The 'Goosebumps' in Goosebumps: Impositions and R. L. Stine

Vicki Coppell

'Something's waiting in the dark' is the tantalising phrase on the front cover of *Stay Out Of The Basement*, one of over sixty of the titles in R.L. Stine's Goosebumps series directed at the pre-teenage reader. Stine is a prolific and imaginative writer who also produces a horror series, Fear Street, for the mid to older teenager, and other stories that, in conjunction with the works of other authors, are part of a further series, Point Horror. This series is also marketed to the mid-teens audience. As well there is now a new series for the younger reader being promoted in book shops, supermarkets and chain stores called Give Yourself Goosebumps. Whilst only a selection of texts from the Goosebumps series is examined in this work, it is worth drawing attention to these other writings as further examples of those darker aspects of Stine's work connected to the commercialization and exploitation of child buyers; literary 'impoverishment' and its possible effects on young readers; and values and world view, including violence and promotion and support of patriarchy.

Rose states that 'the story of Peter Pan can ... be told as the story of money' (1992, p.88). The same can be said of the Goosebumps phenomenon: Goosebumps is not only a series of popular fiction books but is also videos, television programs, computer games, T-shirts, schoolbags, lunch-boxes, rulers, erasers etc. The commercial properties of Goosebumps have the potential to invade the child in all aspects of social experience from the private to the public: the values incorporated in the Goosebumps narratives are extended to the world outside the text and the values incorporated in the world of commerce—the marketing strategies and the competition—become part of the text. Goosebumps becomes the 'monstrous inflation' that Rose argues *Peter Pan* to be.

The highly competitive nature of contemporary consumerism guarantees that popular fiction is made accessible to, and is read by, large numbers of readers. As a result of such exposure the influence of popular fiction, negative or positive, is widespread and thus readily gives rise to the notion that the 'relationship between popular culture [fiction] and the forces of commerce and profit is highly problematic' (Fiske 1989a, p.10).

Goosebumps is a series of smaller works and the series genre is attractive to the consumer, adult and child, because it exploits the deep-seated need of the human psyche to belong to a tribe or a community. The series carries with it this sense of belonging, of becoming part of a group that embodies a common interest much like the sense that one gets in a hamburger outlet; the hamburger is 'junk food' represented iconically in that it is offered as the only, thus ideal food. When large numbers of people come together to eat the food, the iconic representation is reinforced, the legitimacy of the product is confirmed and a sense of belonging to a particular group prevails even when the eating of the hamburger or the reading of the book is done in private. In both cases, the sense of comfort one feels from the series genre of literature or the hamburger is a false consciousness, arising from the constructs of commercialism.

Potential readers of Goosebumps are caught up in the obsession of a successful marketing campaign that creates a false need in the consumer — a need to obtain the next in the series or to acquire a complete series much like collecting basket ball cards or Barbie doll clothes. Apart from the sense of 'belonging' and belonging to the 'correct' community, there is also the competition to be the first to collect the most: Goosebumps is 'like an obsession' and, 'His friend ... has every edition and a standing order for each new release' (Ryan 1996, p.9).

As well as the marketing strategies, discussed in the following paragraphs, Stine further encourages the purchase of other books in the Goosebumps series by including the opening chapters of the next story in the series at the end of each book. As well, the endings of each story are left 'open' thus allowing the opportunity, not to mention the (reader's) expectation, of a sequel. Instead of selling one book the author and publishing house can manipulate the demand for as long as the author can keep churning the stories out while they have appeal. This appeal can be artificially enhanced by emphasising the 'group' or community aspect with distinctive packaging that allows the holistic properties of a 'set' of books to be incorporated into each individual series.

Certain techniques are utilised with the Goosebumps series to make the individual books not only attractive but instantly recognisable to the consumer as part of a set; the Goosebumps books have 'R. L. Stine' in bold black type on the front cover with the series title, *Goosebumps*, in dripping, blood-like bubble style writing that children like to use in their own writing displays. Children are also attracted by the 'cool' way in which tiny raised dots are incorporated into the texture of the series title—goosebumps on the Goosebumps is an example of obvious word play that children love. The covers of the books are all illustrated with a garish horror picture, the impact of which is reinforced with a catchy phrase that paraphrases the title: *Monster Blood* - 'It's a monster blood drive'; *Say Cheese And Die* - 'One picture is worth a thousand words'; *The Headless Ghost* - 'Major headache'; *Revenge of the Lawn Gnomes* - 'Keep off their grass'; *Let's Get Invisible* - 'Now you see him. Now you don't'.

This concept is all part of the marketing drive to attract the child consumer. Children are drawn to this type of play on words that invokes the colloquialisms of their own 'group' speech. It is more the jokey, shorthand speech of the child than that of the adult. Further to this it is the speech that children use to each other and not to adults. This influence helps to separate the child world from the adult world and hence represents the de facto independence of the child from the parent and at the same time reinforces the idea of childhood as a separate social grouping from adulthood. Reading these catchy phrases the child is drawn into the idea that the originator of these words not only 'belongs' to the child community but that this community is a separate one that embodies the shared concept of 'difference'. This 'group speech' is also highly constructed (out of Hollywood B-grade film lingo and American sit-coms) so the child is being simultaneously 'drawn' into other groups. By appealing to the child consumer in this fashion the publishing house achieves 'legitimacy' for its product with the child.

The titles of the individual books are far less prominently displayed at the bottom of the front cover allowing the perception that the whole is more important than each part. This formula is repeated for each book in the series and is applied, with variations, to the other series of books.

The Goosebumps books are mainly retailed through mass market outlets such as discount stores, supermarkets, chain stores. On the shelves of a specialty book shop, an environment in which the consumer is most likely to be constructed as a more discerning book buyer, these titles may not be popular sellers, but in the harsh, competitive world of the mass market they are aggressively marketed to the mass audience amid a plethora of other low priced or generic type books with discounting and/or price cutting at prices that are well within 'pocket money' range. These books are written to appeal to a certain audience and are heavily marketed towards that audience:

> More than 800,000 copies of Stine's work have been sold in Australia over the past two years in response to a world-wide marketing campaign aimed at children between seven and ten.
> (Ryan 1996, p.9)

A particular conclusion that may be drawn is that these works are written and published more for maximum economic return than for reader entertainment and/or enlightenment thus treating children more as consumers than as readers. It is a process of producing literature for children that has the potential to demean children as readers and treats them as inferior: 'the world of books is becoming shallower, more obvious, more expectable and yet weighing more heavily on the young' (Englehardt in Jones 1993, 31).

The concern with this approach is that the pursuit of profit might then define both the 'form and content' of the books (Frith 1981, 41). The content of the series genre of books has the potential to become formulated with stereotyped characterisation and simplification of plot. In Stine's work these stereotypes are disconcertingly patriarchal.

Criteria that assist to define popular culture and hence popular fiction are those of 'repetition and seriality' that, Fiske argues, signify the impoverishment of a text: 'The poverty of the individual text and the emphasis on the circulation of meanings mean that popular culture is marked by repetition and seriality' (Fiske 1989a, p.125). The narratives of Goosebumps are both repetitious and serialised ensuring both the impoverishment of the text

and the impression of incorporated meanings.

To further make use of the earlier 'junk food' analogy it can be argued that the hamburger is a commercial construct that is easily accessible, widely consumed, simply structured, predictable and repetitious. The popularity of the hamburger is also a commercial construct in that it is marketed to the consumer as a familiar, non-threatening product that does not offend the 'average' palate and because it is advertised as a product that will bring a certain happiness into one's life for minimum effort — as a fulfilment of expectations.

The repetitious familiarity of the hamburger would define it as a 'comfort' food that offers universal understanding and gratification of a need. The marketing of the product would have one believe that by buying a 'Big Mac' not only is one's hunger satisfied but the consumer will belong to a whole community or family of hamburger consumers. Goosebumps shares similarities with the hamburger in that the stories are likewise simple in structure, repetitious and predictable and written in a style that does not immediately offend the 'average' child reader. The popularity of the series is a commercial construct having been skilfully written and marketed to access the greatest possible audience. The series, like the hamburger, presents the qualities of familiarity and predictability of structure that offer a certain promise of happiness—the security of expectability. Like the hamburger, Goosebumps stories present a basic plot with stereotyped characters that titillate with the horror of the 'extras'—the action of the stories. The values that are both an explicit and implicit presence in the concept of Goosebumps (the marketing of the product and the stories) are of concern: the marketing aspect because it embodies the commercial exploitation of children, and the stories because of the ideological exploitation of the child reader's intellectual vulnerability.

The Goosebumps series is a collection of first person narrative, linear stories that are simple in language, structure and content. Chapters are short with each one ending on a 'cliffhanger', paragraphs are no longer than five or six lines, and sentences are short and uncomplicated. There would not be many individuals who are not fascinated by the concept of fantasy but these stories exploit the child reader's fascination with the fantastic to produce fast moving adventures that offer little beyond cheap thrills — much like the hamburger with the tempting thrill of the little 'specials' such as toys, mugs, or posters that come if you buy the product. As much as the hamburger 'dumbs down' the concept of food and the palate, works of fiction like Goosebumps do much the same for the child's reading experiences and their intellect.

Jan Susina discusses 'dumbing down' in terms of the commercialisation of children's literature in a special issue of *The Lion and the Unicorn* devoted to exploration of 'the various aspects of dumbing down of children's texts' (1993, p.viii). In her editorial, Susina traces the commercial influences in children's literature from its inception with John Newbery's *A Pretty Little Pocket Book* (published in 1744 and accompanied by the 'Ball and Pincushion, the Use of which will infallibly make Tommy a good Boy and Polly a good Girl'), and points out that 'commercial and market considerations have always been important factors in the creation of children's literature' (p.vi). Susina also contends it was Newbery's skills as a salesman of children's books rather than his literary skills in writing them that made his reputation (p.v). In other words Newbery was able to take something of little value and make it seem to be valuable and in doing so created a precedent for 'dumbing down' children's literature. Susina goes on to state that children's books are the largest growth area in publishing today with children's book stores opening at a rate second only to fast food restaurants.

It is not only the commercialisation of children's literature that 'dumbs down' the genre but also the writing of it: Elizabeth Law comments that because certain authors 'seem to forget that they are older and more experienced and make believe they don't know any more than the youngest child' they 'create simplistic, condescending books that pretend to give young readers credit when actually they are 'dumbing down to them'. In turn, this condescension implies that 'if something is for children, then it had better be obvious' (1993, p.15). The stereotyping and predictability of Goosebumps do make for palpable obviousness. Janet McCalman comments on the 'dumbing down' effect in education, arguing that

when mass education was introduced the curriculum was 'dumbed down' because it was felt that the children of the lower classes and of immigrants would be intimidated by a 'middle-class' curriculum (1997, p.11). This attitude towards mass education arose out of the nineteenth century notion that those of the lower classes were not ignorant because they were denied education but because they were an inferior species of humanity. Authors who 'dumb down' their writing because they are writing for children bear traces of this same discredited 'truth'. Child readers are inexperienced readers, not 'dumb' readers.

It is legitimate to argue a case of character stereotyping and plot predictability as condescending and therefore an example of 'dumbing down'. Treating children as inferior beings in this way and impressing them with outdated and discredited patriarchal values constitute a goodly part of the scary 'something' in the Goosebumps series. However, the skilful marketing of these books has borne the result of a large readership. In the climate of a competitive mass market they have been successful: children, boys in particular, want to read them. It can be difficult to encourage children, (boys in particular) to read, hence children are encouraged to read books that they are attracted to. It is felt that as long as children are reading they can only benefit from the experience and that the young reader will eventually move on to something else.

After the first few books the plots become as predictable as the characterisation: the actions take place in small town American environments; the families are of white middle class background; invariably the family and/or the story includes the obligatory dog; the immersion into the horror adventure is precipitated by the act of breaking a parental or social taboo; the children endure a terrifying experience that they resolve by themselves; a question mark is raised over whether or not the demons of horror have been defeated leaving the path open for the sequel.

The Headless Ghost, a typical Goosebumps story, is set in the small town of Wheeler Falls. The parents are rarely mentioned but the fact that Duane tries out for the basketball team and Stephanie, Duane's companion, joins the Theatre Arts Club (p.110) implies a middle class environment. The two friends break a parental rule by sneaking out of the house late at night to 'haunt' the neighborhood (p.1). Stephanie and Duane also break an adult rule by leaving the tour group in the haunted Hill House and exploring in areas not meant for public access. They are then precipitated into the horror of being lost in a maze of old and disused rooms and corridors, stalked by an unseen terror. This state is representative of the chaos that is implied, threatened, feared, if patriarchal control is not adhered to. It is only after the children have found their way to safety with the intervention of the elderly tour guide that they decide to give up 'all the scary stuff' ('stuff' that required they break the rules) and retreat to the safety of the controlled environments of the basketball team and the Arts Club. Just in case the children (and the reader?) feel brazen enough to ponder breaking the rules again we find that the friendly old tour guide might also be a ghost and thus a part of the chaos they thought they had escaped. It is a sobering reminder that to venture away from order is to bring doubt about everything in existence—the patriarchal social order is represented as the only order that makes sense. This representation is an imposition in that there have been and are other cultures that are not patriarchal and even Western societies are slowly moving away from this concept. The revelation that the tour guide might himself be a part of chaos paves the way for a Headless Ghost II story.

Stereotyping of characterisation and predictability of plot demonstrate a certain lack of respect for the intended reader: either the intended reader is immature and requires no more than the rudiments or the reader is not an important aspect of the text. As well, the predictable nature of the stories adds to an already false sense of comfort: the sense of belonging to a like-minded community is overlaid by the comfortable repetition of stereotyped characterisation and plot. This reduces the act of reading to a symbolic security blanket which some child readers would be reluctant to give up in order to move on to other challenges: stereotypes do not encourage resistant reading but merely reinforce the status quo of class, race and gender.

The stereotyping, plot simplification and repetition reduce the reading experience to something akin to 'junk-reading' (McCoy 1996, p.24) much as the hamburger reduces the

eating experience to 'junk-eating'. The dozens of books mounted in colourfully ghoulish displays of horror assist in the glorification of mediocrity. When mediocrity is presented as something of value then it becomes pretentious and there is the danger that mediocrity becomes acceptable and pretentiousness becomes a value in itself — the glib advertising and gaudy packaging become symbolic of quality:

> The essence of dumbing down is overstatement and simple-minded literalism, which Fussell [BAD: or the Dumbing of America] warns paves the way for the new illiteracy, as well as the 'blockbuster' mentality. Clearly children's literature is not immune to this phenomenon.
> (Susina 1993, v)

Writing down for children to access the widest possible market for commercial gain is 'dumbing down' children's literature. The brighter children who prefer a challenge will ultimately move on but those children whose reading skills and comprehension have not been fully developed face the prospect of becoming 'hooked' on this type of literature to the detriment of their own reading skills and intellectual enlightenment. Ultimately, both the world of art and the general community are the losers.

Popular fiction is usually required to be a 'readerly' text which invites an essentially passive, receptive, disciplined reader who tends to accept its meanings as already made. It is a relatively closed text, easy to read and undemanding of its reader' (Fiske 1989a, p.103). A text, it might be argued, that affords little resistance to the values inherent within its construct. The first person narrative style in which the *Goosebumps* stories are written also diminishes reader resistance to textual assumptions by 'drawing' the reader into the text as a participant in the action. Texts (fact or fiction) that invite such passive acceptance of implied 'truths' 'leave(s) readers susceptible to ... intellectual manipulation' (Stephens 1992, p.4).

Appleyard explores how children come to be readers, why they read; and argues that the 'specific developmental task of children of this age [six to twelve-year-old], after all, is to gather and organise information about the new world they have been launched into' (1991, p.62). Appleyard argues that it is repetition and serialisation that assist the child reader to make sense of her/his relationship with the 'new world' of school and approaching maturity:

> they have to keep filling in the blank spaces in their knowledge of the world while learning the rules that prevent facts from just being random and confusing data. What to adults seems repetitive in these stories must to the child appear as confirmation that in diverse new areas of experience, what counts is still recognizable and familiar.
> (p.63)

This is a valid argument for why children might consistently read particular types of fiction over a period of time: the attraction for the child is the comfort that the perceived 'reality' in the text 'matches' the perceived 'reality' outside of the text. But it is also an argument that overlooks the possibility that what is comfortingly 'recognizable and familiar' in many of these works is an imposed perception of social and cultural 'reality' as normatively patriarchal.

Even if the experience is a shared one, involving, that is, a third party, usually an adult, reading to a child or children, the communication between the narrator and the narratee is no less private; each reader's and listener's experience will dictate that they 'read' the story according to those experiences and not at some homogeneous level of group understanding. Young children in the age group to which Goosebumps is marketed are at their most vulnerable stage of social and intellectual development. These are the formative years of childhood in which the sense of self in relation to the wider community might be said to be in its embryonic stage: 'at around age 8, there seems to be "a major shift" from highly concrete evaluation of others to an increasingly abstract understanding that infers motives, beliefs, and personality characteristics from behaviour' (Berger 1986, p.425). Further: 'children's thoughts about themselves develop rapidly during middle childhood, as their cognitive abilities mature and their social experience widens' (p.426). If children between the ages of eight and twelve (roughly the age group that

Goosebumps are written for and marketed to) are at the beginning of their social and intellectual development then the values incorporated into the literature for this audience, in the absence of (taught) analytical skills, might be absorbed more effectively than at other developmental stages and thus have more influential and long lasting effects.

Children's literary 'choices' are limited to literature made available by influential adults: parents, teachers, and librarians; or publishers and booksellers. It is also accepted that not every child is going to read literature of the Goosebumps type and certainly not all the time. But the problem remains that the values that underscore Goosebumps are those of violence and patriarchal control and constitute an imposition on the intellect of the developing child. The fact that these books are of a genre that is attractive to children (and adults) and have been aggressively marketed to reach the maximum audience means that very many children do read them. One wonders at what cost when even adults might underestimate the power of the text in their own literature:

> Perhaps we all underestimate the extent to which we absorb the values of what we read. And even when we do not retain them, the fact remains that insofar as the fiction has worked for us, we have lived with its values for the duration: we have been that kind of person for at least as long as we remained in the presence of the work, and any ethical criticism we engage in will thus be 'tainted' for those who would prefer some kind of objective view.
> (Booth 1988, p.41)

If mature and discerning adults might have their views 'tainted' by what they read or are affected by the values that are an explicit or implicit property of the text then it can be argued that the child reader would have less resistance to such textual 'truths' because, as Rose argues, 'Children's fiction draws in the child, it secures, places and frames the child' (1992, p.2). It is fair to state then that the young and inexperienced reader's developing sense of self in relation to her/his social environment would be affected to a much greater degree than would be the case of the adult reader.

Although the repetitious exposure to horror in Stine's work might serve to dissipate child readers' fears of their own dark corners, the exposure to the violence of this horror might also serve to desensitise such an audience to the violence and horror of real life situations. An example of this kind of violence may be found in *Stay Out Of The Basement* when, in front of his children, Mr. Brewer axes to death an 'evil' clone of himself, but the reader is deliberately left with the perception that it might just be the 'real' Mr Brewer who comes to such a horrific end. The aggressive marketing of these books sends a message that aggressive competition is a positive element of our society and something to be emulated and, further to this, that violence and horror are acceptable social attributes.

An example of aggression and violence as part of the 'typical' young male is demonstrated in *Revenge of the Lawn Gnomes* with the character of Joe Burton:

> It was a hot, sticky June afternoon. The first Monday of summer vacation. And Joe Burton had just made another excellent shot.
>
> That's me. Joe Burton. I'm twelve. And there is nothing I love better than slamming the ball in my older sister's face and making her chase after it.
>
> I'm not a bad sport. I just like to show Mindy that she's not as great as she thinks she is.
>
> You might guess that Mindy and I do not always agree on things. The fact is, I'm not really like anyone else in my family.
> Mindy, Mom, and Dad are all blond, skinny, and tall. I have brown hair. And I'm kind of pudgy and short. Mom says I haven't had my growth spurt yet. (p.1)

As well as the normalisation of violence in this episode, the characterisation of Josh is a patriarchal 'younger brother' stereotype: an independent individual who may define his own rules. It is also a characterisation of the male child resenting perceived 'superior' qualities of the older female and therefore needing to assert dominance over what might be argued to be a fear of femininity. This influence helps to foster resentment of feminine strengths in young male readers and condemnation and a repression of such in female readers. The 'older sister' stereotype is

depicted soon after on the following page:

> Mindy is weird ...
>
> Take her room. Mindy arranges all her books in alphabetical order—by author. Do you believe it?
>
> ... She is so organised. Her closet is organised by color ... She hangs her clothes in the same order as the rainbow.
> (p.2)

Mindy is so organised that she even eats her dinner 'around her plate clock-wise ... First her mashed potatoes. Then her peas. And then her meat loaf' (p.3). Mindy is the controlled female: not only externally controlled by her position in the patriarchal family but internally controlled by the repression of her own natural drives. It might also be argued that this representation of femininity sets the older sister character up as a kind of 'Big Momma' (or vagina dentata) figure: her inscrutable order threatens the (boyishly sloppy) order of patriarchy. The image is similar to that of the young woman in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) who, in order not to 'neglect proper [patriarchal] self-control' (1990, p.11), takes exhausting pains to control herself. The consequence of such repression is insanity; the very insanity that ultimately 'consumed' the male by 'creep[ing] over him every time!' (Gilman 1990, p.36). The first person construct of the text assists to authenticate as 'truths' for the reader these stereotypes of Josh as normative and Mindy as aberrant.

Older sisters in patriarchally influenced children's fiction as viewed through the eyes of younger brothers are invariably the 'goody two shoes' type, but Stine takes this aspect further and demonstrates the female character in the image of the patriarchal ideal: controlled, repressed and obedient. This stereotyping of the male as the 'free spirit' and the female as the controlled opposite seems to correlate with the notion of the male id being dictated to by the female superego. It is as though they are fantasies of male regression (like *Peter Pan* — the story of the male child who never grew up).

Even when the older sister is placed as the protagonist in a story, Stine represents her in this same manner as demonstrated by the characterisation of Amanda in *Welcome to Dead House*: 'I'm a lot more patient than Josh [the younger brother] is. A lot more sensible. Probably because I'm older and because I'm a girl' (p.3). Conversely, the younger brother is patriarchally demonstrated as 'spoilt' by not having the rules applied to him in the same way that they are applied to the older sister; he is usually favoured and allowances are made for him due to his status as the younger male in the family. This in effect demonstrates the younger brother as having the opposite characteristics of the older sister as evidenced in this passage from *Welcome to Dead House*:

> We hadn't even gone inside [the new house], and Josh was trying to drag Dad back to the car.
>
> 'Josh—stop pulling me,' Dad snapped impatiently, trying to tug his hand out of Joe's grasp.
>
> Dad glanced helplessly at Mr. Dawes. I could see that he was embarrassed by how Josh was carrying on. I decided maybe I could help.
> 'Let go Josh,' I said quietly, grabbing Josh by the shoulder. 'We promised we'd give Dark Falls a chance—remember?'
> 'I already gave it a chance,' Josh whined, not letting go of Dad's hand. 'This house is old and ugly and I hate it.'
> 'You haven't even gone inside,' Dad said angrily.
> 'Yes, let's go inside,' Mr. Dawes urged, staring at Josh.
> 'I'm staying outside,' Josh insisted.
> He can be really stubborn sometimes. I felt just as unhappy as Josh looking at this dark, old house. But I'd never carry on the way Josh was.
> (pp.4-5)

A similar influence is depicted with the character of Casey in *Stay Out of the Basement*:

> 'Yeah. Well he [Dad] got fired,' Margaret said, half-whispering in case her dad might be able to hear her.
>
> 'But why? Did he blow up the lab or something?' Casey grinned. The idea of his dad blowing up a huge campus science lab appealed to him.
> (p.5)

Josh and Casey are free of the emotional and behavioral constraints that bind their older sisters: in both these instances the older sister is the controlled, conciliatory and caring example of the female 'mother' stereotype so prevalent in patriarchal literature. This female character is also depicted as being compliant to authority whilst the younger brother is allowed to behave in a much less repressed and uninhibited manner.

As the protagonist the younger brother is similarly characterised as being fun loving and independent. An example is Joe, the younger brother in *Revenge of the Lawn Gnomes*: 'Me? I'm not organised. I'm cool. I'm not serious like my sister. I can be pretty funny. My friends think I'm a riot. Everyone does. Except Mindy' (p.3).

The fate of the females in Stine's work also bears the stamp of patriarchal stereotyping in that when they 'break' the rules their punishment is more severe than that of the males. *Say Cheese and Die* is the story of four children who break into the home of the 'weird looking' isolate whom the children call Spidey (p.9), and steal an extraordinary camera. Three major patriarchal rules are transgressed: 'difference' is to be avoided because it is anathema to the symbolic order of the phallus; property is sacrosanct and not to be violated by unauthorised entry; ownership is ordained by God to be a right and 'Thou shalt not steal'.

The purloined camera in this tale is the medium by which punishment is meted out. When operated the camera predicts or prescribes that misfortune will come to the subject. When Greg takes a picture of his father's new car (p.30) and of his younger brother, Terry (p.42), the photographs that emerge show the car as a wreck and his brother as terrified. Later Greg's father does have a serious accident in the car (p.32) and it is a very frightened Terry who brings the news to Greg (p.59). A picture taken of one of the four children, 'Birdy', shows him sprawled, unconscious, on the ground and Birdy later gets knocked senseless in a baseball game.

Alarming enough punishments for transgressing the rules but the only female in the group of four disappears completely when her photograph is taken at her birthday party. But her additional 'crime' is that she is curious to know what the camera can do and female curiosity 'along with stubbornness, occupies a privileged position in the pantheon of female sins' (Tatar 1992, p.111). Shari persuades Greg to bring the camera to the party against his better judgement:

> 'Hi, Greg. Why aren't you on your way to my party?' Shari had asked when he'd run to pick up the receiver.
> 'Because I'm on the phone with you,' Greg had replied dryly.
> 'Well, bring the camera, okay?'
> Greg hadn't looked at the camera, hadn't removed it from its hiding place since his father's accident.
> 'I don't want to bring it,' he insisted, despite Shari's high pitched demands. 'Don't you understand, Shari? I don't want anyone else to get hurt.'
> (p.68)

Greg is depicted as the controlling masculine influence: he is logical, authoritative and responsible. In comparison Shari is characterised as demanding, shrill, irresponsible and a potentially chaotic influence. According to Tatar the wives of Bluebeard, by succumbing to their curiosity, 'wilfully insert themselves into an infamous genealogy that can be traced to Eve' (p.111). Shari becomes the symbolic Eve who, seduced by the weird properties of the camera and the desire to see 'what strange things come out'(p.69) when her guests are photographed, persuades the pious but gullible Adam (Greg) to bring the camera. Shari (Eve) is banished — the camera predicts/prescribes her disappearance. Similar to the consequences of the curiosity of the wives of Bluebeard, Shari's fate is complete patriarchal domination: for Bluebeard's wives this domination comes in the form of death. For Shari it is not only death but rejection of her very being, her identity.

It is not until a grief stricken Greg rips the photograph up that the banishment is lifted and Shari returns (p.105). This is a depiction of male power and control and demonstrates to young readers of both sexes that patriarchy is the normative ideology: to deviate is aberrant and punishable. Femininity has always been made to suffer harshly when the (male defined) rules are broken and it

seems that Stine will remind young readers of the 'rightness' of this particular phallic norm.

Another example of the notion of femininity as the evil that besets man can be found in *Monster Blood:* the green glob of Monster Blood that consumes everything in its path, including young boys, is the creation of two female characters. These two females are Aunt Kathryn, who is a witch, and Sarabeth, an evil entity able to metamorphose from animal form (cat) to human form. Sarabeth has enslaved Aunt Kathryn in order to be able to use the witch's magic powers: 'Sarabeth forced me to cast a spell on the can of Monster Blood' (p.120). The character of Aunt Kathryn demonstrates the controlled patriarchal female whilst Sarabeth represents the 'true' chaotic power of repressed femininity that all women are understood to be 'slave' to in patriarchal literature (Showalter 1990, p.8). When this 'evil' is consumed by her own creation (p.124) the spell on Aunt Kathryn is removed (p.126) and phallic order is returned: the young boys swallowed by the Monster Blood reappear (p.125) and the Monster Blood itself is reduced to a harmless ball of green glob — until *Monster Blood II.*

In *Let's Get Invisible* it is Erin who begins the chain of events that almost spells disaster: Max, Lefty, April and Erin find a mysterious door in the attic but it is Erin, as the symbolic Eve, who, prey to her curiosity, urges the others to open the door and 'that's when the trouble began' (p.13). In *The Night of the Living Dummy III* it is Trina who speaks the magic words out loud and brings to life the latest in a line of dastardly ventriloquist dummies. This concept of the female as being either evil or the precursor of the ensuing horror is a repetitious one in Goosebumps and leads one to wonder about the impression of femininity imposed on the minds of young readers by the time they have read thirty or forty of these stories.

The character of Amanda in *Welcome to Dead House* is depicted as flawed and thus deserving of the fate she almost brings upon herself: Amanda is saved in the last resort by her younger brother. Amanda knowingly does wrong: patient, placating, patriarchally 'correct' Amanda transgresses by allowing her younger brother to persuade her to leave the house to search for the missing family dog late at night and without parental permission. Amanda breaks two adult rules at this point but she really has no option because Josh is going in search of Petey whether Amanda comes or not. Amanda is left with the choice of breaking the rules or, an even greater transgression, not fulfilling her responsibility of caring for Josh. This characterisation of Amanda is the female as martyr stereotype: the female character is depicted as fulfilling her responsibilities in the knowledge that what she is doing is 'wrong' according to familial law and will ultimately cost her retribution. Patriarchy in the guise of the 'undead' Ray warns Amanda several times to return to the safety of the familial home but if Josh will not, then she cannot. When Amanda and Josh get separated in the cemetery Ray explains his 'vampire' state and, in a scene almost straight from Bram Stoker's *Dracula,* attempts to find eternal life by violating Amanda:

> 'We need fresh blood,' Ray said.
>
> 'What?' I [Amanda] cried. 'What are you saying?'
>
> 'The town—it can't survive without fresh blood. None of us can ...'
>
> ... His red eyes flickered. 'I'm really sorry.'
>
> He started to raise himself off the ground, to float over me.
>
> (p.94)

Bram Stoker's Dracula also stands over Mina with eyes that 'flamed red' (1974, p.286) and the stupor that he leaves his victims in is also evident in Amanda's story:

> I couldn't breathe. I couldn't move. I opened my mouth to call out to Josh but no sound came out...
>
> Ray floated a little higher. He hovered over me , choking me somehow, blinding me, suffocating me.
>
> I'm dead I thought. Dead.
>
> (pp.94-5)

The sexual connotations that are an implicit property of *Dracula* are also present in *Welcome to Dead House.* Sexuality was a taboo subject in Victorian England and gave rise to works like *Dracula* that titillated with sexual implications. Sexuality is a taboo subject when dealing with children; hence references to such matters are only ever implied in their fiction. Children might talk about

sex and adults might be aware that they do but it is still not a matter for open discussion which leaves the way open for titillating scenes such as the above to find their way into children's fiction.

To further promote the dominance of the male *Welcome to Dead House* it is Josh who rescues Amanda by holding 'the bright beam of light' on Ray causing this parody of a child to disintegrate. Again the implication is that the male is the one with the phallic 'light' of true knowledge, and the female cannot hope to compete.

Of the Goosebumps texts analysed for this study there is one in which the protagonist is a female who bravely and resourcefully challenges social taboos. Lucy, in *The Girl Who Cried Monster*, loves to transgress by terrifying her younger brother with her scary stories but, although she exasperates her parents with this particular piece of mischief, goes unpunished by them. Lucy also defies the adult rules pertaining to the local library by stopping inside the building after closing time to spy on the librarian, Mr. Mortman (this name is a pun on 'dead man' and constitutes an 'adult joke' at the expense of the child reader) Lucy transgresses here because she believes Mr. Mortman is a monster in human form (p.29). When her suspicions are confirmed Lucy is still brave enough to go to the library to continue her holiday reading program. Lucy also returns to this place of horror at night when social conventions dictate that she be at home eating the evening meal with her family. She returns to the library at this illicit hour in order to gain proof of her discovery: a photograph of Mr. Mortman eating flies and moths (ch.14).

Lucy's parents believe her story but decide to invite the monstrous librarian to dinner and then the reader finds that this is no ordinary family. The Darks are actually a family of cannibalistic monsters and the parents eat Mr. Mortman (p.135). The children do not have fangs; they are still controlled even though they are children of the 'other', so they miss out on this feast. A world in which girls are normatively brave, resourceful and successful is a world that is aberrant: a normatively female world is one in which (male) life is prey to the horror of cannibalism or the vagina dentata. Femininity as loathsome is a patriarchal stereotype as much as femininity as madonna-like: they represent the two faces of Eve—the seductress responsible for the downfall of man and the virgin companion of Adam. Young readers of both sexes would find this world a place to dread.

Goosebumps is 'scary'. The series is frightening because it represents a commercial and intellectual exploitation of the young and inexperienced reader who would have little agency to resist: the advertising and marketing of the product which is Goosebumps are aimed specifically at the child as a consumer rather than a reader. The intellect of young readers is controlled in two ways: the marketing of the series appeals to the imagination, to the sense that herein lies the irresistible thrill of the unknown and adventure; the stereotypical images demonstrate a singular view of the world that is both false and inadequate. As well the stereotypical engendering of the characters is presented with 'meanings as already made' (Zipes 1989a, p.103) and allows a false perception of individuality that a young and inexperienced reader might accept as a 'truth'. The series is also frightening in that children are seduced to believe (falsely) that buying the books that make up the series affords them the security of 'belonging' to a larger community of like-minded individuals. Lastly, the series is frightening for its demonstration of inappropriate patriarchal values that image a male over female and for the ideology it unremittingly manifests as normative to the child reader.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Vicki Coppell is a primary school teacher studying part time for her M.A. This article is an extract from her thesis, which examines the impositions that various authors make on their child readers.