

PREFACE

My spirited and artistic twenty one year old son died on the 13th March 2005. Lucas had battled courageously for five years with schizophrenia.

My 'perfect' family life changed when Lucas was sixteen years old. Professionals consulted at this time repeatedly expressed the opinion that my son's worrying behaviour was typical of normal "hormonal teenage" boys. There was no need for concern. Life with Lucas would improve as he matured.

However, Lucas's 'adolescent angst' was not 'normal' and life did not improve. Lucas left school and moved to the city. His life spiralled out of control with psychotic episodes, suicide attempts and emergency ward admissions to locked wards. Counsellors, private clinics and ineffectual Mental Health schedules became the 'norm' for our family as we struggled to find someone who would help us help Lucas.

Lucas was finally labelled with the dual diagnosis; schizophrenia and substance abuse. Recreational drugs had triggered my son's schizophrenia. My son was one of the unlucky ones. Thousands of young people experiment with recreational drugs and remain unaffected. However, for those young people who are genetically pre-disposed to mental illness, the consequence of experimenting with recreational drugs is deadly. Lucas, who was adversely affected, became another casualty of recreational drug usage. My son was another hopeless 'case history' trapped in the 'revolving door syndrome' of a health system that neglects the needs of the mentally ill.

Lucas was prescribed a cocktail of licit medications to help him remain sane as he attempted to manage the grief, exhaustion and loneliness of his illness. The prescribed

antipsychotic medications produced symptoms of neurotoxicity. The side-effects of mood-altering chemicals were worse than the illness. Lucas's problems were exacerbated by a physical and psychological dependency to the prescribed medications.

My son self-medicated with recreational drugs and alcohol to relieve the debilitating side-effects of the prescribed medications. Recreational drugs and alcohol offered temporary relief from the emotional pain. However, recreational drugs also triggered psychotic episodes accompanied by violence, police and emergency ward admissions.

Lucas's perception of the world became increasingly surreal. His ability to distinguish between fantasy and reality was seriously impaired. Odyssey House offered hope. A rehabilitation farm offered hope. However, the regimented programs isolated from family resulted in further emotional hardship for Lucas who was inherently, a free spirit.

My son's harrowing and heartbreaking journey ended less than a week after a senior psychiatrist carelessly discharged him from a private clinic onto the streets. He threw himself in front of a train at Brunswick Street station. However, for his family, the journey continues.

Everything has been turned upside-down and changed forever for everyone who knew and loved Lucas. Expectations of life's promises have been shattered. My emotions continue to overwhelm me; I cannot always put on a brave face to greet the world. Survivors of suicide are condemned to a conspiracy of silence by people with no knowledge of mental illness. Suicide is a taboo subject.

My heart hurts for the pain I saw Lucas suffering and because in his darkest hour, I was not there for my son. I could not silence the hateful voices shouting at Lucas in his head. There is so much regret because prior to knowing what was happening to Lucas, I lacked insight – I had no understanding or experience of mental illness. No more will I share in the joys and sorrows of life only a precious son can bring to a mother. Each year will bring two sad anniversaries. My family is like a three-legged table.

Lucas's younger sister who is studying for a Bachelor of Psychological Science degree admires her brother's courage. She says, given what she now knows about schizophrenia, she would have ended her life earlier had she had to deal with the same confusion, exhaustion, anxiety and depression.

“I am writing this because I want you all to understand why I am going away. I have spent the better part of my life as a sick person, suffering chronic illness and social problems, I have watched the sun rise and the sun set, I have enjoyed simple things and complicated things, cups of espresso coffee, listening to the wind, so much beautiful music and dancing, a good deal of love and goodness. I am now or have decided to die because I am so very sad and tired. I have only love for my family and friends and I am deeply sorry for you all. I did not mean to hurt you.”

Lucas was too sad and tired to continue living. My son did not choose to be mentally ill. No one chooses to be mentally ill. Schizophrenia destroys the human spirit.

Lucas has been psychically resurrected as Marcas Oswald, a fictitious character in a ('fantastic' (al))¹ novel called *Crossing Borders* which accompanies this exegesis. The

¹ “To be defined as ‘fantastic’ (al) a novel needs two features: the possibility of supernatural explanation and the integration of new and old myths and other cultural influences.” (McKenna and Pearce 1999. p,88)

novel will provide a voice for Lucas and all the others who suffer with schizophrenia. Lucas took all those who loved him on an unexpected and extraordinary journey to new 'seeing' places, and in doing so, our lives have been painfully, yet immeasurably enriched.

Introduction

A Definition of Schizophrenia:

It is well known that the schizophrenic's aptitude to separate the realms of reality and the imagination is weakened. Contrary to the so-called normal thought, which must remain within the same realm, or frame of reference, or universe of discourse, the thought of the schizophrenic obeys no requirements of a single reference. (Todorov 1975, p. 115)

The word 'schizophrenia' derives from the Greek language, and denotes the splitting of various parts of the thought process. The etymology of the word schizophrenia is *schizo-* 'broken'; *phrenos* – 'soul or heart'. (Laing 1967, p. 107) Thus, a person with schizophrenia is someone who is broken-hearted.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines schizophrenia as, 'a form of mental disease marked by disconnexion between thoughts, feeling, & actions.' (COD 1964 p. 1126) The most debilitating symptom of schizophrenia is primarily one of fragmentation with a profound sense of loss as a consequence. According to Deveson (1998) a young woman who suffered her first attack of mental illness at the age of nineteen described her experience in the following words:

When I first had the breakdown, it was like dropping an egg on the kitchen floor. Part of the shell is intact, but part of it is shattered, and my personality is the yolk, leaking away. And I cannot get it back together again. (p. 21)

Tell me I'm here is the story of Anne Deveson's son Jonathon, who also suffered with schizophrenia and died when he was young. Deveson (1998) founded SANE, the

national organisation established to make lives better for schizophrenic people and their families. Deveson's comprehensive research into this mental illness detailed in her book was invaluable when my son was diagnosed. Deveson (1998) states:

It has long been known that recovery rates for schizophrenia in different types of society are extraordinarily different. Multi-national studies shown by the World Health Organisation, extending over two decades, show that people who have schizophrenia in developing countries have significantly higher chances of recovery than those who live in the industrialised world. The reasons why have not yet been fully explained, except that, as schizophrenia is a universal illness, it is almost certainly the environment that is influencing these results, although medication remains the primary means for dealing with psychoses. (p. 50)

Taking Deveson's point, would my son's chances of recovery have been improved had he retreated from the materialistic and mechanical time-poor world of the West to spend time sharing in a more spiritual Eastern culture, say on the Island of the Gods, Bali? This question provided the inspiration for *Crossing Borders* which accompanies this exegesis.

The Value of Bibliotherapy:

The research undertaken for my Masters of Creative Arts focuses on Balinese culture in conjunction with the depiction of mental health issues and societal attitudes towards adolescents and incorporates the psychiatric problems encountered by this age group in the work of four authors of YA novels, Gary Crew, Robert Cormier, John Marsden and Jack Travis.

The novels were chosen because the male protagonists in each are not “splendid, clear-thinking young men.” (Salinger 1958, p. 2) They are ‘lost’ and depressed Western adolescents in crisis and ‘at risk’ of self harm. One young man in Richard McLean’s (2003) autobiographical story, *Recovered, not cured, A Journey through Schizophrenia*, describes his experience with schizophrenia as follows:

My life has become hell. I was diagnosed with schizophrenia earlier this year but have been in and out of hospitals for a few years. My doctor and I have a really good relationship, but he can’t help me and admits he doesn’t know what to do. I’m allergic to all the anti-psychotics I have ever been prescribed and now there are none left. I have not any hope left. I hate myself, I don’t understand what’s happening to me. I was once intelligent and full of life but have been reduced to live a life that’s not worth living. I can’t stand it. I don’t feel safe on my own but when around others I freak out. I can’t eat, sleep or even think. Does anyone understand what I’m saying? Please if any one out there does can you offer me some advice or even just a little bit of hope, something I can hang onto until my doctor figures out a way to help if there is a way to help. (p. 161)

This person may have been helped had he read, prior to being diagnosed with schizophrenia, an informative novel focussing on themes of mental illness which had a positive outcome. While those with schizophrenia may not be big readers, the YA genre written in a sympathetic style more suited to their different vision may prove a successful means of communication to help the child, parents, siblings and relations.

The immersion in inner space, the invasive voices and the overwhelming depression for all that has, and will continue to be lost, interferes with the schizophrenic person’s ‘normal’ thought processes. The ability to process information from the outside world is impaired. The despair and hopelessness of the schizophrenic experience is a

living grief for the person. The broken-hearted person will often seek solace by retreating from the world. “There are very few of us who know the territory in which he is lost, who know how to reach him, and how to (help) him find the way back.” (Laing 1967, p. 105)

People with schizophrenia, often perceived by others as anti-social, deviant and invalid, and afflicted with madness are often so depressed by their circumstances, they feel the only way to end the pain is to commit suicide. “Suicide is the main cause of premature death among people with mental illness. Over 10% of those affected will kill themselves within the first 10 years of diagnosis.” (SANE Information Fact Sheet, 2007)

However, according to Simon Champ, attitudes towards mental illness are slowly improving. Champ, who has schizophrenia, has been an activist in mental health reform for twenty years. He was a founding member of the Schizophrenia Fellowship of NSW. Simon is currently a director of SANE. He is also a practising artist who writes extensively about the myths and realities of being an artist living with a mental illness, to illustrate that schizophrenia is not the end of the world. Recovery is possible. There is hope, as exemplified by Champ in Deveson’s book:

Young people are much cooler about having schizophrenia than we were. They see me and think, hey, he’s okay, he’s not come to the end of the world. Whereas when I was first diagnosed, I felt totally without hope.
(p. 265)

However, the mentally ill are among the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in the community. These people are most likely to suffer discrimination in matters such as education, housing and employment. Writers who do choose to address issues of mental

illness in novels for young adults might portray characters with mental illness in a positive light. People who are mentally ill are real people and, as such, these people do experience the same human emotions and the same aspirations as those who are not afflicted with mental illness. Accessible stories will have the potential to positively influence young readers, providing an early intervention strategy.

Authors who address mental health issues have an opportunity to raise awareness in the community as a means of preventing further rejection and stigmatisation of the mentally ill. The provision of accurate information in a non-judgmental way pertaining to the reality of mental illness, as well as information regarding the availability of services and therapies, could be a way of encouraging young people with mental health problems to willingly seek help and accept treatment. Young people need to realise there are services with compassionate professionals who are available to help them, if they are experiencing symptoms of mental illness. Authors, by way of creating 'real life' characters with mental illness, could provide signposts for young people with mental illness so they are able to recognise the symptoms and seek help without feeling embarrassed or ashamed by their feelings of strangeness.

By creating a new 'magical space', authors of young adult literature could help by providing messages of hope, fortitude, rebellion, self-determination and triumph. Adolescents, who often experience feelings of despair and hopelessness, need to feel there is something positive in the future. A fictitious character who abandons hope and decides to commit suicide could influence a fragile and isolated teenager to contemplate the same course of action. Young people may be helped to develop coping strategies by reading novels with some form of spiritual guidance. For those readers who suffer with

mental illness or have a family member afflicted with mental illness, novels with characters in similar situations could have the potential to provide a healing.

Young people read novels for a myriad of reasons. Novels “provide enormous scope for young people to explore their world and thereby gain some meaning as to their experience of it.” (Zeegers 2005/2006, p. 20) Reading provides an escape from troubled times and/or an opportunity for young adults to test solutions to their own problems. Sharing vicariously in another young person’s experience could restore a ‘normal’ perspective about life for a depressed adolescent who feels disconnected from the rest of the world. Novels without the promise of resolution or a happy ending may increase a young reader’s disillusionment about the future. In this regard, Chance (2002) suggests:

Novels chosen by young adults (tend) to have the following attributes: well-developed characters, progressive plots, more conflict with self or another person than any other type of conflict, first person point of view, integral settings, a mix of stylistic devices, specific themes, no dominant themes, and the appeal of humour. (p. 3)

The writer has taken into account all of the above criteria to create a novel based on lived experience. *Crossing Borders* employs Magical Realism to create a believable fantasy. Nothing is impossible in imagined worlds. Since Magical Realism provides new ‘seeing places’, it provides a new ‘seeing place’ for Marcos Oswald. *Crossing Borders* draws a young reader from the reality of the visible external world into the dream-like psyche of Marcos, a young man with schizophrenia.

The term ‘Magical Realism’ is almost interchangeable with the term ‘surreal’. Just as the painters of the Surrealist Movement endeavoured to portray ordinary reality in an extraordinary light, magical realist narratives portray ordinary reality in an

extraordinary light. Magical Realism, which is a fusion of reality and fantasy, works in *Crossing Borders* as a medium to portray the surreal world of a depressed young man who once dreamed of becoming an artist.

A recurrent theme in magical realist literature is the intermingling of cultures. Magical Realism creates a “third space” (Crang 1998, p. 171) between primitive cultures and Western culture. This space is not implanted in one culture; it is a blending of cultures, a harmonious hybrid of creativity and vitality that has emerged from the union, transmutation and connections of diverse cultural spaces.

Crossing Borders blends Balinese and Australian culture to create a “third space”; a new ‘seeing place’ for Marcos and the reader. The novel crosses backwards and forwards between the West and the East, providing contrasts between climate, landscape and the customs of modern day people in popular culture, with the gods, goddesses, demons and witches of ancient mythological worlds. The narrative crosses backwards and forwards between Marcos’s past childhood memories and his current circumstances on the Island of the Gods.

Magical realist authors provide a voice for the “forgotten of society,” (Allende 1987, p. 120) because they support the plight of humans not born in privilege; those people who do not conform, do not fit into the mainstream and as such, are neglected, and ‘marginalised’ as ‘others’. Magical realists are primarily concerned about the welfare of the foreigners, the immigrants, the exiles, the refugees, the homosexuals, the ‘dirt’ poor, the uneducated and the orphans, the mentally ill and the populace of developing countries. (p. 121)

Developing countries are engaged in a process of transition from a traditional past to a modern way of life, in a world dominated by the powerful commercial values of the Western world. Marcos is engaged in his own process of transition as a homeless person, but in a modern culture in the West to a 'homely' traditional lifestyle in the East. He is also making the transition from boyhood to manhood. Deidre Pribham (1999) states:

The world is simultaneously exciting and threatening for young people. Using Lacan's analysis, adolescence may be interpreted as a moment of disturbance, a teetering on the threshold between the Imaginary world, the world of the mother and a world of unity, the Symbolic world of the father. It is a moment of disturbance in a world of separation and loss for the child who is expected to assume a position as a social being in an adult world. (p. 147)

Adolescence is a time of search, and transformation and wisdom for young people, as they question the values and traditional beliefs of their parents, friends and families in an attempt to work out their own values and beliefs. The 'moment of disturbance' or 'state of becoming' is a journey of self-discovery towards spiritual illumination, or a re-birth which must be negotiated with great care to avoid becoming lost without 'thread or clue' (Abraham 1998, p. 113). The quest to achieve independence and find a place of belonging with a purpose to life can be "a black time of suffering, despair and melancholia." (Abraham 1998, p. 135) According to Laing (1967), who researched schizophrenia in order to render the process of going mad comprehensible:

Sanity today appears to rest very largely on a capacity to adapt to the external world – the interpersonal and the realm of human collectivities. (p. 116)

Marcas Oswald's capacity to 'adapt to the external world' is challenged on the Island of the Gods. The unfamiliar communal way of life in a rural setting, which is a direct contrast to Marcas's previous peripatetic way of life on the streets of Brisbane presents geographical and mental challenges. There is a foreign language to be learned. Marcas must eat unusual foods in the company of strangers who, ironically, welcome him like a long-lost member of the family. The young man, who is a bit of a loner, finds it difficult to relate to other people due to his past social circumstances and his mental dis-ease. He would prefer to remain in his room on his own; however, he is obliged to partake of ceremonial activities with the community.

Crossing Borders is innovative because Hindu themes have been incorporated to bring to life the Hindu belief that existence is a continuous cycle of life, death and re-birth, until one attains Satori, "a positive state of completeness (Moksa) or cosmic consciousness." (Guthrie, Morillot & Toh 1995, p. 52) The spirit of the deceased, freed from all earthly desires, merges with the all-loving, all-forgiving universal soul of the Creator. This state is the highest state of enlightenment. Once the spirit of the dead leaves his earthly body he becomes a deified ancestor in the invisible worlds of the Gods, the Land of the Heavenly Souls. Deified ancestors take care of the family on earth. Interdependency during life and in death forms the philosophical foundation of Balinese life.

Thus, the peaceful island paradise of Bali was the ideal place to psychically resurrect Lucas as the protagonist in *Crossing Borders*. The story is never over. Life is a continuous cycle of birth, death and re-birth. Thus, after Marcas's near-death experience

on the Island of the Gods, the young man is re-born into a 'positive state of completeness' and 'cosmic consciousness'.

Bali as a Place of Retreat:

Bali is one of Australia's closest neighbours, and one with whom it is in Australia's interests to foster a mutually beneficial relationship. However the once peaceful island paradise is currently the subject of much debate, due to the terrorist bombings and the young, predominantly males, currently detained in a harsh prison system. The Indonesian government has a policy of 'zero tolerance' towards Westerners involved with drug trafficking. Bali has been the focus of negative international attention due to terrorism and drug smuggling, so now the once major tourist destination for Australian holidaymakers has experienced a downturn in tourism due to Western problems of terrorism and drugs. The impact on the local economy has been devastating for the Balinese people who had come to depend on tourism to sustain their livelihood.

Crossing Borders is an opportunity for the writer to reawaken a positive interest in the Island of the Gods which has "long been famous as an earthly paradise in which a favoured race of men live in Utopian harmony with their own kind, with nature and their gods." (Spies & de Zoete 2002, p. 2) Bali as an enchanted paradise is a place of miracles for one young Western man.

Supernatural forces are always at play. From time to time things do go a little nutty or as the Balinese say, a little one o'clock, so prayer, observance and discipline

must be practised throughout every day of the year. The spirits of the ancestors are always present waiting to guide those like Marcas who have become 'lost' back to a place of belonging in the outside world. People throughout the Western world have travelled to Bali in order to experience the timeless ceremonial culture which is based on "the Hindu belief of brotherhood, which states simply that all people of the universe belong to each other and together share the triumphs and tragedies of the world." (De Neefe 2003, p. 12) The deeply spiritual lifestyle on the Island of the Gods offers a peaceful retreat for visitors from the materialistic and mechanical time-poor Western world.

The Relationship between the Novel *Crossing Borders* and the Visual Arts:

The title *Crossing Borders* originated from a visit to the 1999 *Beyond the Future* Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art Exhibition. Margo Neale, the Curator (Indigenous Australian Art) of the Queensland Art Gallery explained the reason for selecting *Crossing Borders* as one of themes at this cultural event:

This theme (was) an acknowledgement that 'a story is never over', an understanding that is particularly pertinent to an indigenous worldview based on the circularity of existence, which understands that:

Our cultural identities are always in a state of becoming, a journey in which we never arrive ... who we are is not a rock to be passed from generation to generation fixed and unchanging.

It becomes a space for indigenous cultural practitioners, who are increasingly involved in the processes of hybridity and whose existence has always been about negotiating the spaces between cultures. (p. 192)

In a world of dissolving boundaries and expanding horizons, Marcos's story is not over, because in a developing country, the broken-hearted young man who is 'lost' chances upon a new way of 'seeing' and feeling at home. He finds a place where he can belong.

Mike Crang, Lecturer in Geography at Durham University states:

Rather than pine for some past community, it does to recognise that along with the loss of organic communities there come new freedoms, new opportunities and excitements – the chance to escape the claustrophobia sometimes produced in closed societies, the possibilities of chance encounters and new experiences. (p. 118)

Marcos does pine for his old way of life; however, on the Island of the Gods the young man discovers new freedoms, opportunities and excitement, chance encounters and new experiences, and is thus re-born. Marcos, who is staying within walking distance of Ubud, the Village of the Artists, then realises his childhood dream to become an artist is not impossible.

Art, in particular Magical Realism provides a new 'seeing place', a space for the imagination. Art provides a forum for the discussion of diverse viewpoints and extraordinary visions. Artists, not constrained or inhibited by a western focus on linear time and a teleological concept of progress, must unsettle borders of time, culture and knowledge to cross over into new 'seeing' places; metaphysical identities of globalised beauty.

Thus, inspired by the Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art exhibition, I borrowed the concept of *Crossing Borders* as a metaphor to explore Magical Realism, schizophrenia and the obstacles Marcos encounters on the Island of the Gods.

Methodology: Innovative Variations to the YA Genre

The health and well-being of young people is a critical measure of society for two reasons: in moral terms, the way in which society cares for its weak and vulnerable is a measure of how civilised it is; in more pragmatic terms, a society that fails to cherish its youth fails – it's as simple as that. (Nieuwenhuizen 1994, p. 30)

Young adult readers choose books for a variety of reasons; some readers wish to be entertained and others, educated. Others “like books that deal with our age group.” Stacey, Year 11. (Nieuwenhuizen 1994, p. 23) Reading provides a form of relaxation and enjoyment because it makes the real world seem far away for other young adults, whilst some young adults are in search of “incredible and unlikely journeys ...” where they are “led to delve into places we usually hide; sometimes disturbing, but always beautiful.” (Tucker 2005, p. 96)

Authors of YA literature have a wonderful opportunity to nurture, to help young adults build spiritual foundations to sustain them during difficult times. “The writer and reader of adolescent fiction may interact as spiritual teacher and student.” (Shaw 2007, p. 1)

The literary genre of young adult literature is written for, published for and consumed by young adults aged between 12 – 18 years old. Young adult fiction, the ‘coming of age’ genre, deals with the experience of life usually through the eyes of a teenage protagonist. According to White (2000) the criteria that mirrors the world of adolescents, is as follows:

- The main character is a teenager who is the center of the plot;
- The protagonist's actions and decisions are major factors in the plot's outcome;
- The events and problems in the plot are related to teenagers, and the dialogue reflects their speech;
- The point of view is that of an adolescent and reflects an adolescent's interpretation of events and people. (p, 6)

Young adult literature validates youth culture; issues, viewpoints, problems and fears pertaining to young adults have become increasingly important since the publication of *The Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger in 1951.

This novel, originally published for adults, was embraced by teenagers because not only did the narrative portray the teenage vernacular, more importantly, it introduced themes of adolescent angst and alienation. *The Catcher in the Rye* takes a critical look at social issues relevant to young adults through the eyes of an adolescent male, Holden Caulfield. Holden Caulfield, a self-absorbed and articulate boy with a quirky sense of humour and contempt for modern American society, in his search for self-fulfilment and harmonious unity, provided a voice for a generation of young adults.

The novel was considered controversial at the time it was published because the teenage character's radical social opinion and observation challenged the conservative ideals of American society. The same novel published today would probably not generate the same controversy or reach the best seller list given the plethora of 'adolescent angst' novels available in the bookshops today.

Social realism is synonymous with young adult literature. Characters in young adult novels, like their counterparts in the real world, are confronted with world issues. War, racism, multiculturalism, environmental catastrophes, poverty, starvation, physical

disability, relationship breakdowns, sexual abuse, drugs and alcohol abuse, physical violence and psychiatric themes such as mental illness are subjects of discussion in the YA literary genre.

The YA genre “apparently started out as a classification of the American public library system, developing out of library services aimed at ‘Young People’ (a library term for the upper age group of the youth reading market, going back to at least 1930).” (Nieuwenhuizen 1994, p. 6) However, the influx of true-life stories for young adults did not begin to emerge until the 1960s.

The emergence of an alternative youth culture seeking to be heard was part of the 1960s cultural revolution, the so-called ‘Age of Aquarius’. Young adults witnessing the dramatic world events on television, no longer content to be seen and not heard, insisted on being allowed to think for themselves, to express their opinions and to have those opinions respected by the older generation. “The established orders within the family and the school, as well as in government institutions were questioned” and “the new openness, freedom, independence and even assertiveness in society was expressed in the questioning attitude,” (Saxby 1993, p. 8) of characters in novels written for young adults.

Young adults expected their opinions and ideas to be taken seriously and respectfully. The usage of the term ‘young adults’ seemed “to acknowledge the fact that teenagers were “not just limbo-dwellers stuck in between the two ‘real’ ages of childhood and adulthood” (Nieuwenhuizen 1994, p. 10); young adults were intelligent and responsible human beings able to take charge of their own lives.

Industry and marketers did take young adults seriously. Clothing, magazines, records, cosmetics, television programs, films and books were produced specifically for young adults.

As publishers increased their level of marketing to the emerging young adult market, librarians began setting aside novels for young adults in special sections of the libraries; both librarians and publishers began identifying this as a niche market separate from either children's literature or books written for adults.

The well-known pioneers of young adult fiction as a distinct category included Judy Blume and S. E. Hinton. S. E. Hinton's debut novel *The Outsiders* (1967) about the teenage rebellion of the "Greasers" and 'Socs', Anne Head's *Mr and Mrs Bo Jo Jones* (1967) and Paul Zindel's *The Pilgrim* (1968) are considered to be the landmark novels of the young adult genre. (Owen 2003, p. 1) Such true-life stories about real people written for young adults introduced themes previously deemed inappropriate for young adults; sexuality, teen pregnancy, terminations, the predicament of African-American youth, and death.

Nowadays young adults can access cyberspace or read books that will provide information or a vicarious experience on any subject. Thus there are no secrets; children and young adults have virtually the same access to the same information as adults. Young adults can no longer be sheltered from what was 'once upon a time' regarded as an 'adults only' domain.

"Books are a safe way to experience things second-hand," says Gail Mahon, Deputy Chair of the Libraries Board of South Australia. (Nieuwenhuizen 1994, p. 131) Authors of YA fiction are broaching all subjects in graphic detail; teenage massacres,

train surfing, serial murders, rape and teenage pregnancy, homosexuality and AIDS, incest and domestic violence, emotional bullying, self-mutilation, mental illness and suicide. No topic is considered too delicate for young adults.

The words ‘CONTENTS MAY OFFEND SOME READERS’ are inscribed on the back cover of John Marsden’s novel, *Dear Miffy* (1997). It could be argued that this warning is an enticement to purchase, however, given the ominous content of this ‘reality bites’ YA novel, the precautionary warning is a meritorious addition.

Tony, the “only fucking sixteen” teenage male protagonist of *Dear Miffy*, who believes he is “totally fucked up” (p. 89) goes from “being a naughty boy to being a fucking juvenile delinquent” (p. 31) in the first thirty pages. Tony, who does not have a surname because he does not have a family, is not only confined to a wheelchair because he lost both legs and ‘fucked up’ his spine by throwing himself in front of a train in an attempt to end his life. He is also incarcerated in a correctional institution “surrounded by fucking chaos.” (p. 90) The authorities, concerned for Tony’s melancholy state of mind, arrange his admission to a psychiatric ward where Tony is the “most fucked-up”. (p. 95) Marsden’s grim story ends not with a whimper but a hateful bang. “Dear fucking bastards who’ve been reading these letters. ... You cunts. ... Well, fuck you all. ... FUCKING MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS. FUCK YOU ALL. Lots of Love, fuckers, Tony.” (p. 112) The nihilistic trend in teenage literature examined by Kate Legge (1997) in an article entitled *Life Sucks, Timmy* argues:

Recent debate has focussed not on morality nor ideology but verite and a particularly bleak (honest?) strain of social realism for young adults, who belong to a generation exhibiting unprecedented levels of pessimism and uncertainty about the future. (p. 10)

Marsden, who does not believe in concealing the truth from his readers, strings together significant themes such as social hierarchy, youth homelessness, street life, physical violence, emotional abuse, psychiatric themes and institutionalisation, teenage sex and suicide. Pam McIntyre, who lectures in children's literature and edits *ViewPoint: on books for young adults* says:

The nineties isn't much of a decade and the literature reflects this quite strongly ... It seems more of the well-known writers are producing material that is equivocal at best and hopeless at worst. They are grappling with the pressure to take on a teacherly, edifying role. Do you tell it as it is or try and be optimistic? (Legge 1997, p. 12)

Dear Miffy has divided the opinion of academics, teachers, parents and students. Michael McNamara, a high school teacher, commends Marsden's honest portrayal of the 'dark' side of real life:

I know that there are people around me who live similarly disturbed lives in which trouble and violence brew beneath the surface of day-to-day living. It is this that Marsden gets just right ... The violence is there and confronting and there is no easy way for the reader to come to terms with it. (Legge 1997, p. 12)

Marsden acknowledges *Dear Miffy* is "very ugly"; his most extreme "in terms of violence and language" ... however, he says "he set out to give a voice to "extremely damaged teenagers" so he could find "some understanding." (Legge 1997, p. 13) At the age of nineteen, Marsden was hospitalised in an adolescent psychiatric unit suffering from "frustration, rage, boredom and depression." (Legge 1997, p.13) He found the mental tenacity to overcome his adolescent angst, and he has since gone on to achieve

enormous success as a creative writer for young adults. Marsden's first-hand experience places him in a wonderful position to provide much-needed guidance out of the labyrinth, or a means to rebirth.

Childhood is no longer a time of innocence; children engaging in violent computer games, and violent films with adult themes has become an accepted form of entertainment in the 21st century. Children witness the vicissitudes of physical and emotional abuse, domestic violence, and the consequences of drink driving, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy and mental illness during prime time television or at first hand.

Marsden is a social realist. The author believes his need to "understand real life" (Legge 1997, p. 13), and *Dear Miffy* "is as real as (he) can make it so the important thing is that readers will come away ... with an understanding that some people's lives are almost 'beyond repair' even at the age of 16." (Legge 1997, p. 13) Beyond repair?

If Marsden says he is giving "a voice to extremely damaged teenagers," (Legge 1997, p. 13) why not provide hope? To suggest some people's lives are beyond repair at the age of sixteen would surely compound a young person's feelings of hopelessness? It could be argued *Dear Miffy* may also deter a troubled young person like Tony from seeking help, because Marsden's portrayal of psychiatric illness and mental health institutions is negative.

Bokey, Walter and Rey's (2000) definition of a 'negative' portrayal of psychiatric illness in their paper, *From Karrowingi the emu to Care factor zero*, which addresses mental health issues in contemporary Australian adolescent literature, define a typical 'negative' portrayal as:

... one in which the sufferer of psychiatric illness is stigmatised, or there is futility expressed about seeking help from mental health professionals and institutions, or the mental health professional is depicted as emotionally abusive and the endpoint of mental illness is suicide. (p. 3)

Thus, Marsden speaking through Tony's usage of derogatory terms to describe a psychiatric hospital as a "pretty fucking slack" "crazy place", and a "nuthouse", (Marsden 1997, p. 93) where "fucking psychos themselves" (p,88) "try to teach" "fucking retards like us" (p, 88) "all this shit ... like conflict resolution, "alternatives to violence'" (Marsden 1997, p. 94) could be deemed to be unhelpful. Conflict resolution has been proven to be a successful means of helping young adults understand the source of their anger.

YA literature provides a perfect vehicle to educate young adults about mental health issues. "Acknowledging mental illness is the first step towards understanding and the removal of prejudice," (Bokey, Walter & Rey 2000, p. 5) however, Marsden's novel does little to prevent the stigmatisation and stereotyping of young people with mental illnesses as per the following example. Tony says,

They talk, it's like they're from another planet. Most of them are real posh, go to private schools ... I don't think they got much in common with me. They think they've got problems, fucking hell, they must be joking ... to them a big problem is having a zit, like they need six month's counselling ... that's how sad their lives are ... like they're always trying to prove they they're more fucked up than the next person. (p. 95)

The author provides a bleak window into the lives of 'other' teenagers; disadvantaged, abused and lonely, incarcerated in correctional centres and/or psychiatric

institutions. This writer believes YA literature should provide hope for a young readers experiencing a “black time of suffering, despair and melancholia.” (Abraham 1998, p. 135) Readers struggling to achieve an authentic identity and/or managing mental illness or difficult family and social circumstances may, as a result of reading *Dear Miffy*, come to believe life is grim and there is no hope, so why not follow Tony’s example and end it all to stop the “... bad feeling that I couldn’t stand no more. It was the cure.” (Marsden 1997, p. 109)

Tony’s total aloneness in the world is the saddest aspect of Marsden’s novel. The author could have provided a phone number in his text or on the back cover for readers like Tony. It is a well-known secret that Cormier (1977) provided his home phone number in *I Am the Cheese*. Many readers picked up on this clue and called him, so the author apparently provided counselling for many distressed young readers. (Freeman 2005, p. 2)

Feelings of isolation, chronic delinquency, drug and alcohol abuse and/or suicidal thoughts are not uncommon amongst young adults. However, according to Richard Eckersley (1992), social analyst and author of *Youth and the Challenge to Change*, “... it is young men who seem to be suffering the most.” (Nieuwenhuizen 1994, p. 31) Young adolescent males are ‘in crisis’ and at risk of self-harm. This fact is reflected in the high rate of mental illness and suicide amongst young adolescent males. (Sparke 1999, p. 32)

Psychiatric themes are a major component of Australian YA literature. Young adults in teenage novels are “beset with trauma, loss and psychiatric disorders.” (Bokey, Walter & Rey 2005, p. 2) Charlie in Margaret Wild’s (2001) novel *Jinx* who is struggling to “be a man” (p. 48) at a private boys’ school where “rugger-buggers become

school captains,” (p. 48) feels he has “something that twists (his) soul.” (p. 57) He dreams in black, never colour, and his fellow students laugh at him because he carries a kitten in the front of his shirt. The students at Charlie’s school are expected to be high achievers in the classroom as well as being outstanding players on the sporting field. “They tell you to do your own thing but they don’t mean it,” (Cormier 1974, p. 186) teenage boys must comply with the “religious hoopla” and “school spirit crap” (p. 54) or “otherwise they murder you.” (p. 186) There is talk of Charlie being expelled from school, because like Jerry Renault of *The Chocolate War* by Cormier, Charlie disturbs the universe by expressing his individuality; he colours his hair green and shaves his head; eventually the melancholy young man, victimised by his peers, is worn down by his miserable experiences of life and the voices in his head. He contemplates suicide as expressed in Wild’s verse that makes reference to Virginia Woolf, who also suffered with depression:

I read about a woman,
someone famous,
who walked into a lake,
pockets loaded with stones.
They said she was mad.
I think she was brave.
as the water crept
over her chin, her nose,
how did she stop herself
from heaving out the stones?” (p. 59)

Charlie hangs himself in his family home.

In YA fiction, young people are often represented as liminal figures. The word 'liminal' refers to the threshold where binary opposites undo themselves; adult/child, power/powerlessness, independent/dependent, conformist/rebellious, them/us, self/other, ego/alter-ego. These destabilising oppositions underlie the adolescent experience; personal maturation and the growth from childhood to adulthood.

The 'moment of disturbance' is also the 'state of becoming' and as such, adolescence may be compared to the labyrinth, the dangerous journey through the *opus alchymicum*. The process, often compared to the turning of a great wheel, is according to alchemical thought, the process that forms harmony and peace, the new human being, the Philosopher's Stone. (Abraham 1998, p. 135) According to alchemical thought:

Alchemists use the image (of the labyrinth) in a symbolic way to designate a place of confusion, geographical or mental, which has to be negotiated with great care in order to avoid becoming lost without threat or clue. (p. 113)

Young adults begin to sort out their own ideas in order to become individuals who away from the family, feel 'at home' in the world. Feelings of loneliness, emotional turmoil, identity confusion and melancholy are not unusual during adolescence. This phenomenon is a common psychosocial symptom of identity confusion according to Erik Erickson's theory of identity development.

Erickson, who "argues that individuals struggle with identity development through their life course," (Matlin 1996, p. 369) divided his concept of psychosocial development into eight stages from birth through to old age. The major task for young adults is to answer the question 'Who am I, and where am I going?' The fifth stage or

'identity crisis' stage coincides with young adults needing to make decisions regarding their future.

Erikson says adolescents need to have resolved the first four stages of psychosocial development in order to have developed the maturity to explore social, personal and occupational issues. Issues of identity are inextricably linked to adolescence because young people experience major physical and cognitive changes at this stage of psychosocial development.

Young adults need to have formed a close relationship with another person to avoid being overwhelmed by a sense of isolation. For young adults without the protection of a loving and 'normal' stable family, the sense of being 'lost' will be heightened during adolescence.

One author particularly adept at portraying the isolation of young adults, particularly those without the protection of a loving and 'normal' stable family, is Robert Cormier. Cormier provides a compassionate insight into the sensitive psyche of melancholy teenage boys, isolated and outcast, disorientated in time and place, 'lost' without thread or clue. Barney Snow of *The Bumblebee Flies Anyway* (1983) epitomises this isolation when he says:

I was alone, cast adrift, lost, unrelated to anything. ... Staring into a vast emptiness that was as bad as this alien room he was in, trying to hold on, afraid he was being swept out to space, separated from earth, defying gravity, crashing through the orbit to limits past anything known ... (p. 87)

Barney, incarcerated in a hospice for boys with terminal illnesses, does not know who he is or where he belongs. (p. 86) Adam Farmer of *I Am the Cheese* often finds himself “waking up not knowing who he was or where he was.” (Cormier 1977, p. 78) Jerry feels “swept with sadness, a sadness deep and penetrating, leaving him desolate like someone washed up on a beach, a lone survivor in a world full of strangers.” (Cormier 1974, p. 97)

Readers vicariously sharing the experiences of the melancholy young men in Cormier’s stories may be reassured; they are not alone, their feelings of isolation are not unusual and/or their own lives are not so bad after all. “When asked about the themes behind his books, Cormier replied, “We want to touch, to communicate with each other and often fail to do so despite our longings and our loneliness.” (Freeman 2005, p. 2)

The melancholy boys in Cormier’s stories who yearn for human closeness do experience fleeting moments of sheer bliss. The simple things in life are often more rewarding than the bigger things. “Giggling again – he couldn’t remember ever giggling before in his life – and still pleasantly light-headed, he stood at the doorway of the room, grinning happily,” (Cormier 1983, p. 144) generous-spirited Barney gains pleasure from performing good deeds for other people. He builds a car for his friend Mazzo, but even though Mazzo dies before the Bumblebee car is launched, the creative project has given Barney a purpose: pleasure. At the end of Barney’s life he feels he has had the “last hurrah” with the launching of the Bumblebee “skipping across the night and the moon and the stars. Triumphant, brave and beautiful.” (p. 235) Like Barney. Adam’s moments of sheer bliss are bitter-sweet. He remembers being placed in his mother’s lap where he “would curl into her body, feeling warm and safe and protected from all the bad things in the world.” (Cormier 1977, p. 24) And for Jerry, “A strange happiness invaded him,”

(Cormier 1974, p. 9) after he was selected for the football team, even though he was physically injured.

However, many characters in social realism or ‘reality bites’ YA literature do not derive pleasure from simple acts of kindness, nor do they experience fleeting moments of bliss in their lives. It could be argued the dearth of blissful moments for young adult characters in YA literature may be exacerbating the social and psychological circumstances of troubled young adults. Readers may benefit from redemptive narratives with characters who demonstrate “a positive, confident and optimistic outlook on life, or at least the fortitude to endure what life (holds) in store for them.” (Nieuwenhuizen 1994, p. 51)

According to Richard Eckersley, a specialist with the CSIRO, who conducted a Youth Partnership Study in 1996, “The more cynical young people become, the less able they are to exert control over the world and the more depressed they become about the future.” (Legge 1997, p. 14) Mannie, the runaway female protagonist of Murray’s book, *how to make a bird*, (2003) grieving for the loss of her mother and her brother, says she feels like:

... a piece in a jigsaw must feel once it’s cut out and made separate, when it isn’t part of the picture any more; it’s just a bit, a howling bit crawling along the old lino, alone, thinking; this is me, the rest is those others. (p. 232)

So Much to Tell You is another Marsden story of emotional anguish about a depressed fourteen year old girl called Marina. Marina has withdrawn into silence after a terrible accident when acid thrown at her mother by her father exploded in her face instead. Marina writes in her diary, “I feel like I’m in a shattered shocked heap of little pieces on

the floor, trying to put myself and everything back together into the new pattern ...” (Marsden 1987, p. 66). Marina’s feelings are echoed in the words of seventeen year old Jen in Wild’s (2001) novel *Jinx*:

Winters here are mild,
but I can’t stop shivering.
I pile on jumpers,
wear socks to bed.
my bones feel as brittle as ice.
...
but I don’t think I will ever feel
warm again. (p. 66)

Jen is also beset with emotional anguish. This teenage girl’s life spirals out of control after her boyfriend Charlie commits suicide. “I should have known there was something wrong, I should have made him talk to me.” (Wild 2001, p. 74) Jen, unable to manage her guilt and pain, stops going to school. She screams at her mother and sneaks out at night to meet boys who are not her friends. She drinks anything and everything until eventually she is admitted to hospital having overdosed on alcohol.

Thus, it is not only teenage boys who are experiencing a “black time of suffering, despair and melancholia.” (Abraham 1998, p. 135) For many young adults, male and female, it would appear the external world has lost its appeal. Reality is pain and sadness. The world is grim. Glenda Morgan, a high school librarian, says this attitude is reflected in the reading habits of the students she comes into contact with each week, suggesting:

Students do not like adolescent angst novels at all any more. They all have way too much angst in their own everyday lives. They see real life drama on the evening news. Those who do read, because most young adults prefer television, choose fantasy foremost; 'chick lit' for girls and fantasy or thrillers or 'When the war began' ... science fiction and horror stories for boys. They may read biographies of people who have risen above hard times but they do not want to read fictitious stories about hard lives. Older readers continue to read Harry Potter. Enid Blyton books such as the Famous Five re-published are becoming increasingly popular and not only with the younger readers. It seems kids are recoiling from growing up, trying to reclaim the fun of childhood which was lost along the way due to acrimonious family and social circumstances – having missed out on the fun, the excitement of 'growing up' which should be considered an adventure, many of our young readers are searching for cheerful and imaginative material, to replace a lost childhood. (Morgan 2007)

Children in the sixties and seventies were protected from the harsh realities of adult life by their parents. "The kinds of books that celebrate the imagination are vital to a future that includes literary reading." (Jones 2005/2006, p. 75) Enid Blyton provided readers with 'smashing adventures' and as such, it could be argued that her readers developed a life-long love for books and an optimistic outlook towards the future. It seemed in those days, the concerns of the adult world were of no concern to children or young adults. There was nothing much to worry about and there was everything to look forward to because the grown-ups who provided stable family backgrounds remained married 'through sickness and in health' and they did the worrying, they were in charge, so life was a 'smashing adventure'.

If the YA novels on the shelves in the libraries and book shops are a reflection of the psyche of a generation of young adults and their experience of the world today, it

would appear young adults informed about the world are feeling pessimistic about the future. It seems many writers of YA fiction feel duty bound to inform young adults about the questionably 'dystopic' state of the world, should young adults be deluded into believing life is 'a smashing adventure' permeating with love, peace and happiness, a future filled with all things bright and beautiful. It could be argued some writers are projecting their personal cynical attitudes about the world onto a generation of young readers.

Many young adults are 'in crisis'. In May 2007, two sixteen year old girls honouring a suicide pact hanged themselves in Victoria. And a young man shot down a classroom of students at the University of Virginia. He then took his own life. According to statistics compiled by SANE Australia (2007):

Over 2,000 Australians die from suicide every year. More men die by suicide. Depression is a major cause of suicide. Around 20% of Australians are affected by some form of mental illness at some time in their lives. Suicide is the main cause of premature death among people with mental illness. Over 10% of those affected kill themselves within the first 10 years of diagnosis. (p. 1)

Too many young adults are feeling that their lives are not worth living. These young adults, "behave in such ways because their experience of themselves is different," (Laing 1967, p. 108) they are "very sick, beyond caring" (Wild 2001, p. 72) when they decide to end their lives. Life for these human beings becomes an insufferable nightmare, living grief because they have failed "to adapt to the external world – the interpersonal world

and the realm of human collectivities.” (Laing 1967, p. 116) Jack Travis, the melancholy young man of *The best years of my life* expressed his feelings of despair in his journal:

Now I decided to commit suicide ... Suicide seemed to answer all of my problems. Sometimes my suicide plans came from a sense of anger, revenge or self-hatred, other times they were a way to see an end to the pain, failure and shame of my life. ... Another factor was my lack of female company. (p. 100)

Jack, who had no close friendships, only ever felt safe in bed away from the school bullies and the disappointment of his parents. “My dark side was more evident when I was alone at home, including moments of sheer obsession with death. I would often find myself crying intensely and fantasising about my own funeral.” (p. 103)

“What you have happening at this time is ... individuation, where people lose their links and bonds with each other, and as this happens, the individual that emerges is a very feeble individual” (Furedi 2007, p. 23); a human being who, when faced with pain, rejection or disappointment lacks the mental tenacity, the spiritual strength and/or the creative resources to change personal circumstances for the better. Authors of YA literature in the past decade have predominantly focused on social realism:

Social realism, generally employing a first-person narrator who encourages a sense of intimacy and authenticity and who defies the sound of other voices, has begun to follow horrific narratives of children and teenagers in extremis. (Bradford 1996. p. 6)

It could be suggested first person narratives utilising, ‘horrific narratives of children and teenagers in extremis’ are having a detrimental effect on the well-being, the psyche of a

generation of young adults. Books dealing with emotionally-charged issues and social dis-ease could be exacerbating the hopelessness and the lack of optimism young adults feel about their lives. This sense of hopelessness and lack of optimism is captured by Mannie in Murray's (2003) novel, *How to make a bird*:

I was sick of that word hopeless. It had been dumped on me a long time ago, as if it was a dunce hat, as if I would always be somewhat incapable, unable to steer myself through life ... It was like having a curse put on you. You can't help but believe it, because you always believe what they tell you. (p. 181)

Mannie despairs she will ever be able to steer herself through life because someone in her past has told her she is hopeless. Being a sensitive young woman, she believes this to be true of herself. As does Tony, who is told by his teacher, he is a failure who will "be in jail by the time you are eighteen." (Marsden 1997, p. 28)

Young adults who do feel a sense of hopelessness about their lives may not be helped or enlightened if they identify with characters encountering similar situations, expressing the same sentiments. First-person narrations by melancholy characters may reinforce a sensitive reader's lack of self-worth, and 'what is the point?' attitude. If the world is a grim place of pain and sadness, what is there to look forward to?

Young adults could benefit from reading stories about resourceful young adult characters who do find the skills to work steadily through their problems. Given some feel the world is a grim place of pain and sadness, perhaps it would be prudent for writers to provide young adult readers with redemptive stories and guidance, constructive and creative ideas, positive messages, to help them address the problems they are experiencing or may face in their lifetime. Young adults may have "to hurt a great deal

in order to grow and deepen, but there is below all that happens a Yes to the fact of creation ... that all shall be well.” (Shaw 2007, p. 5)

Life is not a fairy tale with a ‘happy ever after ending’; nevertheless, human beings, like the characters in fairy tales who encounter joy and sorrow, success and failure, can and will triumph over adversity given the right attitude. “Failure is simply another revolution in the wheel of life. Its challenge helps you build your centre.” (Blanco 1990, p. 16)

One key to building one’s centre and finding the Philosopher’s Stone is the re-creative force of art, because art provides the “greatest defense and protection against solitude, loneliness, and barren isolation from our fellows.” (Aldama 2003, p. 109) Creative pursuits such as painting or writing provide a therapeutic outlet for estranged young adults seeking a means of self-expression. The young adult, foundering because he “has lost his sense of self, his feelings, his place in the world,” (Laing 1967, p. 110) could benefit by way of finding a creative pastime such as keeping a journal or painting or scrap booking.

Keeping a journal provided Marina with the help she needed to overcome her problems. Jack Travis also kept a journal which provided the foundation for his true-life story, *The best years of my life*. “Painting makes me want to be out in the world again,” says Jen in *Jinx*. (Wild 2001, p. 118) At the conclusion of Wild’s novel, Jen is “making lightning sketches, trying to capture the moment,” (p. 214) at home with her family on a rainy afternoon.

“Plato said, ‘Education is teaching children to find pleasure in the right things.’” (Pipher 1996, p. 189) Barney Snow of Cormier’s *The Bumblebee Flies Anyway* spends

his dying days in the garden. He draws comfort from nature. “Sad somehow, one life ending while another began,” (Cormier 1983, p. 126) Barney observes the shrivelling lilacs past their prime, alongside another small flowering tree with tiny dancing pink flowers. He wonders whether people are like the plants that do not die “but slumber on through the seasons, withstanding the rain and the cold ... Death only a sleep from which they would eventually awaken?” (p. 127)

Thus, writers of young adult literature could help readers by encouraging an interest in creative pastimes, in the natural world and in personal reflection. Novels exposing young adults to moral, spiritual and religious themes will have the potential to “serve as a vehicle for stimulating growth in an awareness of the unity that exists in the underlying spiritual truths common to the great world religions.” (Shaw 2007, p. 1) By providing spiritual guides for the melancholy young men in his novels, Gary Crew provides spiritual guidance for his readers. The author, we discover in *Strange Journeys*:

... recalls his highly structured years of curriculum and Bible study with real affection, and points to the valuable and rich heritage provided by his family’s religious underpinning, at the same time noting the vacuum that exists for many modern Australian children, devoid of any spiritual or theological foundations. (McKenna & Pearce 1999. p. 6)

Nowadays school teachers are being expected to distribute information on all issues ranging from sexuality to ethics, prejudice to self-esteem, drug and alcohol abuse and domestic violence. Community, family and church were traditionally responsible for providing children and young adults with such information, as well as moral guidelines and spiritual values, but this is no longer occurring with any certainty such as tradition might have once implied.

Crew's stories of renewal and rebirth do provide moral guidelines and spiritual values for young readers. The author addresses concepts of Buddhism and Christianity in *The Blue Feather* and in doing so, he provides a forum of religious discussion for his readers. Both teachings are united by the belief that death is not the end to life; it is the beginning of a new phase of existence, in the case of Buddhism "oneness" with the universe. (Mackenzie 1999, p. 13) This knowledge, central to spiritual well-being, harmonious unity is also at the heart of *Elsewhere*, Gabrielle Zevin's fantastic novel.

Liz, a teenage girl, wakes to find she is passenger on board a ship destined for Elsewhere, the afterlife. Liz, a stranger in a strange land, is lonely and unable to accept the fact she has died. She yearns to return to her family and her old life. The sixteen year old girl spends every waking moment on the Observation Deck in Elsewhere, where she deposits coins into a binocular so she can observe her family and friends on earth. Eventually, with Grandma Betty's guidance, the young woman realises that being an observer and living vicariously through what is no longer attainable is a futile exercise. Death should not be wasted because "dying is just another part of living. ... In time, you may even come to see your death as a birth." (Zevin 2005, p. 76)

Human existence is like a circle ... because everything that was old would be new and everything that was new became old ... the circle stretched out indefinitely, infinitely even ... People die. People are born. People die again. Each birth and death is part of the circular nature of life. (p. 68)

Once Liz gains this knowledge, she is able to accept her circumstances and she involves herself in the way of life of *Elsewhere*. She has made the choice to be happy, because

she knows, “There will be other lives,” because “there are so many lives” ... “for unpaid debts, for one-night stands, for Prague and Paris, for painful shoes with pointy toes, for decisions and revisions,” ... “for sweet babies with skin like milk.” (p. 234)

People age backwards in Elsewhere until they are seven days old, at which stage they are sent down a river and released to be reborn on earth. Liz is travelling down the river with the other babies at the conclusion of Zevin’s story. In accepting her circumstances, she says, “there is no difference in quality between a life lived forward and a life lived backwards ... (and) she had come to love (her) backward life. It was, after all, the only life she had.” (p. 268) As the waves cradle the babies, they are rocked to sleep and when Liz falls to sleep “she dreams. And when she dreams, she dreams of a girl who was lost at sea but one day found the shore.” (p. 269)

Like Liz, Marcos Oswald finds the shore in *Crossing Borders*. The readers of *Crossing Borders* will find themselves integrated into a fusion of reality and fantasy that reflects the dreamlike psyche of a melancholy young man in search of harmonious unity, the Philosopher’s Stone.

Marcos Oswald, entrapped in a world of Magical Realism, “continually and distinctly feels the contradiction between two worlds, that of the real and that of the fantastic, and is himself amazed by the extraordinary phenomena that surrounds him.” (Todorov 1975, p. 26) The protagonist with his Western problems confronted with different cultural beliefs and mythological creatures from Hindu legends on the Island of the Gods will experience a rebirth as Liz is about to do at the conclusion of *Elsewhere*. The young man, given a second chance to conquer both the voices of the demons that plague his thoughts and the ghosts of his past life that have hindered his ability to accept

his circumstances and to successfully manage his life, understands as a result of his time on the Island of the Gods, as Liz realises in *Elsewhere*, that living is indeed a cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

Crossing Borders is intended to be an educative and entertaining novel with a positive ending. The novel sited in an Asian country is innovative because the sub-genre of Magical Realism as opposed to the popular young adult genre based on Western adolescent angst has been utilised to tell the story of Marcas Oswald. Magical Realism, a post-modern style of writing, unusual in YA fiction, offers a positive conceptual framework compared to the otherwise fairly dark genre of ‘reality bites’ social realism.

“For most adolescents, feeling different is not so much feeling special as feeling out of touch and estranged, marginalised from a communal culture.” (Reid & Stringer 1997, p. 3) *Crossing Borders* was written to help young adults who feel their “experience of themselves is different,” (Laing 1967, p. 109) to realise that this difference is what makes them special, indeed unique. The health and well-being of young people is a critical measure of society; estranged young adults, signalling to us from the void, need help to find the Philosopher’s Stone in order to feel ‘at home’ in the world.

Literature Review

There are very few of us who know the territory in which he is lost, who know how to reach him, and how to (help him) find the way back.
(Laing 1967, p. 104)

Introduction

The lonely inner journeys of estranged human beings in the modern world are too important not to be told.

The following literature review of YA fiction will discuss mental illness, with particular reference to schizophrenia, to illustrate how the authors and their novels referenced have moulded the creation of *Crossing Borders*. Given that the accompanying novel is based on a YA male protagonist, the review will focus on the adolescent male characters' experiences of melancholy and isolation, psychic dismemberment or death, rebirth or renewal; as well as alchemy, adolescence, Eastern and Western cultural and spiritual values, dreams (unconscious and conscious) and Magical Realism. These topics, which emerge from the analysed novels, have been reconsidered in the light of Lucas's experience, and incorporated into *Crossing Borders*.

The question may be asked 'Do the authors of the novels reviewed provide young adults with a guide to finding the Philosopher's Stone, a path out of the labyrinth of melancholy?' According to alchemical thought, the Philosopher's Stone "can only be brought to its proper form by Art, yet the form is from Nature." (Abraham 1998, p. 11)

The human being or “the Alchemist” (in search of the Philosopher’s Stone) needing to “convert the most unlikely grief to Happiness,” (p. 166) “is advised to employ his imagination as the major tool.” (p. 147)

The Philosopher’s Stone, the most sought-after goal of the *opus alchymicum* (the process of transformation to attain harmonious unity) is the universal panacea or miraculous medicine. It is said that the Alchemist “must descend / Into himself the matter for to finde / Of this our stone” (p. 147) because the substance for making the Stone, is to be found in man himself.

The author believes that some writers, acting as Alchemists, on their own quest for the philosophical stone have provided guidance for young adults in search of a new, freer, and more spiritual state of being and some have not; but that such guidance is vital. Therefore, the writer of *Crossing Borders* in an attempt to provide a new and positive direction for young adults and an alchemical quest for the philosophical stone has transformed personal traumatic circumstances. Most teenagers will inevitably be faced with trauma, and such adverse circumstances will mean they will have to develop a creative means to endure and to work towards changing such circumstances for the better.

Crossing Borders is a contemporary YA novel which utilises the regenerative theme of Magical Realism. It concerns a young Western man suffering with schizophrenia and experiencing social problems as a result of experimenting with recreational drugs. Marcas Oswald’s story is the story of one melancholy young man’s journey in search of the Philosopher’s Stone. Marcas, separated from his own ‘homeless’ world in the West, takes up the challenge of an entirely new ‘homely’ way of life in the East. He finds the courage to accept his circumstances, embraces the need for change

and realises there is meaning in his suffering and a purpose to his life. In other words, he finds his Philosopher's Stone, the symbol of harmonious unity.

That key is Marcos's love of art. The re-creative force of art provides the "greatest defense and protection against solitude, loneliness, and barren isolation from our fellows." (Aldama 2003, p. 109) Marcos is able to overcome his demons so his creative spirit can be freed when he steps from the Timeless Place through a painting back into the external world.

Marcos's story, one of renewal and rebirth on the Island of the Gods, was influenced by the author's reading of contemporary young adult novels which are often negative. However, *Crossing Borders* is an attempt to create a unique work of fiction with positive messages for young adult readers.

Melancholy and Isolation

In the novels reviewed, the central characters are all troubled young men who cannot make sense of their inner turmoil. The young men isolated by circumstances beyond their control all experience symptoms of dis-ease such as altered senses and an inability to sort and interpret incoming messages and sensations and to respond appropriately. Auditory and visual hallucinations, the blunting of emotions, changes in spontaneity of movement, changes in behavioural patterns and physical afflictions such as headaches, dizziness and nausea are experiences common to all of the characters. The characters, without love, protection and physical affection are melancholy young men, disconnected from the external world, unable to distinguish between reality and fantasy.

Barney Snow's home in Robert Cormier's novel *The Bumblebee Flies Anyway* is a hospice for terminally ill teenage boys. The orphan, "tired of sadness, death and dying," (Cormier 1983, p. 89) yearns to feel normal. Barney, who smells sickness and feels "out of context with the world" (p. 87) perpetually questions his grip on reality. He asks himself, "Who am I?" "What am I?" (p. 86)

Life is no better for Adam Farmer in Cormier's novel *I Am the cheese*. Adam, who cannot accept the death of his parents, often finds himself "waking up not knowing who he was or where he was; (Cormier 1977, p. 78) an inhabitant of an unknown world – his name may as well be Kitchen Chair." (p. 92) "How do you find your way back to the real world?" (Cormier 1974, p. 45) asks Jerry Renault in Cormier's novel *The Chocolate War*.

Such confusion, especially the experiencing of auditory and visual hallucinations is common, particularly during the acute phases of mental anguish. The person with schizophrenia is described as psychotic. Psychosis is any major, severe form of mental affectation or disease, generating an *altered state of consciousness* at a given time.

Altered visual perception also causes the schizophrenic or psychotic subject to perceive 'others' as looking deformed, as faces distort and once friendly faces become strange and frightening. Shining eyes are replaced with hollow spaces and people are transformed into skeletons. In Crew's novel *Strange Objects* (2001), Steven Messenger, experiences such distorted visions. When the young man, "well outside the bright ring of firelight" who suffers from a "serious psychological condition, probably schizophrenia" (p. 180) looks at his camping mates, they resemble, "a circle of the dead". (p. 8)

Auditory hallucinations are an equally disquieting dimension to the schizophrenic condition. In Gary Crew's novel *The House of Tomorrow* (1998), sixteen year old Daniel Coley hands in an essay, at the bottom of which he has crossed out the words, "then I heard voices." (p. 4) When his teacher, Mr Mac, questions Daniel about the voices, Daniel is evasive, but he finally says, "They weren't really voices. It was like the feeling of someone needing help; like a message in my head." (p. 23) Daniel needs help.

Hearing 'voices', accompanied by hallucinogenic experiences, is symptomatic of the schizophrenic condition. According to modern thought in the field of mental health, hallucinations are symptoms of chronic loneliness and isolation with extreme anxiety.

Voices are your own emotions and thoughts talking to you. Voices represent deep underlying problems with interpersonal relationships and self-acceptance. Voices provide company in a lonely world. Voices are a direct result of stress and isolation. Voices are thoughts from you to you. (Anne 2001, p. 1 GROW, World Community Mental Health Movement)

Marcas Oswald suffers auditory, visual and olfactory hallucinations in *Crossing Borders*. The young man sees "germs with ginormous eyes, black feelers, and hair-like projections" sucking the leucocytes from his healthy tissue. He hears their screams for mercy. His arms are "bleeding, festering" and "being devoured by leg-less maggots." (Chapman 2005, p. 120) Marcas, consumed by his inner turmoil, can smell the black stench of necrotic tissue. Steven Messenger imagines he can see the aboriginal elder Charlie Sunrise opening his window, "his black hand came through, glossy like a snake's head," and there followed "a snake arm" and Steven "heard a hissing laugh from the grinning mouth." (Crew 1990, p. 111)

Given to hallucinogenic imaginings, the boys cannot make sense of the world because they are “suspended, isolated, inhabitant (s) of an unknown land, an unknown world” (Cormier 1977, p. 92) trapped in a timeless place. They are isolated and melancholy because they are unable to distinguish between reality and fantasy. The dispirited boys cannot find a thread or a clue to lead them through the confusion back to the external world.

Magical Realism

The boys’ hallucinations and mental dis-ease mean that the way they experience the world is surreal, a dreamlike experience. In Art History, the surrealist movement was a quest of faith by artists and thinkers to set people free through dreaming, as the dream was considered the gateway to art. (Hughes 1996, p. 212) In the late 1920s, Franz Roh, a German critic of post-modern art, used the term ‘Magical Realism’, which is almost interchangeable with the term ‘surreal’, to describe the creativity of painters who were endeavouring to portray ordinary reality in an extraordinary light. (Aldama 2003, p. 9)

Magical Realism makes ordinary subjects seem extraordinary. It is a fusion of reality and fantasy. The writer utilised the concept of Magical Realism to portray Marcos Oswald’s schizophrenic state of mind, an altered phase of existence in *Crossing Borders*. Magical Realism has the potential to provoke thought, to be a catalyst for change and to create ideal worlds, therefore *Crossing Borders* was created to provide a new ‘seeing place’ for young adult readers.

Magical realist narratives are open-ended, there is no closure; endings give way to new beginnings, new stories. The writer utilises the idea of new beginnings to explore spiritual themes such as life after death or the Hindu belief that on the Island of the Gods, life is a continuous cycle of birth, death and rebirth. *Crossing Borders* is an open-ended text that yields new beginnings for the protagonist, Marcas Oswald.

Gary Crew is a magical realist who intertwines symbolism, literary allusion, social comment and spiritual thought with primitive and Western cultural traditions to address the concerns of teenage boys in modern Australia. (McKenna & Pearce 1999, p. 2) His novels are like the ships on the horizon that Steven Messenger observes from his secret hideaway in the novel *Strange Objects*. “They always seem to be floating above the surface. Suspended in air ... or in space.” (Crew 2001, p. 50) The ordinary is extraordinary in Crew’s novels; weird and wonderful imagery provides a surreal, dreamlike experience for the teenage reader.

The characters in Crew’s novels inhabit extraordinary psychic worlds. “The fluid, changing, transforming nature of reality,” (Abraham 1998, p. xviii) mirrors the dreamlike fugue experienced by the adolescent boys who are without identity and without home, ‘lost’ boys searching for a thread to lead them out of the labyrinth.

Boys who lose the ability to discern reality often deteriorate until they ‘shut down’. Disassociating and/or withdrawing from the external world provides the boys with a refuge from the confusion, exhaustion, anxiety and the grief of malignant sadness, melancholy. In 1947 H. G. Woodley, suffering with schizophrenia and certified as ‘mad’ said:

... reality is not only a state to be deplored, but to be avoided at all costs; for on the occasions when the (melancholy person) relapses into sanity, he at once observes it to be a most disagreeable and impractical state; for insanity is far more practical than any phase of real life can ever be. In actual life, reality is the recipient of many knocks and buffetings, and the victim of all storms that blow. Whereas, insanity encounters no such tempests; for one lives in a world of make-believe where, despite the raging of the storm, one's illusions remain unshaken. (Porter 1991, p. 5)

Thus, for some boys who are immersed in inner space, whose outer life is bereft of meaning, the so-called 'madness' or "the realm of the marvellous" (Todorov 1975, p. 37), may provide a fantastic source of inspiration for creative expression. It has been suggested that the creative person and the person with schizophrenia share many cognitive traits:

Both use words and language in unusual ways (the hallmark of a great poet or novelist), both have unusual views of reality (as great artists do), both often utilise unusual thought processes in their deliberations, and both prefer solitude to the company of others. (E. Fuller Torrey 2001, p. 383)

Jack Travis in *The best year of my life* (2002) is a socially isolated and lonely teenage boy who, often feeling "he did not belong on the planet" (p. 135) spends the day in bed. "The one place I felt safe was in bed, and that is where I was most comfortable. In addition to feeling physically drained much of the time, bed was a warm place where I was away from the sadistic actions of school bullies ..." (p. 103) However, Jack used his creative ability to write as a means of coping with the fear and pain of rejection. The boy who "was not afraid of being teased for the sake of self-expression," (p. 77) kept a diary.

Keeping a diary was cathartic because it allowed him to articulate his feelings and thoughts about school life.

“I sometimes think I would be able to do fine handicrafts, such as embroidery or tapestry, but I’m sure I would be laughed at if I did.” (Crew 1990, p. 46) Steven Messenger puts his creative energies into making a ‘Life Frame’ with fine wire.

Boys facing adversity may fare better if they have been encouraged to develop their imagination by way of creative pastimes. Putting pen to paper or brush to canvas and having the freedom or confidence to explore “the realm of the marvellous” (Todorov 1975, p. 37) can provide a vital form of occupational therapy, a way out from the labyrinth for some ‘lost’ boys.

Cormier’s character Jerry Renault in *The Chocolate War* has no creative or imaginative way to manage the sorrow in his life. The boy is grieving after his mother has died. He is also being beaten up and bruised on the football field, by the “helmeted and grotesque, creatures from an unknown world” (Cormier 1974, p. 7) because he dared to disturb the universe by refusing to sell chocolates for the school fundraising event. The boy, also accused of being “...a fairy. A queer.” (p. 152) drags himself lethargically around the school until it is time to go home. Jerry like Jack Travis also takes refuge in “A warm bath, soaking in the water ... letting himself mend.” (p. 155) It may be argued the bath, a womb-like environment, symbolises Jerry’s unconscious desire to return to the warmth and safety of his mother. However, creative pastimes may have helped Jerry to become more preoccupied with positive thoughts, express his feelings and overcome his sorrow; the means to finding harmonious unity, his Philosopher’s Stone.

The human being who fails “to adapt to the external world – the interpersonal world and the realm of human collectivities” (Laing 1967, p. 116) becomes a ‘lost’ person. A most accessible form of art for those with a melancholic frame of mind is Magical Realism. Magical Realism ideally could provide a lifeline for a drowning man, who, once saved, may then relinquish it and return to an ‘ordinary’ life in external reality. *Crossing Borders* aims to provide a lifeline for those troubled young adults, a journey back to the external world. This has followed the suggestions that Laing put forward as a result of his research into the schizophrenic experience:

- (i) from inner to outer,
- (ii) from death to life,
- (iii) from the movement back to a movement once more forward,
- (iv) from immortality to mortality
- (v) from eternity back to time,
- (vi) from self to a new ego
- (vii) from a cosmic foetalization to an existential rebirth. (p. 106)

Psychic Dismemberment

The schizophrenic experience is one of profound loss and ensuing grief for all that is, has been and will continue to be lost. It is a living grief for the sufferer and his/her family. The shattered person’s loss of expectations for an ‘ordinary’ life will more often than not result in depression, self-harm and suicide.

“What’s the point ... I hope that I die. I hope I go to sleep and die,” (Crew 1997, p. 152) says fifteen year old Simon Meekam in Gary Crew’s novel *The Blue Feather*, is a

sentiment common to all the characters in the novels studied. Marcas Oswald succumbs to despair in *Crossing Borders*:

It was all going wrong again. Marcas was grief stricken. Exhausted. The black dog could not be silenced. The letter to his parents was written, and although he knew Michellina would be disappointed, Marcas also knew because she loved him, she would understand his decision. (p. 122)

Marcas, assailed by auditory and visual hallucinations, makes the choice to end his torment, his profound sadness, because he believes he can never lead an 'ordinary' life participating in regular activities with friends and family. He feels he is a burden to his family. However the young man who once dreamed of becoming an artist finds that his experiences with art as a gateway back to reality do, and will continue, to give him that way out, a way of escaping the torment. The young male protagonists in the novels studied may have fared better had they been encouraged to develop an interest in creative expression.

Altered senses and an inability to sort and interpret incoming messages and sensations, and to respond appropriately, are symptomatic of the schizophrenic condition. Steven Messenger in Crew's novel *Strange Objects* cannot believe his father is dead. He feels, "Everything had gone crazy ... Nothing was right anymore." (p. 111) When Steven is walking on the cliffs with his neighbour, the boy is so preoccupied by his troubled thoughts, that he is unable to hear or understand his companion. "I kept losing his words." (p. 49) The boys inhabit different psychic worlds, one real and the other imagined.

People with schizophrenia will experience extreme mood changes and/or the blunting of emotions. Cormier's Barney Snow wonders if he is already dead. Barney "kept his mind separate from his body and he banished his emotions altogether," (Cormier 1983, p. 184) as a way of coping during the last stages of his terminal illness. The boy, by keeping his mind blank (p. 186) and holding back the tears, masks his grief.

Adam Farmer in *I Am the Cheese* (1977) disassociates from the harsh reality of the doctor's world. "He had stepped outside himself, departed, gone from this place and was outside looking in, watching himself and the doctor." (p. 29) Disassociation is a defence mechanism for the boy who can trust no one with his inner thoughts.

Behavioural patterns will change amongst teenage boys, especially those who encounter tragedy or social circumstances beyond their control. Daniel Coley's teachers think the fifteen year old boy, who is physically and culturally different from the other students in the school, is exhibiting signs of 'madness' because he has become "so distant ... always dreaming, and alone too. He's lost all his friends. He wasn't like that before." (Crew 1987, p. 9) The fragmentation of the real self keeps pace with the growing unreality of the false self until, in extremes of schizophrenic breakdown, the whole personality disintegrates. "I don't know Sir, just not myself lately," (p. 20) answers Daniel Coley when Mr Mac asks him what is happening in his life.

Barney Snow, "cast adrift, lost, unrelated to anything", (Cormier 1983, p. 87) finds himself "tumbling into oblivion," (p. 78) broken like Humpty Dumpty. Somewhere in his mind he recalls "... he crashed into a mirror that broke into a thousand fragments, sending pieces of himself, splintered and jagged, across the face of the night."

Whilst for Adam Farmer, whose memories are piecemeal, the “entire picture is not quite clear” (Cormier 1977, p. 165) because the teenage boy’s authentic identity has been shattered, not only by the death of his parents, but by an underlying sense of artifice. Unbeknownst to him, his family were part of a Witness Protection Program.

For some of the boys in the novels studied, there is no escape from the tragedy of their circumstances. The traumatised boys who failed to negotiate the perilous journey through the labyrinth to find harmonious unity, the Philosopher’s Stone, suffered psychic dismemberment and/or death.

There is no hope for Tony in Marsden’s *Dear Miffy*. The characters in Cormier’s novels all meet with tragedy.

The Joy and Sorrow of Cormier’s Characters

“In the darkness, moist and warm and wet,” (Cormier 1974, p. 185) Jerry Renault of *The Chocolate War* is painfully defeated in a staged fight with another student. He fought with dignity until the magnitude of the situation coupled with physical injury overwhelmed him. He floats in and out of consciousness. “It doesn’t even hurt anymore. See? I’m floating, floating above the pain.” (p. 186) Jerry’s persecutors “...murdered him,” (p. 7) because he was different. He dared to be an individual.

At the conclusion of *The Bumblebee Flies Anyway*, Barney Snow is bedridden, the only movement the blinking of his eyes. Indistinguishable faces peer over the boy and he hears voices, voices he no longer recognises. At the end, “often, in the grayness,

he searched for something lost, beyond his reach. A face he had known. He tried to summon the face but couldn't. Her face." (Cormier 1983, p. 241) The memory of Barney's mother has been obliterated by way of drugs and psychotherapy; however the boy, facing death on his own, is haunted by a longing for his mother. But, "no one could help him anymore." (p. 241)

"The medicine is working now and I can feel it in my veins. It is singing in my veins along with me." (Cormier 1977, p. 228) Adam sits alone on his bed at his home in "a haven for troubled people" (p. 225) singing the final stanza of his favourite nursery rhyme. "The cheese stands alone. I am the cheese." (p. 229); the young man is utterly alone in his nothingness. Reality and dreams, truths and illusions are inseparable for Adam Farmer. "Darkness gathers" (p. 211), the lost boy as he nurses Pokey the Pig in his fourteen year old arms.

Cormier's readers can immediately engage with the plight of his characters. The first person voice allows the reader to mentally enter into the feeling and spirit of raw emotional turmoil, the pity for and the fear felt by the 'lost' boys in Cormier's novels as also will be felt by Marcas Oswald in *Crossing Borders*. Their emotional pain is palpable.

The struggle to achieve emotional autonomy is an intense experience, particularly for boys without mothers and/or fathers; the "parentless world (is) the worst nightmare imaginable" (Jones 2005/2006, p, 74). Everyone is alone in the world; however, young people feel more lonely and isolated during adolescence. Cormier provides readers with an opportunity to escape their own worries and appreciate the good things in their own lives by sharing in the stories of his melancholy young men. His novels are significant

for the very reason that they are tragic, and tragic stories are as important as happy stories because life is not always untrammelled bliss.

Nevertheless there are ephemeral moments of harmonious unity for the teenage boys in Cormier's novels (1974, 1977, 1983). These moments of sheer joy "breaking through the grayness and loneliness, glowing and glistening" (Cormier 1983, p. 241) provide an escape from reality, a comforting paradise for the characters, and therefore the readers. These tender moments encourage the reader to believe that abandoning hope is not an option, and the struggle is important to balance the bleakness and the death. Humans will not always triumph over tragedy; however, the moments of sheer joy which make everything worthwhile must be treasured. It is possible to emerge from "black time of suffering, despair and melancholia" (Abraham 1998, p. 135) if only for a brief moment.

The Positive Impact of 'Negative' Novels in YA Literature

“The ordinary that we hold up for public viewing can always be mined to reveal layers of the extraordinary.” (Blain 2008, p. 9)

In Georgia Blain’s recently published memoir entitled ‘Births Deaths and Marriages’, the author shares with the reader the sadness and anger she felt during her teenage years growing up with her brother Jonathon. He died of an overdose after a long battle with schizophrenia. The teenage girl, who craved a ‘normal’ family life would possibly have benefited from having had access to a novel about a young person enduring the same circumstances. She felt isolated because her “... brother’s illness marked us out, in my mind, as strange. Families like the one (my mother) wrote about did exist (or so I thought), but we weren’t one of them.” (Blain 2008, p. 9)

‘Negative’ or ‘problem’ novels, which are sometimes perceived as corrupting the minds of young people and therefore dooming their future, have the potential to help and provide solace for young adults, many of whom are living in difficult, often painful situations. Marina, the protagonist in Marsden’s novel *So Much To Tell You* is sickened by the fact her family life does not resemble American TV shows, “where everyone gets on so well together, and the parents are so understanding and caring and compassionate and everyone always talks over a problem and that way they solve it.” (Marsden 1987, p. 34). Marina needs to know that behind closed doors there are thousands of others like her in similar circumstances. Many families who appear to be leading ordinary and functional lives are often struggling with extraordinary circumstances. Thus, realistic and

emotionally raw YA novels can help young adult readers realise they are not alone, and that feeling lonely, rejected, fearful, sad or angry is okay. Readers who relate to a character in a sympathetic novel realistically portraying a troubled family situation may well find alternative methods to help them solve their own problems before they reach desperation point.

‘Negative’ characters such as Marina and Tony are compelling because life is not untrammelled bliss like an American TV show. No one is perfect. Everyone makes mistakes. Life is messy and unpredictable. Things do not always turn out the way we want them to.

Young readers are not only drawn to reading about characters in stories that mirror their own lives, they also like reading about different people encountering foreign situations. Stories that give young adults an opportunity to walk in someone else’s shoes by experiencing intense new emotions and visiting places they would not normally go to in their ordinary lives can be enlightening, whilst encouraging empathy for other human beings. Thus, authors of YA fiction are in a prime position to provide young readers with vicarious experiences; the opportunity to make mistakes and realise the consequences of those mistakes, learning lessons but without the tears.

The other positive impact of ‘negative’ novels is by way of the discussion of adult issues, because YA readers often feel grown up if they are reading such novels. It could also be suggested there is something exciting about subject matter which has possibly been deemed unsuitable for some young adults. Peer pressure often persuades young adults to read ‘negative’ novels.

Authors writing for young adults have a moral obligation to provide accurate information with positive messages. To nurture and to provide joy or hope in a 'negative' novel which includes 'unforeseen shoreless seas and stars uncounted", (Saxby 1998, p. 122) may provide much-needed guidance out of the labyrinth, or a means to a rebirth for troubled young readers.

Gary Crew, the Spiritual Guide

Renewal and rebirth are issues central to the novels written by Gary Crew. Although the problems of life cannot always be resolved, Crew provides spiritual guidance and hope for teenage readers because the possibility of redemption, new beginnings or a rebirth is always close at hand, just a page away. The author reminds his readers there are many greater powers than themselves in the universe. His open-ended stories are fantastic, often without rational explanation; strange, supernatural and serendipitous. Surprising, like life.

The House of Tomorrow and *The Blue Feather* are interwoven with alchemical thought and Eastern philosophies. Simon Meekam's spiritual guide on a journey through the Western Australian desert in search of 'self' is a camel driver called Atman. Atman, according to Hindu philosophy, is the immortal aspect of the mortal existence. Atman's name in Sanskrit means 'one with the self.' (McKenna & Pearce 1999, p. 222)

Mala Glass is one of Simon's travelling companions in *The Blue Feather*. Mala's grandmother, an Indian woman and a devout Hindu, used to tell her granddaughter stories

from Hindu mythology. The mention of the Garuda at the outset of the novel is significant because not only is the Garuda a bird, and birds are a symbol of “the gifts that life holds” (Crew 1997, p. 243), the Garuda is also the fantastic bird of Hindu mythology. The magical powers of the Garuda can eliminate the effects of poison from the bodies of worshippers. The Garuda features on the Indonesian coat of arms. Seventeen feathers on each wing, eight feathers on the tail and forty five feathers on the bird’s neck denote the date of Indonesia’s independence proclamation: 17th August 1945.

This date is important in *Crossing Borders*. It is not only Marcos’s birthday, but it is the day he must leave the Timeless Place. The date symbolises Marcos’s attainment of emotional autonomy and independent status, his renewed strength of spirit and his chancing upon the Philosopher’s Stone, harmonious unity.

Daniel Coley of *The House of Tomorrow* (1987) managed to overcome the difficulties in his life and “he was no longer a candidate for the ‘problem basket,’” (p. 133) when he was engulfed in flames as he attempted to save the life of his grandfather. Mr Mac receives a letter written on the day of Daniel’s death. “It doesn’t matter what others think, even if they reckon you’re crazy, you have to go on and grow and learn who you are – and you know who I am better than my own father.” (p. 180) Daniel’s life was transformed by the kindness of an empathetic teacher, his spiritual guide, who took the time to listen to the concerns of a ‘lost’ teenage boy.

“Crew’s imagery employs a hybridising of religions, especially the way in which concepts of death by fire and water are used in the text.” (McKenna & Pearce 1999, p. 50) Daniel, with a white Australian father and an Asian mother, was raised by his foster parents in a Christian household. The child who is christened will be purified with holy

water to symbolise acceptance into the Kingdom of God, whereas fire is a purifying element according to the teachings of Buddha.

Buddhism teaches that birth, death and rebirth are part of the continuing process of change, the philosophical wheel. The circulation of elements is identical to “the process the alchemists describe as the conversion of the body into spirit, and spirit into body ... to form a perfect new being, the Philosopher’s Stone.” (Abraham 1998, p. 138)

According to this doctrine at the moment of death, when the earthly life is over, and the body can no longer survive, the mind is separated from the body to be reborn into another state of existence. Daniel Coley’s spirit is re-incarnated into the adopted son of Mr Mac’s friends. The boy is re-named Danny in an evocation of the Baptismal and Confirmation rites of the Christian faith.

“In our Faith we do not believe Danny is ‘dead’, but it does not stop me from grieving.” (Crew 1987, p. 183) Daniel’s foster mother informs Mr Mac about the death of her adopted son. Christian and Buddhist teachings both share a belief in the afterlife. Death is not seen as an end to life; it is the beginning of a new phase of existence, “oneness” with the universe. (Mackenzie 1998, p. 13) This knowledge is central to spiritual well-being.

In *Crossing Borders* Marcos is reborn. Rebirths provide hope, synonymous with having found the Philosopher’s Stone, and difficult to attain without some kind of inner belief.

Cultural and Spiritual Values

“Spirituality has been cast out of the world and a mechanical and materialistic universe substituted.” (Crang 1998, p. 105) The novels studied are all set in the West. The novels, with the exception of *The House of Tomorrow* and *The Blue Feather* by Crew, are all novels based on Western value systems, whereas *Crossing Borders* is the story of a Western teenage boy in an Eastern culture. The setting for *Crossing Borders* is the Island of the Gods in the East. The writer was influenced to adopt this perspective because as previously mentioned:

Multinational studies by the World Health Organisation, extending over two decades, show that people who have schizophrenia in developing countries have significantly higher chances of recovery than those who live in the industrialised world. (Deveson 1998, p. 50)

Thus, the reasons why people with schizophrenia may have significantly higher chances of recovery in developing countries were explored through contrasting Western and Eastern cultural and spiritual values. The writer specifically chose the Island of the Gods to examine these values because the peaceful Balinese lead a traditional communal and spiritual way of life.

In a globalised world of cultural homogeneity, materialism and modernisation, the Balinese people continue to preserve the cultural traditions and religious practices of their ancestors which provides the glue of communal life. Each person has a valuable role to play in the daily life of the village and all are encouraged to express their artistic nature.

The Balinese-Hindu existence is also a continuous cycle of birth, death and rebirth, until one attains *moksa*, the moment when the spirit, freed of all earthly desires, becomes one with the macrocosm. On the Island of the Gods Marcas Oswald attains the highest state of enlightenment after a near death experience at the temple above the Wos Gorge; the meeting place of the eastern and western distributaries of the Wos River. Having haemorrhaged after an injury in the rice fields, Marcas goes into shock and loses consciousness. He finds himself re-united with friends and family in the Timeless Place. Marcas meets with the Light, the all-loving, all-forgiving universal soul of the Creator who encourages the young man to believe in himself, to have faith because there are many greater and invisible powers in the universe. Marcas accepts the fact he must return to the Village of the Artists on the Island of the Gods in order to complete his dream journey.

“According to the Rosary of the Philosophers, “No solution ought to be made without blood.” (Abraham 1998, p. 28) Blood is a transforming agent. Simon Meekam’s revelation about his mysterious glass eye towards the closing stages of Crew’s novel, *The Blue Feather* (2002) symbolises the end of this young man’s journey towards self-knowledge. Simon tells Atman when he was five years old he was chased by older boys. Sharp sticks of a bush pierced his eye. “There was blood. Awful black blood. Thick. Everywhere. All over me. And dark. Everywhere was dark.” (Crew 1997, p. 228) The boy who “stepped forward into the dark that would be the making of him: the death of him, yet the life of him” (p. 192) is finally able to face the world without squinting.

Simon knows he is not a coward. He has proved to himself he can overcome adversity by negotiating the geographical and mental hardships of his testing and arduous

journey through the desert, his own labyrinth. And in doing so, Simon has learned "... what it means to be a human being. Well, one who's truly alive ... Truly growing." (p. 240) The teenage boy, who has confronted the pain of the past and learned from his mistakes, has regained his spirit. He is ready to face the future with optimism and without fear. "I am Simon Meekam. And I will be. I will be ... OK?" (p. 222) Simon, who discovers an interest in history, decides he will prove himself by spending time at the museum, putting together a display, "a view of the heavens." (p. 246) The once-troubled young man has found harmonious unity, the Philosopher's Stone.

The best years of my life.

The other young man who makes a successful transition from childhood to adulthood to realise harmonious unity is Jack Travis, the author of *The best years of my life* (2001). Jack was "different from the pack" (p. 135), so he was socially ostracised by his peers, and did not complete his final year at school, refusing to be subjected to any further bullying or humiliation. The boy suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder and accompanying depression; however, "living with depression was still far more pleasant than the endless fear of my days in school" (p. 139) which he described as "staying alive during a thirteen year torture test." (p. 127) The boy, who once planned to commit suicide because suicide would end the "tiredness" so he could enjoy "everlasting rest" (p. 100), was helped by a spiritual woman called Binny. Binny guided Jack as he found the inner resources to work through the trauma of his past. As the young man

emerged from his depression, he realised his dream of becoming an artist by writing *The best years of my life*, in the hope that no other child would have to endure the same sadness as he did during his school years. Those who read *Crossing Borders* will also find in Marcas's journey of self-discovery, the strength of spirit and creative resources to solve their own problems.

The world is not just a grim place of pain and sadness, and literature should not be either. Stories with optimistic conclusions that show young adults how to address problems may be instrumental in helping readers to find their own Philosopher's Stone.

Crew's novels all provide positive endings. Daniel Coley, engulfed in flames in *The House of Tomorrow* is reincarnated; Abel Hawkings of *The Diviner's Son* joins his sweetheart in the spirit world and the fate of Steven which remains a mystery allows the reader to imagine his own conclusion. Themes of renewal and rebirth, central to Crew's novels, also play a significant role in *Crossing Borders*, as Marcas realises he has an opportunity to fulfil his dreams of becoming an artist.

A Voice for the Broken-Hearted

Crossing Borders was created to provide a voice for those human beings who are rejected by society because they suffer from malignant sadness, soul-loss or melancholy – mental illness. The schizophrenic condition would be much easier to cope with if

people better understood the nature of mental illness as described by Lewis Wolpert, author of *Malignant Sadness*:

It was the worst experience of my life. ... I was in a state that bears no resemblance to anything I had experienced before. It was not just feeling very low, depressed in the commonly used sense of the word. I was seriously ill. I was totally self-involved, negative and thought about suicide most of the time. I could not think properly, let alone work, and wanted to remain curled up in bed all day. I could not ride my bicycle or go out on my own. I had panic attacks if left alone. And there were numerous physical symptoms – my whole skin would seem to be on fire and I developed uncontrollable twitches. Every new physical symptom caused new anxiety. I was terrified ... sleep was impossible without sleeping pills: those only worked for a few hours, and when I woke up I felt worse. The future was hopeless. I was convinced that I would never work again or recover. There was a strong fear that I might go mad. (p. vii)

Commentary on the process whereby ‘Crossing Borders’ was conceived, planned and written.

Plan

“Sometimes I write in the dark, by moon – or street-light,” states Gaylene Perry, the author of the paper, ‘*Writing in the Dark: Exorcising the Exegesis*’. (Perry 2006, p. 1) Perry talks about how she conjures up her own environment of inspiration from things that have originated a long time ago, she immerses herself in her imagination and the images and ideas flow as she creates her story.

The writer of ‘Crossing Borders’ also immersed herself in her imagination. She also had the same experience of ideas and images flowing as if from another world; perhaps, the world ruled by the irrational, the magical and the intuitive? And there were times when she felt as if she was channelling her son’s thoughts. Prior to the death of her son, the writer had asked if he would help her write his story and he agreed. This was not to be.

Thus this writer did not formulate a formal plan for the narrative. There is no notebook or a journal with ideas for a storyline, pencil sketches of characters or a list of themes to be included, even though the writer knew what she was trying to achieve; a dream-like narrative to reflect the mind of Marcas Oswald. The fusion of fantasy and reality was intended to create a surreal world as a means of providing young adult readers with a vicarious experience of schizophrenia. It was hoped that ‘Crossing Borders’ would

promote empathy and understanding for young people suffering with all kinds of mental illness by providing a new seeing place in the field of literature for young adults.

The narrative was subtitled 'A Scrapbook Journal' because the writer wished to include the lyrics from songs, verses from poetry and interesting snippets of philosophy collected over the years.

Technical issues

Third person omniscient narration with different voices provides the reader with a variety of approaches to mirror the experience of schizophrenia. I could not make judgements, have opinions and biases or express the emotions of the character Marcos; because the story, although fictitious, was written from personal experience. To attempt to assume my son's persona by writing 'Crossing Borders' in the first person was not an option, nor was writing as a male teenager. The teenager's point of view is too narrow and therefore, too constrictive. Teenagers are not always able to appreciate other points of view.

Linear or non-linear structure

Memory and dreaming do not operate as linear narrative. When one thinks about the past, the past does not always present events in a chronological order; memories like dreams are mostly jumbled and out of order. Marcos is caught in limbo between reality

and fantasy. His mind is not ordered. The text was intended to reflect the schizophrenic man's surreal state of mind. 'Crossing Borders' initially went backwards and forwards between the past and the present to allow the reader to know something of the background to Marcos's life prior to his arrival on the Island of the Gods. Non-chronological flashbacks illuminate crucial points in the protagonist's life.

Tense

The writer employed the past tense for the necessary flashbacks as a way of providing the background to Marcos's life. Once Marcos arrives on the Island of the Gods the present tense creates a sense of immediacy for the reader, as he/she is living in the moment of the narrator thus, vicariously experiencing the same circumstances.

Problems encountered and how they were overcome.

The main problem resulted from the intensely personal nature of the narrative. The writer found it difficult to create the fictional character Marcos Oswald from the painful memories of her son's experience with schizophrenia. It was at times an emotional and psychological minefield, trying to remain objective to tell Lucas's story through the eyes of Marcos. The writer had to imagine by way of her experience as the mother of a son with schizophrenia how heart-broken and rejected her son must have felt when his world was turned upside down.

To try and depict an alien or foreign culture vividly was fraught with difficulty, as was portraying the psyche of a person suffering with a mental illness. The writer had to avoid too much depressing detail as not to bore the YA reader. Graphic details of mental illness were not included because the writer felt such information would not be helpful. The writer had no ability to depict what happens inside the mind of a human being who is experiencing a psychotic episode.

There was an attempt to inject humour into the narrative of 'Crossing Borders' as a means of dissipating tension, without trivialising the seriousness of Marcos's complaint. The writer wanted to create balance without becoming too didactic in order to keep the attention of a YA reader.

18,899 words

Reflection

To go to the land of the dead, to bring back to the land of the living someone who has gone there – it's a very deep human desire, and thought also to be very deeply forbidden. But a life of a sort can be bestowed by writing. (Atwood 2002, p. 172)

For this writer, creating a 'fantastic (al)' ² novel as a tribute to her son's short life bestowed an opportunity to transform lead into gold. In believing "the greatest defense and protection against solitude, loneliness and isolation from our fellows, is the re-creative force of art," (Aldama 2003, p. 109) the writer utilised alchemical thought to blend Balinese culture with the modern world of popular culture to create a magical realist text, a new 'seeing place' for young adults.

Magical Realism, described as "An expression of the New World Reality which at once combines the rational elements of the European super-civilisation and the irrational elements of a primitive America" (Moore 1998, p. 1), has been reborn in an Asian culture. Marcas Oswald's journey to the Island of the Gods is one of supernatural happenings; the young Western man is confronted with mythical creatures, gods and demons, the souls of ancestors and healers on his quest to find the Philosopher's Stone, harmonious unity. "Fanciful reality completely replace(s) the world of the living," (Allende 1991, p. 21) in the marvellous realms of Magical Realism.

² 'To be defined as 'fantastic (al)' a novel needs two features: the possibility of supernatural explanation and the integration of new and old myths and cultural influences.' (McKenna and Pearce 1999, p. 88)

The fusion of reality and fantasy was employed to reflect Marcos's dream-like state of mind, the "black time of suffering, despair and melancholy," (Abraham 1998, p. 135) he experiences on his journey of self-discovery; travelling to the Island of the Gods allows Marcos to return to the "external world – the interpersonal world and the realm of human collectivities." (Laing, 1967, p. 116) Adolescence can be a miserable time for many young adults. Some young adults will be diagnosed with schizophrenia, the most debilitating symptom of which is depression, and "Depression or mental illness is involved in 90% of suicide cases." (Sparke 1999, p. 32)

However mental illness need not be a death sentence. Although there is no cure, recovery is possible. *Crossing Borders* was created to disseminate information, to increase young adults' understanding of mental illness and to offer hope because too many YA novels, in dealing with this topic, fail to educate and/or provide positive messages.

"We have to cope with the stigma society puts on us, from doctors, teachers and politicians and others, but the stigma that is most challenging and most likely to result in us taking our lives is the stigma against ourselves." (Pollard 2005, p. 39) The mentally ill, subjected to their feelings of shame and humiliation, yearn to feel accepted and valued, free to express their ideas and unique experience of life, capable of producing valuable insight or works of art. No one chooses to have a mental illness, but the illness does not have to preclude a valuable life, one that has a purpose.

The neglect of the mentally ill is etched on the worn out faces of the destitute and the homeless. The lost souls abandoned by society who drift ghost-like through the city streets have failed to "adapt to the external world – the interpersonal world and the realm

of human collectivities.” (Laing 1996, p. 116) Their ability to make a contribution to the productivity of a modern capitalistic society has been compromised by circumstances not of their own making.

The writer would like young adults to ‘see’ the homeless and the mentally ill. These human beings are equally, if not more deserving, of care and respect as the physically unwell. These vulnerable and isolated human beings in pain have the same needs; air, water, food, security and stability, love and acceptance, a sense of belonging, and respect.

The plight of the homeless, predominantly males, more often than not young males ‘in crisis’ and at risk of ‘self-harm’, is a modern day tragedy. Mental illness often goes undetected in young male adults because this group, traditionally discouraged from expressing their feelings, are reluctant to seek help for fear of being ‘labelled’ and/or ostracised from mainstream society.

Most young adults will encounter mental illness, either directly or indirectly, at some stage during their lives. For them *Crossing Borders* is a novel with positive messages. The narrative was written to provide hope for young adults if they are diagnosed with mental illness and also to encourage understanding and acceptance of those with mental illness, and those people who share their world.

Young adults need to be aware of the link between the usage of recreational drugs and mental illness. Many recreational drug users will escape unscathed; however, for people predisposed to genetic illness illicit drugs may trigger psychosis, mental illness, depression and finally, death.

“The great tragedy of psychosis is that (by definition) it precludes awareness that something is going wrong – which means it’s vital for (families and professionals) to show insight.” (McLean 2003, p. 167) Families and professionals educated to recognise the symptoms of psychosis will be equipped to provide an early intervention strategy. They will be in a better position to provide reassurance, guidance, occupational therapy – creative pastimes; a pathway for those who have become ‘lost’ in the labyrinth.

The re-creative force of art is our “greatest defense and protection against solitude, loneliness and isolation from our fellows” (Aldama 2003, p. 109); therefore, this writer believes fostering an appreciation in the arts, especially for children and young adults is vital. Artistic creativity is one way to help young adults explore and express their feelings, their inner space. Those people with emotional difficulties, trauma and personal growth issues could benefit from creative pastimes; the making of art is healing and life-enhancing.

It has long been recognised that artists must cross ‘borders’ of time, place and space to break down barriers and in order to provide new ways of ‘seeing’ the world. Lee Mingwei’s ‘Writing the Unspoken’ exhibit at the *Back to the Future* Third Asia-Pacific Triennial (1999), cultural event at the Queensland Art Gallery also provided a source of inspiration for *Crossing Borders*.

After the death of his grandmother, Mingwei, in dealing with grief, found comfort in writing down the things he wished he had said to his grandmother during her lifetime. The artist set up contemplative spaces corresponding to Buddhist meditation positions. Pens and writing paper were supplied for gallery-goers who were invited to compose letters to the living or the dead, to express messages of gratitude, insight and forgiveness.

Visitors were encouraged to read the contents of the unsealed envelopes. Many contained heart-warming reflections; others were intimate thoughts of loss, abuse and regret. The act of reading wrenched visitors from the anonymity and politeness of the museum into the unfiltered, emotion-charged world of real people.

Mingwei's profoundly egalitarian art that worked at dissolving distances and crossing borders offered a direct connection between the artist and the audience and between individual members of the public. The literary genre of Magical Realism also works at dissolving distances and crossing borders. Magical realist narratives have the potential to provoke thought, and to be a catalyst for change because authors concerned with social issues can provide a voice for the 'forgotten of society'; disadvantaged people such as the mentally ill who, unable to conform to the 'norms' of mainstream society, are marginalised as 'others'.

Crossing Borders was created to provide a voice for young adult males 'in crisis' and 'at risk' of self harm. The novel is dedicated to those young adult males like Lucas Chapman who feel different, and as such, are very much alone in the world. Such human beings consumed by sadness desperately need help; compassion, care and hope for the future.

The writer's lived experience and the study of YA novels with accompanying research into mental illness provided a deep understanding of the schizophrenic condition. The writer believes young adults could benefit from gaining a greater insight into this increasingly common, but little understood mental illness, called schizophrenia. Thus, it is hoped *Crossing Borders* will help those young adults who do encounter schizophrenia either directly or indirectly in the future.

Magical realist stories are characterised by open-ended conclusions. The open-ended conclusion of *Crossing Borders* symbolises new beginnings for the protagonist. The cultural values of a ceremonial way of life in a developing country do provide Marcos with recovery in a new 'seeing place'. The young man who has crossed geographical and psychological borders on the Island of the Gods finds his Philosopher's Stone, and, in so doing, is reborn.

Lucas Chapman, psychically resurrected between the pages of an innovative novel has found a home, a place to belong, on the Island of the Gods, in the land of the living.

"I write of Melancholy, by being busy I avoid Melancholy." (Wolpert 1999, p. x)

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