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Follow the Leader: Subject Position and Focalisation in *Came Back To Show You I Could Fly*

Shirley Plank

It has frequently been observed that children's texts are agents of socialization. Perry Nodelman nominates the main thrust of children's literature as 'its effort to turn children from acceptable versions of childhood into the right sort of adults' (Nodelman 1992, p.34), and Jacqueline Rose points out that '. . . children's fiction builds an image of the child inside the book . . . in order to secure the child who is outside the book, the one who does not come so easily within its grasp' (Rose 1984, p.2). This unspoken and sometimes unrecognized desire of the author to 'claim the child' is achieved through creating subject positions for readers within the discourse of the narrative. Some narratives will encourage the reader to occupy a range of subject positions, depending on the various narrators. John Stephens points out that 'in aligning themselves with a focalizing character, readers undergo textual subjection' (Stephens 1992, p.57). An examination of Robin Klein's **Came Back To Show You I Could Fly** (Viking paperback 1989) reveals the ideological pressures from the text as it endeavours to 'normalise' its readers into culturally appropriate behaviour and encourages them in socially acceptable values and beliefs.

Came Back To Show You I Could Fly is principally focalized through the character of eleven-year-old Seymour who is

powerless in the adult world he occupies. Seymour is a thoroughly socialised child, subject at every turn to the approval of the range of adults in his life: his mother, his father, Thelma, (and later, even Angie). Seymour has had 'eleven years of experience in the futility of arguing with adults or expecting his opinions to be listened to' (p.5). His experience and opinions are marginalised, and he shares none of the power which adults exert over him. Adults make decisions for him about his life, excluding him from discussions which concern him. Nodelman points out the reasons for adult domination in children's lives: 'Our attempting to speak for and about children . . . will always confirm their difference from, and presumably, inferiority to, ourselves as thinkers and speakers . . . As long as we keep on speaking for [the child], we won't get to hear what it has to say for itself - and indeed, that may be exactly why we are speaking in the first place. . . . our discourse about childhood often replaces and even prevents our real perception of the brute realities of childhood' (Nodelman 1992, p.29 and p.30). Many young readers smarting from the injustices of an adult world which makes decisions for them without appearing to listen to their opinions, will readily sympathise with Seymour's position, for Seymour is only able to occupy the margins of the powerful adult world which surrounds him. He offers an enticing point of sympathy for the wronged and sensitive reader.

The strategies attached to focalisation can be seen in the first chapter which introduces the reader to the adults who dominate Seymour's life. The following is a typical example:

He supposed dully that one day the tiresome see-saw of his life would stabilise, and he'd know for certain just where he was supposed to live, and with whom. Meanwhile he'd been parked with crabby old Thelma, and had to make the best of it. As she'd said, she wasn't even a proper relation, just someone who'd once formed a casual and tenuous acquaintance with his mother through some church group. His mother, he realised with shame, was adept at

imposing on people and making them feel sorry for her. It was all a pose, the act she put on. Behind her disguise of pastel-framed glasses, floral dresses and thin martyred face, she was a born survivor, as tough as any street fighter. (p.7)

The first sentence here supposedly provides us with Seymour's view, but the language is that of an adult narrator, who is experienced enough to stand back from Seymour to observe 'the tiresome see-saw of his life'. 'He supposed dully' indicates that Seymour's perception is only a vague sense of tiredness at the upheaval of his life, which is made articulate for us by the narratorial voice. The second sentence slips into free direct thought, as indicated by the informal description of 'crabby old Thelma', but the third sentence changes voice again, hardly sounding like working-class Thelma's explanation. It has the insistent voice of the narrator again, as in the first sentence. Then the narrative supposedly slips back into Seymour's actual perceptions, but the language betrays the authorial presence: 'His mother . . . was adept at imposing on people'. This is hardly the language of an eleven year old boy. A short slip into Seymour's voice ('the act she put on') precedes another statement about his mother that purports to be his but is clearly an adult voice. Thus, although readers are occasionally provided with Seymour's words and thoughts, the focalisation frequently carries the authorial voice in disguise.

The slippage continues through the chapter as it introduces his overbearing and critical mother, who is so immersed in her own little dramas that her son is just another problem to be solved. Occasionally the narratorial voice even slips outside the focalised position and into the objective observation of the third person narrator, as occurs here:

He put his eye to the gap above the padlock, but could see only a stretch of bluestone flags with a central guttering, and the shabby corrugated iron fences of the back yards opposite. He placed one foot on the cross-bar and scrambled up - a small, skinny, uncoordinated boy made timid by a lifetime of constant nagging. (p. 9)

This is a change of focus as the focaliser becomes the focalised. Such discreet movement of the focus allows the author to appear to be speaking through Seymour, when very often she is speaking *about* him. Without close examination of the language and point-of-view of the text, readers are lulled into accepting that what they are getting is consistently Seymour's view, when quite frequently Seymour is merely a vehicle for authorial observation.

In providing Seymour's view of his mother, father and Thelma, the first chapter establishes him for readers as an uncertain and lonely boy who is thoroughly powerless in the face of adults who seem not to be interested in his feelings or opinions. This is reinforced in the following chapter when, goaded by overwhelming boredom, he tentatively ventures outside the confines of Thelma's tiny yard and is threatened by a group of local boys. Seymour finds himself once again 'huddling in some secret place trembling with cowardice' (p.18). His vulnerability, more easily understood through the access to his thoughts provided by focalisation, invites readers' sympathy.

However, Seymour is not just a pathetic underdog, fearful and dominated, for he also has traits which render him likeable. He is a potential Sensitive New Age Guy, showing his ability in matters domestic by successfully performing particular tasks according to the rigid requirements of the pedantic Thelma, and capably restoring order to the chaos in Angie's room. He later demonstrates aesthetic sensibilities in the addition of a spray of flowers to Angie's breakfast tray, and in being able to join Angie's imaginative world by selecting appropriate earrings. He blossoms under the unexpected and undemanding attention Angie gives him, and is genuinely concerned for Angie's health and later her unborn baby. In notifying Angie's

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family of her collapse he accepts responsibility for others. This representation of Seymour as sensitive, concerned and responsible invites readers to be well disposed towards him. His uncertainty and timidity are understandable and accepted, not as weakness, but as the product of circumstance; and since the narrative does provide Seymour's unspoken (sometimes unarticulated) thoughts, the reader perceives his unrecognised worth. Further, reader knowledge of narrative development will lead to an expectation - a desire, if readers align closely with Seymour - that he will gather sufficient courage to gain some independence from his dominated and restricted world.

By using Seymour as focaliser, the author is able to subtly manipulate the reader. Seymour's closely guarded upbringing has produced a boy who is unusually naive because of his limited life experiences. He is so inexperienced that his perceptions of Angie are based on misplaced assumptions about her life. He has not previously come into close contact with people outside his own restricted world and experience, and his mother and other adults have 'protected' him from knowledge about many things, including the prevalence of drugs and their effects on young lives. Thus he is unable to assess Angie and her excuses accurately, because he 'does not know'.

Seymour is first innocently struck by her beauty: 'She was the most beautiful person he'd ever seen in his life' (pp.21-22) and he connects her name with 'Angie, Angel'. This dazzling creature immediately accepts him, casually invites him to a cup of coffee, compliments him on his hated name and coffee-making skills, and invites him to stay for a chat. He is not wary of someone who is so unusually warm and welcoming to another who has just barged unceremoniously in to her life. His limited experience sees nothing unusual in this, although most readers would probably think it so. He merely thinks her 'grotty sink' a strange contrast to her immaculate appearance. Angie's prattling reveals in this first encounter that she has ambitions - of owning a florist shop, and her own 'proper house . . . in the country' (pp 25-6) - that are woefully different from the circumstances of her current existence. Seymour, however, accepts Angie as she represents herself to him. He is dazzled by her beauty and friendliness and his loneliness makes him vulnerable, for 'she was the only person he'd ever met in his life who'd made him feel as though his company was remarkable or worthwhile' (p.30). On the other hand, many readers would be able to quickly recognize Seymour's naivety and make a different assessment.

The author ensures readers attain this position of superiority by placing them in a privileged position. They are provided with other sources of information about Angie to which Seymour is not privy, as with the letter from Angie's mother to Judith which is interpolated between chapters two and three. It is provided without explanation, and introduces hitherto unknown characters. It makes reference to things looking 'so hopeless and impossible' (p. 19). Readers trying to make sense of the narrative are naturally curious about these new characters and want to know what is so hopeless. When Angie is introduced to Seymour in chapter three, readers already know she is connected with a 'dreadful business'. Consequently, their suspicions of Angie have been aroused before they meet her, and having already been alerted and made sensitive to doubts about Angie's character, their response contrasts with Seymour's. These interpolations in the form of letters, notes and lists create readers who are better informed about Angie than Seymour. Thus the subject position offered to the reader is the enticing one of being sympathetic towards Seymour, but superior to him.

There are also opportunities within the text for readers who ar themselves more knowing and astute to feel their superiority over Seymour. Some are relatively obscure and likely to be noticed only by a few readers - such as the hint from the unpleasant man at the

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race-track that Angie has practised prostitution (p.125) and is involved with the dangerous criminal underworld of drugs to the extent that she feels the need to use a pseudonym.. Other clues to Angie's life, such as those relating to Jas's whereabouts, are more frequent and more likely to be noted by most readers. These are proof to readers of their superiority to Seymour.

Readers align themselves with Seymour's interests because they like him, and perhaps pity him because they are more knowing. This gap between the superior knowingness of the readers and Seymour's naivety and misperception constitutes the readers' subject position. The readers' interests are involved in following Seymour's perceptions in the hope that he will grow in experience and understanding; that is, that he will achieve the knowledge and understanding they already have about the world in general, and Angie in particular. This positioning of the reader in a superior relationship to Seymour disarms readers and lulls them into a sense of confidence which encourages them to overlook Seymour's function within the text.

For Seymour, the disingenuous focalizer, becomes, in effect, the bell wether for the readers to follow. He leads them unerringly to concur with the values which underpin the narrative. He signifies order, in longing to clean up Angie's flat. He is disciplined and reliable in unfailingly carrying out Thelma's designated orders for the day. He is responsible. in contacting Angie's family, and then later by returning Angie's much-loved doll to her. He is honest, and is so appalled by Angie's theft of the rose that at first he tries to deny it happened. Seymour conforms to all the strictures imposed on him by the adults around him (pp.12, 16). Seymour has been so effectively socialised and imbued with notions of appropriate behaviour, that he represents the dominant culture. In aligning themselves with Seymour, readers are encouraged to accept the values of the dominant adult world which controls him, and which underpin the text. As a disguised model of successful socialization, Seymour 'naturalises' the beliefs of the text.

While experienced readers see and understand more of Angie than Seymour does, his response to the warmth of her personality ensures readers share his concern for her. She possesses some qualities which are appreciated by Seymour and noted by readers. She is good-natured and warm, as he experiences in the outings he has with her; her spontaneity is a refreshing change from the dreary discipline of his holiday at Thelma's; and she draws Seymour into an amusing imaginative world by creating Morris Carpenter for him. She is optimistic, and she has spirit, qualities symbolised by the tattoo of the flying horse. Her qualities are qualified, of course, by the knowledge that she fails to acknowledge the disaster her life has become. Angie's mood swings, her tendency to drop off to sleep, her shifting the blame on to others in order to account for her erratic work history, her explanations about the 'flu', her visits to the mysterious 'hospital' to receive her medication, her pitiful attempt to clear her debts by betting at the races assure the more worldly reader that Angie is on a drug recovery program, and that Jas is probably in gaol for either trafficking in or taking drugs, or both.

Her inability to face the reality of her squalid life is underlined by her description of her current accommodation to her mother, in which she describes it in terms which defy the reality that Seymour has encountered.

'. . . Hey, want to hear about my new flat? A room really, but flat sounds better. It's beaut, all self-contained and everything, isn't it, Seymour . . . There's even a flower garden, well, a bush with flowers, anyway. . . ' (p.66)

Angie's words *'sounds better'* show her desperate attempt to earn approval from her mother, who represents the values of the disapproving world Angie has left.

Angie's description of her reality is thus established as unreliable and the text invites readers to treat her opinions with some scepticism.

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Similarly, when Angie speaks of the future, the text constructs a reading position which judges her plans as unachievable fantasy. She entertains wild dreams of owning one of the mansions in Gresham Avenue, the wealthiest part of town:

'Definitely number seventeen for me,' she said dreamily. 'Jas is going to buy it for me, soon as he gets out . . . soon as he gets himself fixed up with a job . . .'

'Are you and Jas really going to buy number seventeen and live there?'

'Sure we are. One day it'll come up for auction and we'll be there with a big, fat cheque in our hot little hands. It's going to be convenient, too, because there's a shopping centre just around the corner, and that's where I'll set up my florist shop . . .' . (p.46)

Angie's words show that she has no appreciation of the hard work and determination necessary to make such an acquisition. It is not even her own, but Jas's job and 'big fat cheque' which will make the dream come true.

The text frequently invites comparison between Angie and Seymour, who stands in stark contrast to her. His reliability and self-restraint has already been demonstrated by his saving of twenty-five dollars earned from a holiday job, while Angie has achieved nothing tangible towards her dream:

'What I'm really planning to do is open my own florist shop. Bet you never guessed I was a qualified florist, did you? Well. I am. At least, I never actually got the certificate yet, but near enough as makes no difference.' (p.25)

On the contrary, the reader learns during her visit to her mother that she has been fired from other jobs Angie's responses are revealing:

'That old dragon, there was a mix up about Bankcard slips and she went and blamed me and it was really that dumb junior there. Talk about teacher's pet and sucking up! . . . ' (p.66)

This is only one example of many in which Angie's inability to accept responsibility for her actions is revealed, and so positions readers as to raise doubts about the likelihood of her achieving her grandiose plans. Even her more modest dreams of a little craft shop in Queensland (p.36) or a little place in the country keeping chooks and growing vegies with Jas (p.26) are unconvincing. Readers know she will never achieve them because her dreams are so diffuse, lacking the single-minded purpose needed and because her plans include the boyfriend Jas, whose absence is first explained by Angie's uncompleted sentence 'when he gets . . . ' (p.26) which alerts the reader to his current whereabouts. Readers' suspicions are later confirmed by the man who accosts Angie at the race-track (p.125).

Thus Angie does not offer readers a viable alternative subject position within the narrative. She remains distanced from the reader, with none of the insights into her thoughts and fears that focalisation provides with Seymour. She becomes the subject of the readers' gaze, and the gaze quickly becomes critical. Her flat is dirty and untidy, signifying the disorder of her life. She does not keep regular hours and she forgets her promise of an outing with Seymour, demonstrating her unreliability. She dresses in a manner which is determined by mood and attracts attention. These are statements of her spontaneity and her difference, or non-conformity. She demonstrates her dishonesty by stealing a gift for her mother and travelling on a fake student pass. She takes drugs and smokes while she is pregnant, showing her irresponsibility. Thus the two main characters with whom readers can align themselves offer choices between civilised and uncivilised behaviour, order and chaos, conformity and difference, discipline and spontaneity, responsibility and irresponsibility, reliability and unreliability, honesty and dishonesty. In representing the first , the 'accepted' qualities of these oppositions, the child Seymour acts as exemplar for the reader, in opposition to the child-like Angie.

The cultural values in which Seymour has been so well schooled are represented in this narrative by two icons of Australian aspiration. The first of these is having a regular income arising from regular employment, and the other is having a 'place of one's own'. These are values which are shared by both the middle-class world of Angie's family who have succeeded in attaining a degree of material status, and the working class world of Thelma, whose less affluent existence is nevertheless given dignity by its proclamation that what she has, she earned and owns from the work of her own hands. A tantalising clue that these values might also be those of the author is present in the notes 'About the Author' at the rear of the book. The author Robin Klein has volunteered the gratuitous piece of information that she 'lives in a bluestone house in the hills near Melbourne'.

Many of the characters in this narrative are judged by their achievement of these symbols of success. Regular employment and a place of her own are the twin goals of Seymour's mother, as though the economic security they represent would provide a solution to the unhappiness she has endured since parting from her husband two years earlier. For those two years of his short life Seymour has found 'Everything was always temporary, always in a state of flux.' He longs for stability and a certain knowledge of 'where he was supposed to live, and with whom.' (p.7). Emotional stability is thus connected with financial security. Like his mother Seymour too has a 'private list of desirable things he'd one day have in his own room'. (p.13). But he has become so accustomed to disappointment that he resists his mother's promise of a better life at Carrucan, protecting himself against further disillusionment. Seymour 'knew just how stark the gap between imagination and reality could be.' (p.76)

Seymour's father, with his inability to hold down a job, and his occupation of temporary accommodation in a caravan, is seen by others as incompetent and unreliable. Thelma, in her genteel and respectable poverty, feels free to criticise him for failing to provide 'a proper home' for his family, and for relying on his wife to meet the bills (p.149). Although Thelma holds down a job which keeps her in 'genteel poverty' she is independent, and ennobled by the dignity of being successful at her work, whereas he has failed in his duty as husband and father and is so out of touch with his society's values that he steals Seymour's life savings and spends them down at the pub (p.14). He is unsuccessful as a worker, husband and father by his society's standards; he lacks worthwhile goals.

Angie shares the same goals of regular employment and 'a place of one's own', but her desires are shown to be an unachievable fantasy which contrast with Seymour's modest and achievable desires.

Angie's visit home to Merken consolidates the values established to this point, but also modifies them in suggesting that Angie too may be the victim of circumstance. When Angie speaks of Merken and her past life there, she reveals her perceptions of that world. Unreliable as she is, she has a consistent view of it which gives indications of why she is in her current situation. She tells Seymour of the 'keeping up with the Joneses' syndrome there, an ominous sign of people's goals and aspirations. She candidly tells him, 'I never really fitted in, you know.' (p.60). Later, she adverts to the event which, in her mind, marks the extreme disapproval which prompted her departure from the Merken world: 'Just one lousy party and showing off, wanting to sparkle like a Christmas tree' (p.83).

Readers are provided with a view of this visit to her parents' home through the sympathetic gaze of Seymour. He observes Mrs Easterbrook's cool response to Angie's gift and hears her criticism of Angie's flamboyant clothes. In showing Seymour her old room, Angie lets drop that it has been redecorated. Angie's description of her preferred bedroom interior contrasts markedly with the description of what Seymour sees.

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These contrasting descriptions offer readers the opportunity to assess that it has been redecorated into something more acceptable by Merken's standards, just as they can recognise that the absence of Angie's brother and sister was deliberately planned by Mrs Easterbrook. The superior knowledge of readers positions them to be able to draw more informed conclusions from the accumulating evidence regarding Angie's reception at home than Seymour does. The evidence Seymour gathers and naively judges as uncaring, invites readers to identify as an inability by Angie's family to cope with an outlook that does not conform to the rigid social requirements of Merken and the opinion of neighbours like Margaret Duke. Angie's warmth and imagination, to which her sister Lynne later testifies, have been squeezed out of this conformist environment to find outlet and acceptance elsewhere, first with an 'awful crowd of kids' (pp.159,161), later in the world of Jas and drugs. Home ownership and a regular income are shown to have failed without the balance provided by a generous love and belief in an individual's unique qualities, however non-conformist.

Lynne is constructed as a successful product of that comfortable middle class environment: she is beautifully groomed and composed, with a secure sense of self-worth; she is accomplished at ballet and plays the clarinet and flute. Angie's view is that Lynne is successful, whereas she had not been:

'High achievers, that's what my family's all about - did you just happen to notice all those trophies and certificates and stuff on the mantel, cups for this and that?'

'Yes, I saw them.'

'I'm the odd one out. Not that they ever let me feel it, mind. . . I must have been a very big disappointment to my family.' (p.83)

Like Seymour, Lynne stands in contrast to Angie, for she has been successfully socialised to the extent that she wears the 'right' clothes, behaves appropriately and applies herself to her tasks in a way that demonstrate the security of her future.

Lynne criticises Angie for her 'tacky rubbish' , her lack of appreciation of expensive gifts, the disruption and heartache Angie has brought to the family (pp.156-8). Lynne's judgments are largely based on what constitutes good taste in the narrow middle class world she occupies. The reader has already observed from her dismissive acceptance of Angie's gift of earrings that she finds Angie and her tastes an embarrassment (p.104), for Angie's tastes indicate she has clearly slipped out of her class. Like her mother, she copes with Angie by distancing her, remaining aloof. This enables her to cope with what Angie has become:

'Oh, for goodness' sake, Seymour, you don't know the first thing about it! Angie's obviously been trotting out her usual fantasies, and you've just been dumb enough to believe them.' (p.155)

The same judgmental attitude is apparent in Lynne's assessing gaze around Thelma's house and cheap possessions. Although Seymour has suffered under Thelma's critical, domineering attitude to him, and the petty economies of her existence, he is annoyed.

Lynne dialled a number and, while waiting, glanced about at Thelma's possessions. Her eyes flickered over the cheap cane telephone table, the padded stool next to it, the garish oval flower prints Thelma had pinned to the wall. Then she looked coolly at Seymour and he found himself retreating, full of resentment, to the living room while she made the call. How dare she cast those critical eyes over Thelma's genteel poverty. (p.142)

Here, the author's manipulation is betrayed in the narratorial voice, for although Seymour understands that Thelma has been successful in her limited way and is dependent on no-one for her survival, he is hardly likely to think of her situation as 'genteel poverty', which the shift into free direct

thought would have us believe. Seymour's indignation, provided through focalisation, show readers that they ought to be outraged at Lynne's snobbishness and narrowness. Thelma has, after all, kept down a job and owns her own house. She has done all that her society demands of her. Seymour even discovers, after his subsequent unexpected outburst to Thelma, that she does have some sympathy for his situation and she relaxes, albeit grudgingly, the confining rules she has set (p.150). And Thelma's response to the perceived threat in Seymour's mother's life is an indication of a basically humane disposition to which life's hazards have applied a stern exterior. Even Thelma's world is preferable to Merken because it has feeling for another's situation. There is no temptation for the reader to switch allegiance to the unyielding ordered middle class world of Merken, which is critical and rejecting of Angie. Unreliable and dubious though Angie is, her spontaneity and warmth are preferable to Merken's judgmental rigidity.

However, Lynne's calm exterior belie the anguish that she and her family have experienced. She had once been captivated by Angie as Seymour is now. When she is cleaning Angie's flat her 'self-contained face . . . suddenly . . . flooded with emotion' when Seymour finds the cup and saucer she had given Angie years ago (p. 157). 'They looked unused, as though Angie had perhaps valued them too much to risk in everyday use' (p.157). The author again manipulates the focalisation in shifting into free indirect discourse in imposing this observation on Seymour.

Lynne testifies to the interest Angie took in her, even though there is a six year gap in age:

'. . . as well as being my big sister, she was my best friend too. And then it all changed, there was this really awful crowd of kids she got in with.' (p.158)

Seymour's supposed journey to maturity is marked by a growth in strength of character, by acquiring some self-assertive strategies which enable him to cope with the bullies in his life. His inspired lies to the group of threatening boys apparently come from the influence of Angie's imaginative games, but his moral character is never seriously under threat. The text even makes a distinction between Angie's lies and Seymour's, in showing Seymour's initial disbelief, then his shock at her petty crimes. Angie cheats on society by travelling on a fake student concession, by blaming someone else for the 'error' in the day's takings at the dress shop, by stealing the rose for her mother. She takes her revenge on a society which rejects her by blaming others in it, by refusing to take responsibility for her actions whereas Seymour's lies hurt no-one. The success of his lies has not corrupted his secure knowledge of what is right and what is wrong; Angie's lies indicate a constant blurring of the boundaries between reality and fantasy, acceptance and rebellion, responsibility and denial. Readers aligned with Seymour take the cue from his shocked responses to Angie's behaviour, and his pleasure in his victory over the bullies:

Outwitted, he thought, with pleased surprise. You don't always have to roll over and offer up your throat, there are other ways you can get out of things. Other ways where you come out the winner. (p.169-170)

Angie has not been successfully colonised as Seymour has. She perceives society from her position where she is banished to the margins not only by the adults in her life, like Seymour, but by society in general. She is critical of it - especially in its conformity, as her comments on her parents' suburb of Merken reveal:

'Merken's like . . . well, say one person gets ducted heating in their house, everyone else breaks their necks to do the same, not because they actually want ducted heating, but they can't bear to lag behind. That wouldn't do at all, the roof of the world might cave in. It's not really posh, but mind you, they're

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all working on it like grim death. Mortgageville, one of those subdivided places where they bunged up a whole lot of boring houses all alike so everything looks the same.' (p.60)

Unreliable as Angie is, readers detect the truth in Angie's observations, having seen Mrs. Easterbrook's response to Angie's on her visit home. It is because Angie has been unable to conform in behaviour and achievement that she has become an outcast. Mrs Easterbrook's desire to have the perfect family is really a desire to have a family that is admired and conforms to the community's, to Merken's, idea of 'normal'. For Angie, Seymour's early uncritical acceptance and admiration has been a tonic for her, fulfilling her need for admiration, a lack which is strongly felt, living as she does under a cloud of social disapproval. Lynne labels as 'unhealthy' this friendship between an eleven-year-old boy and a twenty-year-old girl, unaware of what it has provided for each of them. Each has made the other seem special: she has given him the genuine attention and encouragement he needs, brightening his dull life imaginatively with her little fantasies and excursions; he has been a brief but genuinely admiring participant in her life who has blossomed under her care.

Seymour's newfound confidence, coupled with his initial rage at what he perceives to be the heartlessness, of Angie's family, enables him to ask Lynne, 'What's wrong with your family?' (p. 145). Later, he complains to Thelma about how his wishes are never consulted (pp.148-9). This is a major step for a boy who has been 'unaccustomed to defying people' (p.144). Seymour's growth through this episode in his life includes a widening of experience which brings an understanding that surface appearances may not provide the full picture. Seymour's contact with Angie and then her family have helped him to move from his initially uncritical acceptance of Angie's construction of herself, to a more compassionate position towards her family, once he has seen the 'raw and hopeless grief' that Angie's drug addiction has brought on them (p.146).

Angie's and Seymour's unlikely friendship faces its greatest challenge when Seymour, having finally been forced by Lynne's information to face the fact of Angie's drug dependency, visits her at Rankin House. Angie is depressed, full of malice, still buoying herself up with fantasies of the future, and still denying her addiction: 'I've been sick, really sick, you know, I got a kind of pleurisy on top of that flu.' (p.175). But Seymour forces out into the open the evasions and silences that have marked their relationship and Angie's life. Stung by her rudeness, he voices the observations he has evaded, saying 'You're always talking about . . . about nicking off to places' . . . 'Your hands are all shaky' . . . 'The flat, that's all over and done with . . .' and then, treacherously, 'They all want you to go to that Lakeview place, you know they do. It's some kind of home where they help you get off . . . drugs, isn't it?' (pp.176-8). Seymour, the successfully socialized young boy, speaks for 'them', for the society whose values he so ably represents. His angry remarks about her unlikely ability to care for her baby are underlined by his parting shot as he returns her doll: 'Here,' he said. 'You might as well have it. Little girls like playing with dolls' (p.179). At this point he has assumed the authority of the adults who have socialised him, and successfully imbued him with their values. He speaks here as an adult, and twenty-year-old Angie is revealed as the wayward irresponsible child. Her inability to face reality, which is a disguise for her inability to accept the mores of her society, is represented as a lack of maturity. To achieve maturity and acceptance she needs to become like Seymour, the exemplar for both Angie and the reader. Her letter to Seymour in the final pages of the book is acknowledgement that Angie recognises him as significant to her life and rehabilitation. He fills, at least in part, the lack she has felt with her family. For all their concern and anguish, real as it is,

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her family has failed her as much as she has failed them.

The last words focalised through Seymour are provided as a moral for the story:

No little winged horse, he thought, looking up into the sky, trapped in the numbness that wasn't, after all, free from pain. He Blinked the illusion of silver rain from his eyes. There would never be any little winged horse plunging splendidly from the sky to land at your feet and carry you away from things not to be borne. That was something you had to learn to do all by yourself. (p.180)

This observation of Seymour's appears to be a revelation new to him but in fact, Seymour has known this 'truth' all along. Readers have already been told he knows 'just how stark the gap between imagination and reality could be' (p.76) The homily is provided again for the readers' moral improvement, under the disguise of his thoughts, to demonstrate that dreams without application and hard work are a waste of time.

By the end of the book, Seymour's position most closely approaches the understanding and knowledge that the readers have. He has arrived at this point not by the privilege of information which the readers enjoyed, but as a result of some joyful, and some bitter, experience. The gap between Seymour's knowledge and reader knowledge which was first created for the reader subject position has been closed; Seymour's growth in experience and understanding has made his and reader perceptions almost congruent. At this point the author is now able to abandon Seymour as focaliser, as the representative for the readers of the attitudes the text values. The narrative concludes with two letters, one each from Angie and Seymour. Seymour's letter is labelled as 'Postscript', but the two letters belong together for the readers who are left to interpret the ending alone, without the guidance provided by focalisation.

The open ending of the narrative provides little reassurance for many readers hoping that Angie will successfully complete the drug rehabilitation program and follow her friend Judy's difficult path into responsible motherhood. Readers' knowledge of drug dependency could lead them to rejoice that Angie has stayed so long with the program at Lakeview, but to retain misgivings about Angie's long term possibilities. Despite the fact that Angie's letter indicates her apparent domestication and optimism for the future indicated by her knitting for the baby, her rejuvenation of the doll, and her plan to stay on at Lakeview for a couple of months after the baby's birth, the reader has misgivings about her future plans which include her return to the stifling environment she has fled. There is little indication that her parents and siblings are prepared to accept Angie's life in any other way than their prescriptions have dictated all along. Their perception of making concessions to the extent of welcoming Angie in their midst as an unmarried mother may be the limit of their negotiability. Angie will have the added test of rearing her child in the approved manner, under the watchful eye of her zealous mother who will probably be wanting some return (in conformity) on her risky investment.

The plan seems doomed to failure. It is likely Angie will occupy her re-decorated room and have to be made over herself in the same way, fulfilling the image her mother has ready-made for her. Success for Angie is probably dependent on her bending the knee and submitting to being socialised as Lynne and David have been. Such a repressive lifestyle in which she is unable even to smoke or to mention Jas's name (pp.65, 67) as before is likely to produce the old habitual responses of recrimination and denial, driving her out again to seek a place on the margins of society where she can find acceptance. Presumably she would return to the insecure world she has left, a likely candidate for easy relief in drugs. Nor is there the reassurance the reader seeks that Angie has admitted to herself the consequences of her dependence on drugs. She still refers to it as 'flu and bronchitis and pleurisy

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and that' in her letter to Seymour, prevaricating and dissembling still, unable to acknowledge responsibility for her body and her baby (p.181). Angie is nearly as far now from attaining the goal of her 'own place' as she has ever been.

The narrative convincingly shows readers that non-conformity to the dominant culture has serious consequences. The reader sees through the chinks in Lynne's armour that life with a drug-dependent family member is not easy. But Klein makes it difficult to take the family's part. Mrs Easterbrook's exasperated reactions during Angie's visit increase reader sympathy for Angie, and readers are further alienated when Mrs Easterbrook marginalises Seymour by sending him outside while she chastises Angie. She is so hostile that Angie, whom the alert reader suspects is pregnant, is unable to bridge the gap to share her news with her mother.

'I came out here to tell you something, but I guess it's not the right time. Maybe it won't ever be the right time. Maybe it won't even happen, anyhow. I think I'd better just take myself off now, OK?' (p.71)

The lesson is clear. Mrs Easterbrook holds the power because she has the knowledge, knows the unwritten rules; she represents the majority view. Angie contests it at her own peril, one individual against the force of the opinions of a whole class.

Whether or not readers are able to find some hope for Angie's future, the outcome for Seymour of these perplexing holidays is not in doubt. Our bell wether comes into his reward and readers are invited to share his delight. Now he has the room of his own he has modestly hoped for, although his letter to Angie does not specify who chose his wallpaper. His mother has at least permitted Seymour to stick up the posters which proclaim the room as his. He continues to accept her domination, but she has another object on which to shower her untiring energies now in the deaf old man for whom she housekeeps. The implication is that Seymour is better off as a result. The new found confidence Seymour has discovered in himself under Angie's tutelage has won him a friend, and his reliability has brought him the reward of a job and regular income. Unlike his earlier assessment of himself as not 'particularly bright' and unwise to 'expect much in the way of a career' (p.50) the world seems suddenly to have blossomed with possibilities for his future. The good things even extend to his father who has a job, hinting at the possibility that he too might wake up to his responsibilities and be able to be accepted back into the family fold eventually.

Readers are able to judge Angie's future chances more objectively, having been kept at a distance from her throughout. Her future is nowhere near as assured as Seymour's. She stands as a cautionary example of what might happen if we rebel against the unfairness that life deals us, and resist the yoke that society places upon our shoulders. We know that if Angie fails in her bid to return to the family, she will disappear again, exiled to the fringes where such people are sent.

So Seymour's future stands in contrast to Angie's. He has been patient with the trials and tribulations of life, and has come into his reward. The likeable sensitive boy is well on the way to overcoming his timidity and gaining a confidence that will enable him to face the future. He has all those qualities his cultural order values in his reliability, honesty, sensitivity, responsibility and discipline. Readers aligning themselves with him are positioned to accept Seymour's qualities as necessities for becoming an accepted member of the community, in which Angie stands as a cautionary example of what happens if the rules are transgressed. Seymour's success is what most readers wish for themselves. Through the focus of an eleven year old boy Klein has successfully socialized her child readers in the desirability of acceptance of the dominant values, tempered with loving tolerance.

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Biographical Note

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