. 475).

Students in both the high literacy and mixed ability classes indicate that the ideology of useful reading is as considerable a part of the discourses of girls' reading as it is for boys. For the most part students identified reading as a way to achieve improved grades in English and at school generally. Aff Roe, for instance, responded to a question about whether or not she enjoyed reading by stating: 'It's definitely a good pastime that I have and yeah, it helps me with my English I guess.' Reading improves her English as: 'It helps [her] think of ideas and describe things.' Similarly, Daisy stated that she enjoyed studying English at school generally because she 'like[d] the discussions and hearing other peoples' opinions and learning different text types.' Here Daisy's use of the term 'text-types' indicates that she has adopted an institutional discourse in explaining the value of her reading. For these students the reading and the studying of novels is linked to skills and knowledge such as the conception of ideas, the ability to use descriptive language and the learning of generic conventions of various 'text-types'. Maree, however, found the reading of non-fiction texts useful for a different reason:

> *M: What about Chinese Cinderella? I suppose it's going back a couple of years, it's something you did in year 7, what did you like about Chinese Cinderella?*
>
> *Maree: I liked how she was the only girl in the family, but everyone hated her.*
>
> *M: Why did that appeal to you?*
>
> *Maree: It told you about like the traditions, like how they bind their feet and stuff. It was like Hana's Suitcase: it had a lot of information.*

Here Maree indicates that the value of a text such as *Chinese Cinderella* lies primarily in its 'information'. Her response demonstrates a relationship between the ideology of useful reading and what reader response theorist Louise Rosenblatt defined in 1978 as an 'efferent reading stance' (1994, p. 25). Rosenblatt describes this efferent reading stance as a mode that prioritizes the acquisition of information. She contrasts this mode with the 'aesthetic stance', a position in which 'the reader's attention is centred directly on what he [sic] is living through during his relationship with that particular text' (Rosenblatt 1994, p. 25).

While the above student responses connect the value of reading to generally defined skills and information to be gleaned from the act, other interviews suggested that the efferent stance taken by readers and the ideology of useful reading could be attributed partly to the demands of school assessment and examinations. When, for instance, Chrysanthemum was asked whether or not she found the experience of reading at school different from reading for pleasure, she replied:

> *When you read it in English you pay more attention, you focus more on like the characters and every like little detail because you want to remember it like just in case you're tested on it in class, but, as opposed to just reading it for leisure, I'm just like 'oh, I'm flicking through'.*

Similar sentiments are evident in the following exchange with Tash:

> *T: I love will. I've read it like four times now and I'm getting sick of it'*
>
> *M: Oh really! If only all students could be as enthusiastic as you!*
>
> *[Laughter]*
>
> *T: People still haven't finished it once. I'm just re-reading it, so I can just go better but it's driving me crazy. No, I think it's good*
>
> *M: So you say you're re-reading it so you can 'go better'? Are you re-reading it primarily so that you'll get better marks?*
>
> *T: Well the first time, well I read it when we first got it at the beginning of the year to get it, like 'cause we had to buy it for school and I was like 'wow, this is good'. I re-read it when I knew we were about to in class. I re-read it when we were doing it in class and now I think I'm re-reading it at home just 'cause we're going to have tests on it and stuff and I'm like, the information's in there if...it's definitely in there, it can't get out.*

Although Tash is an avid reader and evidently enjoyed the book upon her initial reading, she is re-reading the text in order to extract information to help her succeed in the classroom. This efferent re-reading is clearly not as enjoyable as her original encounter with the text.

Tash's assertion that she is attempting to glean information from the text that is 'definitely in there' possesses further ideological implications that do not necessarily relate to an ideology of instrumentalism. It presupposes that the text itself is the most

important element in determining the focus of literary analysis and echoes much twentieth century criticism that emphasized the importance of text-based analysis (see Leavis 1967, as well as New Critics: Eliot 1964 and Richards 2001). While critical approaches such as reader-response theory and poststructuralism—which inscribed the role of the reader in the construction of literary meaning—seemed to influence academic literary studies in the latter half of the twentieth century and early twentieth century, some of the ideological remnants of Leavisite criticism and New Criticism are still evident in the responses of students such as Tash. While these critical approaches do not analyze the text in a manner that might be deemed instrumental, by implying that novels are artifacts possessing information and meaning independent of the critical frame applied by the reading or by the teacher and class itself, Tash is demonstrating the presence of yet another residual ideology in contemporary discourses.

Isolating a reason for the presence of these ideologies is problematic. It seems, however, that the critical discourses of the first half of the twentieth century still haunt the present school curriculum. As Ingrid Johnston and Jyoti Mangat argue: 'Traditional high school reading practices have tended to focus on the New Critical approach of 'close reading' of texts, with an almost exclusive concentration on explication of literary elements such as symbolism, metaphor and syntax' (2012, p. vii). A glance at the current senior English high school syllabus supports this assessment. Significantly, it requires students to 'explore questions of textual integrity and significance' (Board of Studies 2009, p. 42), which the NSW Board of Studies defines as: 'The unity of a text; its coherent use of form and language to produce an integrated whole in terms of meaning and value' (2009, p. 100). In addition, some of my colleagues in the English department talk frequently about the 'universal' value of certain texts and notions of 'organic unity'; one teacher uses T.S. Eliot's conception of the 'objective correlative' to analyze drama texts (see Eliot 1964a). Many of these teachers were trained in Australian universities and teachers' colleges in the 1970s where these critical

paradigms were dominant, demonstrating again that ideologies can potentially resonate for a considerable period after they cease being hegemonic in the institution of the academy.

While Tash's discourse is an example of implicit ideological affect, Rose indicates that the ideology of useful reading is not necessarily accepted at face value by all students, but is rather part of an ambivalent dialogue with ideology and with the institution. An avid reader and high-achieving student, Rose dislikes this instrumental approach and in the exchange below spoke of actively avoiding textual analysis for the purposes of examinations or assessment:

> *R: I don't know. I don't find analyzing the text that interesting. I don't, yeah, if I don't like the book and I have to re-read it over and over again it'll really annoy me and I'll just make up stuff when I have to analyze it.*
>
> *M: What do you mean make up stuff?*
>
> *R: Like, sometimes in essays you think 'oh, well that could fit, but I don't know if it actually happened, but I'll just put it in anyway 'cause I reckon that could pass anyway'. So I do that.*
>
> *M: Very, very interesting considering that you do consistently get very good essay marks, I find that incredibly interesting.*
>
> *R: Yeah. Well, it sort of fits into the text, but you're not sure. So you just think 'oh, if I move it around like that, it could fit. I'll just put that in.'*
>
> *M: Alright, I'll have to look out for that now!*
>
> *R: Nooooo!*
>
> *[Laughter]*

Rose's response demonstrates an ambivalent negotiation with this dominant ideology of useful reading. On one hand she hates analyzing the text and therefore avoids adopting an efferent stance, seemingly resisting the ideology of useful reading. On the other hand she finds her reading retrospectively useful as she seeks to 'play the game' for school assessments, even inventing aspects of the narrative if they suit the argument of her

essay. Alternatively, Consuela negotiated with the requirements of a different subject in an altogether different manner, as demonstrated here:

> M: Any other stuff of late that you've been reading?

> C: Mostly textbooks, but I do love History, so...

> M: What do you mean mostly textbooks? Do you mean as part of History, or just randomly?

> C: Not randomly, but like studying kind of stuff. An essay's coming up and I've mostly been reading textbooks trying to get stuff up, but Religion was hard. But History, I do like History. We're looking at the Vietnam War and I've gotten some books from the library, first-hand accounts. I'm using them in my assignment but they're also actually really kind of interesting, like there was the Battle of Long Tan and kind of stuff like that.

> M: And have you been reading that simply as part of your History course?

> C: Well I started off reading them as part of the history course, but then I started reading them for me, so they're really good. It's all about how life down in the trenches that was...there was references back to World War One—I don't know what they were doing in there—but it was talking about stuff like that, how horrible it is to lose a comrade in battle. So I'm trying to shift over to reality for a little while.

While Consuela's reading of history textbooks is prompted initially by the requirements of study and assessment, she appropriates their utility for her own ends; she stops reading them for the purposes demanded by the institution and reads them 'for me'. To borrow Rosenblatt's (1994) binary opposition, Consuela eschews the efferent stance privileged by school and adopts a more aesthetic stance in its place. Such negotiation is, however, no less ideological than the unthinking adoption of an efferent stance: it merely naturalizes notions of the 'individual', autonomous, humanist self (see Cherland 2008/9).

Indeed, Rosenblatt's binary distinction between an efferent stance and an aesthetic stance to reading seems in the context of this study to be too neat to explain these students' sometimes fraught, often ambivalent, relationship with reading at school. Just as neat and problematic is my own related binary distinction between an ideology of useful reading and 'reading for its own sake'. Operating alongside an

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ideology of 'useful reading' is a continuum of uses *of* reading; there would appear to be a range of applications for reading, some of which are more valued within the educational institution than others. Just as Radway's Smithton women used reading variously as relaxation (1984, p. 61), or as a compensatory activity (1984, p. 70), or as a source of pleasure (1984, p. 70), or even as a subversive act (1984, p. 17), so too do the readers in this study read for pleasure, relaxation, escape, comfort and the relief from boredom. These are all 'uses' of reading, most of which are not prized by the school institution and are therefore not taught or assessed.

While Rose and Consuela's comments demonstrate the capacity of students to negotiate—and negotiate with—the requirements of institutions, there are other instances where the experience of reading of those same students has been affected significantly (and in their opinion, negatively) by educational institutions. In response to a question about reading preferences, Consuela stated:

> *Well I used to love fiction when I was little because like it was so different. I was sick of Primary school—I was bored in Primary school—so I liked because it was like a whole different world that I could get lost in. Go traveling without leaving my couch. And now I just try to...because there's not actually a lot of stuff I can benefit from fiction. Sure, there's like the whole kind of inner meaning about 'listen to your heart, do what you like' but in the real kind of non-fiction books, there's like people who have actually gone through these experiences and kind of stuff like that, so…*

Consuela's comments indicate that while there are times when we might negotiate with the institutional ideology, there are others when institutions influence irrevocably our actions and attitudes. Her comments also highlight a trend in these interviews: students who enjoyed reading when they were younger came to be subsequently alienated from reading. For Consuela, who is an active and avid reader, it appears that reading fiction is no longer of 'benefit'. For others, the demands of reading in secondary school in particular deflated the sense they had of themselves as competent readers. This tendency can most clearly seen in the following exchange with Lorretta:

> *M: Are you a student that tends to enjoy English, do you think?*

L: Yeah, I used to love English. I used to get like 'A's and everything.

M: You don't love it anymore?

L: I like it; I like it more than most subjects, but I don't like, love it like that.

M: What changed? What changed for you to love it and then just like it?

L: It got harder. 'Cause before it was just like creative writing and stuff and I was, like, the bomb at that and I was like acing everything and I was like 'yeah'! But then like it got to more like, I don't know, it got like harder and things that I couldn't do and I hate losing.

Part of the reason for Lorretta's newfound dislike of reading is also one of the main factors contributing to the predominance of an efferent stance to reading and the ideology of useful reading: the increased demands of school assessment and examinations. Lorretta's comments parallel those of students in Reeves' ethnography who found that they increasingly disliked reading as they went further into secondary school (Reeves 2004, p. 7). They also confirm the findings of recent ethnographic work by Manuel and Carter, which argues that in Australian schools, 'opportunities for reading for pleasure are increasingly threatened and diminished by the imperatives associated with high-stakes testing' (2015, p. 126). Kelly Gallagher opines that a similar dynamic currently operates in classrooms in the US (2009, p. 8). The demands of these assessment tasks produce frustration for students such as Jocelyn, who exclaimed:

> *I'm struggling a bit. Like, Year 8 I didn't read three texts I was supposed to. I'm a bit like that. I just kind of…I leave…if we have a question on the book or something for an assignment, I'll just read that chapter that I need to read then I won't read the whole book because...personally I think it is a waste of time. Look, I like to read things I want to read. I don't want to read something because somebody told me I have to. And then I won't enjoy the book. I really do struggle with books sometimes.*

Hannah is another student who enjoyed reading in primary school but now dislikes it, claiming: 'I think I liked [reading] when I was younger, but now I'm not really into it.' Just as Lorretta linked her dislike of English to a sense of academic failure, Hannah's attitude can perhaps be related to cognitive difficulties. She stated: 'I find it really hard to like read, 'cause I have a thing where I have to go back and, like, see what I've read,

so I read over it twice for some reason.' Despite these difficulties, however, she read a number of novels in primary school such as *Chinese Cinderella* as well as multiple Roald Dahl titles. Now she prefers 'just Facebook and TV instead of reading.'

Hannah's comments reveal how school affects the experience of reading. They also indicate some of the ways the requirements of school and school assessment define for students the boundaries of the 'spatio-temporal economy' of reading. Collinson describes the spatio-temporal economy of reading as the 'availability of time and space in which to read' (Collinson 2009, p. 55). As Collinson suggests, it is within this economy that 'readers have to create a *place* for reading which…is never a given' (2009, p. 32, original emphasis). Indeed, for Collinson's adult informants, 'everyday reading [was] reading under pressure' (2009, p. 55), as the lack of time and suitable space imposed material restrictions on their reading practices. Students in my study encounter similar constraints, albeit mainly those of time. Primarily the school is responsible for these constraints. Tess, for instance, used to read more in primary school, but now states that 'I just don't have a lot of time' due to study as well as the demands of competitive 'dancing and stuff after school.' Consequently, her reading is limited to approximately two nights a week, but then only when she 'doesn't have anything [else] to do.' For Tash, the time constraints imposed for reading for school altered the experience of reading in a negative manner:

> *Yeah you look at it in a different way, 'cause like when I'm reading something at home I can sit here like for ages and just read it. It's for school, I don't know, it gives it that tediousness, even if it's like not. You just get that underlying 'you have to do this.' So, it's a bit weird.*

Josephine also insisted that the time constraints of school affected both her and her classmates' enjoyment and use of reading:

> *Well it just makes it less fun. 'Cause, like, for me reading is a really big fun thing, but yeah, when I have to read a book, like, when people say 'okay you've got a week.' I just go 'I don't want to'. And like some other people don't even read at all, so it's even more for them to have to sit down and read. It's like this huge, horrible thing for them.*

Not only do deadlines turn her into a reluctant reader, but her usual use of reading as 'a really big fun thing' is transformed into something burdensome. Daisy related a similar sentiment:

M: Do you read much?

D: Not as much as I should be.

M: How much is that?

D: I mostly read when I have to for, like, school books.

M: Okay, and what do you mean when you say you don't read as much as you should? How much should you be reading?

D: Well I don't read, um, for pleasure and I go on the computer more than read, which is like not good.

Daisy's comments reveal both that book reading is subject to time constraints and also that, as a leisure activity, it competes with 'the computer' for the limited resource of her time. Most significantly, Daisy's assertion that she reads 'not as much as I should be' indicates that even someone who defines herself a sporadic reader can still consider reading inherently edifying. Furthermore, Daisy demonstrates that reading occupies a status relatively high on a hierarchy of cultural activities and also that the ideology of useful reading operates in the discourse even of those who might be considered infrequent readers.

The Role of the Teacher

The manner in which school shaped the spatio-temporal economy of reading as well as the exigencies of school assessment proved to contribute considerably to the dominance of the ideology of useful reading in these students' discourse. It also seems that another significant reason for the prevalence of this ideology may lie in the way many of these students have been *taught* English at secondary school. The following

long extract from the group discussion with the mixed ability class suggests how some students have been encouraged implicitly to adopt this efferent stance:

Maree: ...what I didn't like about Z for Zachariah, we had to do chapter, like, everything that happened in that chapter...

[All: 'Yeah! It's just too much!']

Josephine: There's too much boring work to do!

Maree: We over-analyzed the whole book so much.

Jacqui: And there was not that much to analyze on the book.

Maree: There was like 80 pages and she made us analyze the whole thing, like terrible.

M: So the whole chapter summary didn't work for you?

Josephine: Yeah! Every chapter she's like be like 'oh, do the summary'.

Jacqui: And draw pictures!

Josephine: You had to draw a picture!

Maree: ...for like 80 pages of an 80 page book.

Jacqui: Like I'm not going to be able to draw a dude raping a girl!

[Nervous laughter]

The guy rapes the girl in the book!

M: I don't imagine that was something you actually had to draw.

Maree: No no no no no no...she made us draw things that happened in the book...

Jacqui: For every chapter!

Maree: For every chapter.

Josephine: We had to outline what happened...it was just for a couple of chapters.

M: So the drawing was not something you enjoyed by the sounds of things.

[No]

Maree: And we had to draw a map.

Josephine: We had to read the book and work out where everything was...

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Maree: She wanted to test us, and then we had to draw a map just in case we didn't read it.

M: Hannah, you've been very quiet during this – is this something with which you disagree?

Maree: Did you read it?

Hannah: Yep. I didn't mind it. I like drawing, but not so much from the book. It was kinda hard to picture.

M: Was there anything you enjoyed about your study of Z for Zachariah?

Lorretta: I reckon it would've been alright, but...

Maree: If we just read it.

Lorretta: Yeah, if we just read it in like one go...

Maree: Not over-analyze it all the time.

Josephine: Not just stop at every chapter...

Lorretta: We stop at one lesson, then we'd do the map and then we'd go to the next chapter.

Maree: I mean we didn't even finish it for the essay. I had to finish it like the night before.

Josephine: I know, we had to write an essay and Miss is like 'Just do it'...

M: I'm sorry, just hold on a minute [I quiet the rest of the class].

Jacqui: It was too analyzed; it was like...

Maree: It was an 80 page book, but we would have written like 200 pages in analyzing it.

Josephine: And she made us draw those boxes and we never used them.

Maree: Yeah...

Jacqui: The boxes to draw the pictures.

M: What about Will – is there anything different about the approach we've taken to Will?

Lorretta: You've given us, like, a range of questions, but we don't have to do them smack bang all the time and we don't have to analyze each chapter...

Josephine: We don't have to draw pictures.

Lorretta: We don't have to do word for word patterns in every chapter.

Josephine: And then you don't understand the book because we're reading it all close together, not just lessons in part.

Lorretta: You explain everything in a way we can relate to and understand. Like, she used heaps big words and we were like 'What does that mean' and she's get angry at you if you didn't know what the word meant that she was explaining.

Maree: [Mocking] 'Use your dictionary.'

[Much inaudible speech]

Lorretta: 'Look it up!...'

Josephine: You don't know how to spell it.

Lorretta: 'I don't know how to spell it!'
[Laughter]

M: So you'd ask the meaning of a word and to explain it she'd use another word you didn't understand and then say 'Go to the Dictionary'

Maree: Exactly.

Josephine: Yeah, use your dictionary when you don't even know how to spell it!

Maree: She was terrible.

M: Look, we all have these moments as teachers, don't worry. Is there anything about the way we've looked at Will so far that you've disliked – and you can be honest, I won't hold it against you.

Jacqui: It hasn't been ruined – it hasn't been over-analyzed so that it's ruined the book.

Maree: We're reading it at our own pace.

Josephine: Yeah, I like how we, yeah, get to read at our own pace, 'cause it takes me forever to read books.

Students objected frequently to answering rather literal questions about the content of the text, what they often referred to as 'chapter questions'. This tendency was most evident in the responses of the mixed ability group and can be seen further in the following exchange with Lorretta:

M: So you didn't enjoy Chinese Cinderella?

J: It was a good book, but I didn't like doing all the work or it, 'cause we're meant to write out stuff, like, chapters and stuff.

M: You mean questions on chapters?

J: Yeah we had to do chapter reviews on everything.

M: And you didn't enjoy doing that?

J: No.

A second student in the mixed-ability group, Hannah, expressed similar reservations:

M: And how about your experience of studying books at school, do you think that's enhanced your enjoyment of reading, or do you think it's detracted from it?

H: It depends what we have to do, 'cause, like, sometimes we had to summarize every chapter which got really, yeah, just annoying.

This aversion to 'chapter questions' was not limited to the mixed ability group. Rebecca also stated: 'I don't actually like it when we do the questions 'cause they're just boring and when something's boring you don't put much thought into it.' These responses echo a classroom study by Joyce Many (1991), which indicated that students provided with an efferent stance prior to reading a text, that is, who were asked questions that directed them to focus on concrete information in a text, were inclined to respond in a limited fashion. According to Many: 'Responses written from the most efferent stance focused for the most part on analyzing the literary elements of the story. A number of the students simply evaluated story parts or characters as good, bad, or boring' (1991, p. 73). These responses contrasted with those of students encouraged to adopt an aesthetic stance. These responses,

…had varied cognitive and affective forms. Students integrated accounts of how they visualized particular scenes with descriptions of similar literary or life experiences, or with response segments relating intense emotional involvement. It was this articulation of their own uniquely personal response which often revealed generalized understandings students had drawn from the literary event (Many 1991, p. 75).

As outlined in the previous chapter, students such as Leonnie, Chrysanthemum, Candy, Aff Roe and Maree had difficulty identifying explicit meaning in novels like *Twilight*.

This difficulty may partly be explained by the prevalence of 'chapter questions' in English, as it encouraged the adoption of an efferent stance from a number of students and potentially led these students to view reading as a dull information-gleaning exercise.

The type of questions that teachers compelled students to answer was only one influence upon students' experience of English and reading. The lengthy exchange with the mixed ability group cited above also revealed student opposition to the 'over analysis' of the novels they studied. This attitude was evident in both the group discussion with the mixed ability group, and in the following exchange with Jacqui, who also found it difficult to engage with the content of a novel they had studied earlier in class, *Z for Zachariah*:

> *M: What did you think of Z for Zachariah?*
>
> *J: Hated it.*
>
> *M: What did you hate about it?*
>
> *J: It was boring, there was nothing. The storyline was so unimaginable. It was like yeah, couldn't relate to it or anything like that.*
>
> *M: Okay, did the fact that you sort of studied it as a text at school change how you related to it?*
>
> *J: Probably.*
>
> *M: How do you think that it might've?*
>
> *J: Because we had to over and over and over analyze it, like, way more than a normal book.*

In contrast, she found her study of *Will* far more enjoyable, stating: 'It's been good. It's not over-analyzed or anything.' Students in the high-literacy group shared this opposition to 'over-analysis'. Kandy stated: 'I prefer not studying texts when I read them. I just like to read them and enjoy them more than analyzing them.' Consuela posited a similar sentiment: 'I like it when we have a lot of discussion about a book or a movie we're looking at. I love discussions, that's one of my favourite bits. I always talk

in them.' This is another moment where the use of reading preferred by the institution clashes with that of students: while their teachers insist on them reading primarily for analysis, students prefer to use their reading for pleasure, or, in the case of Consuela, as a vehicle for pleasurable discussions with her peers and teacher.

The comments of Jacqui, Kandy and Consuela highlight the importance of the role of the teacher within the institution of the school and the ideological implications of this role. As Stephen Ball has observed, the ideological importance of the role of teacher has been recognized in the political sphere:

> *Significantly the state began to take on responsibility for the training of teachers well before it took on responsibility for schools. The formation of teaching as a proto-profession, the limitation of its field and the definition of its object were implicated in a political structure and a moral practice at the centre of which is the establishment of 'the learner' as a domain of knowledge* (2013, p. 63; see also Popkewitz & Brennan 1998).

Ball suggests, with this political and ideological significance in mind, that teachers were trained first and foremost to be 'ethical exemplars' (2013, p. 62). Educationalist Alex Moore also affirms this political and ideological dimension of teaching, stating that, 'dominant discourses construct and affect classroom practice and teacher education' (2004, p. 51). As a number of ethnographic studies of teachers' experiences conclude (Alsup 2006; Coats & Trites 2013; Johnston 2003), teachers hold considerable power and yet they, like their students, are in a situation where their relationship with the ideologies proffered by their employer, by the curriculum and even by the dominant culture of their profession (see Lampert, Burnett & Lebhers 2016) must also be negotiated. Indeed, Billig et.al pointed out almost thirty years ago that even the most practical considerations involved in teaching 'inevitably have ideological bases, which define what "the job" actually is, how to do it, how to assess its outcomes, how to react to its successes and failures, how to talk and interact with pupils, how many can be taught or talked to at once' (1988, p. 46). Therefore, it is important to explore both the ideological implications for students, as well as the ways in which 'ideologies are

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reflected in the fundamental perspectives educators themselves employ to order, guide, and give meaning to their own activity' (Apple 2004, p. 13).

The capacity of teachers to affect student engagement with reading in English was evident in many of the responses in individual interviews and was not limited to derogatory comments about the previous teacher of the mixed ability class. Josephine, for instance, indicates that her teacher is a primary shaper of her attitude towards the subject:

> *M: How about your experience of English so far at high school? You know, [Year] 7, [Year] 8...*
>
> *J: I don't know, I think that my experience was...it depends on what teachers I have, 'cause in Year 7 I didn't really enjoy the teacher. Like, the teacher...I felt like the teacher brought me down. 'Cause in Year 6 my marks were really good for English, 'cause I liked the teacher and she brought me down. In Year 8 I had another teacher that tried to get me back up.*

Josephine believes that her teachers hold the power to both 'bring down' and 'get back up' her experience and achievement in English. Undeniably the previous teacher of the mixed ability class was perceived to have had a negative impact on students' approach to English and therefore reading. There seemed to be an over-reliance on the depiction of scenes in the novel they studied through drawings, an activity that students perceived largely as pointless. Perhaps most significant was the teacher's initial inability or unwillingness to articulate concepts using vocabulary accessible to students, and her subsequent dismissal of students who sought further clarification. Not only did this teacher neglect to provide students with the frameworks necessary to understand the work (and even neglected to give them the tools necessary to investigate the language they were using), but they also created conditions through which students felt alienated from the study of English and from reading. This situation is perhaps microcosmic of the role that institutions play in creating divisions that are largely ideological: reading and literary interpretation becomes an activity for the elite, for professional readers who possess the requisite knowledge and the nomenclature, while those who are not

members of this privileged sanctum are to blame for their own supposed deficiencies. The institution is effectively restricting access to this knowledge, therefore increasing its scarcity and its value.

Educational ethnographer Cheryl Hogue Smith suggests that the adoption of this authoritarian approach to reading by teachers encourages students to take on an alternative stance to that of the 'efferent' and 'aesthetic' reader. She argues that students who struggle with literacy are inclined to adopt a 'deferent stance' when faced with texts they have difficulty understanding (Smith 2012, p. 64). This stance is one where 'students concentrate merely on finding "correct" answers, including answers that sometimes aren't there for them to find' (Smith 2012, p. 64). This approach, therefore,

> *…prevents them from encountering a text with anything resembling free attention that would otherwise allow them to fully engage with that text. So instead of discovering how intertextual relationships, subtleties, and multiple interpretations affect the possible meaning and therefore interpretation of a text, they limit their engagement through their narrowly defined purpose* (Smith 2012, p. 64).

Smith argues further that deferent readers have more of a tendency to 'give up' when they find reading challenging: 'they assume…their struggle to understand must be attributable to a deficiency in their reading ability, not in the fact that some texts are just difficult and require patience, sustained focus, and persistence to understand' (2012, p. 64). Accordingly, earlier comments from Lorretta indicated that students in the mixed ability group were made to feel deficient and subsequently did not enjoy English as much as they did in primary school.

Such perceived deficiencies are one reason for students like Lorretta feeling alienated from their reading. This instance also represents a further example of a clash of uses of reading. Lorretta is not a student who always finds reading a chore. At one point she indicates that one of her main reasons for reading horror stories is because she enjoys the sensation of being frightened:

I get really really scared easily. I have, like, nightmares whenever I read a book about...I have a nightmare about it. But I don't know, I like it while I'm there, but then afterwards I have a nightmare I don't like. It's weird [laughter]
[...]
I like being on edge, but I know it's not real, but my imagination...'cause when you read you have the option to make up your own, like, how it looks and you can just get yourself to an extent and then stop because you can stop.

Affective uses of reading such as this clash with the uses of reading condoned by the student's teacher and by the regime of assessment tasks. This clash may in part account for Lorretta's recent antipathy towards English and reading in general.

Indeed, the approach of Lorretta's teacher possesses further implications for the role of the teacher within the educational institution and the operation of power in the English classroom. Students' descriptions of this teacher resemble McKnight's 'phallic teacher' (2016). Drawing on the work of Angela McRobbie (2009), McKnight defines the phallic teacher as 'a figurative ideal, the empowered, high quality, tool-wielding teacher discursively created by a neoliberal educational regime' (2016, p. 474). This 'neoliberal educational regime' is one where teachers 'are required to deliver; [they] move from a mode of critical reflection, political engagement and recognition of the ideological nature of teachers' work, to a mode of delivery, greasing machinery moving forwards, always' (McKnight 2016, p. 477). Moreover, McKnight's study highlights further the constant negotiation of teachers with the ideologies of institutions; teachers are sometimes required – or choose – to be the mouthpiece of the institutions they represent.

Not all student responses revealed hostility toward English and not all teachers embody the traits of the 'phallic teacher'. Students in the mixed ability group seemed to enjoy their study of *Will*, partly because they were given sufficient time to read the text and engaged in class discussion rather than an excess of 'chapter questions'. Students also claimed that the practice of hearing narrative read aloud was an effective teaching and learning strategy. It seemed as though one of the main reasons Lorretta enjoyed her

experience of English in primary school was that her teacher read many of the novels she enjoyed aloud. This experience of listening to stories aloud, however, has been a less frequent part of her secondary school experience. Despite the prevalence of research indicating the social and educational benefits of reading aloud for older as well as younger students (see Piliger & Wood 2013; Richardson & Seward 1997; Verden 2012), and despite the fact that all English Syllabus documents in NSW contain significant listening components[23], listening to narrative is an activity that seems to be considerably less practiced in a secondary school setting.

The move of reading from being predominantly an oral and aural activity to that of reading as a silent practice is a process possessing ideological implications. As a number of researchers have pointed out, not only did educational practices in early modern Europe privilege silent reading, but this practice became the dominant form of the act in middle class schools from the eighteenth century (Collinson 2009, p. 43; see also Baron 2000; Petrucci 1999). Elspeth Jajdelska suggests that this trend began slightly earlier, claiming that 'some readers in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries could afford to own a wide range of reading material' (2007, p. 28). Silent reading is historically an activity more readily accessible for those with the means to read in silence; that is, to read successfully in this manner requires not only books, but also the requisite literacy skills and the availability of a quiet space in which to read. Hence silent reading is aligned with values and circumstances that were at one point considered bourgeois. By tacitly portraying silent reading as 'optimal and normative' (Collinson 2009, p. 43), the institution of the school is therefore legitimizing these class-laden values.

The individual interview with Aff Roe suggested, however, not only that students in both the mixed-ability and high-literacy groups enjoyed stories being read to

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[23] These documents can be found at: http://syllabus.bostes.nsw.edu.au/english/english-k10/.

them by their teacher, but also that it was a strategy teachers could use to encourage students to adopt an aesthetic stance toward their reading:

> *A: I have a wide range. Like, like if it's good, if it's interesting, then I'll read it. Like, that book you read us this morning.*
>
> *M: Did you like that? This is the short story 'Abbreviation' by Tim Winton.*
>
> *A: How much more of that book do you have to go? Is it long?*
>
> *M: It's only a short story. That was one of another, probably ten or fifteen short stories.*
>
> *A: Well okay, you don't have to tell me the ending, but...*
>
> *M: Well it's a discreet story itself; it doesn't actually, it isn't part of a longer novel. But you wish it was part of a longer novel?*
>
> *A: Yeah. I want to find out more about his background and the girl's background.*
>
> *M: Tim Winton's kind of interesting like that because he's got a few different volumes of short stories, there's Minimum of Two and The Turning and Scission I think's another one and these characters keep recurring. Vic Lang turns up in a number of different short stories.*
>
> *A: Was he in the last one you read us?*
>
> *M: No he wasn't...well he was in, you're talking about the first short story in that collection where the two kids are traveling up the coast in a combi. He gets mentioned only once: 'Vic Land the copper's kid is dux and...'*
>
> *A: Yeah, the name like rang a bell and I was like 'maybe this is the story' and now I'm like, 'no it's not'.*
>
> *M: Yeah and it's, I mean, I find reading his stuff terrific, but it's frustrating 'cause you're interested in the lives of these characters, you only get that fleeting glimpse.*
>
> *A: Yeah.*
>
> *M: So you're interested in...*
>
> *A: ...like, that scene when they're, where it was kind of strange. He was sucking her finger. And the age difference! How old was he?*
>
> *M: Twelve. She was sixteen. You found that a strange part of the story?*
>
> *A: Why would a girl like her be with him and stuff and why was she crying? All these questions are not answered. It's kind of annoying, but it was amusing I guess and he uses like language and themes you can kind of relate to. Like a boy fantasizing about this girl and she's like an angel to him and stuff, but...*

M: What are the themes you can kind of relate to? Or any teenager might be able to relate to in that story?

A: Stuff about, like, the opposite sex, obviously and like school, family problems. Not that I have any, but it's just, like, interesting to read about. Stuff about body image. Rebellion's interesting, but it depends how far they go and I'll just switch off. I'll be like 'this kid's just...'. Yeah.

M: So you switch off at what point?

A: If it gets too far to the rebellion, like, if the kid's just crazy in a book, then I'll just be like 'oh, I can't relate to you, I'm sorry. Goodbye'.

M: So you need to be able to sort of relate to a character?

A: Yeah, part of me, kind of.
                                    [...]
M: Yeah and with that story today, how did you find listening to it, rather than reading it yourself?

A: Your voice expressions, that's interesting how you change your tone and stuff. I don't know, it just sounds funnier hearing it from you than if I'd read it. Yeah, I wouldn't have laughed.

M: Okay, cool. Would you be interested in reading any more of his fiction?

A: Um, yeah, I guess so. There's something about him that intrigues me. Yeah, like you mentioned, how he like describes the setting and the characters. Like, sometimes it's good to describe the characters and then their surroundings you know to help connect with the person first. 'Cause he's not saying anything about himself, he's just saying where he is and you just want to know more about him.

While at other points in this study Aff Roe seemed to have difficulty engaging with questions of explicit meaning in some of the novels she had read, in this exchange she engages insightfully with characters and ideas in a story she had listened to earlier in the day. She asked perceptive rhetorical questions about the female character in particular, questions that hinted at her ability to infer the emotional state of the characters and affirmed the claims of Keen (2006) and Zunshine (2012) that reading helps young people to develop empathy at a basic, cognitive level. Aff Roe also was able to identify family, body image and rebellion as key themes in the story. Her response suggests that by students occasionally *listening* to text, they are compelled to perceive inflection that

can aid their engagement with notions of implicit and explicit meaning in the story. Discussion too seems an important component of this process. Smith has argued that discussion is essential in encouraging a move away from the deferent reading stance, claiming that 'by liberating their attention from predetermined and fixed meanings in texts and shedding the counterproductive emotional responses they might otherwise have towards reading and rereading' (2012, p. 74).

Thus the strategy of listening to narrative, combined with a relatively free and open discussion of the text provides an alternative to the limiting and limited nature of an efferent and deferent reading stances. It provides what children's literacy ethnographer Linda Bausch describes as a situation 'where students have many opportunities to shape the curriculum and contribute to the social life of the classroom by positioning themselves as literacy and language practitioners in various contexts' (2014, p. 13). This alternative approach represents a negotiation by the teacher with some of the constraints of the curriculum. This negotiation is, however, imbued with ideology. The selection of the story, a *bildungsroman* written by an Australian author involving adolescent characters, was a decision shaped by ideology and in turn possesses an ideological affect. As Trites (2000; 2014) and McCallum (1999) have argued, these elements of the teenage 'coming of age' novel possess a range of ideological implications for young readers. The agency to read the story aloud—and hence to choose of what intonation to use, what aspects of sentences to emphasize—is no less ideological. Therefore, even when teachers avoid the performance of the phallic teacher, even when they negotiate with the demands of their institution and curriculum, they are still doing so ideologically. They do, however, have the capacity to stress *different* ideologies to those condoned by the institution for which they work.

Reading, Ideology and 'Literature'

While the ideology of useful reading was most prevalent in the way students

spoke about their reading at school and their experience of studying books, it operated alongside another competing and seemingly conflicting ideology: that of high-culture and the literary canon. As Barbara Herrnstein Smith suggests, notions of utility have clashed historically with ideologies such as that of high-culture and the canon which also align with humanism: 'In company with a cluster of related terms including "efficiency", "instrumentality" and "practicality", "utility" figures as a distinctly demoted, grudged ("mere"), and profane good in the discourse of the contemporary humanistic disciplines' (1988, p. 125). Although there were many students for whom the value of literature seemed on one hand to lie in its instrumentality, some of these same students also talked about texts in a way that indicated not only that there was a fixed hierarchy of texts, but they also drew upon ideological discourses that represented certain types of literature as intrinsically worthy of reverence. This ideology operated in spite of the fundamental contradiction that so many students found the process of reading and studying canonical writers such as Shakespeare alienating. Such attitudes demonstrate further the ambivalent and contradictory nature of some ideological negotiation, as well as confirming literature itself to be a type of ideological institution.

The practice of reading Shakespeare is generally prized by school curricula in NSW and Australia. As Ken Watson has suggested: 'Throughout most of the past one hundred years, the place of Shakespeare in the New South Wales secondary English curriculum has not in itself been a source of significant dispute' (2003, p. 57). Given this statement it is perhaps surprising that the NSW English syllabus at the time of these interviews did not require students to study Shakespearean texts until their final year of secondary school, and even then, they only needed to study Shakespeare if they elected to complete the Advanced English course (see NSW Board of Studies 2009, p. 15). Despite the absence of Shakespeare from the syllabus, the school in this study required students to read and study Shakespearean plays in all English courses from Years 7 to 10. This requirement was a direct consequence of Shakespeare being valued by the

teachers in the department, demonstrating again the role of individual teachers within educational institutions. The role of teachers in ensuring students study Shakespeare also demonstrates that rather than a school constituting one, monolithic institution, it more accurately resembles multiple institutions where individuals operate with varying degrees of autonomy at different levels. The attitudes of individual students to Shakespeare did, however, differ markedly from those of their teachers: many students insisted that they found the plays confronting and disillusioning.

In the school term prior to the interviews students had studied *Romeo and Juliet*, something many of them said they did not enjoy. This was a view shared by both the high literacy and mixed ability groups. Tess stated: 'I didn't really like it that much as 'the language got like too much and I just lost a lot of interest in it.' Daisy too 'didn't like Romeo and Juliet' because of 'the dialogue, with the different talking. And it was long and just...olden day.' When Chrysanthemum was asked whether she enjoyed studying *Romeo and Juliet*, she responded with an inordinately long pause, followed by 'Hard. Hard. I didn't like the language'. Leonnie 'didn't really understand any of it' and Abbey exclaimed, 'put it this way: I have a better time understanding Italian, and I'm really bad at that.' Others, such as Kandy, were more ambivalent. She claimed: 'Yeah, [the play] was okay. It was a little bit boring at times because of the language and all, but I think, yeah, it's a pretty good text I think and I can, like, appreciate it, but I don't think I enjoyed it as much.' Similarly, Tash stated:

> *The play, I didn't understand it that well. I thought it was really funny, some of the things they said, 'cause yeah, just, how they changed the words they said then had different meanings and some of them were really funny. And yeah, I just had to refer to the notes that deciphered it mostly 'cause most of it I didn't get it at all.*

Most in the mixed ability group were more vehement in their assessment, with Maree describing the play as 'that one I hate.' For some who said they enjoyed studying the play, there was a sense of surprise that they had understood it and that they had achieved something significant by being able to engage with Shakespeare. Aff Roe, for

instance stated: 'I'd heard about *Romeo and Juliet* before. I found it interesting 'cause I never knew the story. I only knew, oh, the girl and the guy kind of thing…Like, I wouldn't really read books like that. It has that language, but I actually understood it and I was happy.' She also declared that she quite liked the way love was represented in the text: 'Because their love was, like, they died for each other. You wouldn't see that now, you'd just see a break up and tears and stuff and drama, but yeah, but yeah the actual characters like, I guess you kind of relate to them.' She then went on to claim, however, that it was not really the play she enjoyed, but rather the film adaptation directed by Baz Luhrmann (1996); she engaged with the romance 'not through the book, through the movie.' While some students seemed to take pleasure in the plot of *Romeo and Juliet*, a majority of students expressed frustration at not being able to understand the language of the play.

Despite finding Shakespeare alienating, students still conceived paradoxically that *Romeo and Juliet* was an exemplar of 'good literature.' That 'Shakespeare' constituted shorthand for 'good writing' for some students is evidence of institutional ideologies of aesthetic value operating in their discourse. The prevalence of this ideology is best demonstrated in the following lengthy exchange with Rebecca:

M: You talk about Chinese Cinderella being a well-written book. What other books have you read that you would consider well-written?

R: I've been reading a couple of Nicholas Sparks' books and I think the books are much better than the movies. The movies are really corny and predicable, but the books are very well written. Like Dear John and the last one, I actually read them 'cause they'd been turned into movies. Just, they have very good language, like, lots of adjectives, not just the same thing over and over again. Teenage books are usually written in teenage language and teenage language, as you can hear from me, is not that great.

M: Don't put yourself down! I think you're very articulate! Okay, so you don't think that teenage books are written particularly well.

R: Well, the ones where they are trying to make it sound like a teenager, no, because I say 'like' as every second word, as my mum tells me all the time and I say stuff like that and they repeat themselves a lot and so in that way they're not well-written. Like, Will isn't well-written because she's done a good job of

making it sound like a teenage boy, but that's not a literate book. Like, that's not something Shakespeare would write.

M: How do you find Romeo and Juliet?

R: Oh, I don't understand it. I mean, I understood the story, but I don't understand any of the language in it. So I didn't really like it because I couldn't understand a word of it when we were reading it. I wish they had like an actual book with just normal English, 'cause that old English was so complicated. But I didn't like Romeo and Juliet because I didn't believe it. Like, they said 'love at first sight' - I don't believe in love at first sight, unless it's, like, the birth of a child and that's the only time I can think you can have love at first sight. They're love at first sight - they didn't even know each other and then they would say that they loved each other and they killed themselves for each other. They didn't know anything, they wouldn't even know what their favourite colour was.

M: I remember you getting fired up about this in a class discussion! Yeah, yeah, you've said this before! So you found the language in Romeo and Juliet just too...

R: Just too hard.

M: Just too hard. But Nicholas Sparks uses...

R: Well he uses good language. I guess I compared Shakespeare to them 'cause Shakespeare is just known to be this amazing, like, English literary...I don't know how to say it, literary kind of person and so I just compared him. When I want to say that something's written well I just say it's like Shakespeare.

Embedded in Rebecca's response is a range of related assumptions about cultural and literary worth. She surmises, for instance, that books written for teenagers are inferior and that well written books use effective and varied adjectives. It is, however, the way that Rebecca discusses Shakespeare that is most significant. Her experience of reading Shakespeare is divorced entirely from the esteem in which she holds his writing; while Rebecca 'didn't really like' Shakespeare because it proved 'too hard' for her to understand, Shakespeare was still synonymous with good literature. Moreover, what Rebecca conceives of as 'good literature' is derived from a source external to her own experience. Her assessment that the speech of ordinary teenagers is inferior seems to be derived mainly from the attitudes of her mother. The authority responsible for Rebecca's elevation of Shakespeare is, however, more nebulous. As Kate Rumbold argues: 'The relationship of an institution to the value of culture is always attenuated,

and the institutional relationship to the value of Shakespeare is particularly slippery' (2010, p. 315). Notions of Shakespeare's greatness, of what Mellor and Patterson describe as 'the conception of "Shakespeare" as unique yet universal, historical yet eternal' (2000, p. 509), are so deeply engrained, so utterly naturalized; according to Rebecca he is 'just known to be…amazing.' These comments are a clear example of hegemony in action. Cultural and historically constructed assumptions about the value of Shakespeare come to seem simply part of *the way things are*, affirming 'the taken for granted status of Shakespeare' (Balinska-Ourdeva et.al 2013, p. 334).

Rebecca is not the only student to invoke hierarchies of culture and Shakespearean plays are not the only texts implicated in these discussions of value and worth. The following exchange with Consuela indicates her understanding of cultural hierarchies:

> *C: Just that I think it's good that you're asking us a lot about* [teenage reading], *'cause teenagers when they read stuff, they're all kind of varied. It depends. Like, I'm kinda more a fantasy genre and then the other people who are like realists, they like reading real stuff. So there are people who are more mature for their age and there are people who are more immature. And there are the people who love Dolly magazines and don't read much other stuff than that. So...*
>
> *M: What would you consider to be immature reading for someone your age?*
>
> *C: Basically...I consider Dolly can be really immature sometimes. He held your hand, you kissed him, that means you're in love. I kind of consider that to be kinda immature sometimes like it's grown up a bit. It's funny like as a joke, but not all the time. Too frivolous.*
>
> *M: So what would mature reading be then?*
>
> *C: Tomorrow When the War Began. I need to read that. I want to.*

It is in this way that notions of literature serve to legitimate some cultural forms at the expense of others in a way that naturalizes and universalizes cultural assumptions to the point where they are considered 'fixed givens' (Levine 1990, p. 7). Moreover the processes of valuing and ranking enculturated in the school environment possess further ideological implications. Rebecca and Consuela, for instance, are not only learning to

evaluate and grade texts such as the plays of Shakespeare or *Dolly* magazine; they are learning implicitly that a discerning, educated person evaluates and grades. Michael Apple describes how educational institutions encourage this tendency in students, stating,

> *...an understanding of how the kinds of symbols schools organize and select are dialectically related to how particular types of students are organized and selected, and ultimately stratified economically and socially. And all of this is encompassed by a concern for power* (2004, p. 14).

Rebecca's and Consuela's comments also demonstrate that it is not only the institution of the school that propagates ideologies relating to hierarchies of culture and value, but that the idea of *literature* itself operates as an institution. The capacity of literature to function in this manner both by engraining cultural hierarchies and by institutionalizing certain ways of thinking was recognized in the 1970s by Roland Barthes, who claimed literature held a 'special status.' 'Literature,' Barthes stated, 'is that ensemble of objects and rules, techniques and works, whose function in the general economy of our society is to *institutionalize subjectivity*' (1977, p. 171; original emphasis). Terry Eagleton wrote similarly of the ideology of the 'moral technology of literature.' 'What is important', Eagleton argued, 'in this ideology of literature is not so much the object being grasped, which can be any kind of object you like, but the lived experience of grasping it, on the part of a particular individual' (1985/6, p. 96). This institution of literature operates by fostering a particular way of viewing that I touched on briefly in the chapter *Reading, Ideology and Taste*—Bourdieu's 'aesthetic disposition' (2010, p. 20). Storey describes this disposition as the 'aesthetic gaze' and defines it as follows: 'At the pinnacle of the hierarchy of taste is the 'pure' aesthetic gaze – a historical invention – with its emphasis on form over function' (Storey 2015, p. 244). [24] Bennett too describes this 'ideology of literature' as 'the assumption that

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[24] Storey contrasts this notion with the 'popular aesthetic' which 'reverses this emphasis, subordinating form to function' (2015, p. 244).

literature comprises a special kind of writing that is to be understood aesthetically' (1990, p. 5). This gaze is an example of the institutions of school and literature acting together. As Bourdieu suggests, educational institutions provide 'the preconditions for obtaining…the aesthetic disposition, the most rigorously awarded of all the terms of entry which the world of legitimate cultural (always tacitly) imposes' (2010, p. 20).

Rebecca's discussion of Shakespeare is an example of the adoption of the aesthetic gaze which has been encouraged both by the institution of literature and by an educational institution which implicitly promote notions of cultural discrimination and discernment. There are also other students who similarly talk of 'good writing.' For Tash, Richelle Mead is a good writer because she draws on themes and storylines to which she can relate and characters with which she can identify:

> *She's a really good writer…One thing I love is like the teenage angst and the jealousy and the guys fighting over, like, I'm totally jealous. Love that. Um, yeah I don't know it's just, I've always wanted stuff like that. Like, not like I sit around going 'I want guys to want me', but if that was happening to me I'd really like it. So, like, I semi can relate to her, semi can't, but I wish I could, you know.*

Others, however, tend to evaluate the work of a writer or novel in relation to considerations of form. Consuela, for instance, consistently referred to novels being both 'well written' and poorly written. When asked to clarify what she meant by this the following exchange occurred:

> *M: Alright. You talk about novels being well written. In what sense?*
>
> *C: As in like you can really kind of understand the character. Like if they're well drawn, they're well drawn, there's not like the random 'oh, crap did I just give away an important piece of information?!' There's none of that, it's actually...you can believe that this person exists. Most of the books I read are written in first person and kind of past tense. I really like that. I hate it when a book or something is written in present tense. I just can't stand it. I can't read it.*
>
> *M: Why do you think that is?*
>
> *C: I honestly have no idea. I think it might be something to do with the fact...if it's written in past tense you can tell that the person lives out of the experiences they go through, kind of. Otherwise they're somehow finding writing materials up there or down there. It depends and I just...I used to write in first person*

[does she mean 3rd?] when I was younger a lot so it kinda reminds me of a younger person than me writing, so that's probably why I don't like it that much.

In her assessment, Consuela privileges certain features of the form of her novels: first person narration is superior to third person narration, writing in the past tense is superior to the present tense. Consuela's preferences, in a similar way to Rebecca's, are partly tied to notions of age and maturity: certain types of narration are considered childish and others adult and worthy.

Just as significantly, Consuela's preferences are also informed by her perceived logic of the text and position of the narrator: how, for instance, can a character be 'composing' a narrative while living it? This observation suggests a rather literal approach to narration; Consuela prefers a narrator situated firmly and plausibly within the text. This preference possesses marked ideological implications. As McCallum argues: 'Repeated story elements (such as place, characters and events) and discursive elements have implications for the representation of the subject in time, and for concepts of subjectivity' (1999, p. 134). Consuela's preference for 'teleological and linear notions of historical continuity' (McCallum 1999, p. 152) demonstrates the ideological influence of what David Lodge described over thirty years ago as the 'mode of classical realism' (1984, p. 90). This mode, claimed Lodge, is inherently ideological:

> *…with its concern for coherence and causality in narrative structure, for the autonomy of the individual self in the presentation of character, for a readable homogeneity and urbanity of style,* [classical realism] *is equated with liberal humanism, with empiricism, common sense and the presentation of bourgeois culture as a kind of nature* (1984, p. 90; see also Watt 1957, p. 83).

As discussed previously in this chapter as well as the chapter *Reading, Ideology and Taste*, Consuela already expressed an emerging preference for realist fiction that seemed to be at least partly a consequence of me imposing implicitly my own generic partialities upon her literary tastes. These comments where Consuela privileges the logical, teleological form of classical realism demonstrates further the ideological resonances of such acts where institutions or their representatives ordain some modes as

superior to others; it is not simply a case of a student's transitory cultural tastes being influenced, but potentially the ways in which they engage with narrative and view the world beyond the text.

Reading, Ideology and History

The ideological manner in which Consuela's preferences for genre and form are influenced by the institution are mirrored in the way a number of other student reading practices and preferences seemed to be influenced by their school context. One of the most prevalent of these was through students expressing a preference for texts that deal with narrative history. This preference was encouraged in part by the school mandating that students read works of biography such as *Hana's Suitcase* by Karen Levine (2003) or autobiographies such as *Chinese Cinderella* by Adeline Yen Mah (1999). The ideological implications of how texts deal with the past have been a subject of enquiry for a range of academics for a considerable time. Lukacs discussed the potential of historical fiction to encapsulate what he saw as the 'true' conditions and motivations of the social actors of the past:

> *What matters therefore in the historical novel is not the re-telling of great historical events, but the poetic awakening of the people who figured in those events. What matters is we should re-experience the social and human motives which led men to think, feel and act as they did in historical reality* (1965, p. 42).

In the 1950s educationalist Helen Lodge conducted a small-scale ethnographic study enquiring whether or not biography influences 'the moral ideology of the adolescent' (1956, p. 241). Postcolonial theorists such as Dipesh Chakrabarty have examined the role of history as 'a [Eurocentric] discourse produced at the institutional site of the university' (1995, p. 383), and propagated by a 'battery of institutions' including schools (1995, p. 384). Over the last 25 years academics in the field of children's and YA literature have examined the ways in which texts that deal with the past position young readers (McCallum 1999; Stephens 1992; Wilson 2008; 2011). Common to all

these studies is the recognition that such texts have the potential (although in Lodge's study this potential was deemed 'slight' (1956, p. 254)) to influence readers' perception not only of history, but also of their own place in that continuum.

Accordingly, the comments of students in this study indicated that such texts possess significant ideological implications. These implications are all the more significant because many of the texts students mention are ones they are required to study by the school institution and are evident in the exchanges below:

> *Josephine: Hana's Suitcase: I loved it.*
>
> *M: What did you love about it, Jess?*
>
> *Josephine: I just liked the story line and what was happening, how they described it and stuff.*
>
> *M: Anyone else have any opinions on Hana's Suitcase?*
>
> *Maree: I liked how there was letters in it, like when they wrote to each other.*
>
> *M: Fumiko and...*
>
> *Maree: I don't remember their names. That was one of them, but they wrote letters to each other . Yeah, and they described what happened in the gas chambers and stuff and then they find the brother that's still alive.*
>
> *M: Oh you mean Hana and her brother, yep, okay.*
>
> *Maree: It was real, it was like it told you what happened in Auschwitz...*
>
> *Josephine: It told you what happened - it was really interesting.*
>
> *M: Hannah, what did you think of it?*
>
> *Hannah: I don't know, I liked [inaudible]. One of the books I found interesting though.*

Students in the high literacy class expressed similar sentiments. Tess stated:

> *I liked when in Year 7 when we read Chinese Cinderella, I'd already read that in Year 5 and I really liked that book, so I also read the second one. So I liked it when we came back and I like reading books on the Holocaust. I find them interesting...it's happened so it's kinda true so you can really see what went on and it's really interesting to see how they were treated and all.*

Of *Hana's Suitcase* Consuela said:

Oh I did like that book, even though it was very short, that was a good book. My teacher tried to read it to us in primary, but it was too heavy for us. That was a good book because it kind of like personalized the Holocaust. We just keep hearing about numbers of people who died, how it affected other people, the concentration camps and then we finally get to hear about like kind of a first-hand experience and I liked the way they kept on talking about - what was her name? The...was it Japanese...the Japanese lady kept finding…*Fumiko! That's it! She was going everywhere trying to find out about the girl who owned this suitcase. So I liked the way they brought her back into it and then they went back to Hana and then so I liked it 'cause it personalized it. It made the holocaust more real to me. I always knew it was like a horrible thing and a always got kinda 'Oh my God!' whenever we heard about it, but putting like a face to an event, that really kind of opens it all up. So I liked that book a lot. It really kind of opened my eyes to just how horrible this thing was.*

The above comments possess a number of ideological ramifications. The most explicit way in which the students' engagement with these texts is ideological is through the way it privileges *these* specific aspects of history. The struggles of a young Chinese woman in a patriarchal society or a child such as Hana Brady being murdered in Auschwitz are, I would argue, aspects of history that are important for students to engage with and care about. At one point Maree stated: 'I never even knew [the Holocaust occurred]. I have Jewish friends and I never knew.' That such a study could be the first time a student had learnt about the existence of the Holocaust merely reinforces the importance of the study of texts such as *Hana's Suitcase*. However, just because their teacher—and I suspect many others—considers the values and knowledge taught by a text such as *Hana's Suitcase* worthwhile, it does not make such values and knowledge any less ideological. That the institution of the school and its representatives have compelled students to read these texts, the institution is in turn implying that certain events in history—that certain *struggles* in history—are more important than others; in the same way that a selection of authors or genres creates a hierarchy of texts, so too does the focus on particular features of history privilege some people and events. That the English Syllabus (Board of Studies NSW 2003) also mandated that schools study historical texts further reinforces the institutional nature of this intervention. If we accept McCallum's argument that 'concepts of personal identity are formed, in part,

through an awareness and understanding of the past and of a sense of a relation in the present to personal and social histories' (1999, p. 167), then the privileging of these specific histories possesses the potential to play some part in forming students' emerging sense of self and sense of the past.

There are other, more implicit ways in which the study of these historical texts is ideological. McCallum highlights some of these ways, stating:

> *Historical fiction for children is primarily oriented toward the development of an understanding of the present and of the relations between one's self, time, place and others through attaining a sense of history. To this end, historical fiction for children…and the teaching of history, have traditionally been dominated by humanist approaches to history* (1999, p. 168).

The understanding of history conveyed by students in this study indicates the prevalence of McCallum's 'humanist approaches' in their discourse. Tess' comment that 'it's happened so it's kinda true so you can really see what went on' demonstrates an empirical sense of history. Once a text is recognized as 'historical' it is seen to possess a veracity not found in 'fictional' texts. This privileging of empirical positivism is part of the post-enlightenment ideological landscape and still characterizes dominant approaches to the field of history (see Davies 2003; Elton 1967; Evans 2000; Iggers, Mukherjee & Wang 2015). That the texts studied are not strictly works of history merely emphasizes the ideological nature of these ideas; a text merely needs to purport to be a 'true story' in order to occupy the epistemological status of the 'historical'. The tendency to view historical fiction in this fashion is something affirmed by Collinson (2009). In their reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1997), some of Collinson's informants regarded the text as tantamount to a study of history itself, thus engaging in a 'willing conflation of history and fiction' (2009, p. 120). Consequently, not only do the values and perspectives of these texts carry more weight, but they also reinforce humanist notions of chronology and history.

The study of these texts also relates to the discourses of humanism through their implicit promotion of a teleological approach to history (Wilson 2011, p. 5). Hayden

White describes this approach as the 'emplotment' of history (1987, p. 44). As Wilson argues, this emplotment involves history being configured in a teleological manner as: 'The retelling of the past is always future-oriented because it is directed to the endpoint to which it is moving' (2011, p. 5). As Wilson's statement implies, humanism is not the only approach or philosophy that configures history in a teleological manner: Marxism certainly interprets history in this manner (White 1987, p. 63) as, for instance, might the 'Whiggish' school of English history (Burrow 1988). What makes the teleological bent of the historical novels read by students reminiscent of humanist ideology is how they prioritize and lionize the plight of the individual. In this way the teleology of this particular configuration works with ideologies such as that of the aesthetic stance to further naturalize and reinforce the cultural ideologies of humanism.

Ultimately, students' reading at school is implicated in a diverse and complex ideological landscape. Students are required by the demands of this institution to engage with ideologies as a result of the texts they are compelled to read and the manner in which they are taught. Some of these ideologies originate from the curriculum, which is an ideological battleground. Other ideologies are promulgated as a result of the preferences and interventions of individual teachers who are not only representatives of the school institution, but are also partly the product of their own, unavoidably ideologically-charged educations. Some of these ideologies are accepted in a relatively unthinking manner, while at other times students possess the agency to resist the ideologies with which they interact. Most of the time, however, both students and teachers engage in a ceaseless and messy negotiation with these ideologies, sometimes accepting, sometimes rejecting, sometimes transforming the many different assumptions that make up their experience and performance of reading at school.

<u>Reading, Ideology and Family</u>

The family is the second important institution for social and cultural theorists preoccupied with ideology. For Friedrich Engels, the then (nineteenth century) modern age would see the advent of 'the single family as the economic unit of society' (2010, p. 492). This development would possess a number of social significances. Not only was it used to justify patriarchal dominance, which Engels termed 'man's exclusive supremacy' (2010, p. 230), but it reinforced the status quo by allowing the wealthy to pass their property to their (male) offspring (2010, p. 207). In addition, the hierarchical nature of the family would replicate the conditions of servitude demanded of the modern working-class. To substantiate this argument, Engels quotes Marx, who stated: 'The modern family contains in germ not only slavery (servitus) but also serfdom, since from the beginning it is related to agricultural services. It contains in miniature all the contradictions which later extend throughout society and its state' (Engels 2010, p. 207).

In the mid twentieth century, Althusser focuses on the role of the family as one of his most prominent 'ISA'. While he does not devote as much space to the discussion of the family in his work as he does to education and the Church, he still asserts that, in 1960s France, 'the School (and the School-Family couple) constitutes the dominant Ideological State Apparatus' (Althusser 1971, p. 154). Similarly to Engels, Althusser views the ideological role of the family partly as a naturalization of hierarchy, stating that the 'familial ideological configuration is, in its uniqueness, highly structured' (1971, p. 176) For Althusser, the ideological significance of the family also lies in the way that it, along with the educational ISA, is didactic; it 'drums into them…a certain amount of "know-how" wrapped in the ruling ideology…or simply the ruling ideology in its pure state' (Althusser 1971, p. 155). It was in this manner that Gramsci, writing

before Althusser, but not coming to prominence in the academic sphere until the 1970s, also considered the family an ideological institution. Like Althusser, Gramsci saw the family as acting in conjunction with the school to promulgate ideology:

> *In a whole series of families, especially in the intellectual strata, the children find in their family life a preparation, a prolongation and a completion of school life; they 'breathe in', as the expression goes, a whole quantity of notions and attitudes which facilitate the educational process properly speaking* (1971, p. 31).

It is primarily through this didactic role—a role that encompasses the capacity not only to teach values and attitudes, but also to enculturate a *way of life*—that this thesis views the family as an ideological institution. The family is most influential in affecting the frequency of adolescent reading, what the students in this study read, and in propagating some of the dominant ideologies such as useful reading discussed earlier in this chapter. There were, however, also instances where the attitudes of students clashed with those of their parents in a similar way to how students' preferred uses of reading clashed with those advocated by the school. The relationship between reading and this particular institution proved, therefore, to be another site of ambivalent ideological negotiation.

The Family, Attitudes Towards Reading and Book Buying

One of the most significant ways in which the institution of the family affected students and their reading was through the reading habits of parents themselves. Recent studies in Australia (Ozturk et.al 2016) and Finland (Silinskas et.al 2012) highlight how the reading choice and frequency of parents influences considerably the reading habits of children from a very young age. This is an assertion confirmed further by the comments of students in this study. There seemed to be a correlation between students whose parents were avid readers and the reading habits of students themselves; parental involvement in reading established it as a legitimate and worthwhile activity. Conversely, students whose parents read infrequently were generally less likely to read, however this link appeared to be slightly tenuous, as there were examples of students

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who read voraciously despite the actions and attitudes of their parents.

Some of the most frequent readers in this study had parents who read regularly. Consuela stated: 'My mum's a big reader and she, I kinda got it off her. We do the same thing 'cause we don't sleep well…Mum's a big reader, I'm a big reader, my brother's just got into the habit of reading the Harry Potter series, so family of readers.' Kandy revealed: 'Well my mum does because she's in, like, a book. While she has never seen her father read, Chrysanthemum often observes her mother reading: 'I see her read like life stories and all those books.' Rebecca attributed an interest in fairytales to her mother: 'Well I didn't read them like myself. My mum read them to me' and Apple suggested that her father's musical tastes influenced her reading tastes:

> *And, um, I've read David Bowie biographies, Ozzie Osbourne, Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, Slash and Guns and Roses and the Stones and this book called What Would Keith Do? and it's all these quotes from Keith Richards and it's really funny. Yeah, so, I kind of like biographies… I don't know, like, I've never really, at home, I was never really exposed to, like, new music, like, sort of thing. All the radio stations are like older and Dad's got all the CDs, and so, yeah, I just followed suit.*

The reading habits of Apple and her father reiterate the findings of Bennett et.al. (2009), that readers often use biographies and autobiographies to mediate 'other fields of cultural production' (2009, p. 100), in this case, music. In addition, the availability of certain books in her house also affected Apple's habits: 'Um, I don't know, I usually...my Dad's got a bookshelf and it's like the complicated, what I call the complicated reads and um, I don't know, I just pick one. I don't really have, like, a pattern or anything.' Reading is contingent upon the availability of material resources; in these instances, the immediate availability of particular types of books affected what students became interested in reading (Collinson 2009; Petrucci 1999). As the following exchange with Tash reveals, this choice of reading material can occasionally seem unconventional and can shape a student's aspirations:

> *T: Well, my parents are both really literate. Like, I always had books around about everything. My stepparents and, yeah. So what I mostly read was pilot manuals, actually.*

M: Pilot manuals!?

T: I decided when I was about nine or ten I wanted to be a pilot and I was going to become the youngest pilot ever. So yeah, I started reading all my stepdad's pilot manuals and yeah, that's mostly what I read, besides Dr Seuss and The Princess Diaries and stuff like that.

Just as there were examples of students who valued the act of reading partly as a consequence of their parents' practice, there was a loose correlation between reluctant readers and the habits of their parents. Hannah, who is not an enthusiastic reader, said that in her family 'no one really reads.' Significantly, the absence of reading in Hannah's household is a consequence of time constraints. Hannah's mother works at a Returned Services Leagues (RSL) Club and her father for the local council. According to Hannah, they both 'just don't have time' for reading, demonstrating again the extent to which reading is shaped not only by a spatio-temporal economy, but also in turn by a monetary economy. In this instance, reading frequency is aligned with class in much the same way as it is for studies such as Bennett et.al (2009, p. 52).

The alignment, however, between the reading tastes and habits of family and that of students was not always straightforward. Josephine, who identified herself as a reasonably reluctant reader spoke of her parents' enthusiastic reading: 'Yeah, my mum and my dad like to read. You should see my mum—she reads a book really fast 'cause she travels a lot so she's...that's the only thing she does.' Maree, as will be explored further in the next section of this chapter, is an avid reader despite the fact that her parents 'hate reading'. While Maree's parents protest over her reading, they still managed to influence her choice of reading material:

> *I don't do magazines. I never liked gossip. 'Cause my mum's—you know those parents that are really into it, they're always gossiping about the latest celebrities and whatever? Mum's never been like that. She's never had those magazines like Women's Weekly. She's never had them, so I just never got into them. There's always been a book there that I can read. But I think it's kind of pointless reading about celebrities 'cause they're always going to go through changes.*

This passage suggests that students' relationship with the habits and attitudes towards their parents is not always straightforward or deterministic: like so many other institutions in this study, negotiations with family are characterized by contradiction and struggle.

Not only did parents' reading habits influence the reading frequency and choice of students, the *purchasing* of books and reading material was a related manner in which the institution of the family functioned ideologically. Book purchasing is one of the most significant ways that adults, who generally exercise more economic agency than their children, are able to prescribe reading tastes, and hence promote or condone the values and attitudes of the texts they purchase. As Grenby points out, the reading preferences of children and adolescents 'are not based on unlimited access to literature, but have to be constructed from what is obtainable, where and when they live, what they are given by others and what is affordable' (2008, p. 4). Jack Zipes goes further, implying that what he calls the 'sexist and white patriarchal biases' of the *Harry Potter* novels are inflicted upon children primarily because parents purchase these books for them (Zipes 2001, p. 186). Accordingly, the reading material of a number of students in this study was partly determined by what their parents bought for them. Moreover, as it is an action that requires economic resources, book purchasing intersects with class; as the comments of some students revealed, reading itself is an activity that is sensitive to socio-economic conditions.

Lorretta, for instance, indicated that her interest in horror novels was piqued initially by trips to the bookstore with her parents:

> M: Okay and how did you get interested in these books?
>
> L: We just go to Dymocks into like the Horror section and Dad saw that and then he's just like "is that good?' It looked a bit dodgy, like I wouldn't like to read it and then I read it and I was like 'Oh my God! I love this book!' and my dad was like 'I'll get you the next two'. So he did.

At another point she also stated: 'My mother bought me books from there. Mum bought

me books but then I had really bad dreams and then I just don't read then 'cause I don't want to find out.' While Josephine is not a regular reader of novels, her choice of reading material is also partly shaped by her mother:

> *J: The only magazine I do read is Girlfriend and Dolly sometimes, but nothing else.*
>
> *M: How often would you read those?*
>
> *J: Whenever Mum decides to buy them for me. So it's every month or so.*

While the examples above are of parent purchasing books for their children, in Tash's case book buying for quite a voracious reader became too expensive for her parents and stepparent:

> *T: My dad won't buy me books 'cause I just read and read and I'll need a new one every week. My mum...*
>
> *M: So it's getting too expensive to buy you one every week?*
>
> *L. it's getting heaps expensive and my bookshelves are like full. My mum does, but I only see her every second weekend and I only get one weekend so I just go through that quickly. Yeah I read this one online and it was good. I find it more exciting but then I have to shut down my laptop and get away from it. I used to read at the dinner table until that got banned.*
> *[Laughter]*

At the time the interviews for this study were conducted, many nations were affected by the aftermath of the Global Economic Crisis (GFC) of 2009. Book buying surveys at the time indicated that the purchasing of books was less frequent than prior to the crisis (see Hoffert 2010; Horn 2010). While Australia was not affected as dramatically as the USA or Europe by the GFC, the discussion above with Tash is a reminder that book buying and reading are activities that are implicated not just ideologically, but *materially*, by issues of economy and class. Indeed, ideological struggles and negotiations take place with and within these contingencies, affirming Rob White's claim: 'How young people see themselves, and the nature of their relationships to other people and institutions, is shaped by and contingent upon what is happening economically, politically and socially around them' (1999, p. 2).

Family, the Ideology of 'Useful Reading' and Hierarchies of Use

In the section of this chapter that dealt with ideology and the school, I argued that one of the main ideologies to emerge from student interviews was that of the instrumentality of reading. I also suggested that certain uses of reading were legitimized by educational institutions at the expense, sometimes, of the uses to which students put their reading. Both the ideology of useful reading as well as a hierarchy of uses of reading could be traced in part to the nature and prevalence of school assessment as well as the way English was taught. The interviews indicated, however, that the school was not the sole institution that constituted a site of this particular ideological negotiation. The value and purposes of reading was also a negotiation conducted at home.

The ideology of useful reading was reinforced strongly by a number of parents. The following exchange with Josephine reveals an attitude towards reading shared by a number of parents in this study—not only that it is 'good' for their children, but also that it will help them succeed academically:

> *M: And do you ever talk to your mother about reading?*
>
> *J: No. She tries to convince me and my brother to read, but we don't.*
>
> *M: How old's your brother?*
>
> *J: Seventeen. He does Advanced English, Extension and all of it, and he still doesn't read.*
>
> *M: He still doesn't read? There you go!*
>
> *J: He's probably reading his first book now that he's read since Year 7. So Mum's happy.*
>
> *M: Why do you think your mother tries to convince you to read?*
>
> *J: 'Cause she thinks it brings out our English skills and like, you need reading for practically anything, so...she thinks that it's letting us down if we don't read now. We'll be behind.*

Similarly, Kandy's mother was 'always trying to get my sister to read more books and things, yeah. 'Cause she doesn't think she reads enough.' The student for whom the ideology of useful reading was the most prevalent part of her discourse was Maree. It is unsurprising that this ideology was affirmed most strongly at home. This is not to say that Maree adopted unthinkingly the attitudes of her parents towards reading; she claimed not only that her parents 'don't read', but she stated that 'they hate it.' Conversely, Maree was the most avid reader in the mixed ability group. As the exchange below demonstrates, not only is she is a student who enjoys reading, but she likes the subject of English in general and is also an enthusiastic story writer:

> *M: What's your general experience of English at school? Are you someone who likes studying English?*
>
> *Maree: Mmhh [yes]*
>
> *M: Okay.*
>
> *Maree: It's one of my favourite subjects.*
>
> *M: What do you like about the subject?*
>
> *Maree: I've always been good at English. I've always had an interest in reading and writing my own stories. I've been one of those kids that is always reading, like, a bookworm if you want to call it that. Always reading and you know. And you know those parents who hate reading? They're like 'stop reading!'*
>
> *M: Really? Are your parents like that?*
>
> *Maree: They used to be until my little brother got into reading and now they're like 'fine, just go over there and read, don't stand next to me.'*
>
> *M: What is it about your reading that frustrates them?*
>
> *Maree: 'Cause they never got into it and they think it's pointless to just sit there and read a made up story rather than getting outside and doing exercise and activities and enjoy the fresh air and it's like 'no! Give me a book!'*
>
> *M: And that's something you disagree with obviously.*
>
> *Maree: Yeah! I want to read! 'Cause when my little brother just first started reading, you know when they come home with their homework and they have to read novels? Yeah, I used to help him with that, 'cause Mum's like 'I can't do it', 'he's doing it all wrong', 'I can't do this!' You know how they sound it out? 'It's this word!' Let him sound it out himself!*

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M: So you actually helped teach your little brother to read!

Maree: Yeah: 'cause mum just couldn't do it. 'I can't do it! He's not doing it right!'

M: Maybe teaching's something you could consider down the track!

Maree: No!

What is most striking about the above exchange is the antipathy held by Maree's parents towards reading. This dislike is so pronounced that they actively implore Maree to 'stop reading'. The origins of this antipathy are not entirely clear. It seems that they see reading as a sedentary activity, one that prevents their children from getting 'fresh air' and exercise. This attitude resembles a persistent way of representing reading from the nineteenth century: the notion of it as an idle waste of time (see Hughes 1978). Such attitudes are also a component of educational and health-related panics concerning the lifestyles of contemporary teenagers (see Kantomaa et.al 2016; Regan & Heary 2013; Sisson et.al 2011). Maree's parents also appear to harbor a related prejudice towards the 'made up' nature of fiction. The fact that reading is something with which Maree's parents themselves clearly struggle may also contribute to their aversion. As first generation migrants—Maree's father is from Greece and her mother from Italy—it may be an activity that denotes their status as 'outsiders', something that makes them feel marginalized. Maree's comments also intimate that her parents' stance may be related to gendered ideologies; their standpoint seemed more emphatic prior to Maree's younger brother becoming enthusiastic about reading. Ozturk et.al (2016) suggest, however, that is in unusual for attitudes towards reading to be gendered in this manner; they argue, rather, that in contemporary Australia it is more likely that the reading of fiction is regarded as an activity for girls.

Maree's discourse does not reflect directly the attitudes of her parents. However, Maree is one of the most adamant advocates of the ideology of useful reading in this study. As examined earlier in this chapter, Maree's discussion of reading at school

indicated that this ideology constituted a significant portion of her discourse. As the extract below suggests, Maree's attitude extends beyond her attitude to reading at school:

> Maree: I speak fluent Greek.
>
> M: You speak fluent Greek. Do you ever read in Greek?
>
> Maree: When I went to Greek school—I went to Greek school for five years— and we used to have Greek textbooks. Like, you know, history textbooks.
>
> M: Yeah yeah.
>
> Maree: We had them in Greek.
>
> M: How do you find that? Have you ever read any Greek fiction?
>
> Maree: When I was really little, but not at this point.
>
> M: So you wouldn't read...
>
> Maree: I can read it.
>
> M: Do you read any Greek texts regularly?
>
> Maree: I read the Greek newspaper.
>
> M: Okay.
>
> Maree: If it's at my grandfather's.
>
> M: Yeah. And how do you find that experience?
>
> Maree: I reckon it's pretty good, 'cause, I don't know, say you went to Greece and I wanted to live there for a little bit, you'd be able to fit in well, you'd be able to understand Greek more. Whereas if I didn't speak Greek and I went to live in Greece, it would be hard to fit in.
>
> M: Absolutely.
>
> Maree: 'Cause most people in Greece don't speak English at all, unless they've moved from here.

That Maree speaks and reads fluent Greek seems not simply a consequence of the cultural background of her father and grandfather. In the above passage she indicates that she has taken active steps to learn to read Greek in case she 'went to Greece' and 'wanted to live there for a little bit.' This is another example of the ideology of useful

reading in Maree's discourse. In this instance this ideology appears to represent a negotiation between Maree's and her parents' contradictory attitudes towards reading. While her attitudes contrast with those of her parents, her enjoyment of reading is not at all a matter of 'reading for its own sake.' Rather, Maree sees the value in reading for some other utility. While Maree may reject some of her parents' assumptions about reading, she paradoxically uses the activity to provide a connection to the culture of her father and grandfather.

Although Maree's parents are the only family members of those interviewed who appear to actively discourage reading, hers is not the only example where student attitudes towards reading come into conflict with those espoused by their parents. The following discussion with Rose indicates that she would feel uncomfortable speaking to her mother about her reading:

> *M: Okay. And um, do you ever talk to [your family] about reading, particularly if your brother and your mum are reading, do you ever talk to them about books?*
>
> *R: No. Well, I don't think my mum knows what's in my books. Like, I wouldn't want to tell her what I read.*
>
> *M: You think she might disapprove...*
>
> *R: No.*
>
> *M: Of the content?*
>
> *R: It's just uncomfortable. I wouldn't want to, like, discuss it.*

Aff Roe too expressed a reluctance to talk to her parents about her reading as they are 'not really into it.' In the exchange below, Depplikov indicates that although she discusses reading extensively with her parents, they all hold very different attitudes towards what constitutes valid and valuable reading:

> *M: And how about your parents, do they read?*
>
> *D: My dad reads a lot, but he reads more of the, like, the non-fiction stuff. Like he's very 'I only read about the truth, I don't read stupid things like liars and narratives and stuff like that'.*

M: What do you think about that comment, that approach?

D: Well, I find that a bit boring and not adventurous at all. Like, my dad lives in this reality, why read about it as well. Like, I read to escape this. Like, whenever I get bored, or sad or something I just pick up a book and it just makes me forget everything and I'm in that world. So like it's just my dad's loss I guess.

M: Okay, how about your mother?

D: My mum's more of a 'Mills and Boon' type of reader. Yeah, I can't get into that. Yeah, she reads a little bit. She doesn't have much time though.

M: You sort of laugh when you talk about the Mills and Boon type reader. Why is that?

D: They're just really...all of them are the same. They're really corny [laughter] and they're all human. That doesn't really fancy me at all.

As was revealed in the chapter *Reading, Taste and Ideology*, Depplikov is a devotee of romantic fantasy fiction. This preference contrasts sharply with that of her father who 'reads the non-fiction stuff.' Incidentally, while Depplikov clearly rejects her father's tastes in fiction, as will be explored later in this chapter, it is possible that his rather literal approach to reading may have affected Depplikov's approach to religious texts; despite his attitudes to books not appealing to Depplikov's way of interacting with literary fiction, the ideological remnants of his approach may influence the manner in which Depplikov interprets texts that she does not read for enjoyment or escape. Moreover, despite her own reading tastes, Depplikov rejects her mother as a 'Mills and Boon' type reader. This comment exhibits not only the influence of a high/low cultural binary opposition on Depplikov's attitudes to certain texts, but also the contradictory and partial nature of the way she holds that ideological position.

What unites Maree, Rose, Aff Roe and Depplikov in their responses is that they are all second-generation migrants. In all three cases the value they attach to reading and the uses to which they put reading come into conflict with the values and attitudes of their parents. Very little research that has been conducted on reading and ideology for second-generation migrants to countries such as Australia, the United States or Great

Britain. Ethnographic work conducted in Canada by Farha Shariff (2012) and in the Midwestern United States by Carmen Medina (2010) indicates that the process of constructing meaning from texts is, for migrants, one of constant negotiation. She argues that it is 'important to understand that in-school and out-of-school literacies are always emerging in the space between local and global' (2010, p. 42). This research, along with that of postcolonial researchers (see Gutiérrez 2008; Kostogriz & Tsolidis 2008) focuses, however, on the literacy experiences of *first generation* migrants. The experiences of Maree, Rose, Aff Roe and Depplikov demonstrate that the cultural values and attitudes of first-generation migrants possess the potential to clash dramatically with the attitudes to reading of their children.

Books, Reading and Familial Relationships

While the attitudes towards reading of Maree, Aff Roe, Rose and Depplikov often conflicted with those of their parents, other members of their families tended to share these students' values. Reading may have been a source of disagreement between a student such as Maree and her parents, but it was an activity that reinforced the familial bonds she shared with her brothers. In one of the extracts discussed above, Maree indicated that she helped her younger brother with his English homework, while also teaching him to read. Similarly, as the discussion below suggests, reading is an activity that Maree shares with her older brother as well:

> *M: Okay. And why did you read the Harry Potter series?*
>
> *Maree: It first started out as a dare and then I got into the first one and the second one changed and I just had to read them 'cause they were already there.*
>
> *M: What do you mean a dare? Who dared you?*
>
> *Maree: My older brother. He dared me to read them 'cause, you know the six week holidays? He dared me how many books I could read in the holidays and I said that the only really long series that I'd heard of was the Harry Potter series. So I read them all. But it's an ongoing debt because it keeps on having new books.*

M: So you talk about reading with your brother?

Maree: Hmmm [yes].

M: Okay, how often do you talk about reading?

Maree: Well he has to read books for school, so...

M: How old is he?

Maree: 18. And we read them together, if that makes sense.

M: Yeah it does.

Maree: He doesn't like reading on his own, so we read out loud to each other.

M: How often would you do that?

Maree: Once a night maybe.

M: Really?

Maree: Yeah.

M: Fantastic!

Maree: He likes reading.

M: Alright and reading is clearly something you enjoy doing as well?

Maree: Mmmhh [yes].

M: Where would you rank it on your list of priorities?

Maree: I read every night without doubt.

M: And how about other members of your family? Do other members of your family like reading?

Maree: I've got a seven year old brother - he'll read every day, non-stop. He's into like this dragon series, I don't know what it's called, it's like Red Dragon or something and he reads it non-stop and I always have to go to like the shops 'Liz, buy me another book! Buy me another book!'

M: It's not Red Dragon, the serial killer, the Hannibal Lector series?

Maree: No. It's like, what's it called? You know that book Deltora Quest?

M: No I don't, but it's like that sort of quest type, fantasy type fiction?

Maree: Yeah.

While on one hand Maree's home environment has been partly responsible for

enculturating the ideology of useful reading, the shared nature of her reading with her siblings has helped to foster intimacy between them. Rose also outlined the way she talks to her brother about reading: 'Oh, I'd just be like, "oh my gosh, Ryan, my book's really good" and I'd tell him what's happening and stuff and he'd go "yeah I'm reading this book and it's really good too" and he'd tell me what's happening in his book.' Similarly, Depplikov talks frequently to her siblings about reading: 'Yeah, we have like a really big D&M, which is a "Deep and Meaningful"…Every time we get into a book, which is about three times a week maybe.' Consuela who, along with her family migrated to Australia from Ireland, attempts to ameliorate a seemingly fragile relationship with her brother by recommending books to him:

> *M: Do you talk to your brother about reading?*
>
> *C: I haven't got that good a relationship with my brother. I do give him kinda the books that I love, that I still read sometimes, so I do give him books that I think he should read.*
>
> *M: Okay. What do those include, what sort of books...*
>
> *C: Well the Harry Potter series. When he was younger I got him to read all the Roald Dahl and I'm trying to get him into this series called Artemis Fowl. Have you heard of Artemis Fowl?*
>
> *M: Yes, yes I have. Why did you recommend those books to your brother?*
>
> *C: 'Cause I really love them and they're kinda like...he likes...he's a lot like me, he likes a lot of fantasy, kind of good sagas kind of stuff—I love sagas—I really like them so I figured he might like them and he does which is good.*

This propensity to bond with siblings over reading represents an example of Collinson's notion that books provide an 'index of intimacy' (2009, p. 57). Just as Collinson argues that by giving books as gifts, social actors are performing friendship, so too does the act of shared reading between these students and their siblings constitute a performance of their familial bonds.

The discussion of books is also a way in which many students of all backgrounds in this study perform their relationships with their parents. As with the relationship between students and their siblings, in many instances, talking about

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reading is way a student might furnish familial bonds with a parent. Daisy's mother, for example, is in a book club and consequently recommends books that they have read. Consuela stated: 'My mum's a big reader and she, I kinda got it off her. We do the same thing 'cause we don't sleep well.' She will discuss reading with her mother 'if she's reading a good book, 'cause she mostly reads murder novels and stuff and if she thinks they're not too gruesome enough she'll let me read them' and wishes to read *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy 'cause...my mum loved it.' Reading is also a way in which the relationship between Consuela and her godmother is performed:

> *It's crazy. [My godmother] had this book, the book The Hobbit, and it was full-on, beautiful, hard-cover. It even had a little slot thing with gold leaf all around the edges. It was a beautiful book. And I picked it up on I go 'ooo what's this?' and she goes 'That's The Hobbit. It's the beginning of The Lord of the Rings kind of setting' and I'd heard of that and I think I was about five or six. Next year for my birthday she sent me a book, a copy of my own and this one was different. It was green. It still had gold leaf, but it was kind of thick. The pages were massive, thick. It had beautiful kind of like, kind of amazing ink paper pages with the drawings of how everything looked. It was an amazing book. I still have it now.*

The above statement indicates that this reinforcement of familial bonds through books acts in conjunction with other ideological tropes. The giving of a 'beautiful book' does more than perform and affirm the relationship between Consuela and her godmother. It conveys not only what texts should be valued (*The Hobbit* and the *Lord of the Rings* Trilogy) but it also inscribes certain visual and tactile aesthetic codes (the gold leaf, the 'massive, thick' nature of the book). Taken together, these preferences also proclaim the value of reading itself as an essentially 'good' activity.

What seems to distinguish the way in which reading and books constitute a performance of the relationship between students and their siblings and mothers (and in Consuela's case, godmother) and between them and their fathers, is the differing way power operates within those conversations. This difference is shown most clearly in the discussion with Depplikov below:

> *M: And do you ever talk books with either of your parents?*

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D: Well, I talk books with my dad more, because he reads...do you know about masons?

M: Yes I do.

D: Like illuminatis and stuff, we're into kind of conspiracy theories and we talk about it a lot and yeah, that's what we talk about, otherwise...he wouldn't talk to me about vampires and...

M: He doesn't read Dan Brown or anything...?

D: Yeah he does.

M: Oh okay, so he does read fiction.

D: Yeah, he does, but it's more of a 'reality' sort of fiction, if you know what I mean.

M: So based on...

D: Yeah

M: ...on sort of more realistic...not that you'd describe Dan Brown books as necessarily realistic.

D: Yeah true.

The nature of Depplikov's father's discourse indicates that adult reading might also be a site of ambivalent and contradictory ideological negotiation; Depplikov also claimed that her father professes not to read 'stupid things like liars and narratives and stuff' and yet seems an avid reader of Dan Brown's action novels and spy fiction. While ideologies that legitimize realist fiction make 'illuminati' and mason conspiracies are an acceptable subject about which to read, he refuses to touch on the only slightly less fanciful topic of vampires. Moreover, it appears that her father will discuss books with Depplikov, but only on his terms. In this sense Depplikov's comments possibly affirm some of the findings of an ethnographic study by Christine Jarvis that argue reading is a site for the performance of unequal power relations (2003, p. 267).

Tash's discussions with her father about books are similar to those of Depplikov. She states: 'Well he talks about Stephen King and wanting me to read it and I talk about how awesome my books are and my stepsister talks about how she wants to

read the books I'm reading and yeah.' Tash then draws a contrast between this conversation and that between her and her mother:

> *Oh with my mum, yeah. 'Cause she lives in Hornsby, so the train trips up there we both spend [time] on our books and we'll discuss them and well we both like Jodie Picoult so we swap books a lot. It's sort of the opposite to my dad. Like, if she likes a book, then I'll probably end up reading it.*

Both Tash's and Depplikov's fathers wish only to assert their own tastes, to discuss the novels they consider legitimate. These conversations reveal that while the family is most often a site of ideological negotiation, sometimes it does possess the ideological function articulated by Engels (2010): to reproduce dominant, patriarchal power relations.

Daisy's father also attempts to assert patriarchal power through reading, albeit utilizing a different type of discourse. While Daisy observes that her father 'doesn't read as much' as other family members, she claims that 'when he does read, it's kind of like a big deal to him…He boasts about it and it takes like three months for him to finish the book. And he usually just reads when we go on holiday.' This is an example of how 'regimes of value' (Frow 1995, p. 145) can be used to exercise power; Daisy's father recognizes the cultural capital to be found in reading and attempts to use that capital to assert some authority and acquire esteem with other family members. Unfortunately for him, it seems Daisy remains unimpressed, indicating perhaps that such discourses can be resisted.

Students' comments indicated strongly that the family is implicated in their reading life. As Jarvis argues: '[Readers'] identities as members of family and friendship groups are constructed in part through reading processes, and their identities as readers are constructed in part by their family and social situations' (2003, p. 274). Moreover, students are implicated *ideologically* as members of family groups. As with other institutions, the family is a site of ambivalent ideological negotiation, one where students are in a constant dialogue with the sometimes conflicting values and attitudes

of their parents while simultaneously using reading as a way of performing their family relationships.

Reading, Ideology and the Church

The institution of the Church has consistently preoccupied social theorists concerned with ideology. Marx famously excoriated the ideological role of the Church when he described religion as the 'opium of the people' (1971, p. 131). 'Marx', writes Bocock and Thompson, not only 'considered religion in the context of alienation, a condition giving rise to false consciousness and a systematized pattern of beliefs he called ideology' (1985, p. 2), but he and Engels 'tended to explain religious phenomena as directly motivated by class interests' (Bocock & Thompson 1985, p. 3). Religion was considered an institution that served the interests of the status quo (Marx 1971, p. 132) because, like other forms of ideology, it created 'illusory happiness' (Marx 1971, p. 131) which obscured 'real' exploitation.

This conception of the ideological role of religion was expanded in the 1940s by theorists in the Frankfurt School such as Horkheimer and Adorno, who saw religion as part of an exploitative social arrangement; they wrote of a 'system of churches, clubs, professional associations, and other relationships which amount to the most sensitive instrument of social control' (2002, p. 120). Not only did the church serve the interests of the bourgeoisie, but was also responsible for engraining gendered discrimination: 'the church, which in the course of history has hardly missed an opportunity to take a leading voice in popular institutions, whether they be slavery, crusades, or simply pogroms, sided with Plato, despite the *Ave Maria*, in the assessment of woman' (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002, p. 206). Horkheimer and Adorno also saw religion as an

institution that was intricately woven into the fabric of modern society, opining that 'religion as an institution is partly meshed directly into the system and partly transposed into the pomp of mass culture and parades' (2002, p. 144).

The notion that religion was a pervasive institution promoting the interests of the ruling class was reinforced by the theorist who focused most ardently on the ideological role of religion, Louis Althusser. While Althusser argued that in France in the 1960s and 1970s 'The Religious ISA' (1971, p. 143) was no longer 'the number-one Ideological State Apparatus' (1971, p. 152), he claimed that it worked through a 'quadruple system of interpellation' (1971, p. 181) in conjunction with other ISA to 'contribute to the same result: the reproduction of the relations of production, i.e. of capitalist relations of exploitation' (1971, p. 154).

The thesis that religious ideology served exclusively the interests of the status quo was, however, challenged in the 1960s by E. P. Thompson (1967). Thompson examined the manner in which what he termed the 'moral machinery' (1967, p. 352) of the Methodist church and Sunday school in England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries both served *and* resisted the interests of the dominant social order (1967, p. 50). Importantly, he viewed the relationship between the ideology of the Church and the social experience of people as dialogical, writing of 'a dialogue between attitudes and reality which was sometimes fruitful, sometimes arid, sometimes masochistic in its submissiveness' (1967, p. 50). Similarly, Stuart Hall (1985) explored the relationship between religion and ideology in a fashion that avoided the 'reductionist explanation' (Bocock & Thompson 1985, p. 3) of classical Marxism. In examining religious expression and discourse in postcolonial Jamaica, Hall argued that religious ideologies defy attempts to align them neatly with specific class interests, stating: 'the universe of religious languages has never been parceled up and ascribed to the different classes in Jamaica' (1985, p. 295). Furthermore, Hall's analysis investigated the ways in which religious discourses provided opportunities for oppressed groups to 'develop alternative

modes of consciousness' that resist the social order (1985, p. 295).

As a consequence of the analyses of academics such as Thompson (1967) and Hall (1985), examinations of the ideological functions of religion have broadened beyond the assumptions of classical Marxism. The role religion plays, however, in organizing and promoting ideology in a fashion that suits the interests of the status quo was still a preoccupation of theorists through the 1990s and 2000s. This notion is articulated by the prominently Catholic Terry Eagleton:

> *Religion consists of a hierarchy of discourses, some of them elaborately theoretical (scholasticism), some ethical and prescriptive, others exhortatory and consolatory (preaching, popular piety); and the institution of the church ensures that each of these discourses meshes constantly with the others, to create an unbroken continuum between the theoretical and the behavioural* (1991, p. 50).

Zizek (2000), drawing upon the ideas of Lukacs (1968), also writes that religion functions ideologically in conjunction with other aspects of society: 'it is true that the accepted violence and direct relationship of subordination in the Army, the Church, the family, and other 'non-political' social forms is in itself the 'reification' of a certain ethico-*political* struggle and decision' (2000, p. 234).

The role of the Church in shaping the values, attitudes and worldview of young people is not specific to the cultural theorists of the left. The school at the centre of this study is Catholic; the promotion of Catholicism and Catholic values is an explicit part of its mission and that of the school system of which it is a part. According to the *Archbishop's Charter for Catholic Schools* (2014), each Catholic school in the Sydney Archdiocese is required to '[p]rovide a range of evangelising, catechising, and faith formation opportunities to enhance the witness and Catholic practice of staff, students and families' (Fisher 2014, p. 2 of 2). The promotion of Catholicism is not only embodied in the prayer that is a part of every school day, or the Masses students are required to attend on occasion, but it is also suffused through the school curriculum. This suffusion of values takes two forms: it is a requirement of the school that all

students attend religious education classes and the teaching programs in all other subjects, including English, must contain elements of what the Catholic Archdiocese calls 'The Sense of the Sacred.' This notion is defined by Sydney Catholic Schools as, 'a Catholic Values Integration framework across all subjects in the school curriculum drawing on Gospel values, Church tradition and Catholic social teaching' (Sydney Catholic Schools, 2016, n.p.).

While it could be argued and perhaps expected that some of the conservative ideologies of gender and sexuality expressed in students' discourses of taste and meaning have been tacitly influenced by their Catholic schooling, considering the ubiquity of religious values in this context as well as the emphasis placed on the ideological role of the Church by cultural theorists, it is perhaps one of Paul Willis' ethnographical 'surprises' (1990, p. 90) that religious ideology was not overtly prevalent in the comments of most students in this study. As Australian religion and spirituality researchers Marisa Crawford and Graham Rositer suggest, however, 'there is an increasing tendency among young people in Western societies not to see religion, including their own particular tradition, as having a prominent place in their personal development' (2006, p. 131). As has been examined in the previous chapter *Reading, Ideology and Taste*, students such as Lisa proffered certain *moral* discourses, but these discourses did not exhibit a particularly or *necessarily* religious character. Again, these discourses *may* have been influenced by Lisa's Catholic education, but there is little evidence from the interviews that confirm this to be the case.

A significant exception to this absence of religious discourses was a number of Depplikov's responses; she was clearly a devoutly religious student whose selection and discussion of texts seemed to be influenced by religious ideology. Consequently, most of the following section will examine these somewhat aberrant comments. While it may seem unbalanced to focus so disproportionately on the comments of one student, as I argued in the literature review of this thesis, the exceptional response is as important as

the frequent response. Accordingly, qualitative ethnographic studies such as Barker (1997), which analyses the responses of one informant and Barton and Hamilton (2012), which focuses on the experiences of three participants, have demonstrated the usefulness of examining in detail the responses of a limited number of readers. As the discussion below will indicate, Depplikov's engagement with religious ideologies typifies a negotiation that is complex, idiosyncratic and ultimately contradictory.

The first way in which Depplikov's reading is affected by her religious belief is through her selection of reading material:

> D: At the moment I'm actually reading The Boy Who Came Down from Heaven, Who Came Back from Heaven. Yeah, it's actually a non-fiction book.
>
> M: What's it about?
>
> D: This boy and his father have a car crash and this boy is in a coma for two months, but after he wakes up, he and his father write this book and he describes in that two months where he was, his spirit.
>
> M: Are you enjoying it?
>
> D: Yes I am.
>
> M: What are you enjoying about it?
>
> D: Well, I'm a big believer in, like, God and like all that faith and this book, it really demonstrates all that.

The 'non-fiction' book that Depplikov was reading at that time was *The Boy Who Came Back from Heaven* by Kevin and Alex Malarkey (2010). This bestseller tells the story of a young Alex Malarkey's near-death experience and supposed journey to heaven. Recently Alex Malarkey has claimed that this story was 'deceptive' and 'embellished' (Radford 2015, p. 5). Depplikov seems to enjoy reading this text primarily because it substantiates her beliefs presumably about the afterlife; she takes pleasure in it because she is 'a big believer in, like, God and like all that faith.' This would certainly seem to affirm Benjamin Radford's claim that: 'Part of the reason that Malarkey's story was so widely believed and accepted among its Christian audience is that it reinforced their

existing narratives and beliefs' (2015, p. 5).

As the passage below demonstrates, Depplikov's religious beliefs, which she identifies as Catholic, affect both her reading selection and the way she engages with her reading:

> *D: I read the Bible. I read that. I read a lot of, like um, I could read non-fiction 'cause at home we have this book it's like of infamous murders and like I read that. I'm really morbid like that. I read a lot of that. I read about the Illuminatis and Masons and stuff and I read on the computer about that stuff. But I read magazines like Dolly and Girlfriend and stuff, I just find it pointless.*
>
> *M: With the Bible, is reading the Bible for you a regular thing?*
>
> *D: Pretty much I'd say a lot of nights, before I go to bed, I read a passage or something.*
>
> *M: For how long would you say you read that?*
>
> *D: I'd spend about half an hour maybe, forty minutes.*
>
> *M: Why?*
>
> *D: I guess I just want to know more about my religion. Like, I just want to be more educated in it.*
>
> *M: Are you Catholic?*
>
> *D: Yep.*
>
> *M: Do you have any favourite passages or any favourite books?*
>
> *D: In the Bible, yes. I like the Book of Job. Job…Job, I don't know how people say it.*
>
> *M: Yeah, Job, that's right.*
>
> *D: When, you know when God puts him to the test and the devil, they're both sort of in on it. I like that one because the...Job never turns away from God no matter what happens to him. And I like, I kind of admire that strong faith in him. Like, yeah, I wish I would have that. Nothing bad has happened to me so I don't know, so but yeah.*
>
> *M: Haven't been put to the test yet?*
>
> *D: Yeah exactly.*

Depplikov's discourse here presents a number of significances. Depplikov's religion partly dictates her choice of text in The Bible, but the ideology of useful reading is

inherent both in her comment that her reading of popular magazines *Dolly* and *Girlfriend* is 'pointless' and also in her stated reason for reading the Bible—that she 'wants to be more educated' in her religion. This purposeful reading is coupled with an interest in mystical or conspiratorial subject matter such as freemasonry or the 'illuminati.' Much like her reading of *The Boy Who Came Back From Heaven*, Depplikov's tastes seem at least partially informed by her religious faith. Notions of faith also seem to constitute the dominant schema she uses to make sense of biblical texts in these comments. Depplikov's observation that God and The Devil are 'both in on it', that is, they are both colluding to test Job, seems to hint at an emerging sense of religious duality. She does, however, interpret the text predominantly through the prism of her unerring faith in God: 'Job never turns away from God no matter what happens to him.'

Although this preoccupation with faith is a prominent aspect of Catholicism, it is a far more prolific component of many protestant denominations (see Hamman 2010, p. 711). Accordingly, the next extensive passage of the discussion with Depplikov suggests that the ideologies that inform her religious beliefs are unlikely to originate with the institution of the Catholic Church or the religious education provided by the school:

> *M: Are there any sections [of the Bible] you've read where you've thought 'wow, I don't know what that's about'?*
>
> *D: Well yeah, and then I'll ask my dad about and then he'll explain it to me. Like, he breaks it down a lot.*
>
> *M: Okay, so you talk to your dad about the Bible.*
>
> *D: Yeah. But he's Muslim, but still...*
>
> *M: Okay, so he knows the Christian scriptures well and the Jewish scriptures well.*
>
> *D: Yeah.*
>
> *M: Do you ever talk to him about Islam?*

D: Yeah. We have a lot of discussions like that. Whenever me and my dad talk it's a lot of it's about serious things. Like we wouldn't, of course we joke around, but it's more like stuff like that and like I just ask, like, Islam beliefs and we compare it and yeah.

M: Have you ever read any of the Koran?

D: No. I kind of feel bad because, I don't know, I just, I don't know, I just I don't like touching the Koran.

M: Okay, that's alright. Is it, I don't know, is it not your faith or...

D: No it's not that. It's just like, it's more it's their religion, it's their sacred book. I don't want to intrude sort of thing. I don't know, it sounds stupid, but.

M: No, it doesn't sound stupid at all. How about your mother? Do you ever talk religion with you mother?

D: Yep.

M: Your mother's Catholic?

D: Yep. Yeah we talk a lot about religion, especially at dinner, yeah.

M: Okay, how about your sisters?

D: Mmm. We're not religious, 'cause that's gonna like upgrade us, but we're not religious, we're very interested in our faith.

M: Yeah. Go to Mass often, that sort of thing?

D: Every Sunday.

M: Yep. And do your sisters read the Bible often?

D: Yeah.

M: You talk about reading it because you want to learn more about your faith, did you ever, do you have any memories of reading biblical texts as a kid, in primary school or anything like that?

D: Yeah, primary school we read a lot of Genesis, how the world came to be and obviously they didn't, they kind of said in so many words that the creation story's a lie, it's a myth, this and that, and I...

M: Well there's a big difference between a lie and a myth, but...

D: But they're both untrue. So yeah. And obviously me, a fundamentalist Catholic, I kind of blow up at that.

M: What do you mean when you describe yourself as a 'fundamentalist Catholic'? What do you take that to mean?

D: 'Cause everything in the Bible I take very literally and some people say it's symbolic, it's a metaphor, like, I know what to take as symbolic, I also know what to take literally.

M: Okay, so you wouldn't say the book of Genesis is symbolic?

D: No, 'cause a lot of people, for example, a lot of people don't believe that God created the world in seven days, whereas I do. They just say that's symbolic. Like, my argument is 'God is God, He can do anything'.

M: Okay, what about...what parts of the Bible then, if you can think of any, would you then describe perhaps as symbolic?

D: When—I forget what passage it is—do you remember when Jesus says to the Pharisees that 'I can knock down this temple and build it up in three days' and they said that's completely outrageous? But I take that as Jesus. He dies and in three days he resurrects, so that's symbolic.

As with her comments on the Book of Job, Depplikov here demonstrates a tendency to read biblical texts in a literal manner. This is something she recognises with her remarkable statement that she is a 'fundamentalist Catholic.' This declaration is contradictory. Not only does the Catholic Church overtly reject a 'fundamentalist' reading of the Bible, but this rejection was almost definitely an aspect of her religious education at school. The Year 9 Religious Education textbook at the time of Depplikov's interview states that:

> *Fundamentalism treats all the writings in Scripture in a literalist way...The Catholic Church does not agree with this way of reading Scripture. The Church teaches that the Scriptures are more than a simple re-telling of facts. They convey rich truths about God, and God's relationship with people and the world. Furthermore, the Scripture as a library of books only make sense within the faith community that compiled that library and can interpret it within a living condition* (Engebretson 2003, p. 15).

Indeed, it would seem that Depplikov defines her own religious sensibilities in opposition to the Catholic Church's general rejection of Biblical fundamentalism, stating that 'I kind of blow up at that.' Even the passage Depplikov identifies as 'symbolic' may be considered to be so as a consequence of the prescriptive nature of the text itself. The passage highlighted by Depplikov is from the *Gospel According to John*

(2: 13-23)[25] in which Jesus coerces those engaging in commercial activity out of the temple in Jerusalem. When onlookers ask Jesus for a sign that he possesses the authority to do this, he replies that he will, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up' (John 2: 19). Although it may appear that Depplikov has interpreted this passage figuratively, two lines later the scripture states: 'But He was speaking of the temple of his body' (John 2: 21). The text itself, in effect, tells its readers that Jesus' statement is analogous; by interpreting that passage figuratively, Depplikov is still applying a literal approach to the text which is not generally characteristic of a Catholic approach to Scripture. Similarly, her literal reading of the *Book of Genesis* and her claim that 'God is God. He can do anything' is consistent with the discourses used by Christian creationism rather than Catholicism (see Conner 2007, pp. 35-36).

Depplikov's comments demonstrate the limits of the Church as an ideological institution. While Depplikov may identify herself as Catholic, attend a Catholic school and attend Mass 'every Sunday', the Church's doctrine does not determine her position on something as fundamental to Christianity as the interpretation of Biblical texts. Instead, Depplikov's approach to Biblical interpretation would appear to be most likely influenced by her family; her comments indicate that she speaks to her parents in particular about religious texts. This way in which her family may influence her reading in this regard would seem, however, to be unconventional. While most of her family is devoutly Catholic, Depplikov converses extensively with her Muslim father about both Christian and Islamic holy texts. While there is no direct evidence from the interviews to suggest that the approach of her father influences her interpretation of Scripture, there is a potential congruence between Depplikov's religious ideas and those of her father. As recent ethnographic research has suggested, there is a confluence between the views of some Turkish Muslims and Christian fundamentalist educators (Taskin 2014, p. 867). Interestingly, the way Depplikov discusses the Koran is imbued with a 'sense of the

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[25] Biblical references are from the *New Revised Standard Version Bible, Catholic Edition* 1993.

sacred'—it is a text she wishes not even to touch out of what appears to be a respect for the sanctity of that text for the Islamic faith.

Depplikov's relationship with religious ideology is unconventional and contradictory in that she does not appear to follow an orthodox understanding of Catholicism. Her religious beliefs and their entanglement with reading are representative of a highly idiosyncratic and messy negotiation with ideology. In a similar way to the negotiation with and performance of gender ideologies, this particular negotiation with religious ideology is an essential part of identity formation for a young person such as Depplikov. An examination of reading and religious ideology also highlights the interrelationship of different institutions. In the case of Catholic schooling, the institutions of school and Church are not simply designed to overlap in their functions, they are intended to operate hand-in-glove. Both are seen to have crucial and complimentary roles in the evangelising mission of the Catholic Church. However, the students' responses to questions about reading in this study indicates that religious ideology plays little or no role influencing what most students read, how they read it and how they talk about their reading. This absence could represent adolescent agency in their engagement with—and rejection of—Catholic ideology. It could, however, simply be that students do not readily draw upon religious ideology to inform their reading, but questions about another type of cultural pursuit might compel them to utilise such discourses. It is clear from Depplikov's interview, however, that the ways in which those ideologies are assimilated and expressed by individual students themselves can be unpredictable.

Conclusion

A consideration of ideology and reading must take into account the institutions

that foster and promote ideology. While, as Eagleton points out, 'it is difficult to see that schools, churches, families and media are *sheerly* ideological structures, with no other purpose than to buttress the dominant power' (1991, p. 147), it is important to recognize that these institutions are also responsible for propagating and naturalizing ideologies that reinforce the status quo. While these ideologies do not act upon students in a uniform manner, it is important to acknowledge that both the ideology of useful reading and of the canon serve to bolster historically bourgeois conceptions of reading. Often institutions work together to promote these ideologies, complimenting each other in their attempts to socialize young people.

These ideologies are not, however, propagated or naturalized in a monolithic way: not only can the ideologies promulgated by institutions appear contradictory, such as that of useful reading and that of the canon; but so too are students' negotiations with these ideologies contradictory and ambivalent. There are many instances in this study where institutional ideologies are resisted, where the adolescent does not adopt unthinkingly and in a wholesale manner the dominant values and attitudes of school, church or home. As Raymond Williams has argued, 'no mode of production and therefore no dominant social order and therefore no dominant culture ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy, and human intention.' (1977, p. 125). In most of the cases in this study, students are not unsuspecting dupes, but nor are they unfettered exponents of their own will. Again, their relationship with both ideology and the institution is primarily one of inconsistent and untidy negotiation. Avenues exist for adolescents to exercise agency in their interactions with text, language, and with dominant power structures, but that agency possesses limits. Just as students possess the capacity to negotiate with ideology and with institutions, so too do representatives of those institutions, such as teachers and parents.

Conclusion: Surprises, Regrets and Possibilities

M: This is the way of research—the moment you turn off the tape recorder, the person being interviewed says something incredibly interesting. Do you mind repeating what you just said to me?

T: This is what I read for: to show people how much I like reading.

M: Really?

T: Okay, I love reading and I've never been able to tell anybody and now I have and it feels great.

M: It feels really good to talk about your reading?

T: Ah huh.

M: Well that's fantastic. I'm glad this has provided you with the opportunity. That's really, really interesting. I don't know what to ask you about it! Is that the only, is that the primary reason you read?

T: No, of course not, but like, I've always thought: wow, I read so much and no-one has any idea that I stay up for hours after I turn my light off, you know, reading. Like, even my parents, they don't understand how many hours I spend reading everyday.

The above exchange with Tash occurred towards the end of her individual interview. It is significant in a few ways. It is another example of the capacity ethnographic studies have to surprise the interviewer (Willis 1990, p. 90); my surprise is clearly evident in my awkward statement: 'I don't know what to ask you about it' and the uninspiring question that followed. Tash's response shows that—contrary to so much commentary exclaiming that teenagers no longer read—reading is a fundamental part of her identity. Her comments also reiterate well the ambivalent nature of adolescent reading: for her it is an act that is at once a very public part of her identity-work ('This is what I read for: to show people how much I read'), and is also intensely private. Indeed, the ways in which reading was part of the identity construction for many students in this study was very public in that they *performed* dominant ideologies. Reading is, however, also part

of the world of teenagers that is personal and private. Most importantly, this passage demonstrates the ability of ethnographic work to allow cultural actors to contribute to the representations of their cultural and social lives. Tash's simple declaration: 'I love reading and I've never been able to tell anybody and now I have and it feels great' represents, to some small degree, the way that ethnography has the capacity to enfranchise its subjects.

In the introduction to this thesis I described the relationship between adolescents, reading and ideology as a 'negotiated contract'. This analogy illuminates the range of ways that young people engage with the ideologies presented to them by what they read, as well as those offered to them in their social, cultural and institutional lives. It is an analogy that recognizes both the agency teenagers exercise when engaging with texts, as well as the fashion in which ideology shapes their responses, attitudes and performances. The ambivalence demonstrated by Tash is emblematic of the ambivalence that, I argue, characterizes the adolescent negotiation of the reading contract. Student engagement with and expression of ideology is frequently overdetermined, inconsistent and contradictory. This ambivalence was articulated in different ways throughout this thesis.

In the chapter entitled *Reading, Ideology and Taste*, there emerged from students' discourses on taste the first of a number of well-worn ideologies: the distinction between fantasy and realist fiction. This distinction echoed cultural critics from the distant past, representing what Raymond Williams refers to as a 'residual' cultural form (1977, p. 121). To create distinctions between themselves and others students utilized this particular residual ideology. Indeed, as Bourdieu (2010) suggested, tastes were used predominantly to create and reinforce a range of distinctions between students, but the fashion in which these distinctions were articulated were messy, inconsistent and ambivalent. Many students defined their tastes in relation to an ideologically constructed mainstream and in so doing, accrued subcultural capital. In

accumulating and subsequently defending this subcultural capital, students—particularly those in the high literacy group—would paradoxically draw further on seemingly antiquated ideologies, resembling in many ways the mass-culture theorists from the 1940s and 1950s who railed against the democratization of culture. Student tastes and the way they expressed them were also part of the performance of conservative sexual and gender ideologies. The group discussions in particular revealed a febrile articulation of heteronormative femininities. Some individual interviews exhibited a postfeminist 'backlash' against contemporary feminist discourses.

Many of these older, conservative ideologies were also a significant feature of *Reading, Ideology and Meaning*, as textual meaning was revealed to be a second site of ambivalent ideological negotiation. While students often constructed textual meaning in intelligent, insightful and idiosyncratic ways, they just as frequently expressed ideas that were shaped by dominant ideologies. While many students possessed the schemata and repertoires that enabled them to identify and critique textual ideologies, these schemata and repertoires proved to be ideologically formed. On some occasions the capacity of students to critique textual ideology was influenced by the nature of the text itself; more overtly didactic novels elicited more thorough, articulate responses to questions of meaning. These texts did, however, seem to be less effective ideologically, as dominant ideas and tropes were more easily recognized by students. Texts that proved to more subtle in the way they propagated ideology allowed for their underlying assumptions to seem natural and universal. Moreover, students who identified with the central protagonists in a novel tended to be less willing or able to critique its ideological approach. This trend was, however, inconsistent—*Twilight* in particular was a series that elicited an engagement with the subject position that proved ambiguous and contradictory.

The final chapter, *Reading, Ideology and Institutions*, accounted for the types of ideologies that emerged in the chapters on taste and meaning. In this chapter students

also expressed old ideologies such as that of 'useful reading' and seemingly antiquated attitudes to the universal worth of Shakespeare that entrenched high/low cultural boundaries. These attitudes towards Shakespeare were among the most indicative of ambivalence in this thesis: while Shakespeare constituted shorthand for 'good writing', most students did not enjoy the experience of reading and learning about this playwright. This contradiction demonstrated the power institutions such as the school, as well as the institution of 'literature' itself, hold to propagate and perpetuate ideologies that clash with the lived experience of readers. The manner of the ideological negotiations students entered into with family was similarly characterized by tensions and paradoxes. While there was a loose correlation between the attitudes of students towards and about reading of parents and their children, some students demonstrated that reading could be a site of intergenerational struggle, particularly between first and second generational migrants. Reading was a way of reinforcing familial bonds, while also constituting a site of power struggle, particularly with male parental figures. While overtly religious ideologies were not a prevalent feature of the reading of students in this study, in the case of one student, reading was a domain for considerable ideological contradictions. This student revealed her negotiations with religious ideologies to be passionate, yet wholly inconsistent, defying the religious understanding promoted in general by her church and by her school. In addition, these institutions proved to be sites of ambivalent negotiation not only for adolescents, but also for their 'representatives', such as teachers and parents.

Ultimately, this final chapter suggests reasons not only for the ambivalence of ideological negotiations, but also as to why a number of residual ideologies emerge in students' discourses of reading. The most prominent of these reasons is the nature of institutions themselves: so many of these ideologies are deeply entrenched within educational discourses and practices in particular. They are ideologies that are also reproduced and reiterated within the family setting. These are also ideologies inscribed

within books themselves, books that are read, re-read, passed to friends and family and are studied as a part of school curricula. Many of these ideologies have become entirely naturalized and universalized in the manner put forward by Gramsci (1971).

These residual ideologies re-emerge also because the cultural dynamics that created them have not simply disappeared. There are still cultural *haves* and *have-nots* in the same way that there are still economic *haves* and *have-nots*. Culture is still a battleground. Almost thirty years ago Gamman and Marshment stated:

> *Popular culture is a site of struggle. It is not enough to dismiss popular culture as merely serving the complimentary systems of capitalism and patriarchy, peddling 'false consciousness' to the duped masses. It can also be seen as a site where meanings are contested and where dominant ideologies can be disturbed* (1988, p.1).

Such struggles are still being fought and it is partly because of this that ideology critique is legitimate and useful in understanding the dynamics of contemporary culture.

As Gamman and Marshment suggest, adolescents are implicated in these dynamics in a way that is engaged and active. In this sense, reading seems to constitute part of what Zizek calls 'the most elusive domain [of ideology], the "spontaneous" ideology at work at the heart of social "reality" itself' (1994, p. 9). Students produce and reproduce ideologies in the way that they create and recreate identity. They talk about their reading in ways that are complex and contradictory. At times they accept the ideologies and subject positions offered to them by texts; at other times they resist and reject such ideologies. Most of the time, however, the way they engage with reading—cognitively, educational and socially—represents, as Stuart Hall (1980) suggested, a negotiation with ideology.

In many ways the dynamics revealed in this study affirm the work of text-based scholars who have focused on ideology. Students' negotiations with ideology, for instance, affirm what Trites (2000) has to say about ideology in YA fiction, what McCallum (1999) suggests about adolescents and the subject positions offered to them by fictional texts; what Stephens (2013) and Trites (2014) have written about how

schemata, scripts and persistent metaphors operate in fiction on a cognitive level are implicated in the mechanics of ideology and fiction. It is, however, the altogether messy nature of this negotiation that is brought to light by a qualitative ethnographic method. It is this method that allows the researcher to observe the ideological negotiation as it is in *practice*—not as a neat and straightforward 'transaction', but again as something contradictory, overdetermined and finally, ambivalent.

Indeed, the messiness of ethnographic work means that it occasionally reveals insights that do not fit easily into my analysis of the dynamics between reader, text, society and ideology. There are, again, moments of genuine surprise; moments and asides and student observations about their reading that seem to resist being (over)analyzed. I found the exchange with Jocelyn below to be one such moment:

J: You know what I like reading? I like reading sheet music for the piano.

M: You like reading sheet music?

J: Yes I do.

M: Do you like reading it as you play it or do you like reading it...?

J: As I play it. I just thought I'd say that [I think she thinks I've asked if she reads it BECAUSE she plays it].

M: No, absolutely! That's incredibly interesting. When do you read sheet music? Where do you read sheet music?

J: When I'm playing piano. Sometimes, last year I, was it last year? Yeah. We went to Adelaide and I brought the sheet music on the plane with me and what I do is sometimes I sit down and I take it all apart and I try to figure out - even if I don't have a piano in front of me (obviously, I was on a plane) - but it's just something to do. I, like, there are different symbols and signs and everything and I like, I just make a note of it.

M: Okay.

J: So actually in front of the piano I play it.

M: So when you're reading it on the plane, the sheet music, what's happening in your head?

J: I've been asked that question before.

M: Oh, okay! Probably not by another PhD student, but, who asked you?

[Laughter]

J: Do you know who asked me? The flight attendant! She's like...

M: Okay.

J: ...like, what's happening, what are you thinking about? Like, you don't have a piano in front of you so...? Usually I think about the fingering, 'cause I don't have something in front of me, or I'll just be going like this [moves fingers] on my lap.

M: Yeah

J: Ah, yeah, usually I can picture a whole piano in front of me and I can see myself playing. So when I'm looking at the music I know exactly what's happening.

M: Yep.

J: It's...and I don't really have to think about it either. It's muscle memory, like, I don't even, even when I'm playing, sometimes I daydream. If I know a song so well, I'll daydream and then at the end of the song I'm like 'oh, I've finished!'.
[Laughter]
So yeah and if I haven't played something for a really long time, what will happen is I can't look down. I actually have to look up while I'm playing 'cause otherwise my mind will try to control what my fingers are doing and so, yeah, if I'm sitting on a plane, with nothing in front of me except this piece, this sheet of music, usually I will, I can see it in my head, or...

M: Can you hear it in your head?

J: Yeah. If you give me a sheet of music, like just anything, or write any notes down, I can hear it in my head.

M: Okay, and provided, like, I'm assuming that you've never heard the song before?

J: Yep.

M: Wow! I mean, I don't know anything about music, but that sounds extraordinary. Yeah, unreal.

J: I don't think a lot of people can do it. I know that sounds pretty bad coming from me…

Jocelyn's practice seems so unusual, so utterly different from how teachers and academics might conceive of adolescent reading. This is not to say that Jocelyn's act is not implicated in the politics of identity or in the dynamics of ideology: she may have been reading orchestral sheet music in an attempt to seem 'cultured' for example. In the

interview, however, it did not appear as though this act was part of any conscious affectation and is not accounted for easily by textual, or social or cultural theories.

Similarly, the responses of a student such as Lorretta seemed incongruous and idiosyncratic. She had a particular interest in horror books and films and enjoyed reading 'horror, like, from the point of view of like the murderer and him telling how he murdered the victim.' She even wrote horror stories that she described as follows:

> *There was this one that I just kept writing about it, like, it was called Dead House Island and it was, yeah, it was two brothers and sisters and they find a box and it turns into a house and they have to go into the house and then they find their mum and dad and they're dead and they're like 'oh my God' and they go out and then their mum and dad owned a shop and they take over the shop and people come to the shop and kill them and yeah it was just...I don't know, it was really weird 'cause I was really little and had like a weird imagination.*

Lorretta simultaneously enjoyed and dreaded the sensation of being scared; she 'like[d] blood and gore I guess', but also seemed adversely affected by with horror texts, stating: 'Yeah. I get really, really scared easily. I have, like, nightmares whenever I read a book about [horror]. I have a nightmare about it. But I don't know, I like it while I'm there, but then afterwards I have a nightmare I don't like. It's weird [laughter].' Extraordinarily, Lorretta explained this ambivalence using the analogy of getting a needle:

> *L: Like you know like when you're about to get a needle?*
>
> *M: Yep.*
>
> *L: I'm right with the pain, but I don't like knowing that it's going to happen or like getting piercings, you're like 'oooo' - you back away from it, like, I don't like that feeling, but then when it happens I'm like 'yeah it's all done'. You know what I mean?*
>
> *M: Yet you got piercings done!*
>
> *[Laughter]*
>
> *L: No but I don't know, when I have a needle I'm like 'okay'—like when she puts the needle in I'm okay.*

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Similar to the responses of students such as Consuela, Rebecca and Depplikov, this analogy seems to me to be emblematic of the quirky, intelligent and emotionally sensitive way that many adolescents are able to discuss their experiences of reading and viewing. Again, it is a comment not readily made sense of within the usual academic frameworks.

Lorretta proved to be a student who revealed further seeming contradictions about her reading and viewing. Despite her evident enjoyment of horror novels and films, she also had a very strong response to books and films composed for younger children. Her response is detailed in the exchange below:

M: Do you often cry in books?

L: Yeah. I get really emotional. Like, in movies as well. Like I just cry in random parts. Like, a guy will say something sweet and then, or something will happen and I'll like, get all teary like. I wouldn't like, yeah, but there's like if someone dies, that's like the main character and is like really nice, then...like, have you seen Kung Fu Panda?

M: No I haven't! You cried in Kung Fu Panda, did you?

L: Yeah I did.

M: At point did you cry?

L: I don't want to spoil it, but...

M: That's alright.

J: The old sensei guy dies, but he turns into like a tree flower thing. Like, the flowers are falling off the tree and he turns into it and the guy's like 'No! Don't die!' and then yeah, I was like crying. I was watching it, I was like crying and [inaudible. Lorretta indicated that someone saw her and said] 'oh my God, are you like crying'. [She lies:] 'No!'

It was like really sad, I don't know why. I get really emotional. I get emotional in real life as well and if I think about something sad I like cry and I [inaudible], will be like 'What's your problem'! I don't know.

That an aficionado of horror and slasher novels and films could be so affected by *Kung Fu Panda*, again, seems incongruous. It certainly represents the complex and often contradictory nature of adolescent tastes and responses to fiction. It also represents the

importance of the *affective* nature of reading and viewing. It is not really within the scope of an analysis of teenage reading and ideology to focus on this very prevalent emotional aspect of reading and viewing. It is, however, an area that presents important future research opportunities.

Along with the question of 'affective reading' there are other areas of inquiry that remain untouched by, or remain beyond the scope of, this thesis. As I outlined in the methodological discussion in Chapter One, it was my intention that this study involve a written component for students in the form of a reading journal. As a consequence of student apathy and, more significantly, student insecurity, as well as potential flaws with the way I administered the task, participants were reluctant to complete and submit this part of the study. As the method employed by number of researchers suggests (Brooks & Browne 2012; Maine & Waller 2011; McGillis 1996; Stephens & Taylor 1992; Thomson 1987), how students *write* about their reading is important. Accordingly, the reading journals may have revealed a range of ideological negotiations different to those evident in verbal student responses.

An area of reading that also remains largely unexplored in this thesis is the many possible ideological implications of student engagement with digital media. As a considerable number of studies demonstrate (Davies 2012; Durrant 2012; Flegar 2015; Gee 2003; 2007; Israelashvili; Hobbs 2007; Hagood 2008; Kenway & Bullen 2008; Kress 2003; Kim & Bukobza 2012; Rennie & Patterson 2008) young people's use of this medium frequently constitutes part of both their education and their identity-work. Indeed, Kenway and Bullen maintain that adolescents increasingly resemble 'cyberflaneurs'—peripatetic, critical and engaged participants in online culture (2008, p. 25). Consequently, it was surprising that the internet was not raised more often in the interviews—either by myself or by the students. Some students mentioned Facebook in particular as something that occupied time that they might otherwise spend reading books and some of Consuela's responses suggested that she engaged with online

discourses about the fiction that she read. Overall, the students gave the impression that the discussion of books did not constitute a significant portion of their online life, not did any student give any indication that they were avid participants in fan forums, or that they wrote fan-fiction. Had the interviews been conducted more recently, however, it is possible that online interactions may have been a more considerable part of their book reading life. Moreover, the ideological implications of these interactions with a more emergent cultural form (Williams 1977) may be an area of fruitful future enquiry.

While book reading may not seem to be as ubiquitous for adolescents today as the use of the internet (although some ethnographic work suggests that book reading is every bit as frequent (see Rennie & Patterson 2010)), that is not to say, however, that books are any less ideologically pervasive as other media. At one point in the chapter *Reading, Ideology and Taste* some students appeared to have difficulty distinguishing between the fictional and non-fictional worlds within books. This was one instance where books were afforded an elevated status that impacted upon the way students ontologically perceived their world. This elevated status was further accentuated in the chapter *Reading, Ideology and Institutions* where special status was granted to writers such as Shakespeare. It is perhaps because of this elevated status that books are potentially a more effective delivery system for ideology than digital media. In an age that has been recently classified by some as 'post-truth' (see Flood 2016), where people are increasingly aware that the 'news' they encounter online is frequently and deliberately fabricated, books could appear to be even more objective, reliable, authentic and 'untainted'. Books could, therefore, prove to be even more efficacious ideological Trojan horse in 2016 than they were at the time of the interviews in late 2010.

While the scope of this thesis possesses limitations, its ethnographic bent has revealed the intensely ideological nature of adolescent reading. It has shown that young people are implicated in a contest between old, established and relatively new

ideologies through what they read and through those institutions that attempt to mediate their reading. The way students discuss their tastes and discuss meaning demonstrates that they constantly exercise agency in their negotiations with these ideologies and institutions. This agency is, however, constrained and shaped by these same ideologies and institutions. The negotiation that takes place between the agency of young people, ideologies and institutions is not straightforward, singular or consistent: they engage with ideology in a way that is often disordered, multifaceted and ambivalent. It is therefore important that this negotiation at the site of reading continue to be an object of further study for scholars who seek to understand not only how young people are acted upon by social and cultural forces, but also how they actively participate in the constant drafting and redrafting of the reading contract.

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Appendix: Final Ethics Approval

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MACQUARIE
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8 February 2017

Mr Michael Couani
Department of English
Faculty of Arts
Macquarie University
NSW 2077

Dear Mr Couani

Reference No: 5201000720

Title: *Adolescent reading*

This letter is to confirm that the ethics application cited above met the requirements set out in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (2007 – Updated May 2015) (the *National Statement*).

The application received approval from the Macquarie University Faculty of Arts Ethics Subcommittee on 30 June 2010.

The above project was conducted by Mr Michael Couani, Doctoral candidate, under the supervision of Dr Robyn McCallum.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely

Dr Karolyn White
Director, Research Ethics & Integrity
Chair, Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee

This HREC is constituted and operates in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (2007) and the *CPMP/ICH Note for Guidance on Good Clinical Practice*.