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Notes from the Margin: Understanding Collective Reading Experience in St. John's, Newfoundland

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**Notes from the Margin: Understanding Collective Reading Experience in St.
John's, Newfoundland**

by

Jennifer Jane Rottmann

**A thesis proposal submitted
in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the collaborative degree of Master of Arts in Education and Women's Studies**

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ABSTRACT

Book clubs are a popular social phenomenon, yet they have been significantly understudied in academic research. By understanding the functions and uses of collective meaning-making through articulations of The Granny Bates Book Club members in St. John's, Newfoundland, this study seeks to illuminate how readers in diasporic communities discursively engage, specifically with children's literature, to negotiate subjective positionings in complex and contradictory ways. The provocative space of book club readership, marked by the comings and goings of diasporic islander identity, legitimizes the members' enjoyment and pleasure gained from reading children's fiction. It acts as a learning space in which members deliberately exchange historical knowledges, display aesthetic evaluations of text, negotiate social, economical, geographical, and regional struggles, as well resist/adhere to gender roles and expectations, all of which adds to banked cultural capital in their daily lives. These 'notes from the margin' speak to the enduring possibilities of everyday cultural practices, specifically as practiced within an interpretative community of female readers perched on the eastern edge of Canada.

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INTRODUCTION

Though reading groups have a genealogy that stretches back centuries, the phenomenon of studying book clubs has been largely ignored and under-researched for a variety of reasons. Academic researchers have historically seen women's reading of canonized middlebrow fiction to be of little importance, as it is neither viewed as part of a resistance movement nor a potentially revolutionary culture (Long, 2003). Research conducted on reading groups in the past three decades, however, has brought to light the enormous complexity of processes that occur within this misinterpreted space, including but not confined to, acts of subversion, negotiations of subjectivity, and conflicting notions of collective identity, fantasy, transference and power (Devlin-Glass, 2001; Kaufman, 2004; Long, 2003; Radway, 1983,1984,1988,1997). Reading has always been a political act and as such cannot be separated from questions of power, privilege, exclusion and social distinction; yet it is often viewed as narrowly transmissive and meagrely informative in the field of education (Farley & Robertson, in press; Long, 2003; Robertson, 1997).

The collective reading experience is a beautiful and powerful phenomenon: a distinctive cultural and social outlet in the daily lives of many people, especially women, across the country. For myself, reading is one of my favourite pastimes, but there is nothing that I enjoy more than being able to talk about books with others in a cozy space like a book club. Negotiating meaning with others not only enhances my understanding of the books I choose to read, but enables a constant analytical grappling, entangled with insight, interpretation and social and individual acts of meaning-construction. To engage in reading processes that occur amongst a particular group of readers within a distinctive

geographical area like St. John's, Newfoundland will add richness to the studies of how individuals in diasporic communities negotiate aspects of subjectivity through the collective reading experience. By diasporic communities, I imply those collectivities that are marked by migrations, displacements, locations and the journeys that surround forced movements of people. Quite literally, 'diaspora' means a dispersion from 'home,' a centre, a locus; an economically and historically forced occurrence which, arguably, many Newfoundlanders and residents of Newfoundland have experienced (Delisle, 2008). My study will further contribute to an understanding of the intersubjective relations between reading, and identities of a regional, cultural and social nature, which are fundamental aspects of educational discourse and individual subjectivities. This study is part of Dr. Judith Robertson's larger SSHRC funded research project entitled "Saltwater Chronicles: Reading the Regional Book Club of Newfoundland and Labrador."¹

By understanding how cultural groups (some of which are marginalized by poverty, geography, age, and aspects of gender) explore opportune spaces wherein empowerment and positive negotiation of aspects of self can occur, the study of the collective reading experience in St. John's, Newfoundland can effectively challenge the transmissive model of reading prevalent in schools today. Instead of teachers acting as the owners and distributors of knowledge, teaching can and should be seen "as a performative act... a

¹ Dr. Robertson's study *Saltwater Chronicles: Understanding Reading in the Regional Book Club of Newfoundland and Labrador* was funded by SSHRC (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council) during 2003-2007, Grant # 0401-213-03, Dr. Judith P. Robertson, Principal Investigator. This funded research was approved by The Social Sciences and Humanities Ethics Research Committee (File # 01-04-06) for active research to December 31, 2007.

catalytic function that incites students to construct their own meanings. Pedagogy is unpredictable, incomplete, and immeasurable” (Silin, 2006, p. 236) much like our sense of self and subjective positionings which are often negotiated in the space of a book club.

Reading not only affects performance in all academic subjects, but also the success of learning endeavours throughout students’ entire lives. Reading provides a space where movements of self-identification and subjectivity are manifest, and is one main resource that individuals, both children and adults, use to make sense of their worlds. At the same time, there is a potential for some groups to have their understandings and experiences reinforced through the text being read, while other students’ identities and experiences may be marginalized (Dei, James, Karumanchery, Wilson, & Zine, 2000). By engaging with literature read collectively within a particularly vibrant literary culture such as St. John’s, Newfoundland, where over 20 book clubs currently exist (Robertson, 2007), and by trying to understand how members of book clubs use the group reading experience to negotiate aspects of power and personal meaning, I believe that the knowledge that emerges from this study will assist educators in challenging the dominant discourses that often misappropriate difference, subjectivities and knowledge production. The Granny Bates Book Club (GBBC), of St. John’s, Newfoundland, which I had the privilege and pleasure of engaging with as a participant observer in the fall of 2007, is an eclectic group of adult readers who meet monthly to discuss their reading of children’s literature². In working with this group, I focus on the following research questions:

² Although I use the term ‘children’s literature’ as that is the manner in which the GBBC members identified the genre, the choice of literature is more typically described as young adult or juvenile fiction, targeted at youths ranging in age from 12 to 18 years.

- Why do adult readers specifically choose to read children's literature, and how do readers use a book club to identify with or relate to aspects of childhood?
- How do adult readers use the collective reading experience of children's texts to relate to themselves, each other and wider economic, social, historical, geographical, regional and cultural struggles?
- How is gender practiced within a book club in ways that help produce gender identities?

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In the past three decades, there has been a growing interest in book clubs as a social and cultural phenomenon. Such work presents a “challenge to the traditional boundaries of both literary and historical studies” (Flint, 2006, p. 514) by paying particular attention to how reading is consumed and used by the readers themselves and the powerful discussions that book club meeting often provoke. In *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, Nafisi (2003) articulates her experience of forming a book club under the precarious³ gaze of the Islamic Republic in the late 1990’s, where the book club functions as an active enclave of survival and revolutionary courage, and where the women who composed its ranks ‘read to live,’ instead of ‘living to read.’ As a “pocket[s] of freedom”, (Nafisi, 2003, p. 25), this book club gave its members an opportunity to indulge in their love of literature, while simultaneously being able to voice their frustrations, and growing understanding, of the restrictive regime under which they were forced to live. Reading became an escape from gender oppression, a site for pedagogical subversion and “a promise that life can be otherwise” (Flint, 2006, p. 511). Group discussions of fiction gave this club an opportunity “for the simultaneous recognition of individuality and solidarity that reading has historically provided women” (Flint, 2006, p. 533). It allowed these women not only to recognize their own subjectivities, but to create and negotiate new ones that were not the “figment of someone else’s dreams” (Nafisi, 2003, p.28). Even so, the “reading practices...the book [is] describing and encouraging, and what

³ I use the term ‘precarious’ as it was forbidden to read North American literature during this time and consequences could have resulted in death.

reading practices are being declared [as] significant intellectual engagements with literature, and with Iran,” in the popular positioning of Nafisi’s book, remain understudied aspects of group reading experience (Hay, 2007, p. 7).

In her impressive 3-year study of contemporary women’s reading groups in the United States, Long (2003) argues that the collective reading experience has historically been, and remains, an informal educative space for women to assert agency and resistance to patriarchal and colonial structures. Long’s work problematizes the traditional view of reading as a wholly private endeavor, in which scholars dismiss the importance and question the practice of reading as “epiphenomenal, marginal or inconsequential” (p. 17). Arguably, the historical image of the “woman reader” as portrayed by Long (2003), and Seaholm (1988), as a passive consumer of culture activity defunct of educational status has left an indelible mark on the manner in which contemporary women readers and book clubs alike are viewed. Echoing historical studies of literary societies of the eighteenth and nineteenth century (Flint, 1993; Seaholm, 1988), Long argues that reading groups offered a “semi-public” sphere (p. 49), allowing for the merging of public and private life, and the opportunity for women to partake in social activities outside the home. It has been argued by several scholars that many early North American social movements have been inspired by women’s reading clubs, such as the construction of libraries, inculcation of kindergarten and mandatory schooling, scholarships, crime prevention campaigns, women’s right to vote and temperance movements (Long, 2003; Seaholm, 1988; Sedo, 2004). In conjunction with their contemporary counterparts, literary societies provided “a common language and a medium of intellectual and social exchange that helped define themselves and formulate

responses to a larger world” (Sicherman, 1989, p. 209, as cited in Sedo, 2004, p. 19), and encouraged women to redefine themselves “to some degree, different from that of wife, mother and homemaker” (Long, 2003, p. 49). Historical accounts of literary societies not only illuminate the agency actualized by the members, but also provide the researcher with a historical points “from which to “[witness] contemporary book clubs norms, customs and values, both articulated and assumed” (Sedo, p. 2004, p. 19).

Since the function of book clubs has significantly changed over time, consequently, the ways in which book clubs are represented in research is also changing. Negotiating aspects of identity formation, narrating the self, and relating the self to the larger social world, have been some of the most consistently shared experiences of book clubs. However, the drastic changes in women’s lives, in an era of contemporary post-modernity, speak to a shift in these negotiations as well. Since the lives of women have changed in virtual, post-colonial times, the manner in which experiences are projected through the reading of literature has also shifted. As articulated by Long (2003), women’s lives in the nineteenth-century were more constrained in the public sphere, possibly causing the need to assert their dedication to social motives within book clubs. Presently, though the passions of social justice strongly permeate the meetings of many book clubs⁴, there is little research to date that investigates the uses of collective reading to augment gendered practices of social care.

⁴ This is substantiated by my own involvement in book clubs as well as Robertson’s (2007) findings, in which, for example, monetary collection for scholarships, hand-knit clothing, or food for food banks are a regular ritual within women’s book clubs in St. John’s, NL.

Long suggests that both past and present book clubs proudly assert their tendency to balance the ‘classics’ with ‘good’ mainstream fiction, tending to shun popular culture and avant-garde literature. Radway’s (1983) influential study of women reading romance novels, as opposed to the more mainstream fiction that book clubs often insist upon, is notably the cornerstone of research into gendered reading practices. Radway problematizes the basis for certain literary criticisms, which disparage the reading choices made by romance readers. Radway argues that our cultural knowledge of women’s collective reading experience is incomplete, and warns that researchers must explore what the entire act of romance reading means to the women who buy and read these books. Radway’s (1983) study releases romance readers from the grasp of condescending traditionalists, and by focusing on the actual event of reading, and how the text is interpreted and used by the women who engage with it, she explores beyond the surface of what the text means to these readers. Readers enjoy their self-indulgence, and justify their guilty pleasures by linking their reading of romance novels to the values of escaping domestic drudgery, and the learning of new information.

Radway’s (1983) representation of her relationship with the participants in her study sheds light on the methodological issue of power relations in research. While the dynamics of finding participants for any study is a daunting task, Reinharz (1992) notes how feminist discourse insists upon a continual reflection on the relationship between the researcher and the researched. In writing about the harm inflicted upon Indigenous people through research, Smith (1999) acknowledges that “many indigenous writers see anthropology as representative of what has truly gone wrong with research” (p. 11).

Although she admits that one discipline alone cannot be blamed for the centuries of harm

inflicted on subjugated people, Smith reminds us of the salient moral and political relationship that exists between a researcher and her participants. In her writings, Radway (1983) consistently uses language denoting solidarity: “If we are serious about feminist politics...we would do well not to condescend to romance readers as hopeless traditionalists who are recalcitrant in their refusal to acknowledge the emotional costs of patriarchy” (p. 68). This model of Radway’s (1983) own gendered reality, and her sensitivity to how the gender of her participants becomes a performative aspect of their daily lives, exemplifies the value of self-reflexive language to articulate the conspicuous nature of the relationship between the researcher and her participants.

Throughout many of the empirical studies done on book clubs, a notable theme is the degree of social distinction that members are proud to embrace. As Long (2003) articulates: “Non-readers (even occasional readers!) need not apply” (p. 21). Both practically and conceptually, reading groups create boundaries that separate their participants from other women who, due to their educational or social background, may feel uncomfortable discussing books. This theme of distinction is explored in Devlin-Glass’s (2001) study of the aesthetic and educational objectives of four Australian book clubs that have been in existence since 1946 through the Victoria Council of Adult Education (CAE). The readers were recruited through networks of friendship to enhance the protectionist sentiment of these groups, and the women were adamant that all groups explicitly voiced a value in “freedom, relaxation and intimacy of all-female and female-centered discussions” (p. 574). Far from being passive readers of literature, the women interacted with the CAE and with group members in a “complex dance entailing negotiation, selection, and conflict, and even silent resistance” (p. 575). The women

positioned themselves at times precisely with, and at other times in resistance to “taste hierarchies” put forth by the CAE. Devlin-Glass’s findings indicate that these women’s book groups have a reading repertoire that is ‘middlebrow,’ gendered (i.e., women-centred), and culture-specific. What was found to be of the utmost importance for these women was to see their participation in these group’s discussions as a form of strength and possibility, and in which to maintain their “cultural currency” as literate and intellectual citizens (Bourdieu, 1984, as cited in Devlin-Glass, 2003). Critical of how certain theories fail to get at the meaning of lived everyday practices in peoples’ lives, Devlin-Glass argues that research has also been “gender-neutral, or at worst, dismissive of women’s role as ‘cultural consumers’” (Bourdieu, 1984, as cited in Devlin-Glass, 2003, p. 572). The women readers in Devlin-Glass’s study saw literature as a cultural marker, adding to their store of “cultural capital,” and their degree of social distinction.

The perceived links between education, reading groups and social distinction have been challenged with the wide-spread popularity of Oprah’s Book Club, which has single-handedly revolutionized the perceptions of how book clubs function as ideological spaces of middleclass(ism), power and privilege. As Kaufman (2001) argues, Oprah asserts that the purpose of her book club is “to get America reading”: to reunite literacy and those who can read but for whatever reason have chosen not to. Although Oprah’s Book Club has been well documented in the popular media, it has received little attention from the academic community, and conversely, Oprah makes little reference to formal schooling. This media crazed literary phenomenon deserves attention.

As the theoretical inquiries into the problematics of literacy have increased in the past decades, literacy is understood as something more than merely a cognitive practice.

As Hall (2003) notes, “Literacy, no longer a neutral practice, is an ideological one” (p. 642). With this awareness comes the need to explore the relations governing the social and political functions of popular group reading experience. Hall argues that understanding this literacy/literary formation is significant: theoretically, it has the potential to help academics to advance theories about the ways literacy and the literary imagination are embedded in culture. Pedagogically, it may help teachers to connect with the complexity of students’ literacies, and their motivations for developing meaningful reading experiences beyond the classroom.

Oprah’s role in her Book Club, and the books that she chooses, illustrate the ways in which “hierarchies of taste,” as signalled by Devlin-Glass (2001), take form. Oprah maintains cultural authority as a ‘literacy sponsor’⁵ through the illusion of intimacy. She teaches messages of personal transformation, self-improvement and “good taste.” Simultaneously, she benefits from her success as a literacy sponsor through ratings and revenue, as do the authors of the works she reads. However, there also exists a certain resistance to this mode of literary sponsorship. As Sedo (2004) notes, many book club participants in her study in Vancouver resisted reading “Oprah’s picks,” and were adamant about distinguishing themselves, and their practices, from hers. To read her books was seen as a symbolic gesture towards “lowbrow literature,” and it was important for these women readers to distinguish themselves from the popular, bestseller category that Oprah often favours. While Hall’s (2003) view of Oprah as a literacy sponsor is notably skeptical, he does applaud her for defying the traditional elitist practices of book

⁵ The concept of the literary sponsor comes from Brant (1998) as cited in Hall (2003, p. 649).

clubs and “get America reading again” (Long, 2003, 200). He places significant merit on this populist phenomenon and highlights that Oprah’s Book Club “invites teachers to consider, by contrast, the ways that the classroom study of literature sometimes dims the joy of reading” (p. 665).

The idea of a literary sponsorship, and the valuing of hierarchization in individual “tastes,” while readily apparent in the phenomenon of Oprah’s Book Club, can also be seen in many instances of contemporary book clubs as well. Radway’s (1988) later study of commercialized book clubs in New York City, *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month-Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire*, points out that one of the most fascinating aspects surrounding the book club, was their effort, as social organizations, to create and maintain a “non-hierarchical, non-elitist atmosphere even as it is identified and assumed as a cultural institution with the values associated with high culture” (p. 524). Radway (1988) also shows that, in defining the books their members would read, the editors of the Book-of-the-month-club acted as a literary authority, and made choices which were presumed to be those that would draw “the reader into its world by seemingly erasing the boundaries between the text itself and external reality” (p. 537). The books these editors chose were preoccupied with values that were congruent with the editors’ dominant “middlebrow⁶” identities. Similarly, Oprah, who differs from many

⁶ Middlebrow in this context refers to a culture of taste, historically defined against highbrow academic evaluation of literature, typically seen as professional. The origin of the term is often associated with Virginia Woolf’s (1942) claim of middlebrows as being concerned with reaching towards the confines of the highbrows but falling short of the avant-garde academics whose passions relate to their deep commitment to beauty, value, art, form, and integrity. Interesting to note is that while Woolf criticized those members

dimensions of the traditional literary figure (i.e., as a Black woman, raised in poverty, with a successful career in a medium often sneered at by literary critics), “selects books based on her own connection to them without any regard for academic literary analysis” (Long, 2003, p. 200). Oprah values and asserts her literary taste, exemplified in the numerous books chosen by Black female authors, and thus further asserts herself as a figure of cultural authority within her book club.

The aforementioned literature presents knowledge about how “taste” and “sponsorship” in popular book clubs make possible both “a form of social regulation and a mode of psychic resistance” (Robertson, 2008). The emergence of alternative grass-roots book clubs, as opposed to the traditional ‘middlebrow’ literature circles discussed above, has opened new arenas for cultural expression, which stretch reading across social boundaries.

To highlight the small (yet growing) research projects undertaken on Canadian soil, Fuller’s (2004) research of women’s textual communities in Atlantic Canada

of the middlebrow, she often wrote for middlebrow publications and her literature has been classified as middlebrow in nature.

A more recent use of the term is evident in Radway’s (1988/1997) renowned work in her study under discussion. An underlying theme in her study is the paradox of the term, middlebrow, as she suggests that the readers of the Book-of-the-month-club operated “with an eye toward academic ways of evaluating books” yet “middlebrow culture, apparently, defines itself against academic ways of seeing” (1997, p. 9). Radway (1997) attempts to characterize middlebrow “as something other than a watered-down version of a more authentic high culture...as a culture with its own particular substance and intellectual coherence” (p. 12). Operating under the paradoxical auspices of middlebrow, she argues that the readers of the BOTMC “oscillated continually between critique and appreciation” (p. 12). Although the club banked on the literary authority of its editors, “it made every effort to place that expertise in the service of nonprofessional readers, who had little reason to care about a book’s intricacies of textual construction but who were manifestly interested in its ability to capture their attention, to promote an intense response, and to act as a form of provocation” (p. 358).

elucidates how power and language can be actively engaged within a group; “when we attempt to understand the community dynamics within which articulation takes pace, we become capable of hearing the knowledges named by words and their expression of group agency (p. 9). Over a ten year period, Fuller interviewed writers, readers and publishers with diverse backgrounds, from “Canada’s eastern most edge” (p. 4). She analyzes various literary works by regional authors to demonstrate how Atlantic writers use their stories to combat regional stereotypes that plague Canada’s literary canon, as well as addressing issues of racism, sexism and poverty. As a critique of power relations, her work is concerned with how *everyday* knowledge is articulated, constructed and valorized “as a situated practice that explores local knowledges that are bound to the communities that experiences them” (p. 13). My reading and analysis of the deliberate articulations of GBBC readers resonates with Fuller’s work, as being situated in its moment: “it is a snapshot of a specific series of textual communities as I observed them” (p. 9-10). Fuller’s research, in addition to Delisle’s (2008) work on Newfoundland writers, further illustrates the experience of loss that permeates NL writers and stories, and stipulates “that writing challenges the ideologies of change and individualism by putting words to shared experiences” (Fuller, 2004, p. 29).

In St. John’s, Newfoundland, Robertson (2007) has tracked the experiences of a medical students’ book club, a university women’s book club, a stay-at-home-mothers’ book club, and one book club that meets regularly at a restaurant to cook and eat the delicacies described in the books they read. Reading as an institution, from publishing to education, has historically been used and controlled by the hands of a dominant class, and has not appealed to or necessarily supported the learning of those who do not fit this

social category (Horsman, 2004; Stuckey, 1991). Reading, as a pleasurable or even insurgent (yet educative) activity has notably been seen as tangential to the lives of working class, unemployed or poor students who may not partake of mainstream literary formations. In looking at book clubs, it is important to note how “literacy and [the] practices of reading it produces in our society can never be divorced from questions of power, privilege, exclusion and social distinction” (Long, 2003, p. 16).

This study seeks to advance knowledge about the uses of a book club in a particular region of relative isolation (i.e. an island in the North Atlantic), exploring certain dynamics of disenfranchisement within the larger Canadian framework, while also examining how collective reading operates within this context in relation to the social dreams and differences of members. In addition to my preliminary research questions, I explore the following secondary questions as a guide: Why do adult readers in St. John’s, Newfoundland meet to discuss children’s books? How do the readers use this space to position themselves as ‘good’ parents and/or teachers? What are the potential uses of this experience in relation to the practices and performances of gender? And how does gender frame the collective reading experience? There is much is to be learned about reading and subjectivity in the context of this informative, educative space. My study adds richness to the understudied and even misinterpreted notions of regionalism and reading formations, gendered readership, and the uses of the fictive child in the adult literary imagination.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Post-Colonialism—Psychoanalysis—Feminist Poststructuralism

Post-Colonialism

To define post-colonialism is a tricky task, but as an area of study, post-colonial theory is concerned with “the historical, political, philosophical, social, cultural and aesthetic structures of colonial domination and resistance...[and] is a way of reading, theorizing, interpreting and investigating colonial oppression and its legacy that is informed by an oppositional ethical agenda” (Ching-Liang Chow, 1999, p. 463). In terms of this project, I am concerned with the subtle ways that resistance can manifest itself in everyday life, and which are overlooked throughout most historical accounts of literacy in Newfoundland. According to Statistics Canada (see Grenier et.al., 2007), Newfoundland readers lead the nation in measures of illiteracy. From this knowledge, it is worth asking: What are the silences, errors, effects, and historical problems involved in this kind of statistical ‘fact’? Pratt’s (1992) work on narratives of British colonial accounts reminds us of the many subjugated knowledges often absent in historical representation, and how ideological paradigms shape the way that colonial history has been written and interpreted. Pratt’s work re-affirms how a researcher must acknowledge, or better yet, explicitly state how the data and information they use were recovered, using methods of analysis that illuminate what is relegated to silences, or that which is not said.

Brah (1996) similarly calls for the necessity of a new language or linguistic currency in a globalized, digitalized world marked by the constant transnational movements of populations. ‘Diaspora,’ as a theoretical concept encompassing historical experiences of migration, border crossing, and the politics of location, “creates a

conceptual grid for historicized analyses of contemporary trans/national movements of people, cultures, commodities and capital” (p. 181). As a conceptual category, ‘diaspora’ is of great importance to my understanding of the space in which the GBBC operates. Historically, St. John’s, Newfoundland has occupied a crossroads of migratory populations, settlers, colonials, exiles and ‘come-from-aways.’ Brah describes a multi-axial tool of analysis that allows us to conceptualize diaspora in terms of historical lived experiences and economic, political and cultural relationships within groups, and to think about identity in pluralistic, contextual and changing terms that interrogate or problematize the political and power-derived implications surrounding the textual sites of ‘official’ discourse. The idea of ‘homing desire,’ and what ‘home’ individuals and communities subscribe or relate to, is based on the related notions of origin, displacement, and/or residence. Delisle (2008) unpacks the notion of diaspora, arguing that it is an appropriate term to describe not only Newfoundland’s labour forced migration, but also a way of conceptualizing literary works by Newfoundland writers, further illuminating the struggles the province has in Canadian culture. In my study, the concept of diaspora is used to identify where the GBBC readers are geographically, spatially, culturally and politically, and to locate the tensions of identity that may be manifested through collective reading experience in relation to shifting “regional” identifications.

Brah (1996) urges us to be continually mindful of deconstructive, totalizing concepts. Post-colonial theories of identity provide a space and a language needed to discuss, explore and revisit contested and contradictory experiences of reading that are so often appropriated as fixed and unchanging. Brah stresses that, even though they are

implicated in the construction of a common and given 'we' with an emphasis on binary modalities of representation, diasporas are heterogeneous and contested spaces. Like Pratt (1992) and Smith (1999), Brah warns against the dangers of binary analysis, urging us to question how certain signifiers (black/white, male/female, civilized/savage, townie/baymen⁷), merge into one another in a proximal articulation of power. This multi-axial tool of analysis, she asserts, engages the complex array of contiguities and contradictions, and of changing multi-locationality as we move across time and space. She emphasizes that "identity is always plural and in process, even when it might be construed or represented as fact" (p. 195). Newfoundland book club readers, including those living in St. John's, are "strangely positioned in the North Atlantic between Europe and post-colonial America [in] a contradictory zone of migration, invasion, colonization, national belonging, separatist fantasies, nomadism, emigration, and tourism" (Robertson, 2008, p. 11). Analyzing these composite formations through the lived practices of a cultural community like a book club can allow us to "mobilize diaspora as a conceptual category as opposed to using it as merely a description of different migrations" (Brah, 1996, p. 201).

In terms of my analysis, this post-colonial notion of diaspora has also helped me to understand and situate the history that shaped discussions of the GBBC readers, the subjugated knowledges that were produced and negotiated within the meetings, and the

⁷ The *Dictionary of Newfoundland English Online* defines a townie as "a native of St John's, especially a male, usually derisive, and contrasting with bayman: one who lives on or near a bay or harbour; inhabitant of an 'outport'; sometimes with derogatory connotation. Retrieved on June 15, 2008 from www.heritage.nf.ca/dictionary

often contested subjective positionings as these played out on the geographically and socially marginalized “Rock”.

Psychoanalysis

At its core, psychoanalysis, coined by Sigmund Freud in 1896, refers to analysis of the conscious and unconscious processes of the mind⁸. It is also engages with the interpretation of text and “seeks for a meaning beyond the immediately apparent context of text” (Barker, 1999, p. 201), paying close attention to how this meaning becomes manifest through language. As Boldt and Salvio (2006) illustrate, in *Love’s Return: Psychoanalytic Essays on Childhood, Teaching and Learning*, education and psychoanalytic theory have had an amicable relationship for over a century. As demands on educative practices continue towards standardization and efficiency models, teachers find it “increasingly difficult, even starting in children’s earliest years, to make room for their own and their students’ subjectivities, idiosyncrasies, creativities and emotions” (p. 3). Relationships—to teachers, peers, texts, ideas, and the self—prove to be the force that mediates between, on the one hand, the threat and fear that permeate the demand for learning, and on the other, the possibility and willingness to learn in spite of these anxieties. As articulated by Britzman (2006), “What educates is not the person but the emotional experience of relating that becomes the basis for furthering meaning” (p. 166). Reading books within a social dynamic is a fundamental part of this continuing process

⁸ Psychoanalysis. (2008). *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*. Retrieved August October 10, 2008, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/psychoanalysis>.

by which relations with the “other” are transformed into psychological possibilities within individuals. As Grumet (2006) encapsulates, “Rituals of reading are analogues for the social structure within which we develop selves and society. Through the interpretation of text, reading permits communication that may also significantly change social structures...It’s not just people who change: knowledge does also” (p. 212). In terms of this project, psychoanalytic theorizing of reading allows for the opening of a space for understanding how desire, love, hate and resistance perform in readers’ relations to individual and social subjectivities and identities. Psychoanalytic ideas disrupt the utopian idea that all readers are on the same path to learning. It also interrupts linear models of educational theory and curriculum, thereby allowing us to understand the force and necessity of disruptions and negotiations in learning.

Concepts of fantasy and desire from psychoanalysis inform this study into how readers in a book club relate to the figure of the child in fiction, and the significance of this identification. As argued by Rose (1984) the most important aspect of psychoanalysis for discussing children’s fiction is “its insistence that childhood is something in which we continue to be implicated, and is never simply left behind... and persists as something which we endlessly rework in our attempt to build an image of our own history” (p. 12). In her analysis of *Peter Pan*, she is concerned with the aims and demands of adult writers capitalizing on the willingness of child readers to enter the book and remain fixed and timeless: “It was not the issue that *Peter Pan* did not want to grow up, it is that someone else wanted him to stay put” (p. 3). Rose exposes the difficulties surrounding the history of children’s fiction and seeks to dismantle what she sees “as the ongoing sexual and political mystification of the child” (p. 11). She argues that adult uses of *Peter Pan* (for

example, their simplification of author J.M. Barrie's language for normalization in the "official" school curriculum) enacts a problematic relationship between adult and child, power and desire. In its origins, the tale was created as an adult fictional play, and subsequently revised for school-age children years after the story had been written. The widespread dispersion and multiple "rebirths" of *Peter Pan* and other popular children's books signify their intrinsic, enduring value as cultural texts.

At stake here, as Rose reminds us, are adult investments in the child as a fantasy figure upon which a culture may project its ideals. In this context, psychoanalysis is concerned not just with the sexuality of the child, but "that our subjectivity is divided in relation to itself...and not something we can ever fully know, or ultimately can be cohered" (p. 14). What will be examined throughout this study is the question of how adults grapple with, and negotiate aspects of their subjectivity in the event of reading children's fiction. In conjunction with feminist analysis, psychoanalysis brings to literary and cultural research an emphasis on rich and useful descriptions of the psychic experience of self that is discursively constituted in culture. Boldt and Salvio (2006) also suggest that "play and literature are two important resources children can use to bridge the critical gap between their inner worlds and demands of the school" (p. 5). My research seeks to learn how the discursive space of book clubs enables the inner life of reading experience to function in an educational manner for readers.

Psychoanalysis concerns itself with experiences of loss, and how loss infuses cultural dynamics, including reading. Winnicott's (1971) use of object relations theory introduces the idea of the separation of self and other (upon the first realization that a child and mother are not the same self) and how this process of division and its

realization creates a psychic loss that never really dissipates. According to Winnicott, the separation allows for the transference of self to our first transitional object, which is continuous with our sense of self in a reality in which everything else is separate. As children's sense of self and the world spirals to a plethora of cultural artifacts, texts in turn can serve as transitional objects to augment this inner sense of distance between self and other. The textual meaning that accrues in reading experience through interpretation, both externally produced and dialogical, and internally sustained, provides the bridging quality that object relations theorists recognize in transitional objects (Farley & Robertson, in press). Grumet (2006) also suggests that texts can function as transitional objects and offer us "'eternal symbiosis': 'a sense of stability': an icon for an ego mediating the relationship between the self and other" (pp. 214-215).

Psychoanalysis alerts us to the idea that the child lives on in the adult. Thinkers such as Melanie Klein, Hannah Segal and Adam Phillips all converge around Freud's notion that the baby — with all her capacity for rage and joy — inhabits us all (Klein, 1975; Phillips, 1988; Segal, 1952). For my study, the relevance of this idea is that it reminds us to be mindful of the child who inhabits the adult reader, both in memory and in unconscious ways, and the complicated dynamics at play in adult readers who are concerned with what children are reading.

Since readers tend to develop quite strong feelings and relationships with the authority of books even in a short period of time, the use of psychoanalysis also brings to light the idea as transference. However, these transferences may be re-cycling old issues and hurts pertaining to relationships with real authority figures from growing up, articulated by what Britzman (1998) notes as the 'then and there' of the past in the 'here

and now' of the present (Grumet, 2006; Farley & Robertson, in press). In terms of my book club research, psychoanalysis helps me to better understand the unresolved feelings of childhood and learning that adult readers may project onto their readings of children's literature. Psychoanalytic concepts such as identification, desire and transference provide useful analytical categories for elaborating the emotional fervor of reading experiences, and offer a framework for remembering that adults read children's books with the baggage of their childhoods lingering close by.

Feminism and Poststructuralism

A feminist perspective is crucial in order to engage with the access and production of power and knowledge in gendered reading practices:

Feminist theory [in terms of literary practice] can best be understood as an ongoing series of interventions in reading practices, interventions in the politics of reading, and that also assume that reading practices can make a difference to our experience of the world. (Robbins, 1999, p. 49)

As this project is primarily concerned with reader subjectivity, I am using Weedon's (1987) definition of subjectivity, as "the conscious and unconscious thought and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (p. 32). Poststructuralism is another destabilizing theory that postulates that text does not inherently contain meaning; it is acquired through language which is socially produced, plural and subject to change (Weedon, 1987). Feminist Poststructuralism offers a productive framework for understanding the mechanisms of power in our society, to analyze the opportunities for resistance and the possibility of change. It is a theory which "decentres the rational, self-present subject of humanism,

seeing subjectivity and consciousness, as socially produced in language” (Weedon, 1987, p. 41). Feminism is also concerned with the relationship between experience and theory, access to and production of knowledge, and the patriarchal structures and social powers that legitimate what counts as knowledge (Weedon, 1987). Feminism further provides a theoretical perspective for analyzing the ways in which gendered subjectivity becomes manifested in the collective reading experience. I am using Wolfreys’ (2004) definition of gender as “the cultural constitution of femininity or masculinity, the notions concerning what is ‘appropriate’ to either gender, and the ways in which these serve ideologically to maintain gendered identities ” (p. 74). This link between personal lived experiences, and emergent social practices, is the ‘doing’ of gender this project seeks to explore. Post-structuralism’s concept of the mobile subject has produced a shift in literary/literacy theories towards a notion of hybridity and context-centered meaning making in reading experience.

Reader response theorist Stanley Fish (1980) articulates that poststructuralism stipulates that there are no fixed signs or meanings in text; it is the ambiguous and unstable movement of the reader’s subjectivity that creates meaning. Fish’s (1980) revolutionary concept of “the interpretative text” is predicated on Derrida’s (1974) notion that signifiers only have identity in their difference from one another, and are subject to endless deferral. For Fish, “the interpretative text” is dependent upon each reader's own subjective experience located in an “interpretive community.” This community constitutes or enables a distinct epistemology in how one comes to “know.” As reader response theorist Culler (1981) states, “...when [readers] finish the book their experience turns into knowledge...as though finishing the book took them outside of the experience

of reading and gave them mastery of it” (p. 79). Interpretive communities “exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around” (Fish, 1980, p. 14). Fish exemplifies the point that communication occurs only within a system of normative meanings and is always contextualized, even if not explicitly stated. As readers, we actively participate in this communication without reservation, and our confidence is communal and conventional in our interpretative communities. As Fish concludes, “There is no way to ever limit, or isolate interpretation” (p. 321). The concepts of interpretive texts, interpretative communities, and shared systems of understanding frame my research of book club members’ experiences in their cultural constructions of collective meaning. Attentive to factors and influences that may affect the St. John’s book club to read in ways that are distinctive, mobile, and tied to local context, I look at how gender gets performed in language, and how fantasies of the child are configured, both of which are important aspects of the GBBC interpretive community. The valued notion that “assumptions are so habitual as to be unthinking” (Fish, 1980, p.319), can be related to group reading processes of book club members, including how assumptions about textual meaning came to be, and how they in turn frame the present. Throughout this study, I have been alert to how the GBBC members use the collective reading experience to produce themselves culturally as adult and gendered readers.

In the next chapter of my thesis I turn to the research methods I used to find my participant sample, to engage with their lived experiences of group readership, and to analyze the processes of subject formation at play therein⁹.

⁹ The methodology is designed within the framework of qualitative study using post-structural and psychoanalytic concepts of readership as framed within Dr. Judith P. Robertson's SSHRC # T 0401-213-03 *Saltwater Chronicles: Understanding Reading in the Regional Book Club of Newfoundland and Labrador*, authorized for active research by The Ethics Review Board of The University of Ottawa from September 2003 to December 31, 2007.

METHODOLOGY

Multiple strategies that respect the humanity of the participants of the study are at the forefront of a qualitative research framework. As stressed by Denzin and Lincoln (1994), “qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter...and describ[ing] routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals lives” (p. 2). It is an arena where the reflexivity of the researcher’s feelings, voices and assumptions not only frame the entire research process, but are vital to a successful effort to consciously maintain the interpretive nature of the project as a whole.

The conceptual and practical challenges in my attempts to negotiate the relationships of self, identity and subjectivity, found in the collective reading experience, demands a methodological perspective that is complex, holistic and integrative (Creswell, 1998). I situate my research within the particular context of a contemporary book club in St. John’s; an experience bounded in time and space yet relevant in the broader context of how people make dialogical sense and meaning of their lives through cultural texts, especially and including those read in book clubs. In-depth and rich descriptions of the making of meaning and sense that the participants grapple with, and in regards to their identities, can only be attained through the complexity of a qualitative research design. Smith’s (1999) emphasis on the potentially alienating adversity of research itself has guided my cautionary tactics to use language that does not perpetuate colonization.

The multifaceted approach of this research framed by postcolonialism, psychoanalysis and feminist poststructuralism has allowed me to adapt my methods of

data collection as I have progressed through this researching journey. My initial plan was to employ five data collection techniques: a) introductory demographically focused *questionnaires*, b) in-depth open-ended *interviews*, c) *participant observation* of book club meetings, d) *textual analysis* of books read during my participant observation, and e) *a daily research journal* of my reflections and experiences during the research process. However, I chose to combine the demographically focused questionnaires with open-ended interviews as I felt the protocol of conducting a questionnaire at the time of my first introduction to the welcoming members of the GBBC would have projected an unnecessary formality, thus widening the gap between a “come-from-away” Mainland researcher and her participants. By allowing my research questions to intersect and merge within the interviews, a supply of rich data emerged through in-depth, open-ended conversations without sacrificing demographically focused information. The interview protocols used were developed with other members of the Saltwater Chronicles research team (Dr. Judith Robertson and David Lewkowich), and were adapted to suit the specific context of my study (See Appendix 1-3 for examples of consent forms and interview protocols).

1. Local Context: St. John’s, Newfoundland

Located in the north east coast of Newfoundland’s Avalon Peninsula, St. John’s is the oldest English city founded in North America. The city is a historic portal for both international trading activities and artistic innovation, rich in literary culture and distinguished by particular historical and environmental conditions.

What a plane ride as passengers clapped and cheered as the pilot announced that we were about to descend into St. John's airport, immediately followed by a joke about the party nature of Newfoundlanders'. With my first step out of the airport, I was met with a sweet yet salty wind that whipped across my face, sending my hair straight flying in every direction. After hauling my luggage into taxi, I search for the tiny piece of torn paper I have shoved somewhere, bearing the scribbled notes of my new address for the next four weeks. Pleasant Ave. I smile. (journal notes, 14/11/07)

Historically, Newfoundland has been subjugated to centuries of harsh treatment by imperial authorities and these histories live on in Newfoundlanders' fierce regional pride, and wariness of "come-from-aways." Newfoundland was the last province to join Canadian Federation in 1949¹⁰, yet is in some ways still a 'have not' province in Canada, isolated both geographically and economically. During the time I spent in St. John's, I can attest to the pride Newfoundlanders exude with even the most idiosyncratic subtleties, such as

recommendations for the best cod-fish on the island that 'Mainlanders' or 'Canadians' could only dream of tasting. I found myself at a variety of welcoming events, such as jam sessions of local musicians at Auntie Crae's coffee shop, the famous ritual of being 'screeched in', which entails learning the history of how Jamaican rum has become a favourite in the province and receiving a certificate of an honorary Newfoundlander status. I attended the release party of an independent literary journal publication, *Riddle Fence*, marking the twentieth anniversary of the virile Writers Alliance of Newfoundland and Labrador. *Riddle Fence* (2007), whose very existence is sustained by the subscription of local and Mainland fans, serves as a literary venue for the collection of creative writing

¹⁰ It is noteworthy to mention that it was a slim "majority" as 52% of Newfoundlanders voted for Canadian Federation. Retrieved on October 15, 2008, from *Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage Web Site Project* (1999), http://www.heritage.nf.ca/arts/p_arts.html.

by regional writers. The following quote by editor Mark Callanan illuminates how this literary medium expresses what it means to be a Newfoundlander:

Fences keep things out or keep things in. They bisect land and define territory. I like to think of Newfoundland and Labrador as being constantly stuck between two things, two states—occupying a liminal space. It is partway between the Old World and The New, partway between a country and a province; it is torn between storied past...and the allure of the future...; the people here are border dwellers—lodged between the earth and the sea (p. 4).

Through attending these events, I felt a strong sense of communal pride that lives on in the daily lives of Newfoundlanders.

I also felt the apparent economic tensions while I watched the daily news channel—NFTV—depict images of overcrowded career fairs, hosted by Alberta oil companies, with individuals searching for employment, waiting for hours in a daunting line. The inculcation of skilled trade courses, as well as innovative long distance learning through on-line instruction in secondary high schools across the province was repeatedly discussed in the daily news, as reporters portrayed the excitement of student interest, as well as the dreary economic conditions that predicate the necessity to have such courses available to Newfoundland's youth in the first place. Ubiquitous advertisements for part-time employment opportunities were noted in the windows of shops and restaurant chains alike, some with signs offering “free meals and full benefits with part-time work.”

Ongoing migration from Newfoundland to other provinces in Canada and the US has been occurring for well over a century and has become a significant part of

Newfoundland's culture (Delisle, 2008). Further boosted by the collapse of the fishery and cod moratorium in 1992, *The Royal Commission on Renewing and Strengthening Our Place in Canada* (2003), reports "a ten per cent decline in the province's population between 1991 – 2001, due to massive out-migration, is a shocking indicator that something has gone seriously wrong in the economy of Newfoundland and Labrador" (p. 35). While many Canadian provinces have experienced migration for economic purposes, NL has shown a net loss of migration since 1981, with the highest net migration rate among all provinces from 1996-2001. It was estimated in 2003, that the expatriate community reached nearly as much as half of the total population of the province (*The Royal Commission on Strengthening and Renewing Our Place in Canada, 2003*).

Gratifyingly, the year in which I conducted my research (2007) constituted a happy turning point in the Newfoundland and Labrador economy. Premier Danny Williams successfully negotiated *The Atlantic Accord*, which with its promise of offshore oil revenues amounting to 5-7 billion dollars by 2010 has resulted in the province's escape from being the poorest province in Canada to potentially one of the wealthiest per capita, signifying that an important shift is in place for Newfoundlanders.¹¹ While the 2007 provincial budget forecasts a change in the province's economic fortunes, the

¹¹ The Premier is on the precipice of signing two additional contracts with off-shore oil magnates (South Hibernia and Come-By-Chance) that will expand the provincial revenue by an additional 3 billion dollars by 2010.

current unemployment rate remains the highest in the country, at 13%.¹² It is the recorded observations from my researcher's journal followed by research into migration and economic trends of Newfoundland, that helped me to understand and interpret my experience of the social conditions that prevailed in St. John's, Newfoundland during my work with the GBBC readers.

2. The Participants: "Children's literature enthusiasts"

The transient nature of book clubs was undeniably an obstacle in finding interested participants for this study. Due to the necessity of finding enthusiastic and devoted participants, I sought out those who would most likely take an active interest in exploring their identity performances as readers in an existing book club that may be open to the purposes of my research. With the assistance of my thesis supervisor and other members of the Saltwater Chronicles project, I established contact with one

¹² Statistics Canada. 2007. *Division No. 1, Subd. J, Newfoundland and Labrador* (table). *2006 Community Profiles*. 2006 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 92-591-XWE. Ottawa. Released March 13, 2007.
<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/data/profiles/community/Index.cfm?Lang=E>
 (accessed October 16, 2008).

member, Sue (a pseudonym¹³), of the Granny Bates Book Club (GBBC). Since children's literature, and its uses and effects in the world, has been a passionate interest of mine for as long as I can remember, I was particularly interested in working with adult readers of children's literature. The GBBC, who allowed me to hook up with like-minded readers and experience the power of what it means to read together and discursively create meaning, has been running for three years. The club currently has 5-8 members, all of whom are white women, between 28 – 58 years of age, educated¹⁴, and attend monthly meetings regularly in the cozy attic of the Granny Bates Book Store.

Situated precipitously near the top of Granny Bates Hill in St. John's, Newfoundland, the bright red store is nestled amongst its neighbouring historic buildings, and on one of the steepest hills in the downtown core, which is nearly impossible to cycle up (although I made many attempts). Its giant bay windows, boarded with white painted panes, perch over the street where passersby, taking shelter from the squall like winds and rain, can gaze into the welcoming warmth of its snug interior.

Upon entering the store, the chimes perform their dancing task and I am greeted with a friendly smile and genuine concern for the torrential downpour I had endured, which felt like being in one of those groundhog games at the fair where mother nature had the mallet and I was but a pesky groundhog rearing my head at the most inopportune times.

The store itself is a cornerstone of children's literature in the community as it is the *only*

¹³ For the purpose of this study, the findings will be referenced in the following manner: 1) The participant's pseudonym, 2) The data source (i.e. Interview: I, First meeting: FM, Second Meeting: SM), and 3) the date of the source.

¹⁴ All women who participated in interviews and/or meeting have either pursued or are pursuing a post-secondary education.

exclusive, independently owned children's book store in Newfoundland and has been in operation for over 16 years. The store is owned and operated by Margie Macmillan and

Granny Bates' Hill
by M.A. Devine

I'm wandering back to-night
To visions calm and bright,
As I sit alone within the firelight's glow.
To the time when boyish dreams
Were tinged with rosy dreams

In the merry, merry days of long ago.
One scene amongst them all
With pleasure I recall,
As memory lingers fondly with me still:
Oh! the pleasure and the joy,
When I was a laughing boy,
And went sliding over Granny Bates' Hill.

I see thy berg-lined shore,
My island home once more.
I tread thy glassy snow-slopes once again,
Tho' I've wandered far away
Across the rolling sea,
To find a home beside the hills of Maine.
Thy cherry-cheeked boys,
Thy girls with romping noise,
Far up thro' memory's vale they throng at will;
I see the hillside white;
I see the moonlight;
I see the slides of Granny Bates' Hill.

The snows of sixty year
Have tinged and streaked my hair,
I've many brawny sons to manhood grown;
I see the churchyard still
Beneath the pine-clad hill,
Where after death my body will be thrown.
But in the brands to-night
I trail a vision bright:
A scene that makes my inmost spirit thrill,
And I waft a backward sigh
For the youthful days gone by,
When sliding over Granny Bates' Hill.

Norah Flynn, who pride themselves on their expertise of knowing and selling 'good' children's literature. One owner, Margie, sees their role as providing "value added free services" to local, potential readers, including children, parents, teachers, librarians and school boards alike across the island and Labrador. In a recent radio interview, Margie passionately discusses how the vital difference between Granny Bates Book Store and their competing chain big box bookstores can be exemplified. It is in the "breadth of their stock, where 75% of the store's stock is considered well written and respectful of children as readers, the majority of which you will not find in any other bookstore, and where only 10-15% may be new publications" (cited in Beale & Macmillan,

2006). The Granny Bates Book Store differs radically from a chain store not only in its cozy welcoming intimacy, but also in its commodity items. Other St. John's bookstores that sell children's literature tend to distribute the best sellers in 'kiddie' pop culture

literature, often related to the newest movie craze, which the Granny Bates employees label as a “branded product or merchandise” (Beale & Macmillan, 2006)¹⁵.

Through providing recommended reading lists for inquiring teachers and librarians with books that “feed your soul and enrich children,” the active role that the Granny Bates Book Store has established with school boards is only one example of how the store operates as a literary authority for the St. John’s and Newfoundland community.” As Margie explains, the very fact that the store exists implies that children’s books are important enough to have a building devoted to “just books—no toys—just books.” She describes her feelings of satisfaction and privilege, in a job whose main responsibilities are “to match a book with the person who comes in looking for one” (Beale & Macmillan, 2006). Granny Bates also won the Best Specialty Book store in Canada in 2005, and the fact that they are still in operation amongst the incursion of larger Canadian and American multi-national chain competitors “is a statement in itself, in a market that is not huge that doesn’t have a lot of discretionary dollars to throw around” (Beale & Macmillan, 2006).

Dr. Judith Robertson made original contact with the GBBC in 2005, and in concert with The Saltwater Chronicles Research Team, the site was chosen as one of three in which an in-depth case study would be done, and in which I would act as primary researcher. The members were very welcoming and interested in the project, as was exemplified in their zealous enthusiasm to conduct interviews after the first meeting I

¹⁵ Significantly, during the period of time in which this research was conducted, 3 other independently owned St. John’s bookstores—all over 10 years in existence—closed their doors, driven to bankruptcy by the strong Canadian dollar whose historical all-time high failed to be reflected in the disparately priced CAN/US book price tags.

attended, as well as in their self-acclaimed love for children's literature. Although membership has been transient over the years, the 'core' group of 5-6 members who attend regularly "are the driving force of the club" (Melissa, I, 29/11/07). I will now introduce the GBBC readers who are the subjects of this study.

Sue: The inculcation of the club was instigated by Sue. She worked at the Granny Bates Book store at the time, and attests that "there are a lot of people out there who love kids' books around!" (Sue, I, 06/12/07). Originally from Ontario and a former English Professor of Children's Literature with a Ph.D., Sue has been living in St. John's since 1999. Currently working as a literary editor, she admits reading is her life:

I mean, I use it for many things though, I use it for an escape, I use it for relaxation. I feel like my eyes are going to fall out of my head because I read so much [laugh]. But I'll take a break from editing and sit down and read for two hours. So yeah, reading is fundamental to pretty much everything I do. (Sue, I, 06/12/07)

Although she doesn't see herself as the 'leader,' she supposes she is the organizer of the GBBC "in as much as it is organized," a role she assumes is more due to her being a representative of the store rather than one prescribed. During their interviews, the other members spoke very fondly of Sue's organization of the club, with a hint of relief that someone fulfills the necessary administrative tasks that keep the club operating.

Willow: Originally from Vancouver, Willow moved to St. John's to pursue a degree in Archeology at Memorial University. Her sister Melissa, who shares her love for reading children's books and Science Fiction alike, introduced her to the club. Through the club, Willow also landed a part-time job at the Granny Bates Book Store and has been

working there for over year and describes it “as so much fun,” and jokes that she gets paid to read. She is currently organizing an on-line advertisement campaign (via Facebook) to encourage fellow “children’s literature enthusiasts” (Julie, I, 26/11/07) to join the GBBC.

Melissa: From Vancouver as well, Melissa moved to St. John’s just over two years ago with her husband and two adorable young boys. As Melissa explains, “I work with kids’, that’s my job, my passion and interest” (Melissa, I, 29/11/07). She is a former Youth Care Worker, specializing in children with autism, and currently “works with 2 very young children.” She saw an advertisement in the newspaper for the GBBC, and admits that, being the ‘new kid on the block,’ the social aspect of the club was appealing. She is also a member of two other book clubs, one in St. John’s, and one in Vancouver, which she attends when she returns to the west coast.

Julie: A “third generation townie,” Julie works as a librarian at the Faculty of Education, Memorial University, and sits on various editorial committees for children’s literature journals. She has been in the club since its inception and speaks fondly of her relationship to the owners of the book store: “...so we’re friends, we’re not just colleagues, we’re friends. So it’s very natural to hear about it [GBBC] and assume that I would be a part of it” (Julie, I, 26/11/07).

Hillary: Who grew up “more or less in St. John’s,” and has been drawn to the Granny Bates Book store for years, more recently to guide the reading practices of her two children (aged seven and ten). Although Hillary herself is originally from Newfoundland, with an Irish mother and a ‘Canadian’ father, she is not considered a true ‘Newfoundlander’ by some and “has a real beef about it” (Hillary, I, 04/12/07). Despite

this, she has one of the strongest (and most captivating) accents of any of the members. This issue of habitation and migration on the island of Newfoundland (long-term, recent or return) is an important aspect of the concept of “homing” and diaspora discussed by Brah (1996). “Homing” which refers to how individuals and communities relate to each other based on origin or displacement, and the tensions of shifting regional identities within power relations that play a vital part in their overall subjective positioning. This post-colonial notion is one I return to later in the thesis.

3. Role of the Researcher: Humble Observer

Following Reinharz’s (1992) view of abandoning one’s image as a researcher of a project and “returning to the role of student and humble observer” (p. 61), I embraced my work with the openness of a learner and the reflexivity of a researcher. In order to ensure the privacy of participants, their names are kept anonymous and disguised by using pseudonyms¹⁶. My role in the book club meetings was that of a participant observer. Sue, with whom I initially made contact, expressed the members’ desires for me to actively participate in book club meetings. In general, my active involvement with the book club helped to lessen the gap between the participants and myself. I believe that establishing a good relationship with the participants is essential to establishing an environment of trustworthiness and comfort (Reinharz, 1992; Smith, 1999). I concur with Radway’s (1984) methodological notion that a researcher’s account “is never a perfectly, transparent, objective duplication of one’s individual’s culture for

¹⁶ Even so, the Consent Form approved by the Ethics Board of the University of Ottawa acknowledges that complete anonymity in published results cannot be assured due to the small local context in which the study occurs, and the likelihood that most readers will be well known and recognizable to each other.

another...and the content of that account depends equally upon the culture being described and upon the individual who, in describing, also translates and interprets” (p. 9). The codes and themes that have emerged in my research are my interpretation of the meanings expressed, and the theories put forth by the women of the GBBC. This issue will be further discussed in my analysis chapter, but I feel it notable at this time, as conceptualizing the role of the researcher is vital to any rigorous (and feminist) methodology.

Smith’s (1999) notion of ‘giving back’ emphasizes the concepts of ‘shared research’ and ‘researching back,’ as a means of breaking the barriers of past-regulated imperialism and colonization. As mentioned before, Newfoundland has for decades been a ‘have not’ province in Canada, isolated both geographically and economically. Indigenous research methodologies have enabled me to approach cultural protocols, values and behaviours as factors to be built upon, reflected on, and declared as part of an ethical research design, which will be disseminated back and shared in culturally appropriate ways. Grassroots distribution has been a important goal of The Saltwater Chronicles research project goal, realized through various in-progress initiatives; including a website, a video production, a proposed CBC Newfoundland noon-time radio broadcast, and a monograph potentially to be published by The Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) of Memorial University, Newfoundland. ISER’s mandate is to foster research that questions social and economic conditions arising from the particular historic, geographic, and economic circumstances of Newfoundland and Labrador. I also plan to participate in “Word on the Rock,” a yearly celebration of literary works in Newfoundland in which writers, artists, and publishers alike exhibit and

share their work. We believe that these dissemination efforts are important factors in building local community, strength, memory and pride.

Smith (1999) also speaks to the damaging role that education can sometimes play, through its organization of knowledge and representation of difference, and how the “hidden curriculum” in education contains concealed discourses, many of which have serious effects on minorities. The ‘truth’ currently taught in schools can perpetuate damaging myths about local and regional knowledge and heritage, languages, beliefs and ways of life. Teachers and researchers alike must engage in a “re(hi)storation” (Iseke-Barnes, 2005; Smith, 1999), through the pedagogical process of interruption, as a means of bringing into view that which has always been, yet continues to be neglected, abandoned and forgotten. Indigenous research methodologies have helped me to use language and strategies that are aimed to work politically and ethically, and to re-historicize Newfoundlanders’ literacy/literary practices through the GBBC.

4. Specific Research Strategies and Data Collection Techniques

4. a) In-depth Interviews

Seidman (2006) argues that the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding “the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 9). As it is important to establish a good rapport with the participants, I would strive to create an arena where my participants can speak freely and justly about their lived experiences. The open-ended, semi-structured interviews I conducted allowed me to investigate people’s views of reality, while simultaneously maximizing the participant’s active involvement in the construction of their own stories, the existence of which further limited my authority as a researcher. By providing a casual conversation style, rich in description, to “produce nonstandardized information that allows researchers to make full use of differences among people” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 19), the interview space I achieved was one where multiple realities and voices can be both heard and respected.

The use of semi-structured interviews has become “the *principal means* by which feminists have sought to achieve the active involvement of their respondents in the construction of data about their lives” [italics in original] (Graham, 1984 as cited in Reinharz, 1992, p. 18). Guided by this principle, I conducted one open-ended interview with each of the five book club members who were present at the first meeting attended.¹⁷

¹⁷ As previously discussed, due to the intimate dynamics of a small reading group, composed mainly of 5-6 members, complete anonymity was not feasible. Participants may have self-monitored more so than if complete anonymity was guaranteed causing a possible limitation to what was disclosed during interviews and meetings.

To contextualize the meetings, I ask you, the reader, to visualize the cozy, loft style, attic of the Granny Bates Book Store, where six or seven chairs are organized in a circle around a plate of cookies and a box of chocolate *Turtles* atop a low, antique wooden stool. There's a table, nestled in the crutch of a bay window, displaying a shiny kettle amongst a bunch of eclectic looking mugs, waiting to be hosts to the varieties of tea Sue has just dashed out to purchase. One by one, the members arrive with their copy of *Peter Pan in Scarlet*, tenaciously grasped in their arms. Some with pages dog-eared, and others with post-it notes jetting out in all directions, you can actually smell the apprehensive excitement for what discursive proclivities lay ahead. Although friendly introductions are exchanged, the members have this inquisitive look in their eyes, as if to say, "What is this frizzy haired, self proclaimed scholar doing here studying us?" My hunch is affirmed when Hillary, catching the tail end of my discussion with Willow about the project, comically asks, "Aren't there book clubs in Ottawa? Why did you come all the way out here just to study us?" I giggle and start my rehearsed rant about the project and its beginnings, to which each member responds with nods and smiles. Though I suspect that they are suspiciously proud to have me there, I begin to dubiously wonder if any of these smiling readers will be interested in being interviewed, and begin to worry about what I'm going to do for the next month of my life if the answer is simply "No." However, my anxieties were calmed after all five members agreed to be interviewed, and expressed a keen interest in the project. Phew! (journal notes after meeting, 11/19/07).

Although it was my initial plan to conduct two interviews with 3-5 members, I found that each of the five interviews conducted were rich in oral testimony, exemplified by longer lengths and detail than anticipated, lasting up to 90 minutes rather than the 30-

60 minutes I initially expected. Coupled with time constraints from members as well as myself, I decided that one interview — in conjunction with two on-site visits, each lasting 2 hours, in which I served as a participant observer — would allow for an ample richness of data in which significance would not be sacrificed. Interviews were conducted at a time and place chosen by the participants, and incidentally, were all done in cozy, local coffee shops in St. John's downtown core. All five interviews were very casual in nature, as exemplified by the sheer abundance of transcribed conversation; and all five participants seemed quite excited to share their experiences of being members of the GBBC. All interviews were audio recorded, dated and transcribed by me.

4 b) Participant Observation

I spent four weeks in St. John's from mid-November to mid-December 2007, living west of downtown, and was gratefully able to participate in two club meetings. During these meetings, I refrained from taking the detailed notes I had initially planned, as a means to enhance my participation as an active member. These meetings were filled with a truly immeasurable amount of discussion, ranging from focused analysis of the texts read, to intertextual comparisons, historical accounts, author profiles, childhood stories, personal histories, future speculations, questions, concerns and an abundance of laughter. Both meetings were recorded, dated and transcribed by me. Prior to the meetings, I read the book club selection and conducted an initial textual analysis of the piece. It is important to note the difference between the first and second meeting, especially in terms of the eminent effect my presence had on the discussion. For the first meeting, members agreed that they had stayed more "focused" and "more on topic than ever," affirming the delicate and inevitably mediating role of a researcher in any group

setting. By the second meeting, Sue suggested that the easy going, relaxed atmosphere of the GBBC would lead the members to see my presence as “Oh, that’s just Jenn!” (Sue, I, 06/12/07). Although it is without question that my presence affected the group’s dynamics, it did so in both formal and informal ways, and in ways that differed as the month of my research progressed. The time I spent with the members, both during interviews and social events during my stay in St. John’s, significantly reduced their “staying on topic,” as can be seen from the plethora of ideas discussed during the second meeting. I feel that this point is noteworthy, as the salient relationship between researcher and participants is an important aspect of the horizon of meaning making within this project.

4 c) Textual Analysis: Content analysis of children’s literature has been a prominent theme among educative researchers, as exemplified by Rose’s (1984) critique that the very concept of children’s literature “is an idea whose innocence generally covers up a multitude of sins” (p. 1) (See also Robertson 2000, 2001; Roberston, Gritziotis & Campbell, 2000). I use the suggestion by Wolfreys (2004), “to be attentive to the ways in which the text is articulated, the ways in which it appears to articulate itself and the ways in which appears to be silent on matters” (p. 213), as a guide for analyzing the texts read and discussed by the GBBC. More specifically, I focus on the following questions to guide my personal textual analysis: What is the story about? Where is the setting? How would I characterize the figure of the child in the story? Is the book being read outside of Newfoundland? What is the background of the author? What problem or dilemma confronts the child and how does the story plot resolve this? How is the figure of the child engendered through language and plot? These private probes assist me, in advance

of the meetings, to being alert to the ways in which adult readers may attribute importance to the book being read, and the possible cultural meanings of this collective behaviour within the interpretative community.

4 d) Researcher's Journal

Since the researcher's journal may be the most important aspect of my research, it will inevitably influence the previous four forms of data collection. While in St. John's I kept a journal, and on a daily basis, logged my thoughts and observations about the context of the research. These notes have been used to augment hunches that I developed about how the book club space is used to produce meaning. The concept of "bringing and creating the self in the field" (Reinharz, 1997, p. 3), is a prominent theme in feminist and qualitative research, which seeks to not only acknowledge the role of the researcher, but also to illuminate this role, through the process of self-reflexivity, as the foundation of the study itself. Reflexivity, as discussed by Guba and Lincoln (1981), "is the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, the 'human instrument'" (p. 210). It is the conscious experiencing of the self as both inquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner, as the one coming to know the self within the actual process of research itself. Similarly, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) envision researchers as "interpretive bricoleurs," producing a 'bricolage' — a pieced-together set of representations that is fitted to the specifics of a complex situation. I believe I used this method of a bricolage, one that changes and takes new forms, "as the bricoleur adds different tools, methods and techniques of representation and interpretation to the puzzle" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 4). Creswell (1998) emphasizes the importance of maintaining descriptive and reflective notes, as both are essential in adding to the richness and details of qualitative

research, and in learning about people's lived experiences through their engagements in collective reading. In my interpretive analysis of readers' responses to children's texts, I have also been attentive to how gender is at work in subjective positioning (Fuller, 2004; Reinharz, 1992, 1997; Weedon, 1987).

4 e) Data Analysis Strategies

Through careful readings and re-readings of the transcribed interviews, book club meetings, the textual analysis of the books read by GBBC, the use of my private journal to add emotional and experimental depth, and post-interview emails with the participants used for clarification of data, I found patterns that emerged. I then coded these patterns into corresponding conceptual categories that took form as the study itself also took shape, echoing Fraenkel and Wallen's (1996) reference to Bogdan and Biklin's (1998) notion that researchers "are not putting together a puzzle whose pictures they already know" rather "they are constructing a picture that takes shape as they collect and examine the parts" (p. 443). As I have constructed and refined these concepts that fall into the conceptual categories, I have been attentive to the narratives that have taken shape through the member's stated personal experiences. I also paid close attention to moments of emotional response to topics deeply felt by the members that were not constituted as a patterned regularity, yet took up a significant portion of the dialogue. Guided by the work of Carolyn Steedman (1982), I analyzed these significant moments to see how the readers were deliberately using discursive practices of the GBBC to position themselves subjectively. I concur with Radway's (1984) claims about her analysis of romance readers: she worked with her participants' conscious statements and beliefs about their behaviour and then posited additional desires, fear and concerns in an effort "to uncover

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the unintended, sometimes unperceived, consequences of their behaviour and self understanding” (p. 10). As a result, my analysis (clearly informed by both feminist and psychoanalytic ideas) echoes Radway’s account, as an “oscillating back and forth between the readers’ perceptions of themselves and their activities...and the unseen cultural ground or set of assumptions upon which they stand” (p. 10). I now turn to the first meeting of the GBBC, in which “the interpretive text” (Fish, 1980) was Geraldine McCaughrean’s *Peter Pan in Scarlet*.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Textual Analysis

Peter Pan in Scarlet, by Geraldine McCaughrean



Peter Pan in Scarlet, by Geraldine McCaughrean (2006), is noted to be the ‘official’ sequel to J.M. Barrie’s original *Peter Pan* (1937). The story of how the book came to be is of particular interest, as it was specifically commissioned by the Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) for Children, to which, in 1937, J.M. Barrie gave the copyright for his original story, *Peter Pan*, and its characters. As the exclusive rights for *Peter Pan* were to expire at the end of 2007, a competition was initiated in 2004 to determine who would write the official sequel. Writers were invited to submit a sample chapter and plot outline; a process by which Geraldine McCaughrean was successfully chosen to complete *Peter Pan in Scarlet* which was published in 2006. McCaughrean has written over 130 books and has been critically acclaimed for her imaginative work in children’s fiction. I will present a detailed overview of the story narrative before moving to a discussion of its engagement by the GBBC.

Peter Pan in Scarlet has been praised as being “refreshingly dark,” “a book of timeless charm,” and “as unsentimental as a book about fairies and lost babies can be.” (Smyth, 2006). As well, reviewers applaud McCaughrean for her affinity for words and proclivities in a creative language that honours Barrie’s legacy. Vaguely following the epilogue from *Peter Pan*, the premise of this fantastical tale is the return of the League of Pan (Wendy, John Darling and the Lost Boys) to the mythical world of Neverland, which has digressed into quite a state of dystopia since their last visit. The story is set in 1926, with images of Neverland ominously seeping into the grown up characters’ dreams, who

wake to find various artifacts from their Neverland nestled in their beds. The capture of a feisty fairy, Firefly, reveals that the secret to adults returning to Neverland is to dress in their children's clothes, as "everyone knows when you put on dress-up clothes, you become someone else" (McCaughrean, 2006, 22). Dressing up as a child is a reoccurring theme throughout the story. This transformation from 'rational' adults to 'adventurous' children occurs with a few interesting twists; Tootles sheds his moustache and transforms into a girl; Slightly, who is childless, remembers "that you can end up anywhere if you dare to go right down to the bottom [of the bed]" (McCaughrean, 2006, 26).

Thus transformed into their child selves, they fly to Neverland, where time stands still and pretend is real, only to find scarlet skies and a leaf-stricken Peter in disarray. The crew embarks on treasure hunting adventures with all kinds of twists and turns. They befriend Ravello, whose physique is not much more than a bundle of ravelled wool, and who ominously offers to work as Peter's humble butler. Aboard the ship, Peter wears Captain Hook's legendary red coat and as the journey unfolds, Peter becomes nasty and irritable with his crew as he slowly, yet unknowingly, transforms into a replica of Hook. Ravello eventually reveals his true identity as Hook himself, or what was left of him after a timeless eternity of living in the stomach of a crocodile. The unknown treasure they find reveals more about Hook's past than the expected riches and dreams that the League of Pan hoped for.

Upon returning, the League of Pan stumbles into the Maze of Witches, where desperate mothers and nursemaids have been frantically seeking their lost children who had fallen out of their prams many years ago. The Lost Boys, now reunited with their mothers, return home. The exception is disconsolate Peter, who cannot fly because

Ravello stole his shadow, and shadows only grow back with sadness. Significantly, McCaughrean's *Neverland* is a place inscribed with loss.

In her detailed discussion of the *Peter Pan* interpretive text, prominent literary theorist and psychoanalyst Jacqueline Rose (1984) argues that the figure of the child in the story is, above all, “glorified; having access to a world where childhoods can last forever with the assumption that discovering a new world is the same as controlling it” (p. 13). I concur with Rose's articulation that the child is most often articulated in children's literature, and clearly exemplified in *Peter Pan* and *Peter Pan in Scarlet*, “as a pioneer embarking on an exploratory and colonist venture of imagined worlds,” of a “primitive or lost space that only the child has access to and restores these worlds for us and gives them back to us with a directness which ensures that our own relationship to them is, finally, safe” (p. 9). This fantastical restorative desire is believed to be at the heart of every adult, exemplified by Hook, who unduly sobs, “only children have the ability to wish”. Peter—as a transformed replica of Hook—is revealed as a manipulative character through his desire for the treasure that Hook can no longer attain on his own.

One of the well-known problems confronting the child in *Peter Pan in Scarlet* is the fear of growing up and losing sight of childhood. In terms of children's fiction, childhood is often discussed as being “part of a strict developmental sequence at the end of which stands the cohered and rational conscious of the adult mind” (Rose, 1984, 13). Psychoanalysis challenges this linear, developmental model through fundamental theories of the self as fragmented, irrational, hybrid and incomplete (Phillips, 1988; Bollas, 1995; Winnicott, 1971; Rose, 1984). The story's plot works to resolve this dilemma of growing up and ignoring the felt experience of being a child by positioning *Neverland* as a world

that even adults have access to, if they are willing to shed their “rational” adult personas and allow the child within to rear its little, irrational head.

In stark contrast to the fantasy world of Neverland, the second text read and discussed by the GBBC was Markus Zusak’s *The Book Thief*, which is set in Germany



during WWII and tells the gripping tale of 9 year old Liesel Meminger, who finds love, strength and hope in the face of utter tragedy. The sarcastic and eloquent persona of Death, who feels “haunted by humans,” narrates the story of Liesel’s career as a book thief; a portal

into a devastating time of war, with subtle yet powerful glimpses of sunshine. The book begins with the witnessing of her first stolen treasure, *The Grave Diggers Handbook*, found at the burial of her younger brother, just before being taken from her (possibly) communist mother and placed in the foster home of the Hubermanns. Hans is portrayed as a kind, gentle painter and his wife, Rosa, possesses “the unique ability to aggravate almost anyone she has ever met,” and who notoriously swears (in German) like a sailor. To calm her frantic nightmares, Hans ironically teaches Liesel to read using *The Grave Diggers Handbook* and despite the dark subject matter, sparks her love for books and words, a prominent theme throughout the story. Liesel befriends a neighbour, Rudy Steiner, a feisty boy with lemon coloured hair, who continually begs Liesel for a kiss. Together, Liesel and Rudy find bouts of happiness and joy in the midst of misery and despair, including ‘stealing’ books from the mayor’s wife’s library, who discreetly watches this seemingly sinful act, smiling.

The book takes an unexpected turn when the Hubermanns decide to hide Max Vandenburg, a Jewish man with feathers in his hair and swampy eyes. Max lives in the

damp, dreary basement of the Hubermans for nearly 3 years, miraculously surviving fatal sickness, escaping authorities on numerous occasions and builds a heart warming relationship with Liesel. Max not only shares Liesel's love for reading, but he also writes her two storybooks during his stay; astonishingly, on painted pages of the *Mein Kampf*¹⁸, an act which forges an everlasting bond between the two. As the encroaching effects of the war creep closer to Molching, life gets more precarious and dangerous for the Hubermans. The household agrees to help hide Max in another city, although Max takes it upon himself to leave as he feels the Hubermans have already done enough. As the threat of air raids increase, neighbours communally gather in chosen basements during drills where Liesel, becoming more aware of the power of words, reads aloud to calm her frightened neighbours. Himmel Street is eventually bombed and everyone is killed except for Liesel, alone in the basement writing her life story, *The Book Thief*. The story ends years later with Death travelling to Australia to take Liesel's elderly soul while handing her the story of her life that she wrote years before.

The figure of the child in *The Book Thief* is portrayed as a pillar of strength and hope amidst tragedy and death, described as having a "a [Harry] Potterish appeal" (Maslin, 2006). Although Liesel's robust character experiences devastating hardship and loss, the story of her life conveys the idealized qualities of a child who perseveres through the most ruthless hardships of human suffering, imposed via a technology of racist domination unprecedented in all human history. The omniscient narrator, Death, plays a vital, distancing role in conveying the story that, if told in a different manner,

¹⁸ The autobiography of Adolf Hitler, which in the story was the second book that Liesel, ironically, read.

could have been heart wrenching to read, but whose humour acts as a sort of distancing to the tragedy that occurs. The problems confronting the child are very real struggles to survive in a time and place where childhood, in stark contrast to *Peter Pan in Scarlet*, is not glorified, but rather something to survive and persevere through. Book thievery, here, is not only morally defensible, but is the single means available to a child within a system of total domination to survive and create historical memory. Although Liesel is surrounded by compassionate and loving individuals, she is not always treated with actions that connote love and support. The plot resolves this dilemma by allowing the compassion of the characters to shine through actions, which Liesel cherishes, using these actions to maintain her own strength through utter tragedy.

Having summarized and analyzed the texts read by the GBBC, I now draw attention to my analysis of how these interpretive texts are used by readers to create the conditions through which gendered subjectivities and collective meaning construction may occur.

Justification for Analysis of Data

The following analysis generally follows the interview probes I used, through which repetitions and themes emerged that were further supported, extended or contested in the GBBC meetings. Through a detailed reading of the transcripts from two GBBC meetings and five in-depth interviews, I have paid close attention to how members of the book club use language to position and constitute themselves actively and discursively as social, gendered, subjects. My analytic strategy also requires me to be attentive to how the members themselves interpret and construct collective meaning. I noted in my journal that during the meetings and interviews, the members overtly negotiate certain aspects of the plot, narrative, character development and their relationship to the text. It is through this narrative, and the meanings that are created by the women, whose “goal is just to sit around and chat about kids’ books” (Hillary, I, 04/12/07), that this study forges an understanding. Although the members’ discursive participations in meetings essentially enhance their understanding and relation to the books read, upon a more detailed and rigorous reading of the transcripts, I found patterned regularities emerge. My hunches compelled me to look specifically at how participants were using the space of the club to not only contribute to collective meaning in relation to the texts themselves, but how they were using *the interpretive text discursively* to position themselves individually, and collectively, as a group of literate, educated women with a passionate, vested interest in ‘good’ children’s fiction, in a diasporic, economically struggling, geographically and spatially isolated community such as St. John’s, Newfoundland.

As Long (2003) cautions, researchers should be wary of only seeing the “central cultural practice as simply reporting what each thought about a book [which] almost

entirely misses the point of why participants are there” (p. 144). It is precisely this distinction that I enunciate: between what the readers articulated, and how I have analyzed and used their articulations as evidence to construct the claims that I have made. This notion also echoes the work of Carolyn Steedman (1982), whose interpretation and representation of a story written by three working class girls, *The Tidy House*, reminds researchers that “no material is transparent” (p. 37). It is essential to differentiate the researcher’s understanding of the text from the participants’ consciousness and motivations, and just as the members of the GBBC were not consciously trying to convey an interpretive message about the insights gained from belonging to the club, “they did not *set out* to reveal what we may come to see as the message of ‘The Tidy House’...they were not motivated to convey something to an audience....” [italics in original] (p. 12). This is an account of my interpretation of what I witnessed while reading and working with the GBBC.

Endorsing interpretations by connecting both participants’ and researchers’ language, Bogdan & Biklin (1998) argue that “when we do analysis, as researchers we are usually part of the dialogue we are trying to consider” (p. 177). In following earlier articulated cautions of Smith (1999) and Reinharz (1992, 1997), I have remained cognizant of my role as a researcher in all aspects of the research and have not ignored the fact that my role mediates meaning and is mediated by the research context. During interviews, I used the interview probes as guidelines, but each one became a casual conversation, which seemed effortless and spontaneous due to the eclectic and welcoming personalities of each member of GBBC. I frequently started questions with “how do you feel,” or “what do you think?” in order to allow the members to speak

freely. As previously stated, as a means to enhance my participation as an active member, I refrained from taking the detailed notes I had initially planned to, during meetings. Instead, I ran home (literally as it was just starting to rain after both meetings), listened to the recorded meeting and jotted notes in my journal of recorded associations I witnessed during the meeting.

In the following pages, I introduce the first of six sets of patterns to emerge from my transcribed interviews and the GBBC meetings. In relation to my research questions pertaining to the uses of collective book club experiences in the formations of individual and collective subjectivities, I focus on the readers' feelings of legitimization. The GBBC provides an enabling context in which "closeted lovers of children's fiction" can experience affirmation and open exploration in the company of like minded others.

Uses of the Granny Bates Book Club

Legitimization: “Closeted Lovers of Children’s Fiction”

Long (2003), echoing Radway’s (1984) findings on romance readers, articulates how meeting in a group “provides ideological support for its members, all of whom are conscious of the stigma attached to romance reading” (p. 159). Similar to the social stigma romance readers may feel imposed upon them, a prominent theme explicitly apparent in all five interviews I conducted was how, as readers of children’s fiction, the members of the GBBC have been teased and made fun of throughout their adult careers. The GBBC essentially gives the members an opportunistic space to discuss and explore their textual interpretations in a manner that is not available to them in their everyday lives. I witnessed some of these women’s eyes actually light up and widen when they expressed the relief they felt to have found a group that not only shares their particular reading interests, but validates this interest in the face of any possible critics—that there are, in fact, like minded, educated women who share their “peculiar” literary tastes. As one member, Willow, adamantly states, “This book club gives people the right, to not only read kids’ books, but then to say I am reading this for a book club. So, back off! [laugh]” (Willow, I, 29/11/07).

I find it interesting that Willow is also a self-proclaimed, avid science fiction and fantasy fan; another genre that has a certain stigma projected towards its readers. Some literary critics do not consider science fiction/fantasy *real* literature, and the fanatics of the genre are typically men (Radway, 1984). At one point, Willow voiced to me her

frustrations regarding the categorization, which for her functions as stigmatization, of genres of literature in bookstores:

It perpetuates the stereotype that it's not *real* literature. There's fiction, and then there's that other crap, weird people read....and a lot of the kids' books are science fiction and fantasy because it's not as taboo for children to read it as it is for adults. [italics added] (Willow, I, 29/11/07)

Willow further explains the reason she does not belong to other book clubs:

Because if I go to a regular book club, it's pretty much guaranteed we aren't going to read any [Sci-Fi/fantasy], because most adult book clubs shy away from that area because it's taboo to reading it because fantasy is [seen as] all airy fairy, elves and wizards shooting fire at each other and.... it's all crap and it's not aliens coming down and stuff. It's not *real* literature which is crap because *ultimately all fiction is fantasy*. [italics added] (Willow, I, 29/11/07)

Melissa, who incidentally shares her sister's fondness of science fiction and fantasy, admits that "I was amazed to see that there were others who enjoy them [children's fiction] as well because I always got teased by my friends when I was reading kids' books all the time....and some people say 'Oh, I don't read *that* stuff!'" [italics added] (Melissa, I, 29/11/07). Melissa confesses that she does not always admit to people that she enjoys reading children's books because of the negative reactions she has encountered. However, when she does disclose her 'closeted' affinity for the genre, some 'come out' and confess their love reading children's books and/or their interest to join the GBBC. I believe this to be the most integral use of this club from the members'

perspectives, and question why there is such a stigma attached to women who enjoy reading children's books.

For Hillary, echoing Rose's (1984) argument that childhood is often viewed as something that is left behind, she articulates that "I think if I went to a lot of people I know and wanted to discuss kids' books, they would look at me like 'gee, haven't you got *beyond that one yet?*'" (Hillary/04/12/07), as childhood is habitually seen by many as a phase of life that adults should have already graduated from. Rose further suggests that the glorification of the child in children's fiction is "not only a refusal to acknowledge difficulties and contradictions in relation to childhood; it implies that we *use* the image of the child to deny those same difficulties in relation to ourselves" [italics in original] (p. 8). This bears testimony to Allison's speculations on the reasons why members belong to the club: "I guess there are lots of different motivations and it kind of legitimizes reading children's books if you feel at all funny about it" (Allison, 21/11/07). As my own interest in the project was piqued by the fascination that GBBC exists, I can attest to the sense of surprise and excitement I personally felt, that a group of adult readers with a vested interest in reading children's fiction not only exists, but also has been operating for over three years with many of its 'core' members still participating. Yet it is precisely the psychoanalytic critique of children's fiction and the societal myth that childhood is something to *get beyond* that informs this project.

Sue, who fondly explains that her initial motivation for creating the GBBC was in looking for something fun to do, which at the same time would encourage the reading of children's fiction and promote the store, expresses that:

It is sort of nice to have that space that those of us who love reading kids' books don't always have people to talk about them with. Every time I turn around, I keep running into people who say, "I just love reading kids' books and people make fun of me"...So I think that's really what it is; a celebration of reading and enjoying kids'' books and being able to talk about them. (Sue, I, 06/12/07)

In the daily lives of these avid readers of children's fiction, there is no other socially sanctioned forum to exercise their love for, and longing to discuss, this captivating genre dismissed by many.

Why is it so surprising that a group of educated, literary women enjoy reading children's books and enjoy talking about them? The significance of the group as a functional use for legitimizing reading tastes for a genre that is not considered *real literature* suggests a simultaneous valorization, on the one hand, of a love for the genre, and on the other, as a site for cultural resistance to the *real literature* women *should* be reading. Although I don't believe that there is an answer to what women *should* be reading, comparing the genre of children's fiction to other studies I have read serves to re-affirm the uniqueness of the GBBC and its activities. Devlin-Glass's (2001) findings suggest that the women readers in her study of Australian book clubs, situating themselves as serious middlebrow readers, typically read texts that were written by women, are culturally specific, and "which in various ways take up issues which trouble the socially conscious" (p. 583). The most popular genres read in this context are family romance, female-focused, biographies, and fiction dealing with social issues. Similarly, Sedo (2004) found that the majority of participants in her Vancouver based book clubs

read contemporary fiction, non-fiction, classical literature, mystery and biography (p. 100). While Long (2003) does not disclose the genre preferences of her impressive study of 121 book clubs, she briefly mentions the existence of only two science fiction groups, both composed of more men than women, and whose profiles suggest their careers were in engineering and other science related fields; two industries dominated by men. Even looking to Oprah's Book Club Picks, the books that are chosen are typically adult fiction, which focus on stories of perseverance and life transformation. What these findings support is that, in recent studies examining the complexity of collective reading groups, the reading of children's fiction by adult women readers is a space yet to be explored.

As noted earlier, Long (2003) discusses how practically and conceptually, book clubs create boundaries that separate readers from other non-readers, distinguishing themselves as "socially cultured and literary people" (p. 22), and therefore adding to their social distinction and cultural capital.¹⁹ If the women readers of the GBBC see the club as a legitimizing space to share their knowledge and love for children's books, a space that is absent in their daily lives, then the discursive practices of the club add to their store of cultural capital; as literate, educated women who are simultaneously proud of their reading choices, materially and psychically immersed in issues, memories and fantasies of childhood yet also, because of past negative reactions, shy to share this pride with 'non-readers.' Sedo (2004) suggests that readers want to discuss the very

¹⁹ A concept associated with Bourdieu (1984) and discussed by Barker (2004) "to be forms of accumulated knowledge, skills and advantages that a person has, giving a higher status in society which works in a system of exchange amongst social groups" (p. 37).

personalized, emotional experience of reading, where “the work of collective, dialogic textual interpretation becomes new, shared knowledge” (Sedo, 2004, p. 36). It is precisely this that adds to each member’s ‘banked’ cultural capital: the shared knowledge and life experiences that are exchanged through the textual interpretations each member brings to the meetings.

As previously stated, and as seen through the vast amount of intertextual play in book club meetings, all five members of the GBBC are educated and well informed about the children’s texts they read. Some members, such as Sue and Allison, are perceived by others to have had a longer and deeper relationship with children’s fiction. As mentioned before, Sue is a former English professor with a Ph.D., specializing in children’s literature, and a current literary editor, while Allison is a librarian at the Faculty of Education, Memorial University, and sits on various children’s literature journal editorial committees. Both women have been part of the club since its inception, and are noted by other members to have a stronger yet welcomed background in their knowledge of children’s fiction. Hillary’s career as a “children’s literature enthusiast” (Julie, I, 26/11/07) admittedly started later in her reading career, but regardless, she spoke fondly about a number of different books, authors and writing styles, displaying her own amicable relationship with children’s literature. Although Willow and Melissa are newer members to the club, both claimed, nonetheless, to be avid readers of children’s texts, and attribute their own literary foundations to their self-proclaimed love of science fiction and fantasy.

Arguably, each member, possessing the necessary ‘knowledge’ to engage with the children’s books they read, comes from their own interpretive community (Fish, 1980) of

reading practices, through which education, class, gender, genre and race are inherently embedded (See previous findings by Radway, 1984, Robertson, 1997, and Long, 2003 to support this speculation). Although I feel I am somewhat ‘well read’ in the field of children’s fiction, having been raised on Judy Blume, a fanatic of *Nancy Drew* in my youth, and admittedly obsessed with *Harry Potter* in my adult career, during the first meeting, I felt that I did not possess the particular prior knowledge of texts that the members obviously had. As Bourdieu (1984) claims, “A work of art has a meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded” (p. 2). The members of the GBBC not only possess this cultural competence through their beloved reading practices, but also assert their individual encoding abilities in discursive participation in meetings. As I will demonstrate below, these encoding abilities work in two directions. First, they allow a simultaneous recognition of the ideal child figure who perseveres and creates triumph in an obstructed world. Second, at the same time the encoded abilities support readerly identifications that create ongoing subjective positionings in the present. These subjective positionings have much to imply about the readers’ gendered, regional, and moral negotiations with their realities. This group possesses “expert” knowledge, and a non-member would be lost with the accumulated encoding knowledge that the readers of the GBBC possess and exert during the meetings.

Intertextuality and comparative analysis are dominant practices in the GBBC, as members use their interpretations of the text, and prior knowledge of other books, in a complex dialogue about the books’ differences and similarities. As Long (2003) asserts, “readers enjoy finding something they can recognize and feel close to...sometimes

providing them with self reflective insight, much like seeing oneself through a mirror as well as exploring things that are strange and unfamiliar which they can learn from" (p. 177). Comparative analysis was evident within the first few moments of the first meeting, as Melissa, Willow and I admitted that none of us had read the original *Peter Pan*. Melissa asked the group if *Peter Pan in Scarlet* is anything like the original *Peter Pan*, to which Sue and Allison simultaneously voiced opposing answers, "Not at all! / Yes!" This priceless clash was met with barrels of laughter, slapping of knees and wiping of tears from virtually everyone in the room, and the debate then began, as to how each member engaged, compared and contested various aspects of the plot, narration, character development and writing style:

A: I thought she had really captured the sort of the old fashioned British euphemisms...and thought she did an excellent job [laugh]

MI: And why do you think not?

Sue: Because...one of the things that really makes *Peter Pan* for me is the narrator, he's so cantankerous and small and nasty and funny and childish and that's nowhere in there. I mean, there is an intervening narrator occasionally who feels really motherly to me...and that's exactly how the narrator *shouldn't* feel in a *Peter Pan* book.

A: Yeah, the voice. I agree the voice wasn't the same but *the writing style* was....you can't separate them in your mind?

Sue: I can't separate them...and I knew she was making those references and trying to pull some of that in but I...

Hi: As far as you're concerned, it didn't work?

Sue: It didn't work and in terms of her other books, I thought it was the weakest of anything I've read of hers...did you? (turns to Hillary)

Hi: Well, I like her stuff a lot and I always find I like her language and I didn't feel I lost that here. But I have to say that in the first half of this book I

struggled...I did not want to turn the page, I was not engaged...and was trying to figure out why, because I will put a book down if I'm not engaged, right? The only reason I kept going is because I wanted to talk about it and it's *Geraldine McCaughrean*....I wish I had read *Peter Pan* before, though, because I didn't remember much of the details from years back to kind of piece it together.

Sue: I would say you might be better, not having read it before we did. *Peter Pan* is so much better. [laugh]

W: I think I'm the only person who liked the book! [laugh] (FM, 19/11/07)

What this debate above exemplifies, specifically because it is at the start of the first meeting and sets the intertextual tone, is the way that Sue, Hillary and Julie demonstrate their ability to encode formal and literary aspects of the text — narration, language and writing style — and then use the reflections of others to take away new insights, creating novel perspectives on the text itself. Long (2003) asserts that many women rationalize their reasons for making a certain interpretation, therefore “using the book for self understanding and revelation of self to other participants rather than for discovery of meaning with the book” (p. 146). As each member grapples with how they relate to the text, the club becomes a space where they express how they ‘feel’ about a book, using their individual background knowledges to contribute to the provocative discussion of the text. It is precisely what occurs in this ‘talk’ that has captivated and informed past researchers on the potentially transformative power that ‘talk’ can have in creating meaning, a sentiment represented in Fiske’s (1987) articulation of the conventions of talk:

...and most belong to or attend some sort of club or social organisation.

And we live in neighbourhoods or communities. And in all of these social organisations we talk. Much of this talk is about the mass media and its

cultural commodities and much of it is performing a similar cultural function to those commodities - that is, it is representing aspects of our social experience in such a way as to make that experience meaningful and pleasurable to us. These meanings, these pleasures are instrumental in constructing social relations and thus our sense of social identity. (Fiske, 1987, ¶ 17, as cited in Sedo, 2004, p. 50)

This quote serves as a reminder of the pleasures we engage in during simple discursive practices such as talking to like minded individuals, and as a way of articulating our inner-most thoughts and feelings, helping us to make sense of what we 'know'.

Interestingly, the performance of intertextual readings during the meetings could be the basis for a thesis entirely on its own, as members are constantly expressing their knowledge of other texts, authors, movies and pop culture, which in turn reminds them of the interpretive text at hand. Throughout the first meeting, Sue revisits and reasserts her disenchanted feelings for the narrator compared to that in the original *Peter Pan*, tapping into her stored expert knowledge of this classic tale:

But the first book really plays off of different kinds of writing for kids', so certain kinds of adventure stories, famous pirate stories, all the pirates grow out of a certain genre of writing, school stories, domestic stories, so a lot of what happens in Neverland is like a parody of children's literature from the history of children's literature at the time. (Sue, FM, 19/11/07)

Sue admits that she loved the original *Peter Pan*, which is clearly demonstrated by her constantly employing a mode of comparative analysis during the meeting. Intertextuality is a major factor in the constitution of what we know, but in the absence of sociality,

intertextual knowledge goes unrecognized. This idea bears testimony to Long's (2003) assertion that "when women get together to discuss books, they are often searching for intellectual companionship they cannot find in other areas of their lives" (p. 22). It also resonates with Fuller's (2004) provocation that by "put[ting] words to group-based social realities....those words are then heard and valued, prized or rejected, by members of the local communities who *do* recognize the knowledges embedded in the stories and in the telling, or realization, of those stories" [italics in original] (p. 15). Although Sue's life revolves around reading, being a literary editor and a member of another book club, it is through the GBBC that she can validate, socially, her specific cultural expertise of children's fiction.

Although some members had yet to read the original *Peter Pan*, by discussing other works by Geraldine McCaughrean, an explosion of intertextual competence was ignited, and a display of deep narrative and formative intelligence was made evident. These processes of meaning making and cultural reproduction are belied by an atmosphere of informal and even playful banter:

MI: What else has she written? I've never ever read anything...

W: We have *tons* downstairs. [laugh]

MI: Yeah I saw the list and I swear I've read her but

Hi: We did *White Darkness* but I don't think you were then..

MI: No I don't think I was

Hi: People had mixed opinions about that one as well so the writing...

Sue: The writing in that one was *so* beautiful, stunning. She is so gifted. *Not the end of the World* which is about Noah and the flood...

MI: That's the one I read

Sue: And it is very dark. I mean there's a scene in that...where they're on the arc, and it's just after the storm has gotten bad. And people are trying to get on the arc, like swimming to the arc, and Noah's pushing them away, and there's this scene where's she's describing this and it's just devastating. Absolutely.

Ju: Did you see the television movie that was on ANR? It was on a few years ago.

Sue: No.

Ju: That was the scene that jumped out at me or stayed with me the longest. How all the people swimming and dying and yeah...

Sue: Yeah, because that's what you always think about...and the animals, and you don't think about all the people lying there and dying and the bodies. [laugh]

MI: And the screaming and children and all that. [laugh]

Sue: Yeah, you don't really think about that.

W: Yeah, I don't think I ever have before.

Sue: And now you have...[laugh] ²⁰

Hi: That sounds like material for Donna Joan Napoli, ya know?

MI: Madeleine L'engle has written that story as well.

W: *Many Waters*?

MI: Yeah, *Many Waters*, and it's about the daughter as well. She doesn't understand why she's not up there with her mother.

²⁰ I take a moment to comment on the [laugh] that I have not only noted in transcripts as laughter was a welcoming response to many comments made during meeting and interviews, but the manner in which the [laugh] is used. Humour is fundamentally a way of dealing with something, hence the expression "laughter makes the world go round." Laughter equals relief, release and allows us to nonchalantly mention something as disturbing as screaming, dying children, desperately swimming to the sanctity of refuge, Noah's arc, to no avail. There are a plethora of examples where laughter is used as a distancing tool to the atrocities of events that, although briefly touched upon, are not explored to their fullest capacity. As articulated by a popular quote by Mark Twain, "The human race has only one really effective weapon and that is laughter." Although there is no definitive evidence, one might speculate laughter in this instance may also act as a defense against women's possible discomfort with excessive intellectualization in the public sphere, and its alienating effects in sexualized/gendered world.

Within the span of less a minute of transcribed conversation, three texts, two authors, a television version of the interpretative text in question, the author's writing style, and a "devastating scene that nobody talks about," are articulated by all five members in very deliberate ways. Willow, by stating that "there are *tons* downstairs," demonstrates her knowledge of not only other works that Geraldine McCaughrean has written, but also exudes a degree of pride in the "breadth of the stock" that the Granny Bates Book Store maintains, as was previously mentioned. Sue's description of the scene "that nobody talks about" projects not only her desire to praise the "beautiful and stunning" language used by the author, but also shows her desire to discuss a potentially controversial scene in the "relaxed and casual atmosphere" of the GBBC.

Since all the members explicitly state that they welcome and cherish the *casual* nature of the book club, in comparison to the rigid confines of academia or other "adult" book clubs, where there's an "attempt to turn it into something academic or analytical" (Hillary, I, 04/12/07), I find this constant, descriptive use of the word 'casual' quite ironic. In fact, the discussions these women partake in are interwoven with levity and formal insights. Arguably the thread of conversation is highly analytical in nature, containing complex literary ideas, and exchanges in a community and province deemed to lead the nation in levels of illiteracy. This poses a paradox in understanding the use of the dialogical functions of the GBBC in the members' everyday lives. Long (2003) asserts that "reading in an academic setting is predicated and sustained by rigorous analysis of texts," while members in book clubs "are not held accountable for interpretations in the same way that are 'professional readers' and their students" (p.

147). Members are resisting ‘academic’ analysis in one way, yet collectively participating in analytical practices in another. However the latter is accomplished on their own terms, for their own pleasure and agency, and in ways that they may have not been able to exercise within the confines of institutionalized education or within the public domain elsewhere. Four of the five women interviewed adamantly articulated contested memories of reading in school, and of “hating every single book...that you were forced to analyze the crap out of” (Willow, I, 29/11/07), with “the impression that you had to know everything” (Melissa, I, 29/11/07), and reading materials towards which “you don’t have a choice” (Julie, I, 26/11/07). Since the GBBC is a group of highly energized readers, who gain pleasure from the very type of analysis that they spoke of disliking as young students, this paradox speaks to the narrow reading model that haunts our school systems. It also raises questions about the altered conditions needed by girls/women who want to “think” and may feel constrained to do so in school. As Hillary expresses, “You’re dealing with a bunch of people who really enjoy what they’re doing and are excited by it, and I think that is sort of contagious, right? Even if you secretly weren’t when you went there, you would be very quickly” (Hillary, I, 04/12/07).

Julie, adding that she had seen the television movie (*Not the End of the World*), and stating that the illuminated scene “jumped out at me or stayed with me the longest,” signifies an emotional attachment to a visual representation of a descriptive scene. She speculates in our interview that, “There’s always revelations...that you had never articulated, even to yourself” (Julie, I, 26/11/07). Here Julie engages her subjective use of the GBBC to augment her skills and satisfaction as a reader. Maybe in another scenario, when someone mentions seeing the movie, Julie might proudly admit, ‘I read the book,’

exerting her pride towards the GBBC, and of reading ‘good’ literature. While writing this section, I pondered over how often I perform this dance of intelligence in my own life, and the examples are, admittedly, endless. How often in collective conversation do we voice intertextual examples to contribute to the discussion at hand, therefore projecting what we know, and valorizing our knowledge base. As Sumara (1998) argues, “the practice of learning is not the assimilation and accommodation of new knowledge but, rather, the examination of new knowledge in relation to old knowledge” (p. 205).

Melissa, who during our interview admits that “there have been chats where I just don’t say anything and just kind of listen” (Melissa, I, 29/11/07), perks up to comment on the “devastating” scene as well as exerting her knowledge of a similar text, *Many Waters*, written by Madeleine L’Engle. Similarly, Hillary mentions the author Donna Jo Napoli, and although she utters this name only momentarily, she concludes her statement with “ya know?”; implying this is likely a *known* author, a common name, a shared form of knowledge somewhat restricted to the group. If she were to toss the name Donna Jo Napoli out in a different setting with a different social group in another area of her life, would she do so with the same confidence? I believe she would not, and although no one responds directly to Hillary’s possibly rhetorical question, it is said with an assumption that her knowledge of this author is acknowledged and valued.

In turn, Alicia admits that reading *The Book Thief* evoked spontaneous memories of reading *Rose Blanche* (1996), a children’s picture book written by Roberto Innocenti and Christophe Gallaz, describing a six year old’s discovery of a nearby concentration camp and her witnessing of the unthinkable horrors and cruel impact of the Holocaust. In the book, Rose brings food daily to the imprisoned children, bearing resonance to the

scene where Liesel humbly offers bread to a starving, feeble man being marched to Dauchau, and as a result, Liesel is beaten by a Nazi soldier. This scene is obviously disturbing, and elicits feelings of attachment to a similar text, portraying the brutal yet informative nature of the subjects of atrocity, gender, hunger and childhood:

A: Do you remember the book about the little girl feeding bread to the people in the concentration camps? Do you remember that? [turns to Sue]

Sue: *Rose Blanche*.

A: *Rose Blanche*, that's right, *Rose Blanche*. There was a children's picture book right?

Ju: It is, but one that you *don't* use with young children.

A: Yes, *but the point is*, that this little girl...goes and finds a concentration camp and she then takes bread and feeds it to the people at the camp and...this made me think of that because there was that part where they put the bread on the ground and Dachau was close enough to a village or a town where the children were, you know, aware. And so I did think about *Rose Blanche*, yeah...

While illuminating Alicia's prior knowledge of a similar text, this dialogue also encapsulates Julie's "expert" statement; another form of expressing informative knowledge that the dominant culture (patriarchal, "Canadian") may not acknowledge or valorize. Although written as a children's picture book, *Rose Blanche* is recommended for students in grades five and above, supporting Julie's claim that it is "one you don't use with young children." Long's (2003) findings suggest that the core members of some book clubs possess certain literary authority, acknowledged by other members, "either because they have graduate degrees in literature or because they are integrally involved with the worlds of books, whether as teachers [Sue], librarians [Julie and Alicia] or book

sellers [Sue and Willow]" (p. 95). Members who make expert or authoritative statements are fundamentally staging their desires, pleasures and authority within this provocative space: "I knew I was going to enjoy it and because I have *obviously* read the reviews before." Within this women's space, sometimes their authority is appreciated, and looked to in reaffirming preconceived thoughts, as Hillary asks Sue's opinion, and admits, "I knew I thought that but didn't know why" (SM, 10/12/08). While, at times, the reader's authority is contested and refuted, at other times it is valorized and celebrated. For example, with a hint of desire to put forth her own claim, Alicia replies to Julie, "Yes, *but the point is*." Although members spoke fondly of the equal and egalitarian nature of the club, clearly the space is, at times, deliberately used as an area where expert statements can be put forth, grappled with, agreed upon, debated and contested; all of which add to the work of producing gendered cultural capital for these intelligent and educated women. This bears testimony to "the importance of [a] group's conversations, for which a range of personal and intellectual qualities, talents and skills becomes not merely relevant, but essential" (Long, 2003, p. 153).

It is through the discussion of history that we understand and search for meaning about what is happening in our present day lives. The members subjectively display intellectual command of historical knowledges both found in, and surrounding the text, which further warrants the educative, meaning making nature of book club meetings. As eloquently articulated by Melissa, "It's like mine, and other things and different points of view collect in the middle of the room and make a new picture" (Melissa, I, 29/11/07). When Melissa said this during our interview, I envisioned a giant quilt, with each piece of fabric encrypted with readers' written notes of personal insights, questions, and

knowledges. As the quilt takes shape and the pieces become sewn together through the forging and building of articulated thoughts, seams strengthen, possibly answering some questions, while creating others, furthering the learning process as a whole. I found this idea to manifest itself on several occasions during the meetings, resonating with my own role of the interpretive bricoleur piecing together a bricolage of research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005), where discussions provoked members to use the materials they have and speak of historical knowledges, and a wide diversity of past events.

During the first meeting, members focused on one particular scene from *Peter Pan in Scarlet* that merits attention. It is the scene of the infamous London fog, a strand of which caused Peter to fall ill, and then was miraculously pulled out of his chest by the partially grown Dr. Slightly. Willow (placing the first few pieces of fabric in the collective quilt of meaning making I have envisioned) demonstrates her spatial and historical knowledges, and enlightens the group on what she knows about the “spooky” London fog:

W: ...the actual London fog, it doesn't exist anymore. It was made up of coal, dusts and all sort of pollutants and it was really unhealthy and it would come in and blanket the city and it was just nasty!

Hi: So is that what they're referring to?

W: Yeah, London fog is this super polluted nastiness, it's not what we think of as fog and isn't around anymore.

Sue: And it probably was on the go in the [19] 20's wasn't it?

W: There was a lot of coal dust.

Ju: Because they were burning coal in the houses. (FM, 19/11/07)

Within just a few sentences, historical accounts of the mysterious London fog²¹ are articulated, a speculative time of references is situated within a context of reason, and a quilt of shared knowledge begins to take shape. This signifies not only a deliberate demonstration of knowledge, but the women's excited and collective uses of building on the thoughts of others and learning through discursive practices, bearing testimony to Sedo's (2004) notions of clubs as "spaces for mutual affirmation of badges of wisdom to provide enrichment of daily lives" (p. 245). Likewise, during the second meeting, Alicia ponders over how slowly *The Book Thief* moves through time, and the effects this pace has on her as a reader. The dynamic of narrative temporarily meets the time of reading, and gets incorporated into a communal, cultural moment. She informs the group of the cornucopia of historical facts that she tapped into while reading:

A: And it's interesting because this book works very slowly through time.

W/Hi: [In agreement] It does²².

A: And at one point you think 'how long' and then you think, oh my god, he's been hidden for like 1.5 years you know because it's in [19]42, I think it's in [19]42 he leaves and I was just thinking about how many years you'll be hiding like [19]39-40, [19] 40-41 and I was doing this on my fingers [laugh] and thinking it's just impossible, that you could possibly stay hidden and of course he

²¹ According to *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, the notorious London fog has been described as resembling the consistency of "pea soup" referring to its particularly yellowish colour due to the burning of soft coal, prevalent in London prior to the Clean Air Act of 1956. Retrieved on August 2, 2008, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>.

²² A brief excerpt from *The Book Thief* to illustrate how "slow time" is portrayed: "For Max Vandenburg, there was cool cement and plenty of time to spend with it. The minutes were cruel. Hours were punishing. Standing above him at all moments of awakesness was the hand of time, and it didn't hesitate to wring him out. It smiled and squeezed and let him live. What great malice there could be in allowing something to live" (Zusak, 2005, p. 250).

doesn't and then I start thinking if he could possibly survive the war if he gets picked up in [19] 42. I mean, Anne Frank was picked up in [19]44. If the Arnhem bridge had been never been taken then of course Anne would not have been captured but the Arnhem bridge had been taken and the allies couldn't get across the, was it the Rhine, I guess? Or whatever it was. The Frank family was captured in September and I was busy doing this you know..[motions counting on her fingers]

Sue: She died very shortly before Liberation, didn't she?

A: Yeah because of typhus, it was the typhus, right. (SM, 10/12/07)

It is apparent that these women know very well certain details of history. During this discussion, I noted that the other members were nodding their heads, either in agreement with these 'known' facts or in sheer fascination of the historical events that were being expressed (as I was definitely part of the latter). The GBBC clearly acts as an ideologically sanctioned space for each member to exercise and experiment with intimate knowledge, while also providing a common language for these women to question and challenge what, and how, they read in a paradoxically *casual*, yet highly informative and educative atmosphere.

As previously mentioned, in regards to how my presence affected the first meeting, as "the dynamic does change depending on who's in the room and that's not something you know beforehand" (Julie, I, 26/11/07), it was articulated that, during this meeting, the group "stayed focused, the whole time," and "stayed more on topic than we ever have!" Long (2003) remarks that many woman readers in her study "noted the freedom to leap from topic to topic in the stream of consciousness structure (p. 145)", yet the idea of staying focused was voiced as something the GBBC readers were proud to do and took pleasure from. A glimpse into the etymology of "focus" provides insight into

the deliberate emphasis placed on how the group stayed focused. From the Latin *focus*, used in post-classical times for fire, hearth and fireplace, ‘focus’ was originally used in the mathematical sense as point of convergence. In the literal context, to be focused means to concentrate attention or energy towards a central point, to maximize clarity or distinctness of an idea, to direct toward *a particular point or purpose*²³. During interviews, members articulated that the perceived goal of the club was “to sit around and chat about kids’ books” (Hillary, I, 04/12/07), “to keep the club going” (Melissa, I, 29/11/07), to provide a space that “gives people the permission to read kids’ books” (Willow, I, 29/11/07), and “to have that space that those of us who love reading kids’ books don’t always have people to talk about them with” (Sue, I, 06/12/07). The pride and pleasure associated with staying focused provides a tighter context for realizing their (oppositional) goals of reading together, and to feel like they have met these aforementioned goals. By articulating that they stayed more on topic than ever while I was present, the readers also allowed themselves to feel a sense of self gratification in their relationship to me as a researcher, and to take pride in this club, that this “time that I carve out for me” (Julie, I, 26/11/07), is taken seriously. As Julie notes: “I protect that” (Julie, I, 26/11/07). While conversations can easily run adrift, where a plethora of diverse topics of conversation can occur, as demonstrated in the second meeting, the group still uses the interpretive texts as a way of drawing the discussions back to the topic at hand. Melissa admits that in comparison to the two other book clubs that she belongs to, the

²³ Focus. (2008). *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*. Retrieved August June 15, 2008, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/focus>.

GBBC's discussions are often "a little more textually than in other clubs and maybe a bit longer, and then we'll move onto other topics, usually other books we'll talk about and a little bit of what's happening in our lives" (Melissa, I, 29/11/07). The care for staying focused is a clear sign that these women claim and cherish this space, which allows them to realize and meet the goals that originally brought them together: to read children's literature in a careful, nourishing, pleasurable and caring way.

In this section I have argued that the GBBC functions as a storehouse for producing, negotiating and exchanging gendered cultural capital. Specifically, the cultural capital gained, challenges and sustains women's private communal exchanges of formal knowledge about children's literature as "articulation is dialogic—those words need to be heard by a community capable of recognizing their value" (Fuller, 2004, p. 10). Such knowledge includes insights into formal literary codes such as narration, language, historical context and intertextual frames of reference in both canonized and popular children's literature. What is fundamental is that the articulated knowledge is *legitimized* and *valorized* within the space of the GBBC, which is deliberately used by the members due to the absence of such a forum in their daily lives. This could be related to Sedo's (2004) findings that the one of the major reported reasons for joining a book club was the desire to be "intellectually stimulated...as discussion is informed, but not intimidatingly academic" (p. 110). Members of the GBBC's discussions are highly analytical yet members adamantly admit that the club is free from the confines of academia's tenacious grasp. This illuminates the gap between what the dominant culture (academia) constitutes as knowledge and how it is evaluated and the importance of local/situated knowledge to the owners that take pride in being the 'knowers' (Fuller,

2004). This notion concurs with Sedo's (2004) findings, as her participants offered insight "into the importance of power people...attribute to new knowledge, literature and reading, knowingly or not" (p. 127).

Further, the cultural capital minted and exchanged by the GBBC readers includes honing their skills in focus and attentiveness, as well as working collectively to realize the historical relevance of narrative and children's plight within certain traumatic historical contexts. Members take pride in staying focused as the information exchanged in the meetings is an "act of taking risks with both the intellect and the imagination" (Flint, 2006, p. 536). These articulations are precious and protected. I will return later to the significance of these patterns in relation to my thesis questions. What is clear is that within this space of excitement and struggle the *pleasure* of women's activity as producers and makers of meaning is fundamental and it is this area of interest to which I now turn.²⁴

²⁴ Acknowledgment to conversations with Dr. Judith Robertson for her assistance here in the final edits of this thesis.

Aesthetic Evaluation and Display: The Pleasure Principle

As previously mentioned, the GBBC reads ‘good’ children’s fiction, filtered through the scrutinizing eyes of the Granny Bates Book Store. As reading groups have a tendency to “follow the dictates of literary authority as they choose what to read” (Long, 2003, 149), the practice of reading and discussing what shared values the group have about their chosen “literature...promises a payoff in cultural capital and personal insight” (p. 149). Reading for the sheer enjoyment of children’s books is a common articulation of these children’s literature enthusiasts: “So many times it’s like I’ll be reading a random kids’ novel and enjoying the hell out of it because they’re fun and someone will be like ‘Why are you reading that?’” (Willow, 29/11/07) The author’s evocative use of language and the desire to “linger over it” (Julie, 29/11/07) is an important criterion for the members of GBBC, in determining not only how well a book is written, but also grasping at the beauty they get out of reading, simultaneously “judg[ing] its formal aesthetic value” (Long, 2003, p. 149). In addition to the form and structure of a text, the captivating power of the language used illuminates the aesthetic evaluation of texts; an activity that the members of GBBC use the site of the book club to exercise.

One of the dominant themes during the discussion of *The Book Thief* was reader attentiveness to the constant use of colour that appeared throughout the book. In its uses, colour often evokes a deeply felt sense of emotion. Whether in descriptions of a literary nature, art, fashion, or decorating, attentiveness to colour may be said to be a cultural

marker of taste (Bourdieu, 1984)²⁵. The consistent talk surrounding the uses of colour exemplifies the GBBC members' understandings of aesthetic recognition. They appreciate the uses of colour as a descriptive tool in *The Book Thief*, as well as a means to develop their aesthetic attraction to formal elements of the text. In the book, Death himself uses colour as a distraction for the haunting job he is doing: "I do, however, try to enjoy every colour I see-the whole spectrum...it takes the edges off the stress. It helps me relax...It helps me cope" (Zusack, 2006, p. 309). Such language provokes philosophical speculation about the uses and effects of colour in life—and the possibility of colour/lessness in afterlife. The connection that exists between the colours described by the narrator and the reoccurring symbol of the swastika is also noted by both Alicia and Willow: "Death says that the three times he sees Liesel, the sky is, the first time is red, the second time is white and the third time is black and that's the flag right?" (SM, 8/10/12). Colour, in this sense, evokes feelings of attachment to a powerful and notorious sign, which represents an insurmountable degree of human suffering, and the pain of a distinct historical period still branded in the present day lives of many. The use of colour as a descriptive tool for portraying distinct features of a character, as in Rudy's "lemon colour hair" (Zusack, 2005, p. 48), Hans' "silver eyes" (Zusack, 2005, p. 33), and Max's "swampy eyes and a face, white like eggshells" (Zusack, 2005, p. 195), was not only understood as signs of a "well written text" (a criterion clearly important to the club), but also as something that the readers assume or expect they would notice, and are

²⁵ There are political and economic determinants for such cultural "taste" as in the case, historically, of particular colours being restricted to member of royalty or lower classes, or even coloured signs to signify caste or outcast (i.e. the yellow star).

clearly surprised when they do not. Reading an excerpt from *The Book Thief*, Alicia notes:

The summer dress the mayor's wife, the summer dress was yellow with red trim.

There's a pocket with a small flower, no swastikas, black shoes. Never before had she noticed Ilsa Hermann's shins. She had porcelain legs” and there is a lot of colour *and I don't know how I missed it!* [italics added] (SM, 08/12/07)

By articulating the shock of ‘missing’ the descriptive use of colour, Alicia is positioning herself subjectively, as a reader who *should* notice such uses of colour, as “categories of literary judgment that develop in reading groups are grounded in what participants have found to be worth talking about” (Long, 2003, p. 150). In this particular discussion, members repeatedly articulate the examples of colour they found throughout the book, and pondered collectively over its meaning. These deliberations were further supported by Hillary, who spoke during our interview of feeling like she “missed” some of the references discussed in *Peter Pan in Scarlet* and felt, “strangely,” more inclined to read the book after the meeting. Again, the idea of missing something, which is later noted to be something worth discussing, implies the expectation of being attentive to the aesthetic values of the text; a privilege linked to those of a particular educational background and social origin (Bourdieu, 1984). One “sees” colour. If the visual sign is missed, what else has gone missing in terms of understanding? This implication also echoes Fish’s (1980) notion of interpretive activities, as conceptual movements shaped by understood practices and assumptions. The GBBC, by virtue of its members’ ‘shared assumptions,’ facilitates the act of displaying aesthetic judgment,

through which each member taps into their interpretive community, and in doing so, further shapes their ability and pleasure.

The importance of aesthetic analysis is further evidenced in the discussion surrounding the frequency of non-English words used in *Peter Pan in Scarlet*, as each member takes note of particular words they were attracted to, and enlightens the group by pondering their meanings:

pequeno marquis

Hi: ...it looks like Latin maybe?*marquis* is like a building isn't it?

Sue: No, no. A *marquis* is a person of some kind like a political designation...or 'little governor' is really what he's saying. I think there are several languages used.

esplorateri piccoli.

Sue: The little explorer, that's Spanish isn't it?

Hi: Or Italian.

Ignoramus minimus

Hi: But it's made up Latin, surely?

W: No, *Ignoramus* is a real word and *minimus*, just means little.

Doppel-kinder

W: German for the twins. [laugh]

Stupidi bambini

Hi: Stupid baby.

Bellisimo generalissimo.. [laugh]

W: Yeah, but these [foreign words] are also all Hook saying it and they're in italics, whereas the Russian stuff was the narrator.

Sue: But, I mean again, if you consider the topic at the time, it would have not been long after the Russian Revolution and the British connections to the Russian royal family, and what happened with the Czar and the Czarinas and stuff (FM, 19/11/07).

By negotiating the meaning of a few non-English words, which admittedly could be seen transparently as nothing more than the noted instance of something different, members articulate their attraction to the form and structure of the text, while also exercising their aesthetic judgment in terms of the beauty (and semiotic complexity) of riddled language. All non-English words in the above dialogue were italicized in the text, a literary technique that conveys a designation of importance to certain words, noteworthy and deliberately used as “the most elevated of linguistic and cultural norms” (Rose, 1984, p. 115). Earlier in the meeting, I noted references to various Russian words, (responded to by Willow in above dialogue) which eventually sparked Sue’s explanation of the historical significance of the Russian revolution, and its possible effects on that use of language. Upon reflection, members grapple with not only the meanings of words, as in their direct translation, but also their intention, structure, and purpose, collectively deciphering and judging the aesthetics of the text, an enterprise of “filling in the gaps” (Iser, 2000, 1978), whilst also unleashing their linguistic and historical knowledges. Relevant here is also the fact that Barrie’s original *Peter Pan* was replete with exotic and foreign words accessible only to the highly educated, and subsequently standardized and normalized for easy access for school children. But while the language was changed, as Rose (1984) argues, the structures of the feeling of the idealized eternally youthful child were not. Admittedly, the above ideas present quite a task for a ‘casual’ group, whose

goal is “to sit around and chat about something you have in common” (Willow, I, 29/11/07). “Most of the special human satisfactions,” Rosenheim (1980) reminds us, “do require planning and training in their cultivation. Even the deepest, most appropriate satisfaction from sport...are achieved through training and practice in execution or experienced, sophisticated practice” (p. 42). The pleasure derived from reading in the GBBC is as organized and cultivated as partaking in sport, and equally as sophisticated.

Setting aside the inquiry into the use of non-English words, Hillary asks the question if *ignoramus* is a made-up word, to which Willow responds, “No, it’s a *real* word” (FM, 19/11/07). Yes, *ignoramus*²⁶ is a real word, valid in the sense that it is classified, defined in an ‘official’ English dictionary with origins, roots, historical uses and relevance. However, the validity of a word like ‘*janny*,’ which Sue attempted to use while playing on-line scrabble with her daughter, was “disallowed. They said it wasn’t a word! ...So I emailed the web server...” (FM, 19/11/07). This instance of rhetorical attentiveness is very important, and warrants a detailed discussion, offered below. At stake here is the use of aesthetic forms (specifically language/words) as a weapon of cultural tradition, agitation, marking and distinction.

The online *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* (1997) phrases ‘*janny*’ as a noun, an “elaborately costumed person who participates in various group activities at Christmas; a fool, a mummer.” Mummering, or *janny*ing, is a Newfoundland Christmas tradition, “from back in the day,” (Sue, FM, 19/11/07) dating well over 200 years old.

²⁶According to the *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, derived from a Latin origin, 1570-80, *ignoramus*, classified as a noun, means an extremely ignorant person, to be ignorant of. Retrieved June 13, 2008, from <http://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/ignormus>.

The Mummers Song: Bud Davidge of Simani (1982)

(first five verses)

Don't seem like Christmas if the Mummers are not
here,
Granny would say as she'd knit in her chair;
Things have gone modern and I s'pose that's the cause,
Christmas is not like it was.
(Knock, knock, knock, knock) Please open the door.
We have...

Hark, what's the noise out by the porch door?
Granny, 'tis mummers, there's twenty or more.
Her old weathered face brightens up with a grin,
Any Mummers, nice Mummers 'lowed in?

Come in, lovely Mummers, don't bother the snow,
We can wipe up the water sure after you go,
Sit if you can or on some Mummer's knee,
Lets see if we know who ya be.

There's big ones 'n' small ones 'n' tall ones 'n' thin,
Boys dressed as women and girls dressed as men;
Humps on their backs an' mitts on their feet,
My blessed, we'll die with the heat.

There's only one there that I think that I know,
That tall feller standing o'er long side the stove,
He's shakin' his fist for to make me not tell,
Must be Willy from out on the hill.

Historically, during the twelve days of Christmas, Newfoundlanders would disguise themselves in old clothing, masking their faces with veils and paint, knocking on doors of their richer neighbours, and eerily asking, "on the inhale to disguise your voice," "Any mummers allowed in?" (Willow, first meeting 19/11/07). Once invited in, it was customary for food and drink to be offered to the visitors, who in turn would entertain the hosts by singing, playing instruments, or performing amusing comedy acts, while all the while, the hosts would attempt to guess their

identity. These activities were commonly attributed to the working class (and taken up in the homes of their slightly wealthier neighbours), and it was actually thought to help maintain the status quo by the annual release of the socially and economically oppressed; "that sort of uptrain of authority where the high is made low" (Sue, FM, 19/11/07). As noted on the *Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage Web Site Project* (1997), "Fuelled by excessive alcohol consumption, along with religious and political tensions, violence was a frequent outcome. This led to the legal abolishment in June 1861 of mummering

festivities throughout Newfoundland.” Although the practice of Mummering or *Jannying* still occurs today, it is done more so in the festive nature of a Newfoundland kitchen party. Jannying has also influenced many local theatrical performances, such as *The Mummies Play*, which remains an integral part of Newfoundland’s unique, artistic flavour.

With the unmistakable degree of cultural significance embedded in the word ‘*janny*’, which is defined in a ‘valid’ dictionary, and carries meaning and history for an entire province of Canada, it is a wonder that ‘*janny*’ is, nevertheless, not considered a *real* word. Questions of the production, distribution and legitimization of knowledge here arise, as Newfoundland, despite its historical significance, remains a routinely ignored part of Canada, and ostracized from the grouping of the ‘Atlantic’ provinces. This sense of exclusion and isolation is not strange to the works of Newfoundland writers, notoriously expressed by the author Wayne Johnston, as a “contagion of self-debasement” (as cited in *Riddle Fence*, 2007, p. 27). Newfoundland is not only economically and politically marginalized, but its distinct linguistic character has been stereotyped as “Newfie Talk...often associated with laziness and stupidity” (King and Clarke, 2002, p. 539). This association does not go unnoticed by Newfoundlanders who are well aware of the stereotypes that exist as *The Royal Commission on Strengthening and Renewing Our Place in Canada* (2003) reports that “88% [of Newfoundlanders] felt that other Canadians have stereotypes about Newfoundlanders, including ‘stupid’ ‘lazy/don’t work...and ‘uneducated” (p. 429 as cited in Delisle, 2008, p. 28). While the term *Newfie* has been ‘taken back’ in a sense and spoken with pride by many Newfoundlanders, “it serves as a highly salient marker of a particular stereotype of

Newfoundland identity, and in turn plays a role in reinforcing the (socioeconomic) marginalization of Newfoundlanders” (King and Clarke, 2002, p. 538).

In trying to understand the sometimes atrocious nature of validated knowledge and language, feminist poststructuralism theorizes language as a site of struggle, which occurs “at the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet [language] is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is *constructed*” [italics in original] (Weedon, 1987, p. 21). Weedon further postulates is through the unpacking of language, seen as a site of struggle, that we can “understand existing power relations and identify areas and strategies for [political] change (p. 40). In a contained, safe site for themselves, the GBBC offers its members a common language in which to exercise their human right to explore local knowledges that each individual owns, and which are “bound to the communities that experience them” (Fuller, 2004, p. 13). Such a candid and equitable forum, furnishing a space for regional articulation, arguably provides a “grounding among both textual and personal companions that enables participants to confront the wider changes they perceive around them and their own personal wishes, fears, dreams and regrets. Articulating these responses to the world, books, and each other, they invent new forms of subjectivity” (Long, 2003, p. 176). Although the discussion of the validity of the word ‘*janny*’ lasted only for a few moments during the meeting, it is these precious moments that provide “the attention to the particular” in the GBBC, and allow for “unpacking the processes of mediation and representation, and for recognizing how belief systems are articulated through language” (Fuller, 2004, p. 11).

I have now identified two salient patterns of how GBBC readers use collective reading experience to identify with or relate to aspects of childhood. To review, the female adult readers of this study use interpretive texts (namely, children's literature) as a means of appropriating, negotiating and exchanging cultural capital. Arguably, their attentiveness to the formal and intertextual elements of children's books provides for a gendered reading practice within a space in which the pleasures of agency and play may collide. Secondly, the community of readers demonstrates notable readerly interest and pleasure in aesthetic images—namely, visual depictions denoting colour, and distinctive word usages. Dismantling certain utterances like *janny* not only sheds light on how knowledges become validated through language, which is arguably linked to the exclusion and mockery that Newfoundlers experience because of their unique dialects, but also open up discussion for the political consequences of language as a site of struggle. In the concluding chapters of this thesis I will discuss the gendered cultural significance of such interwoven identifications. Now I turn to a third salient pattern of readership in the GBBC, namely, what it means for these female love of children's literature to read as Newfoundlanders'.²⁷

²⁷ Acknowledgment to conversations with Dr. Judith Robertson for her assistance here in the final edits of this thesis.

“I’m a third generation townie!”

Newfoundland undoubtedly has a fierce regional pride that permeates into the core strength of its very foundation, a fortitude that is shown through its popular representation as “The Rock.” This pride, which exudes from a sense and desire of belonging, described by Marjorie Doyle as “the fibre of Newfoundland” (Doyle, 2007, p. 41), is predicated on the historical and geographical marginalization that the province has endured through centuries of colonization. Regionalism, defined “as an ideological discourse which positions and produces subjects in specific and very political ways” (Kelly, 1993, p. 13), has shaped the Newfoundlander’s regional identity as something that is tenaciously held on to; insular, bounded, and reflected in the everyday lived experiences of the community.

Baldacchino’s (2008; 2004) revolutionary work in the emerging field of Island Studies—the study of islands on their own terms—posits that although islands apparently bestow on their inhabitants a stronger sense of self pride and identity, and although insularity tends to be equated with community, this is not always the case. To illustrate this schism, Baldacchino (2004) points to the frequency of “Island states which are not (yet) nations but are internally ruptured” (p. 273). The signature of an island is its geographical locality, a bounded rock nestled in a body of water, which acts not only as its key economic resource but also as its boundary, its separateness (both geographically and conceptually) to an often-contested mainland. However, as Baldacchino’s work further reminds us, “just as boundar[ies] are fractal....locality is ephemeral” (p. 272). Newfoundlanders’ insular pride in their *islandness* is a clear example of subjective resistance to being at the receiving end of “a powerful, cultural [and] financial

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regime...that chooses to type cast them in very specific ways, all reminiscent of smug, taxonomic subordination” (Baldacchino, 2008, p. 41), represented in the assumed communal narrative that marks the Newfoundlander’s identity and status. Speaking of such resistance as positive force, Baldacchino (2008) cites Bhabha (1994):

The celebration of locality of which ever shape or form, includ[ing] the fabrication of a sense of nation, becomes a viable strategy for subverting the narratives and representations promulgated and imposed by external dominant powers and cultures...even if hybridity is the outcome (p. 42).

As Bhabha (1990) writes, the notion of hybridity opens up the concept of “the ‘third space,’ which enables other positions to emerge” (p. 211). The ‘third space’ allows for a reflection on the discourses that work to maintain the binaries we seek to eradicate; self/other, past/present, dominant/minority—where the ‘in-between’ of such binaries are negotiated—and where “the struggle to situate oneself...at the dynamic intersections of race, culture, gender/sexuality, class, and nationality, in specific historical and geographical contexts” occurs (Asher, 2002, 85). It is in this space “where interrogation of various intersecting forces...allows us to understand self and other,” and where hybrid knowledges emerge, “which engage difference in productive, meaningful ways in school and society” (ibid). For the present study, it is in the GBBC readers’ repeated discussion of the fixed labeling of Newfoundlander status that reflects their collective awareness of being in a ‘third space.’

Reflecting on the dismissal of the word ‘*janny*,’ Hillary confesses that she has never heard the words ‘*janny*’ or ‘*mummer*’. Sue speculates that the word might originate from a specific region, to which Hillary replies, “Well, a lot of people say I’m not a *real*

Newfoundlander so maybe that's why... I always try to figure out why that is because I find that very odd. To me, I talk like anyone else around here [laugh]". As I have previously stated Hillary has one of the strongest Newfoundland accents I heard while living in St. John's, so much so that I was absolutely mesmerized by her articulations during our interview. The apparent schism between the cadences and syntax of her speech and unfamiliarity with a popular NL word and tradition, points to the kind of hybrid outcome that Baldacchino (2004; 2008) says marks islander identities.

When Julie is posed the question of where she grew up, she replies, "Here, and my parents are from here. I'm a third generation townie!" (FM, 19/11/07). The often-internal rapture that Baldacchino (2008) discusses can be applied to the ongoing strife between townies and those from around the bay (historically referred to as baymen). In *Newfoundland: Dawn Without Light*, Herbert Pottle (1979) suggests that the struggle between townies and baymen²⁸ has been caused by political grudges as townies are seen as the "haves," the prosperous businessmen, while baymen are seen as the "have-nots," the fishermen struggling against the corrupt and greedy townies (Pardy, 2001). Here we see the notorious binaries that post-colonial, and feminist post-structural theorists strive to eradicate, in order to understand how groups become situationally 'known,' and juxtaposed to one another as "polarized dichotomies" (Asher, 2002, p. 88). If a townie is only a townie because he (not she) is not a baymen, what, I wonder, happens when a

²⁸ As indicated earlier in the thesis, *The Dictionary of Newfoundland English Online* defines a townie as "a native of St. John's, especially a male, usually derisive, and contrasting with bayman: one who lives on or near a bay or harbour; inhabitant of an 'outport'; sometimes with derogatory connotation. Retrieved on June 15, 2008 from www.heritage.nf.ca/dictionary.

townie moves around the bay or vice versa? Asher calls forth the need to develop a “hybrid consciousness which requires us to examine our own implicatedness in the very systems/structures we are trying to change, allowing us to locate both self and other within...discourse...” (p. 89). Although there will presumably always be a divide between townies and baymen in Newfoundland, echoing centuries of contested/colonized identities, developing spaces, such as the GBBC, to grapple with such conflicting notions of the fractured self helps to dismantle the practices of discourse that keep identities static and fixed.

Expanding on the notions of fixed binaries, Hillary elaborates on her “quasi Newfoundlander” status and explains that although her mother is Irish and her father is “Canadian” (from Montreal), she has spent most of her life in Newfoundland: “I consider myself to be a Newfoundlander, I don't know what else I would consider myself to be, really” (Hillary, I, 04/12/07). Brah's (1996) notion of diaspora offers a critique of “the discourses of fixed origins” (p. 180), shedding some light on the pluralistic and shifting regional identities of the inhabitants of Newfoundland. At the same time, one might speculate that the claimed status of “townie” by Julie also demonstrates her use of the GBBC as a cultural space for subverting patriarchal claims of identity.

Literally, diaspora means “a dispersion from home,” and has been used as a theory to conceptualize the forced mass movements of population in the wake of political strife, famine, war and other global atrocities. In specific relation to Newfoundland, this concept works as an “interpretive frame referencing the economic, political and cultural dimensions of these contemporary forms of migrancy” (Brah, 1996, p. 186). Though Hillary considers Newfoundland her home, as a place of origin on one hand and as “the

lived experience of locality” on the other (p. 192), she has been told by many that due to a partial absence, she has been stripped of her subjective position, as Newfoundlander, to which she nevertheless proudly subscribes. On a different note, those who were born in Newfoundland and have grown up elsewhere sometimes hold on to the Newfoundland identity with a sense of pride and a sense of belonging:

Sue: ...I know a writer who was born here, I think he moved when he was like four years old and he's lived in Ontario ever since and he's still considered a Newfoundlander.

Hi: Oh he's a writer, well that's different. [laugh]

J: Start writing! [laugh]

Delisle (2008) points out that it is rarely mentioned that many of Newfoundland's most successful writers, such as Wayne Johnston, Donna Morrissey, Michael Crummey, and Patrick Kavanagh, wrote their best-selling works outside of the province. This fact signifies the contradictory notions of subscribing to the Newfoundlander status. The Newfoundlander identity is “differentiated, heterogeneous, contested...even as implicated in the construction of ‘we’ and is about political and personal struggles over the social regulation of belonging” (Brah, 1996, p. 186). To be a Newfoundlander is to subscribe to an identity with its primary characteristic defined in opposition to the canonical Canadian identity; the ongoing struggle between island and mainlander. The harsh economic and social conditions that have pervaded the migrancy of people to and from the province disrupts the often-dominant label of the ‘Newfoundlander’ as fishfolk tenaciously bounded to the island. “Diaspor[ic] space,” Brah notes, “is the point at which boundaries of inclusion and exclusion of belonging and otherness of ‘us’ and ‘them’ are

contested,” and are thus, “potentially the sites of hope and new beginnings” (p.209).

Individuals within larger populations, such as Newfoundlanders, instead of being represented through the abhorred label of “Newfie,” or skewed statistics of illiteracy, can instead be viewed as living through shifting, intersecting, multiple axes of understanding, and within differentiated aspects of regional identity. To think critically on what it means to be a Newfoundlander, an inhabitant of Newfoundland, a townie or a baymen in these pluralistic terms, “where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed; where the permitted and the prohibited perpetually interrogate; and where the accepted and the transgressive imperceptibly mingle even while these syncretic forms may be disclaimed in the name of purity and tradition” (p. 208), allows for an interruption in the labels that are constructed or assumed; embraced or stripped.

Arguably, the GBBC serves as an ensemble of relations which—in their movement, enunciation, and contestation—continually re-signify and transform the “fixed” identity of a Newfoundlander.

And yet, in the case of Hillary, being told that she does not possess the regional sensibilities of those who have spent all their life uninterrupted on “the Rock,” her subjective positioning as a Newfoundlander is contested in “the face of constructed imperatives of ‘purity’” (Brah, 1996, p. 208). She posits that, “In order to be part of it, they have to have pretty rigid ideas about who’s in and who’s out, right?” (Hillary, 06/12/07). The shifting and pluralistic subjective positions that Brah (1996) encourages us to embrace with the notion of diaspora are “at the core of culture and subjectivity” (ibid). The GBBC itself exists as a site to articulate subjective positioning, allowing individuals to grapple with aspects of their ascribed regional, cultural and historical

identities, to continually create and re-create their ways of knowing, and seeing the world in which they live, “as [they] stand on the threshold of the future” (Long, 2003, p. 176). In this way, “reading groups provide a deliberative space that encourages reflective awareness of this process” (ibid). It is this reflective awareness, spoken of by Long, which is exercised in the space of the GBBC; a space which may not be apparent or easily accessible in the everyday lives of its members. In this sense, the club also provides essential “equipment for living” (Burke as cited by Long, 2003, p. 131), as members make sense of their everyday lived experiences and their positions as regional/transnational social subjects. It is through the precious moments of speech, and in the intimate space of a book club, that that the GBBC readers are sanctioned to “investigate reading as a situated practice that explores local knowledges that are bound to the communities that experiences them” (Fuller, 2004, p. 13).

Having reflected on the women readers’ uses of the book club to reassemble their diasporic naming strategies as “Newfoundlanders”, I now wish to turn to a fourth common cultural claim made upon the space of the GBBC: namely, to adopt an attitude and to adopt images around what it means to love children’s literature.

“Children’s Fiction Enthusiasts”

All children, but one, grow up.

J.M. Barrie, *Peter Pan*, p. 1

The above quote from J.M. Barrie can be seen to represent two popular assumptions about childhood. First, that it is a phase of being that we are expected to discard, like a snake that sheds its skin, and that to deny that this is the case would be to defy the laws of ‘nature.’ Secondly, the quote represents our fixation and mystical obsession with childhood, as a place to escape back to, and as an earlier romanticized version of our ‘self,’ where life was not as difficult as it is in the present. The origin of the conception of childhood is intrinsically linked to the origin of children’s fiction, a link that can be best illustrated by how conceptualization of this “playful” genre differs from its adult counterpart. In *Classics of Children’s Literature*, Griffith & Frey (2000) propose that prior to the eighteenth century, there was virtually no concept of childhood and what little texts were created for children were used as moral, religious and academic instruction. Children were thought of as miniature adults, fulfilling their prescribed role in the community as soon as they were weaned to function on their own. It was not until the Industrial Revolution, when technology made feudal and tribal life more “sophisticated,” that the idea of ‘childhood,’ spawned out of the emergence of the middle class, began to take shape. Childhood began to be recognized most often through time spent in the home, “protected, entertained and educated. It was largely for young people occupying this newly developed social niche that children’s literature came into being” (Griffith & Frey, 2000, p. 1). As the publishing industry grew during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a variety of printed material aimed at children was produced with

the common idea of childhood as “a peculiar time of high spirits, innocence and freedom....free from the order and responsibility and the rationality, sobriety and good sense that are supposed to govern the adult world” (Griffith & Frey, 2000, pp. 1-2). In general, much of children’s literature was characterized as freer in style, more informal, playfully charming as opposed to its adult genre, capitalizing on the themes and situations that were deemed important and distinct for the precious notion of what childhood was meant to be. A Griffith and Frey (2000) note, this genre became characterized by “the tensions between adventure and homely security, between the desire for independence and the need for love and approval, between the challenge of growing up and the temptation to keep things exactly the way there are, and between the liberating power of fantasy and the sobering constraints of reality” (pp. 1-2) (See also Galbraith, 2001; Robertson, 2000, 2001). It is precisely these themes of innocence, plenitude and loss that the adult world considered to be important aspects of childhood, which has further led to the evolution of the genre of children’s literature, as it exists today.

Psychoanalysis informs us that childhood is never resolved, forgotten, or left behind, and that instead, it exists as “something in which we continue to be implicated” (Rose, 1984, 12). To deny that childhood lingers in our conceptions of self is to deny that the self is never a static entity—for as any living subject can attest, the self is always partial, fractured; a continual work in progress. Rose (1984) argues that we use the image of the child in fiction as something fixed, as a static notion of innocence, a timeless entity, and as a means to deny the struggles and violent passions that occur in our childhoods, just as they continue in our adult lives. As she notes, “There is no child behind the category of children’s fiction other than the one which the category itself sets

in place, the one which it needs to believe is there for its own purposes” (p. 11). It is to ease the “rational” adult mind that we use the fantasy figure of the child to represent all that is lost of our former, seemingly innocent selves.

The members of the GBBC are proclaimed children’s literature enthusiasts. They have a deeply invested interest in the genre for variously articulated reasons. In addition to the often fantastical narrative that is found in children’s books, Willow proposes that, “I guess because they’re often about children learning about their environment and that’s what I want out of a book, a new culture to immerse myself into...” (personal email, Willow, 04/15/08). As mentioned earlier, there is often a colonial aspect and an exploratory narrative in children’s fiction; the adventures of seeking treasure, the discovery of new worlds, and a new terrain to conquer. Though Sumara (1998) writes that, “the narrating of the self, whether it is done by oneself or by others, is always a kind of traveling” (p. 204), in any journey that is embarked on, there is also always an assumption of a return home, implying a closure of some sort. Gilead (2001) discusses the recurring literary device of “closure,” and its many perceived uses in children’s fiction (specifically fantasy). As she reveals, the initial escape from fictional reality to fantasy “raises the possibility of regressive slippage from adulthood to an idealized realm of childhood....relegating it to a mere stage in the process toward adult selfhood,” however “thinly concealed is the fact of fantasy as [the] object of adult” (p. 288). This is a difficult but important idea, and it merits pondering. Gilead’s point is that adult readers use fantasy as an object or mode of psychic defence against difficult, painful realities. The return to “reality” often provides the reader a sense of psychic closure, the ending of a brief exposure to the idealized childhood remembered in a character’s fantasy, and a

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return to their “rational”, adult life. When we think of ‘closure,’ we are generally concerned with something as finished and complete; a concept that we, as adults, are typically obsessed with. Yet to allow ourselves to be surrounded by the fantastical writings of children’s books, “...is comforting. It's familiar, yet it's awakening and forces you to go back to a place or perspective that you may have moved on from or chosen not to live by” (Hillary/04/12/07). Sumara reminds us that, “Remembering is not the same as interpreting, for interpreting requires that memory be interrupted and reorganized” (Sumara, 1998, p. 203). Arguably, it is through this interruption and reorganization of memory that the members of GBBC actively use the collective reading of children’s fiction to relate to the forgotten aspects of childhood that we are expected to rid ourselves of.

Children’s fiction is often discussed as having a moralistic message for its respective audience, “which goes way beyond the more transparent didacticism and pedagogy of its earliest modes and into the heart of writing... [and as] an ethos of representation” (Rose, 1984, p.139). Although fiction is not merely about moral teachings, as literary critiques are more often concerned with the “ongoing restricting and reconditioning of the readers’ [subjectivity]” (Sumara, 1998, 206), it is, nevertheless, precisely the moralistic undertones that are duly noted by the GBBC readers as an important reason for enjoying the books themselves, as well as their imparting of valuable moral lessons to children. Upon reflection, Alicia shares that, “I always liked reading fantasy and science fiction to my kids because there seemed to often be moral things that were being discussed, and it seemed to be an easy, interesting way to get them thinking about ideas like that” (SM, 10/12/07). An example of how moral distinctions

are articulated in the GBBC can be seen in the discussion surrounding Liesel's 'stealing' of the books from the mayor's wife's library: as Hillary points out, "she *only* took one [book] at a time" (SM, 10/11/07). Though this statement of Hillary's bears testimony to an assumption that the act of stealing is wrong, when this particular act is contextualized (as being witnessed by the mayor's wife, who watches her, smiling, as well as the child-like innocence surrounding Liesel's careful and timely selection of books "by colour, title, the prints") a situational moral judgment becomes apparent. Similarly, accompanied by their friends, Liesel and Rudy routinely steal apples from a nearby farmer's field. These acts of theft are sometimes portrayed as innocent, as a means to calm their hungry, rumbling tummies, and other times, are depicted as somewhat malicious actions undertaken by a gang of youths, led by a deviant teenage terror. It is through the contextualized moral judgment surrounding the act of stealing that members felt "there was a real sense of that range...you had levels of cruelty and levels of kindness...in terms of everyday life of people's decency and humanity" (SM, 10/12/07). Thievery, typically deemed a morally deviant act, is rationalized and justified by the aura of childhood innocence, as well as the social factors that compel and perhaps even justify 'stealing.' For the GBBC readers, such moral distinctions could be considered one of the important issues that children's fictional writings "gets [kids'] thinking about" (Alicia, SM, 10/12/07). Within this collective moment, the women's culture of reading may be performing important decolonizing work that has implications for law and justice—particularly as practiced for or against children. Hillary further articulates:

I think reading is one of the greatest ways to gain a perspective on what happens and what we choose to do and our attitude towards certain things. I love the way,

especially kids'' books, can really set up stories or set up, create stories or images or analogies in a very subtle way, apply to our own lives, to anybody's lives. And I think the greatest lesson I've learned, is not from reading self help books or a certain psychologist's interpretation of something, but from stories. I think that it is one of the richest ways to make life meaningful, and opening our eyes to things of interest and beautiful things and people. So for me that is huge." (Hillary, I, 04/12/07).

Melissa sees writers of the genre as "often less afraid to write different types of imaginary, fantasy or that type of stuff...so their subjects are a lot lighter and imaginative" (Melissa, I, 29/11/07). However light the tone of children's fiction may be, "they invite serious contemplation of important human issues in a context of sustained imaginative ventures" (Griffith & Frey, 2000, p. 2), "that requires *a kind of sensitivity* that you can't find in adult books" (Sue, I, 06/12/07). When painful subjects are written about through the eyes of a child (as a young protagonist is often the narrative voice in children's fiction), it is typically less heart wrenching to read than its adult counterpart. As in the case of *The Book Thief*, although narrated by the sarcastic, almost lovable voice of Death, "you're often seeing it from Liesel's point of view too" (Alicia, SM, 10/12/07), and essentially reading like a child. For example, the group empathetically ponders over the description of Max having "swampy eyes" and the repercussions of his precarious hiding place in the basement of the Huberman's. For myself, thinking of my nostalgic moments playing in swamps, I thought swampy eyes would be how a child would characterize something, in an almost playful sense of the word 'swamp.' Rarely would I think, with my *rational* adult mind, to describe someone's eyes as "swampy." The point

is that the GBBC readers claim such language to engage with moral issues, especially in relation to nurturance and children. For Sue, the descriptive phrase characterized his illness:

Like when somebody's sick...because you've got to figure he's not going outside and suffering from stress and depression and I can't even begin to think what it's like to be like living down there just thinking everyday...so I always thought that was just a sign of his illness. He's always been thin but he looks swampy when he's really thin. [laugh] (SM, 10/12/07)

My interpretation of “swampy eyes” engages a description from a child’s point of view—the very essence of children’s fiction. I was brought back to a time in my life where I would have potentially used the word swampy as a descriptive word, before I had shed my playful (or frightened) skin. In this example, to read like a child is to distance oneself from the very real complexities, and possibly, atrocities that are being described. At the same time, it is to hold a moral universe at hand for closer examination. This is an appealing aspect of children’s fiction, as the content can be very disturbing. Reading like a child, or through the eyes of a child, often “softens the blow” of the devastating impact that stories of human suffering and pain can have on an adult reader (SM, 10/12/07).

The format of *The Book Thief* offers another kind of ‘softening,’ as the story is constantly interrupted by Death’s foretelling of devastating events; a distancing tool to calm the possible anxieties the reader may feel about the unthinkable tragedies of WWII. For some, using foreshadowing as a distancing tool was a much needed structure, and as Hillary admits, “I don’t think I could have gotten through the book had it not been for that you know, distancing.” As Julie thought, “it was too overwhelming,” Sue states that,

“the narration lacks subtlety,” while Alicia posits, “I thought maybe for a child, for a young child...because otherwise you would be totally torn apart” (SM, 10/12/07). As adults reading through the eyes of children, we are essentially protecting ourselves, as we would ultimately want to protect children, from succumbing to the difficult knowledge of harsh realities discussed in the text, which in many ways have shaped our lives.

Psychoanalyst Michael O’ Loughlin (2006) argues that “the ascription of childhood innocence may represent a manic attempt to deny the unacknowledgable history of our own subjective experience and unnamable desires” (p. 189). He further argues that, as adults, we essentially try to protect children from their “unconscious memories of the unresolved trauma of their ancestors,” which can embody a generation of anxieties, wishes, identities and desires bestowed upon them from the familial lineage (ibid). Again, insofar as childhood is typically glorified in children’s fiction, any slippage back to our “repressed yearnings” (Gilead, 1991, p. 277) needs to be framed in a cushioning realm of idealization and not in the unpacking of generations of “unconscious knowledges” (O’ Loughlin, 2006, p.189). The act of reading children’s fiction *like* children, then, continues this paradox. For adults, it can pose an escape or an attempt to revert back to our childhood selves, but only the romanticized childhood selves that fiction poses as “unpacked.” Even if children’s fiction fools us into nostalgic notions of romanticized childhood, rich with purity and innocence, it also allows us to hope in ways that maybe our adult subjectivities—often saturated with jaded and tainted views of the world we live in—will not allow us to do. “Adult fiction can be really hopeless, you know. It can be, I don’t know, more demoralizing. Usually in young adult fiction, you’re

looking for a redeeming ray of hope at the end or something that, you know, doesn't leave you an emotional mess" (Julie, 21/11/07).

Sue admits that part of the reason why she loves to read children's fiction is because it's "much more playful to read and I love things that are playful" (Sue, 10/11/07). Child's play is one area that is used by psychoanalysts to create a space of creative exploring, revealing unconscious wishes and desires. Imaginative play is how a child makes sense of their world, and through which they can take creative and fantastical steps in learning to express themselves (Winnicott; 1971; O' Loughlin, 2006).

For Melissa, child's play in literature is important, as it allows her to feel connected to her three-year-old son, and understand how his 'play' helps him to discover himself through imagination and language. This is an instance in which the GBBC space is explicitly claimed as a maternal space for projection and idealized nurture. In Neverland, when characters imagine something, it is perceived as real, which allows them to explore outside the confines of what 'reality' is. Such transgressive perceptions replicate the function of a child's play, which can be real in the way they make sense of what they know:

I liked how their imagination and play became real for them. Something about that I really took to, and how it was portrayed, because Owen, my son, he plays like that. It was really neat to see how, like, the way she wrote about them, and slaying the dragon, and they talked about it like they were really doing it and because it was Neverland, it was real to them...and that is exactly what children do and that is what Owen would do if he wanted to slay a dragon. Like Owen somehow learned about Christmas wreaths, I don't know if someone taught him

that...and I was doing yarn work and he got some of my yarn and said, "Mommy, mommy I'm hanging a Christmas wreath." And all it was, was a piece of white yarn draped over top of his art easel. But in his world, it was a Christmas wreath (Melissa, I, 29/11/07).

Melissa admits she reads to her children often, with the hope that they will become avid readers themselves. Once again the claim may be said that the collective reading space is being used by at least one of the readers as a space for practicing women's culture of nurture. While it is important to note that such space does not operate outside the dynamics of colonization, Cullinan (1989) remarks how, "Readers are made in childhood; the models we provide and the books we select influence children in lasting ways...and it is our responsibility to know their books" (p. 5).

In our adult lives, there are not many socially accepted forms of the play that children's fiction allows us to do. But by reading texts that are playful, and through making sense of fantastical worlds that often captivate the narrative flow of children's fiction, the members of the GBBC are encouraged to toy with the energies of imaginative play that social forces have forced us to forget. In the following dialogue, the group ponders over what is causing Neverland's scarlet skies:

Sue: Generally, that the idea of introducing the war was interesting but it also seemed, that one point when the narrator says that maybe it wasn't that Hook poisoned their blood, maybe it was just the war' and all that, came in and changed everything....It seemed to be a very interesting decision to make and it is based partly on when *Peter Pan* was written so it's not out of line with that and in fact one of the Darling Boys did die... So, that works, but it also felt really strange.
Hi: To have that influence of the outside world in that way, is that what you mean?

Sue: Something of that magnitude from the outside world felt kind of odd. And I don't know that I dislike it.

Hi: Yeah because as I understand it, Neverland is...

Sue: It's like a world of imagination...

Hi: Yeah, it doesn't have to even follow the rules, apparently.

Ju: Yeah, but the real world in here doesn't follow the rules either. I mean the babies, they get lost and fall out of their prams, and off to Neverland.

Sue: But that's a Neverland perspective, that's a Neverland explanation, isn't it?

Sue: That's the narrator's explanation and it is true that events of that magnitude affect kids' play and sort of infiltrate, but sometimes it felt kind of forced, you know?

Hi: For me it was almost too big...to bring in a dream event makes sense, but the war, to me, felt jarred. It didn't flow smoothly with the context of the story.

The articulated speculations and contradictory explanations of what is affecting Neverland is a serious concern to the readers of the GBBC, because the way it is written doesn't make transparent sense to them. As members ponder over the effect of the war on Neverland, articulated as being "odd," "strange," and "jarred," they seek to fill in "the gaps...the fundamental asymmetry between text and reader," what is written and what is assumed by the reader (Iser, 1978, p. 167). Speculating that it could be the effect of WWI, or the historical "real" of a Darling boy's death, or alternatively the imaginary ongoing battle between Hook and Pan, allows the readers to collectively negotiate meaning. They collectively seek to add much-needed clarity for things that are not perceived as being clearly written in the story, or in life, and to forge a collective thought to try and understand why McCaughrean chose to take this particular narrative path. When things jar the world we live in, or shake an understanding of ourselves or

assumptions that we have previously held, by grappling with the circumstances surrounding such flux, we can reflect on and re-evaluate our sense of self and the relationships we have to the social forces that influence us. Crucially and critically, these are female readers—mothers, librarians and booksellers—claiming small moments to make big understandings of special import to children in society.

Even though there is often not a collectively agreed-on response to the texts, Long (2003) finds that challenging opinions of dominant ideologies and assumptions gives reading groups a collective authority of their own. It is through the forging of plot, and filling in the gaps for themselves, that the readers can make sense of what they are reading, since “only if it ‘feels real’ can it enter into someone’s subjectivity with the power to provoke the kinds of expansive reflection that members appear to desire” (Long, 2003, p. 152). In our gendered adult lives, there is little room to exercise the forgotten joy of negotiating pretend worlds that the reading and discussion of children’s fiction allows us to do.

I will now turn to a fifth network of reading patterns at work within the interpretive community—that of identifying “The Wendy Syndrome.” In what follows we can witness the GBBC readers using a language of desire with explicitly contradictory (feminist/non-feminist) investments, all of which, arguably, are productive of new order, new contestations of gender, domesticity and childhood.

Wendy: The Domestic Slave

For the readers of the GBBC, the books they read have to make sense to them, as exemplified in the forging of plot that I witnessed in their book club meetings. Long (2003) suggests that “when readers find the imagined worlds of a novel to be believable, the book in question often elicits the kind of connections that leads to a satisfying discussion....Characters whom readers can identify with and learn from appear to be most central to this process, so believable settings and plots serve mainly to ground the characters more fully in ‘reality’” (pp. 151-152). Much of the discussion that is centred around characters focuses on those who most frequently appear in the book, such as Pan, Hook and Ravello in *Peter Pan in Scarlet* and Death, Liesel and Max in *The Book Thief*. The members’ brief and articulated reactions to Wendy, cast as a “domestic slave,” is of interest both for what is acknowledged and discussed, as well as what is left silent, what is not said. Firstly, the group’s characterization of Wendy’s role as a submissive female and surrogate mother, shadowed by the strengths of Pan and Hook, displays a collective resistance to the dominant, archetypical gender depiction, which is commonly found in many children’s classics. A number of feminist researchers have illuminated the devastating effects that stereotypical perceptions of girls and women in children’s literature can have on young readers (Davies, 1993; Steedman, 1982; Westland, 1993, Yeoman, 1999). Further studies have also given rise to a growing body of feminist literature that explores ways of working within these gender depictions, as well as using alternative ‘upside down’ feminist tales (Westland, 1993), both of which create a space of active resistance and further exploration into the performance of gender identities. The

following dialogue acts as a portal, in which one can see the GBBC's resistance to the fixed, and seemingly timeless gender roles predominant in children's classics:

Hi: She didn't have much of a role...

Ju: She didn't have much of one in the first one either. She was kind of a domestic slave.

[yeah]

Sue: Yeah, but that's what she wanted to be. [laugh]

Ju: And she is, sort of, in this one, but it's downplayed a little bit. The first thing she does when she gets to Neverland is sweep up all the cobwebs, and she says to Peter, "We're here to do spring cleaning," because it was too difficult to describe the real reason, and he says. "You can sweep up my nightmares."

Sue: And that's also when she goes back at the end of the first book. She says she'll go back every year to do spring cleaning, so that's what she does until she gets too old, and she starts sending her daughter, and then when Jane gets too old, she starts sending her daughter. So the way that left at the end of the first one, is that Wendy or one of her offspring go and do spring cleaning for Peter.

Ju: But later on, she's talking about how girls are silly, especially if they're not brought up right, because then they become too domestic and that jumped out at me because she was being domestic herself and...

Sue: And she was so jealous of Tootles wanting to play wedding all the time.
[laugh]

Other than a few instances of maternal comfort and cleaning, members concur that Wendy does not have much of a significant role. Even though *Peter Pan in Scarlet* continues its predecessor's romanticized idea that all children must stay young, Billone (2004) argues that "[it] closes the doors of childhood to little girls" (p. 185), as Wendy is characterized as taking care of others first and foremost, much like how women, in the

context of society in general, are expected to be selfless in regards to familial concerns, holding everybody else's needs above their own.

However, in analyzing the reactions of the members of the GBBC, there is a hope that appears in resisting the Wendy syndrome. By working within the confines of such classic tales, and finding areas in the interpretive text that demonstrate resistance to proposed gender expectations, readers, and educators alike, are given the power to mobilize subjective positionings, which otherwise may have been characterized as unchangeable. Julie notes Wendy's contradictory concerns regarding girls "becoming too domestic," as her primary preoccupation throughout the entire story is unarguably domestic. This could be contextualized as McCaughrean's attempt to manipulate the language that she was trying to emulate from the original *Peter Pan*, a language that historically, and continually, works discursively to position women as inferior to men. Weedon (1987) argues that many of the perceived possibilities that are offered to women are always secondary, such as "the primary role [and hegemonic assumption] — that of wife and mother" (p. 3). Through depictions such as the maternal, submissive Wendy, these roles are conveyed to be 'natural,' circumscribed to Wendy simply because of her being female, and not as something chosen. However, by acknowledging the concern that the character herself has with girls becoming "too domestic", a possibility is glimpsed that there is more to Wendy's hopes and dreams than simply being a domestic slave.

During Julie's interview, she admits that all characters in the book are cast as stereotypes, adding that in the case of Wendy, "You had this sense that they looked to her, admiring Peter, but looking to her...and it wasn't until Peter threw her out of the quest and she pretended to break the window to come back [into Neverland] that you got

a sense of her as a person” (Julie, I, 26/11/07). Even though Wendy is stereotyped as a “domestic slave,” Julie chooses to note oppositional instances where some aspect of Wendy’s personal strength can be interpreted through the narrative. The idea of the others “looking to her” can be interpreted as reflecting an awareness of Wendy’s mature attitude, wherein girls are often associated with a quality of leadership quality, which helps to guide the crew of explorers, a quality ‘felt’ by characters and readers alike, implying that indeed, Wendy does have a backbone. As well, her defiant act of breaking back into Neverland, overruling the stubborn ruler Peter, casts the spotlight (admittedly dimmed but nonetheless notable) towards Wendy’s strength, indicating “a sense of her as a person,” an important aspect through which Julie was able to relate to Wendy as a character (Julie, I, 26/11/07). Clearly, strength and wisdom are attributes that Julie looks for in female characters.

Willow also vocalizes her lack of being able to relate to the female characters (Wendy and Tootles), as she says, “I wanted Wendy to be a bit less typically woman or female. I guess because they were all about playing married and house cleaning and I am just not like that at all. So, like the two female characters in the book, there was no connection for me really at all” (Willow, I, 29/11/07). Her desire for Wendy to be less “typically woman” acknowledges the stereotypes used to depict female characters in children’s fiction, marking her resistance to the dominant gender roles—“that of wife and mother”—common in this genre of literature, which she nevertheless, claims to love. In her critique of fairy tales, Steedman (1982) notes that they paint a picture “of women in our culture, and...that they must be either innocent and beautiful, so passive that they are almost dead, or profoundly and monstrosly evil; good mother, bad mother” (p. 142).

Although most feminist critiques of children's fiction are directed towards fairy tales, where the protagonist is stereotyped (i.e. *Cinderella*, *Snow White*, etc.), such a critique can also apply to the nature of Wendy's secondary, supportive role, cast in the shadow of a boy who is allowed to stay young forever. Another way of reading her character (although admittedly this perspective didn't arise in discussion) is that Wendy is simply a realistic representation of contemporary cultural ideals, in which the "wise mother and wife" is expected to contain and bear the infantile/regressive antics (often destructive) of patriarchy.

It must be noted that the reaction to Wendy does not take up much time in the meeting, nor during the interviews, which is something I did not expect. I wondered about the thoughts that were potentially and deliberately silenced, "of the conscious or unconscious compliancy to gender roles imposed upon women, the nostalgic memories of caring for (and being expected to care for) our younger siblings, playing "dress- up" with our mother's clothes, accessories and make-up as girls, where we can't wait to grow up and become the young ladies that we are supposed to be. I remember a picture of me, eyes shaded in the most ridiculous colour of blue and some God forsaken shade of lipstick, that I probably begged to own, smiling ear to ear and feeling like I was on my way to growing up" (journal notes, 05/12/07). However, as Long (2003) suggests, listening to others' responses "and the personal stories they elicit...becomes a prism for the interrogation of self, other selves and society beyond text" (p. 153). Many of the readers of the GBBC are mothers who presumably have felt the pressures of juggling multiple duties imposed upon them (i.e., as primary caregivers expected to maintain their careers, marriages, beauty etc.). Whether resistances are articulated or remain silenced,

the GBBC has the potential to provide a discursive framework for women to grapple with aspects of their gendered identities. Of the few strengths that are given to Wendy's role in the narrative, the most important is that of a maternal guide, so those with less experience can eventually learn to guide themselves, echoing Long's (2003) suggestion that when readers respond to characters, "it is almost as if they are real, analyzing their emotional responses to them and associating outward from them to aspects of their own lives or those of kin and friends" (p. 153). It is by making sense of ourselves and our lives that we can approach "a necessary starting point for understanding how power relations structure society" (Weedon, 1987, p. 8).

To this point in the discussion I have demonstrated that the function of the collective reading experience is fivefold: the GBBC readers actively deploy the setting analytically and affectively, sorting discursive material into forms of cultural capital, intertextual knowledge, aesthetic pleasure, historical and regional remembering and gender deconstruction. The discoveries are often fleeting and polysemous, as is culture in the making. I now turn to a sixth and final pattern of reading engagement that—as above—demonstrates the women's transformative agency as they self identify as literacy guides and mentors.²⁹

²⁹ Acknowledgement to conversations with Dr. Judith Robertson for her assistance here in the finals edits of this thesis.

Literacy Guides

The GBBC reads ‘good’ children’s literature. Although most members enjoy the fact that the club offers the opportunity to read books they normally wouldn’t read, their choices have already been filtered through the ‘value added’ pre-selection of the Granny Bates Book Store, where the members also purchase the chosen books. All members stated that the selection process occurs in a very nonchalant manner, wherein Sue or Willow pass around a few samples of books which have either already been articulated by a member as interesting, expressed in a prior meeting, or presented in the publisher’s catalogue used by the store. The members read the backs of the books, and scan the covers to see which one sounds interesting, what they are in the mood for, and from this, a tentative list is formed. Everyone has the right to veto a book, although there has never been a voiced conflict during the process.

Similar to Devlin-Glass’s (2001) findings, where readers took the cultural authority of the CAE seriously and positioned themselves within the ‘hierarchies of taste’ as ‘middlebrow’ readers, members of the GBBC assert themselves as readers of solid, pre-selected children’s literature. The members spoke very highly about Granny Bates Book Store being the “foundation for the club,” (Melissa, 29/11/07), whose tastes “they have learned to trust over the years” (Julie, I, 26/11/07) to consistently deliver good, solid literature, as opposed to all the “crap that is out there” (Hillary, I, 04/12/07). The fact that they are reading a book, chosen by *the store*, puts the text in the category of ‘highbrow’ literature that the women are proud to be reading, reiterating the fact that the store acts as a literary sponsor for the GBBC. As Long (2003) suggests, “Through conversation,

groups can find the consensual authority to reevaluate books or to reconsider the criteria for literary worth” (p. 150), and although members do not explicitly specify their criteria, they view the books that are chosen as being up to the standards that they trust.

As it is important to these women readers to be informed about the texts the club reads, both Sue and Willow embody the respectful attitude towards reading that the store advocates—being a former and current employee, respectively—informing customers of the “breadth of the stock” that is filtered through a value-driven and highly selective process, which helps to foster a general sense of pride in the books they sell. Melissa voiced her desire to read good, solid material to her two young boys, and as her husband is not an avid reader, to act as a role model for the future reading practices of her children. She hopes her children will “get” a passion for reading from their mother (Melissa, I, 29/11/07). Julie attests to the fact that the club focuses on “quality literature” as much as possible, and admits that some of the literature she is familiar with at the education library is mediocre at best, but somehow still gets added to a curriculum’s reading list. Hillary appreciates being informed, since she is then able to direct the reading practices of her seven-year-old son and her ten-year-old daughter. As she articulated during the second meeting’s discussion:

By the time you get to be older you know what, or have a better sense anyway, of what is a good book. What I really find hard to take in the schools is that they're just told to read, and it doesn't matter a damn what they read. They get no guidance and it's presented as if it is all equal and it isn't all equal, and if we don't say, like, “I don't think this is good,” then how [are] they [going to] make those decisions? Like...they're not making

the decisions and they shouldn't be making the decisions! (Hillary, SM
10/12/07)

Hillary's fiery disenchantment with how reading is presented in schools today illuminates how the growing concern that "nobody is putting good literature in the libraries" (Beale & Macmillan, 2006), is a large part of what these women have expressed to be worth talking about, as they take on the role of informed readers who care about what children are reading, because the education system just is not cutting the cake. Sedo (2004) proposes that book clubs, and independent bookstores, are the "culture fabric to the city" (p. 9), and the possibility that literacy is not being proliferated in Newfoundland schools is a wider concern that the GBBC embodies. It is important to the members to be informed, so they can then direct the reading practices of their own children's, or other young people in St. John's (and more widely throughout the province of Newfoundland)—an embedded function within this provocative and socially transformative space. Equally important is saving children from the negative experiences of reading in school that most of the members articulated as having experienced themselves. They do this by sharing their love and informed knowledge about the texts with their children. Book club reading, depicted through the GBBC members as providing a space to discuss what books mean to them, which reaffirms, resists, contests and expands their previously held assumptions and prior knowledges, can be one way of saving children from the potential hell and hatred that in some unfortunate cases becomes associated with reading. This couldn't be more true in North America than now, where an organized culture of surveillance has policed the pleasure out of reading for both children and their teachers in schools. The GBBC allows these women to position themselves as

active agents, constantly adding and displaying their cultural capital, and who resist and appropriate texts they see ‘fit’ to read, both for themselves, and for future generation of ‘literate’ Newfoundlanders. As Fuller (2004) reminds us, “working with words to understand different articulation of the everyday world, can make a contribution to the imagining and achievement of a more just society— one in which differences actively reshape social and legal relations between communities” (p. 12).

Reading within the comfort zone of the GBBC is, I have argued—a contested and transformative cultural zone, marked by the comings and goings of diasporic islander identity, gender politics, the banking of cultural capital, displays of aesthetic taste, and a profound desire to partake in literacy sponsorship. These “notes from the margin” speak to the enduring possibilities of everyday cultural practices, specifically as practiced within interpretative communities of female readers perched on the eastern edge of Canada. I now turn to my concluding comments about the uses and effects of book club experience within the Granny Bates Book Club of St. John’s, Newfoundland.³⁰

³⁰ Acknowledgment to conversations with Dr. Judith Robertson for her assistance here in the final edits of this thesis.

CONCLUSION

Book club research has only recently emerged as a popular branch of cultural studies of subjectivity around the globe. A recent colloquium of scholars in Birmingham brought together over 150 researchers from around the world, all of whom were engaged in work focused on the significance of this unique literary formation. Despite the designation of St. John's as an urban centre, the point remains that collectively, its inhabitants are marked by marginalization: geographic, linguistic, national, and economic. Despite this marginalization, though, the paradoxical fact remains that, within this context, book clubs comprise a vibrant and obvious cultural space and little research has been done on the relation of place and space to reading practices. By engaging with literature read by individuals in a minority and diasporic culture like St. John's, Newfoundland, and by trying to understand how readers use reading experience to negotiate aspects of power, gender and personal meaning, the knowledge that has emerged will assist educators in challenging the dominant discourses that so often misappropriate difference and can harm a child's sense of self. The enormous popularity of book clubs today, and the many alternative forms that continue to evolve, have dismantled the traditional literary authorities and opened up an arena of continued research. The endless possibilities for negotiations of self—in relation to narrative, environment, and the dynamics of resistance and subversion—make book clubs an understudied yet fascinating place to explore further.

My study seeks to answer three prominent research questions, as I asked how and

why the members of the GBBC came together every month, a precious time carved out and claimed by the members, to collectively read together and make meaning. In regards to questioning their proclaiming love of children's books and how they identify with aspects of childhood, I have been guided by the psychoanalytic thought that childhood never dissipates and remains a vital and active part of our hybrid, fractured selves that we constant try to complete. These readers embrace their child within and relish in the escaped realities that children's fiction offer our adult, rational selves, as a fellow children's literature enthusiast, C.S. Lewis, reminds us that "no book is really worth reading at the age of ten which is not equally (and far more) worth reading at the age of fifty" (Lewis, 1947, p. 100 as cited in Cullinan, 1989, p.8). Although the members consciously seek to distance themselves from the analytical confines of their educational background, the space of this club is used as an accumulation and exchange of cultural capital that they use to position themselves as gendered, social subjects with a deeply rooted investment in the reading choices of children today.

This space valorizes their choice of reading pleasure and allows them to exert the knowledge of not only their beloved genre, but of the stored repertoire of their lived experiences in the diasporic community of St. John's, Newfoundland. In a precarious time for the 'have-not' province (although recently blessed with previously mentioned optimistic political and economic advances), this club also is used as a space that questions the validity of historical and regionally defined knowledges, challenges regional and cultural labels that we often un/consciously subscribe to, and allows for analytically witnessing and displaying aesthetic judgments and pleasure of which no other social structured forum is available for the members.

The readers of GBBC engage in discussions that challenge the normative contours of gendered identities and seek disruption of archaic/lingering predominant gender roles, as well as remaining silent at times where further subversive discussion could potentially occur. What is fundamental to the practicing and production of gendered identities is that discussions “challenge individual members’ preheld notions and allow them the possibility of new epiphanies about both literature and life” (Long, 2003, p. 147), and allow for new subjective positionings. The members read out of gendered positions, and yet discussions have the potential to challenge gendered prescriptions and seek out new perspectives. Their discussions not only enhance their responses to the interpretive text, but deliberately allow for the members “to voice their concerns, narrate the particularities of their lives...to explore the disassociations between what matters to them and the social structures or ideological frameworks that fail in important way to address them” (Long, 2003, p. 219).

In conjunction with the Saltwater Chronicles team that seeks to understand the uses of collective reading experience and meaning making amongst reading groups in Newfoundland and Labrador, my study builds on Lewkowich’s (2008) findings; book club reading in NL is a “complex and fragmented landwash activity” (p. 189) that can never truly completed, understood, nor tamed. In collaborating with the informative and mentoring supervision of Dr. Judith Robertson, whose groundbreaking work in this understudied field has allowed for our studies to attempt the “chipping away violently at any one, overarching understanding of what reading *is*, or what it is that readers *do*” [italics in original] (Lewkowich, 2008, p. 189), I hope that my study, too, will add to the growing understanding of how individuals use collective reading experience as deliberate

spaces that “creatively remake themselves and their world” (Long, 2003, p. 222). Such work sparks future research, questioning the functions and uses of reading groups and how readers make meaning in marginalized communities across Canada, thus enhancing our ever-changing understanding of “what is it that readers *do*. ”

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Researcher's name _____ Date _____

I would like to be kept in touch following the study with any publications or news arising from it.
Yes _____ No _____

For this purpose I can be reached at (address, phone number or email) _____

If you have any ethical concerns regarding your participation in this study, you may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 159, (613) 562-5841, or ethics@uottawa.ca.

Please feel free to keep one copy of this research consent form.
Thank you for your cooperation!

Appendix 2

Jennifer Rottmann
University of Ottawa
October 26, 2007

Notes from the Margin: Understanding the Collective Reading Experience in St. John's
Newfoundland

Questionnaire

I will be asking the following questions in the initial questionnaire to gain a sense of members' current and previous experience in regional book clubs.

1. How did you first hear and become a member of the Granny Bates Book Club?
2. How long have you been a member of this club?
3. What (if any) is your experience in previous book clubs?
4. Why do you feel you belong to this book club? What potential gains do you feel you get from the book club?
5. What does reading mean to you both solitarily and collectively, and how do they differ?
6. Why do you like to be in a book club that reads children's literature? What have you learned from this experience?
7. Would you be interested in joining a smaller focus group to further discuss your experiences within the club?

Appendix 3

Jennifer Rottmann
University of Ottawa
October 26, 2007

Notes from the Margin: Understanding the Collective Reading Experience in St. John's
Newfoundland

I will use the following questions/probes to guide the in-depth, semi-structured interviews during my stay in St. John's, NL. Interviews are expected to last 30- 60 minutes in length and will be conducted in a quiet, private place of the member's choice. Interviews will be audio-taped and later transcribed by myself and transcribed in Ottawa.

- What are the origins of the Granny Bates Book regional book club?
- What brings individuals as readers to this particular book club?
- How would you characterize your experiences of reading children's books in the book club?
- How do you relate your experiences of reading to conditions of your own life, including everyday worries and concerns?
- How do you think reading in your book club is different from reading in school?
- How does power work in the book club – is there a leader? How and why do you think others consent to being led in their book club reading practices? How are books chosen?
- Does reading in a group pose particular challenges or feelings of pleasure or power for you?
- What are the criteria for book selection? (popular/NL author, theme, popular book?)
- How would describe the heart of the book club's operation? What are the aims and goals of the book club and how are these articulated? Describe a typical meeting.
- How would you finish the following sentence “*When I am talking about the book in a book club meeting and exchanging ideas with other members, I feel like a*”. (possible question would be to expand on this metaphor)

Questions to be asked in the interview following the participant observation:

- How do you feel you related to the previously selected book? (in terms of characters, author, plot, theme?)
- How do you feel discussing the book within the meeting change/alterd enhanced your interpretation of the book?
- What affect do you feel discussing the book with members has on you as a reader?