Divine Madness

Identifying, Analysing and Developing the Campus Clique Crime Novel

Creative Writing PhD Thesis

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Contents

Abstract

Donna Tartt's novel *The Secret History* (1992) recounts the crimes of an elitist clique at an exclusive liberal arts college in rural Vermont, USA. Since 2005 there have been a number of predominantly American novels, including John Green's *Looking for Alaska* (2005), Martha O'Connor's *The Bitch Goddess Notebook* (2005), Lev Grossman's *The Magicians* (2009), Jennifer McMahon's *Dismantled* (2009) and Amber Dermont's *The Starboard Sea* (2013), that feature a campus, a clique and a crime. Their plots contain cycles of repression and return, and characters who falsely believe that their superior intelligence places them outside the moral codes of society. These novels, which I have termed campus clique crime novels, have not previously been defined as a distinct sub-genre. The purpose of this thesis is to identify, analyse and develop the campus clique crime novel.

The exegesis locates the campus clique crime novel within the wider body of campus fiction and conducts a comparative analysis of three primary texts, Tartt's *The Secret History*, Green's *Looking for Alaska* and Grossman's *The Magicians,* to determine the key narrative devices and themes of the sub-genre and to identify ways in which the campus clique crime novel may be further developed.

The creative project, a novel titled *In the Company of Saints*, incorporates all the key narrative devices identified and analysed in the exegesis; however, I used the drafting process to play with these devices and determine how they might be developed.

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

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Introduction

According to Plato, the ancient Greeks believed that madness was occasionally not a failing of the mind, but a gift from the gods. In *Phædrus* the character Socrates explains:

> The divine madness was subdivided into four kinds, prophetic, initiatory, poetic, erotic, having four gods presiding over them; the first was the inspiration of Apollo, the second that of Dionysus, the third that of the muses, the fourth that of Aphrodite and Eros.[1]

The second, that of Dionysus, is achieved by performing a *bacchanal*, or as Benjamin Jowette explains: 'with holy prayers and rites, and by inspired utterances' and is 'a way of deliverance for those who are in need'.[2] Jowette also notes that there are strong parallels

> between the young Athenian in the fifth century before Christ who became unsettled by new ideas, and the student of a modern University who has been the subject of similar *aufklärung*. We too observe that when young men begin to criticise customary beliefs, or to analyse the construction of human nature, they are apt to lose hold of solid principle.[3]

In 1992 Donna Tartt married this 'loss of solid principle' and Dionysus' divine madness in her international best seller, *The Secret History*. In her novel protagonist Richard Papen escapes an unhappy working class upbringing in California by winning a scholarship to Hampden College, an elite liberal arts college in rural Vermont. There he befriends a precocious clique of students from more affluent but equally unsatisfactory backgrounds. Under the tutelage of their ancient Greek professor, they come to believe themselves superior to the laws and moral codes governing the wider community, engage in decadent behaviour and practise ancient rites (including performing a *bacchanal*) as a means of distancing themselves from their pasts. In the course of the *bacchanal* they kill a farmer, and when Bunny, a fringe member of the group, threatens

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[1] Plato, *Phaedrus* (Trans. Benjamin Jowette) (Project Gutenberg: 30 October 2008) EBook #1636. Kindle Edition. Available: http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1636. Accessed: 30 March 2012. Location 1 317.
[2] Benjamin Jowette, 'Introduction', *Phaedrus*, location 934.
[3] Benjamin Jowette, 'Introduction and Analysis', *The Republic*, location 1910.

to expose their crime and secrets of their past, they murder him and frame the crime as a hiking accident. As the police investigation unfolds the group begins to fall apart. Its unofficial leader, Henry Winter, commits suicide and Richard returns to his native California disillusioned.

From 2005 a group of American novels bearing strong similarities to *The Secret History* have been published. These titles include: John Green's *Looking for Alaska* (2005), Martha O'Connor's *The Bitch Goddess Notebook* (2005), Lev Grossman's *The Magicians* (2009), Jennifer McMahon's *Dismantled* (2009) and Amber Dermont's *The Starboard Sea* (2013). These novels share *The Secret History*'s theoretical concerns and feature a clique of students who meet at a typically elite campus where they are misguided by destructive authority figures and are, at least in part, responsible for a major crime, but remain unclassified as a recognisable sub-genre. I have termed these novels 'campus clique crime novels' and the purpose of this exegesis is to firstly locate the campus clique crime novel within the broader genre of campus fiction before undertaking an analysis of the sub-genre itself using three primary texts: *The Secret History*, *Looking for Alaska* and *The Magicians,* which have been chosen to demonstrate both the sub-genre's diversity and uniformity. *The Secret History* provides the template for the campus clique crime novel and is the work against which all subsequent texts have been examined. *Looking for Alaska* is an example of novels, such as *The Bitch Goddess Notebook*, which are set on high school rather than university campuses and which more directly target a young adult readership. In *Looking for Alaska*, Miles Halter transfers from a public school to Culver Creek Preparatory School in Alabama, where he befriends a group of student pranksters who later come to call themselves the Barn Night Crew. When the group's leader, Alaska Young, is killed in a car crash that may or may not be a suicide, the group members are left to consider their role in her death. *The Magicians* uses fantasy to satirise and extend the sub-genre's key

themes and is an example of how the campus clique crime novel is becoming self-reflexive. Despondent with his life in Brooklyn, child prodigy Quentin Coldwater enrols at Brakebills College for Magical Pedagogy where he becomes one of an elitist group that specialises in physical magic. Quentin inadvertently summons the Beast, a monstrous manifestation of his repressed inner desires, who murders both Quentin's classmate and his girlfriend.

Additionally, this exegesis uses this analysis to discuss where and why my novel *In the Company of Saints* adheres to and challenges the conventions of the campus clique crime novel to answer questions about the possibility of developing the sub-genre, particularly how might the inclusion of an active rather than a passive narrator alter the campus clique crime structure? How might a narrative use other key elements in the campus clique crime novel in new ways while remaining true to the sub-genre's principal themes? And most importantly, can such a narrative still be classified as campus clique crime fiction?

The Target

Locating the Campus Clique Crime Novel

1.0 Introduction

Before analysing the campus clique crime novel it is necessary to examine the wider body of campus fiction this sub-genre, and more specifically *The Secret History*, is rooted in. Studying *The Secret History*'s labelling as both a Bennington Brat Pack novel and a campus crime narrative provides an understanding of the origins and wider literary context of this as yet undefined sub-genre. A further exploration of the popularity of Young Adult clique novels in the early-to-mid 2000s then provides a more immediate context for the campus clique crime novels published in the latter half of the decade.

1.1 The Campus Novel

The Secret History can be broadly classified as a campus novel. According to Jay Parini, the campus setting functions as 'a microcosm, a place where humanity plays out its obsessions and discovers what makes life bearable'[4]—or unbearable, as the case may be. The convenient, closed-world, hothouse environment offered by the campus has made boarding schools and live-in universities popular settings for fictional narratives since the mid-nineteenth century. However, according to Frederic Carpenter, many of these early campus narratives, such as Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857) and *Tom Brown at Oxford* (1861) and Owen Johnson's *Stover at Yale* (1911), 'used the college uncritically as a setting for carefree and mildly exciting adventures' where 'all serious criticism of college life—or life as a whole—was ignored.'[5]

[4] Jay Parini, 'The Fictional Campus: Sex, Power and Despair', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Washington. 47:4 (22 September, 2000) B12.
[5] Frederic I. Carpenter, 'Fiction and the American College', *American Quarterly*, 12:4 (Winter 1960), pp. 443-465, 444.

Consequently, critics did not seriously acknowledge the campus novel as a genre until a spate of novels published in the 1950s, such as C. P. Snow's *The Masters* (1951), Mary McCarthy's *The Groves of Academe* (1952), Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* (1954) and Vladimir Nabokov's *Pnin* (1957), broke from the light-hearted revels of Hughes's and Johnson's texts to become, according to Malcolm Bradbury, 'much less concerned with nostalgia or social recollection' and 'more with intellectual and social change.'[6]

Elaine Showalter attributes the sudden proliferation of campus novels in the United States at this time to the GI Bill, which offered veterans free tertiary education and, in doing so, opened universities to lower-middle and working class students for the first time and instigated a wide spread expansion of tertiary institutions and a new, politically volatile campus culture:

> The genre has arisen and flourished only since about 1950, when American universities were growing rapidly, first to absorb the returning veterans, and then to take in a larger percentage of the baby-booming population.[7]

This period saw an influx of writers entering academia for the first time. Prior to the war, creative writing pedagogy was in its infancy. A course in modern composition had been offered at Harvard since the 1880s,[8] a small number of universities accepted original works of art in place of research from 1922,[9] and the Iowa Writers' Workshop was established in 1939.[10] However, it was not until the post-war period of expansion that there was a widespread increase in the number of creative writing programs offered at universities, as Robert Pinsky explains: 'Creative writing programs are part of a

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[6] Malcolm Bradbury, 'Campus Fictions', *University Fiction*, ed. David Bevan, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990) pp.49-56, 51.
[7] Elaine Showalter, *Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and its Discontents*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005) 1.
[8] Nigel Krauth, 'Where is Writing Now?: Australian University Creative Writing Programs at the End of the Millennium', *TEXT*, 4:1 (April 2000).
[9] Kenneth Chan, 'Writers as Teachers, Teachers as Writers: Creative Writing Programs in the US', *TEXT* 6:1 (April 2002).
[10] Krauth.

cultural change that includes the GI Bill, the rise of state universities, maybe the decline of English departments.'[11]

While the genre has since encompassed several sub-genres,[12] all campus fiction, according to Stephen Connor, follows one of two basic plots:

> The one concerns the disruption of a closed world, and the gradual return of order and regularity to it, while the other concerns the passage through this closed world of a character who must in the end be able to escape its gravitational pull.[13]

The first is a template for the traditional campus crime novel with the discovery of a body in the early stages of the narrative signalling the 'disruption' Connor speaks of and the professor-turned-detective working to restore order. For example, in Diane Bell's *Evil* (2005), anthropologist Dee P. Scrutari arrives at St. Judes, 'one of the outstanding Jesuit liberal arts colleges of the northeast United States'[14] to discover that her office's previous occupant has disappeared. She sets out to find the missing academic and in the process uncovers how the patriarchal governing body of the college is oppressing female staff and students. She then teams up with a feminist action group to expose the corruption and implement a greater equality on campus, effecting the 'return to order' Connor describes.

The second plot Connor outlines follows a similar structure to the *bildungsroman* and has, in fact, been dubbed by Showalter, 'the *Professoroman*',[15] with the campus acting as the site for the academic protagonist to journey through a series of rites of passage, the successful completion of which gives him or her higher understanding and self-awareness. For example, in Amis's *Lucky Jim*, Jim Dixon learns, through an increasingly humiliating and (for the reader) hilarious chain of catastrophes,

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[11] Robert Pinsky, 'Robert Pinsky Interviewed by Michael Shea', *The Southeast Review* (6 November 2009). Available online: http://www.southeastreview.org/2009/11/robert-pinsky.html. Accessed: 8 February 2012.
[12] Most notably the academic satire, proliferated largely through the novels of David Lodge, and the campus crime novel, significantly developed through Amanda Cross's Kate Fansler series.
[13] Stephen Connor, *The English Novel in History, 1950-1995* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 70.
[14] Diane Bell, *Evil*, (Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2005) 2.
[15] Showalter, 4.

that he is unsuited for navigating the complex and often vicious politics of academia and chooses to leave.

It is this second plot that best summarises *The Secret History*, with Richard facing a series of moral challenges during his time at Hampden College before re-emerging, altered, into the wider community. However, it is not an exact match as, rather than advancing to a state of enlightenment and understanding, Richard is reduced to a state of despair following the trials he faces at Hampden, and while he ostensibly continues with his life, he is tormented by his involvement in the murder and unable to progress beyond this event:

> Walking through it all was one thing; walking away, unfortunately, has proved to be quite another, and though I once thought I had left that ravine forever on an April afternoon long ago, now I am not so sure…I have only to glance over my shoulder for all those years to drop away and I see it behind me again, the ravine, rising green and black through the saplings, a picture that will never leave me.[16]

Campus fiction reflects and critiques the major ideological and political shifts occurring in the academic world, albeit through a slightly delayed commentary, as Showalter explains: 'Academic novels are rarely in sync with their decade of publication; most reflect the preceding decade's crises, and changes.'[17] In *Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and it Discontents* (2005), Showalter chronicles the development of the campus novel from the 1950s to the early years of the twenty-first century. Her analysis of key texts published in each decade makes it one of the most comprehensive critical guides to the genre. However, her study primarily focuses on novels featuring academic protagonists rather than those reflecting student culture. Despite *The Secret History* being one of the most internationally successful and influential campus novels of the 20th century, Showalter only briefly mentions it amidst

[16] Donna Tartt, *The Secret History*, (Penguin: London, 1993) 2.
[17] Showalter, 12-13.

a handful of other texts as an example of how authors use the academic calendar to structure their narratives.[18]

Showalter also ignores the small group of student-focused campus novels penned by Tartt's peers, the so-called Bennington Brat Pack. In fact, few literary critics have drawn attention to this precocious clique of Bennington College alumni, despite their huge commercial success in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This has been largely documented by the popular media, with the group members' eccentricities and flamboyant lifestyles generating almost as much interest as the novels they produced.

1.2 The Bennington Brat Pack

The Bennington Brat Pack is a sub-set of the literary Brat Pack—a group of Generation X American authors, including Bret Easton Ellis, Jay McInerny and Tama Janowitz, who became pop icons and whose novels simultaneously revelled in and rallied against the gross materialism and excesses of 1980s youth culture. As Rob Spillman recalls, they were:

> Fiction writers who were anointed the new rock 'n' roll stars… These club-hopping novelists were getting huge advances, giant publicity pushes and serious Hollywood deals[19]… The tortured writer's look was everywhere. Andrew McCarthy's brooding, chain-smoking novelist in *Saint Elmo's Fire* was the ideal man. Fashion mags had spreads advocating 'the writer's look'… The gossip pages were filled with accounts of young literary lights hobnobbing with models, just like old time rockers… It was like Paris in the '20s or Greenwich Village in the '50s.[20]

The Bennington sub-set of this group included Bennington College alumni Bret Easton Ellis, Jill Eisenstadt and Donna Tartt. Their respective novels, *The Rules of Attraction* (1987), *From Rockaway* (1987) and *The Secret History* depicted the

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[18] Ibid, 11.
[19] Ellis's debut novel, *Less Than Zero* (1985), was adapted into a major motion picture the year he completed his undergraduate degree.
[20] Rob Spillman, 'Clean and Sober', *Salon* (February 1997). Available: http://www.salon.com/feb97/bratpack970221.html. Accessed: 6 March 2009.

decadence of 1980s undergraduate East Coast campus culture.[21] According to Elizabeth Wurtzel (writing in 1987):

> Bennington College was known as the most expensive school in the country, the rural refuge for rich flakes. But these days, the Vermont college also seems the place to go if you want to graduate a published writer.[22]

When asked why she thought there was such concentrated success among her classmates, Tartt speculated that it was a combination of bright students and innovative teaching methods.

> For one thing, it just happened that there were a lot of talented students there at that time. For another, we had good teachers: Arturo Vivante, Joe McGinnis, Nicholas Delbanco, Mary Robinson, and Jamaica Kincaid… Instead of being rigorously schooled to turn out writing in one particular form or style (like the minimalist Carver style that was so popular in writing workshops in the 1980s), we students were seeing all kinds of work and hearing all sorts of theories… With a lot of other disciplines thrown into the mix. [23]

In addition to creative writing, Tartt also studied classics. However, fellow Bennington Brat-packers claim that the behaviour of their peers also provided ample inspiration for their sexy, coked-up, alcohol-fuelled narratives. According to Ellis:

> There was a lot of opportunity at Bennington for almost *Sybil*-like transformation. You'd see some girl from Darien, with her Ralph Lauren blouse and her hair in a blond bob—by midterm she'd have shaved her head and be shooting up.[24]

He elaborates: 'I wrote exactly what I saw happening, the people who were doing drugs, acting rowdy, the parties, the sex.'[25]

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[21] Jonathan Lethem, being a fellow Bennington alumnus of this period, is also sometimes included in this group. However, unlike the early work of other Bennington Brat Pack authors, his novels do not depict the 1980's campus culture these novelists are identified with.
[22] Elizabeth Wurtzel, 'The Bennington Knopf Connection', *The Harvard Crimson* (19 October 1987). Available: http://www.thecrimson.com/article.aspx?ref=136524. Accessed: 6 March 2009.
[23] Donna Tartt, '*The Secret History*: Author Q & A'. Available: http://www.powells.com/biblio?show=TRADE%20PAPER:NEW:9781400031702:14.95&page=authorqa. Accessed 6 March 2009.
[24] James Kaplan, 'Smart Tartt', *Vanity Fair* (September 1992). Available: http://www.languageisavirus.com/donna-tartt/interviews.php?subaction=showcomments&id=1088883552&archive=&start_from=&ucat=1&. Accessed: March 4, 2009.
[25] Jamie Clarke, 'An Interview with Bret Easton Ellis' (January 1999). Available: http://www.geocites.com/Athens/Forum/8506/Ellis/clarkeint.html. Accessed: March 13, 2009.

Ellis's novel, *The Rules of Attraction*, is a hyper-real retelling of his Bennington years. Narrated from the perspective of a group of depraved undergraduates at the fictional Camden College, the novel is a series of boozy, postmodern fragments detailing the characters' wayward antics: wild parties, drug abuse, explicit teacher-student relationships and suicide. For example, here one of the characters, Sean, describes the 'Dressed To Get Screwed' party:

> Lauren Hynde was standing with friends on the stairs. She was holding a cup of grain alcohol punch that was being served from a trashcan by this fat girl who was almost naked… Tony kept talking to me about this new sculpture and had no idea I was staring at this girl. He was only wearing underwear and had a mattress strapped to his back… Centrefolds from porno magazines were glued to the walls everywhere and there was a movie being projected on the ceiling in the living room above the dance floor.[26]

In Eisenstadt's *From Rockaway* (also set at the fictional Camden) 'Parties at Camden are everywhere, all day.'[27] Here Eisenstadt's protagonist, Alex, describes the Revenge of the Dress to Get Laid party, which is either a homage to *The Rules of Attraction* or drawn from a memory of a Bennington party attended by both Ellis and Eisenstadt:

> There's a porno movie flickering on the ceiling above the dance floor… Alex has to dance vertically since the room is so full. Fishnets, garters, transparent lingerie. Where do the girls get this stuff? The boys, they're a lot more practical. Bathrobes, or towels, loincloths, underwear, or nothing at all… Bodies falling from the sky, from this guy with a mattress strapped to his back, giving rides.[28]

Similarly, in *The Secret History*, 'the shaggy, druggy ways of small schools around the country are sharply, and humorously captured.'[29] With their cartoonish names, student characters outside the clique, such as Judy Poovey and Laura Stora, could almost be characters out of *The Rules of Attraction* or *From Rockaway*. Their

[26] Bret Easton Ellis, *The Rules of Attraction*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987) 169-170.
[27] Jill Eisenstadt, *From Rockaway*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987) 79.
[28] Ibid, 165.
[29] Martha Duffy, 'Murder Midst the Ferns', *Time*, 140:9, (31 August 1992) 69.

shallow dialogue mirrors Ellis's and Eisenstadt's satires of their generation's wayward superficiality. For example, Judy reminisces to Richard about the previous year's 'Swing into Spring' party:

> Last year I went and didn't eat anything before and I smoked pot and drank, like, thirty martinis. I was all right and everything but *then* I went to Fun O'Rama. Remember? The carnival they had—well, I guess you weren't here then. Anyway. *Big* mistake. I'd been drinking all day and I had sunburn and I was with Jack Teitelbaum and all those guys. I wasn't going to go, you know, on a ride and then I thought, okay. The Ferris wheel. I can go on the Ferris wheel no problem…

Richard explains that this story ends 'as I knew it would, with Judy being pyrotechnically ill behind a hot-dog stand.'[30] Similarly, the few parties Richard attends reflect those described in Ellis's and Eisenstadt's novels:

> The music was insanely loud and people were dancing and there was beer puddled on the floor... I couldn't see much but a Dantesque mass of bodies on the dance floor and a cloud of smoke hovering near the ceiling.[31]

Although Tartt herself remains closed-lipped on her life and the life of her friends during their time at Bennington College, many critics have suggested that her Bennington experiences served as strong inspiration for her novel. As Viner points out, *The Secret History* is set at Hampden College

> a small, elite, artsy place in Vermont and Tartt went to Bennington, a small, elite artsy place in Vermont. She had a tutor, who, like Julian Morrow in *The Secret History*, was eccentric and elitist. She was a member of a high-minded, Greek-quoting clique.[32]

On the one hand, Tartt's refusal to comment on these similarities can be attributed to a common reaction among writers who grow tired of critics pouring over the significance of autobiographical details in fictional works. On the other, Tartt's refusal to discuss her personal experiences at Bennington can be read as part of the

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[30] Tartt, 295.
[31] Ibid, 80.
[32] Katherine Viner, 'A Talent to Tantalise', *The Guardian* (October 19, 2002). Available online: http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2002/oct/19/fiction.features Accessed: September 28, 2011.

conscious mythologising that occurred around the Bennington Brat-packers, with the authors becoming almost as sought after as their novels.

Bret Easton Ellis was labeled the 'Bennington bad-boy'[33] and was seen to party as hard as his protagonists in the years following the publication of *The Rules of Attraction* and its predecessor, *Less than Zero* (1985), published when Ellis was just nineteen. Tartt, too, was represented by the media as similar to the precocious, reserved and almost otherworldly classics students in her book. As James Kaplan observes in his 'gushing'[34] exposé in *Vanity Fair*:

> With her Norma Desmond sunglasses propped on her dark bobbed hair, her striped boy's shirt… and the ever-present cigarette, she is, somehow a character of her own fictive creation.[35]

This image was supported by accounts given by her classmates, who claimed:

> If you went to her room at 4 a.m., you'd find her sitting at her desk, smoking a cigarette wearing a perfectly pressed white shirt buttoned up to the top, collar studs, trousers with a knife crease.[36]

According to Threase Eiben, this image of Tartt as the elegant and just a tad eccentric recluse was part of the huge marketing campaign that supported *The Secret History*:

> Tartt's publisher, Knopf, primed the publicity pump, sending the author on a 20-city junket… Articles in *Elle*, *Vogue*, *Vanity Fair*, and other publications divulged myth-making detail: Tartt was soignée; she drank; she smoked; she quoted T. S. Eliot.[37]

It is understandable that Tartt is considered a member of the Bennington Brat Pack, as she has much in common with her Bennington contemporaries. Ellis even makes reference to Tartt's Greek class in *The Rules of Attraction* with his character, Stuart, asking: 'Who *doesn't* go to the Dressed To Get Screwed party, besides that weird classics group (and they're probably roaming the countryside sacrificing farmers

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[33] Threase Eiben, 'Murder in Mind: An Interview with Donna Tartt', *Poets & Writers Magazine* (November/December 2002). Available: http://www.pw.org/mag/0211/eiben0211.html. Accessed: 4 March 2007.
[34] Tracy Hargreaves, *Donna Tartt's* The Secret History*: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2001),67.
[35] Kaplan.
[36] A description cited by both Viner and Kaplan.
[37] Eiben.

and performing pagan rituals)?'[38] However, it is equally understandable that many critics, and Tartt herself, hesitate to group *The Secret History* with *The Rules of Attraction* and *From Rockaway*. Stylistically, Tartt's novel has little in common with Ellis and Eisenstadt's texts. The latter are hectic, fragmented postmodern romps, whereas *The Secret History* is carefully structured with clear rising action, central crisis and dénouement.[39] Tartt's language is elegant, precise, and peppered with references to Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Poe, Eliot, Waugh and Fitzgerald, to name a few. The role of this excessive intertextuality is discussed in section 2.3. Even *The Secret History*'s grittiest passages are tempered with an eloquence and nostalgia absent in Ellis and Eisenstadt's work. For example, the following passage describes Richard's sexual encounter with a drunken girl he meets at a party following Bunny's murder:

> Posters; dried flowers in a beer mug; the luminous glow of her stereo in the dark. It was all too familiar from my suburban youth, yet now seemed unbelievably remote and innocent, a memory from some lost Junior Prom. Her lip gloss tasted like bubble gum. I buried my face in the soft, slightly acrid-smelling flesh of her neck and rocked her back and forth—babbling, mumbling, feeling myself fall down and down, into a dark, half-forgotten life.[40]

Despite the carnality of the scene, the language is romanticised and nostalgic. Tartt uses this technique, which David Lodge terms 'special pleading',[41] throughout what is essentially a harrowing narrative, seducing the reader into the world of the clique and generating empathy for her young criminal protagonists, much as Nabokov uses his 'fancy prose style',[42] to give 'a seductive eloquence to a child-abuser and murderer'[43] in *Lolita.*

[38] Ellis, *The Rules of Attraction*, 179.
[39] Tartt, 41.
[40] Ibid, 322.
[41] David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction: Illustrated From Classic and Modern Texts* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1992) 94.
[42] Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*, Penguin Modern Classics Edition, (London: Penguin, 2000) 9.
[43] Lodge, 95.

1.3 The Campus Crime Novel

While *The Secret History* negotiates an uneasy relationship with the novels of Tartt's Bennington contemporaries, its positioning as a campus crime novel is still more precarious. Though it follows few of the conventions typical of traditional campus crime fiction, the two crimes that mark the major turning points of the narrative—the manslaughter of the farmer during the *bacchanal* and Bunny's murder—make it necessary to discuss *The Secret History* in relation to this sub-genre, if only to demonstrate how it deviates from the traditional campus crime novel. In Tracy Hargreaves' analysis, *The Secret History*:

> Begins as a murder story, albeit with a difference, since who copped it and whodunit are revealed in the first paragraphs. The only element of suspense left to us is *why*, although actually, this doesn't take long to discover.[44]

Though there are some male authors writing within the campus crime sub-genre—most notably, Philip Roth in his novels *The Professor of Desire* (1977), *The Ghost Writer* (1979) and *The Human Stain* (2000), and Thomas Cook in *The Chatham School Affair* (1996)—campus crime fiction is dominated by female writers. Among these, Carolyn Hielbrun, writing as Amanda Cross, is undoubtedly the most prolific, having produced, between 1964 and 2002, fourteen novels in her Kate Fansler series. It is not surprising, then, that much of the criticism of the campus crime novel, and indeed, of the campus novel, has largely focused on Cross's body of work. Other examples of female campus crime novels include Dorothy L. Sayers' *Gaudy Night* (1935), Paullina Simons' *Red Leaves* (1997), Scarlett Thomas's 'Lily Pascale Mysteries': *Dead Clever* (1998), *In Your Face* (1999) and *Seaside* (1999), Diane Bell's aforementioned *Evil* (2005), Marisha Pessl's *Special Topics in Calamity Physics* (2006)[45] and Jincy Willett's *The Writing Class* (2008).[46]

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[44] Hargreaves, 24.

[45] Pessl's novel features a campus, a clique and a crime as well as a precocious and ambitious protagonist, destructive authority figures and heavy intertextuality, making it a near perfect candidate for the campus clique crime sub-genre,

The traditional campus crime novel[47] adheres to the narrative structure Jeanne Addison Roberts ascribes to British detective novels, such as those by Dorothy L. Sayers, Agatha Christie and P.D. James:

> Its plots repeatedly affirm the belief that justice prevails. The classical detective is an agent of God—or at least an anthropomorphic image of a God who protects the established values of a given society… The setting of the classical detective story, typically a country house or small town, is as conservative as the plot: the chief interest is in a reconstruction of a past often felt to be more real than the trivial-seeming present; and the end of the story, with disruptive forces banished, the social ritual, typically an upper-middle-class ritual, is quietly resumed.[48]

Similarly, the traditional campus crime novel uses the geographical segregation of the campus from the wider community to create a closed-off world, much in the way British detective authors use a small island, village, or country estate to isolate a group of suspects, each with seeming motivation to commit the murder. As is often the case in such novels, the detective or sleuth will arise from within this segregated group of characters.[49] However, the detective or sleuth figure in the campus crime novel is usually an academic (most commonly an English professor),[50] with the academic's research skills being the scholarly equivalent of the detective's sleuthing abilities. This allows the academic an easy (and convenient) transition into the detective role, as Leonardi explains:

> The academic-woman-as-detective novel falls more easily into the British than into the hardboiled tradition, predictably enough, since these heroines are by profession more inclined to

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save for the important distinction of the protagonist being cast in the role of detective rather than criminal and the clique being innocent of the crime.

[46] Although whether Willett's narrative is true campus crime is debatable as the class referred to in the title is a night class rather than a university topic.

[47] I say 'traditional', as with defining any genre or sub-genre in literature there are always numerous exceptions, in this instance titles such as Zoe Heller's *Notes on a Scandal* (2003) and Sebastian Faulks' *Engleby* (2008) feature a campus setting and a crime, but these are not the focus of the narrative.

[48] Jeanne Addison Roberts, 'Feminist Murder: Amanda Cross Reinvents Womanhood', *Feminism in Women's Detective Fiction*, pp. 94-111, 94-95.

[49] Like many authors of detective fiction, successful campus crime writers, including Cross and Thomas, create series around their academic-turned-detective figures, and like private eyes, these characters, based on their sleuthing reputations established in the first novel of the series, are often called in to investigate the crimes in later books, rather than having a direct connection to the crime.

[50] Reddy, Maureen T. Reddy, *Sisters in Crime: Feminism and the Crime Novel* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1988), 43.

> research and deduction than to chases, break-ins, and more than one brush with death per novel… [There is a] consciousness of the similarity between the academic and the detective enterprises.[51]

However, unlike many popular British detective novels, the campus crime novel is often underpinned by a strong political agenda, typically using the instance of the crime as a platform for discussing the marginalisation of minority groups within the academy. Given that the genre is dominated by female authors, it is unsurprising that many of these novels draw attention to the oppression of women within a patriarchal academy; Diane Bell's *Evil* is particularly didactic on this point. However, the treatment of racial minorities is also examined. For example, in Roth's *The Human Stain*, Jewish professor Nathan Zuckerman is fired for using the term 'spooks' to describe two absent students, who, unbeknown to him, are African Americans.[52] Consequently, much of the criticism of the campus crime novel negotiates the sub-genre's politics, particularly its feminist politics, although there is much debate as to whether these novels progress or subvert the feminist ideals they, at first reading, appear to support.

According to Glenwood Irons, women's campus crime fiction is a site of feminist progression:

> Female authors who have chosen to create a woman (and sometimes a feminist) detective have altered the male prototype to the extent that their detectives speak from a woman's perspective and address problems which women face in modern society… The obvious subversion of order, which the woman detective represents, perhaps addresses our collective desire to undercut or at least question the institutions which inform our daily lives.[53]

She cites Heilbrun's Kate Fansler novels as pioneers of feminist detective fiction: 'Amanda Cross may be the first woman mystery writer who consciously set out to create a feminist detective.'[54]

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[51] Leonardi, 112-113.
[52] 'Spook' being both a kind of ghost and derogatory slang for African American.
[53] Glenwood Irons, 'Introduction: Gender and Genre: The Woman Detective and the Diffusion of Generic Voices', *Feminism in Women's Detective Fiction*, pp. ix-xxiv, xii.
[54] Irons, xx.

Roberts supports Iron's view:

> [Heilbrun] maintains a delicate balance between conservative traditions of the conventional detective story and the feminist insistence on change… She has, with increasing clarity, conceived of the detective story as a vehicle for demonstrating some of the ways in which society murders and maims women.[55]

However, other critics dispute this reading, claiming campus crime authors, such as Heilbrun, have altered nothing of the traditional detective narrative formula, save the detective's gender. They imply that when authors empower female characters by having them fulfil traditionally male roles they still ultimately measure women's success by patriarchal standards, as Leonardi argues:

> Women in English departments (and, I suspect, anywhere in the academy, the government, the literary establishment, the media) are always already imprinted by 'their' [male] sex and 'their' language. No simple insertion of women chairs, women writers, women lawyers, women editors will change this, just as no simple insertion of a woman detective will transform the detective genre.[56]

Others see the sub-genre as a developing site of feminist progression, explaining that where authors, such as Heilbrun, were initially content to have their female protagonists fulfil traditionally male roles, in their later work they have sought to move beyond this, as Reddy states:

> Cross begins by accepting genre conventions, modelling Kate on earlier male detectives such as Peter Wimsey, but her commitment to classic detective fiction diminishes with each successive book as her interest grows in the implications of a feminist critique for the crime novel.[57]

She elaborates:

> As Cross has Kate investigate murders and the conditions of her own life, the author modifies and develops the detective's character so that Kate moves from the position of 'honorary man' to more androgynous, autonomous being to woman who identifies *as* a woman and *with* other women.[58]

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[55] Roberts, 95-96.
[56] Leonardi, 116.
[57] Reddy, 53.
[58] Ibid, 54.

Unlike many campus crime novels by female authors, *The Secret History* does not feature a woman detective who sets out to restore order. In fact, only one of the classics students is female. Moreover, this character, Camilla Macaulay, is by no means a vehicle for subverting the patriarchal authority of the clique; rather, she is almost a cliché of the unrequited love interest. In Richard's words she is:

> A slight lovely girl who lay in bed and ate chocolates, a girl whose hair smelt like hyacinth and whose scarves fluttered jauntily in the breeze… The Queen who finished out the suit of dark Jacks, dark King and Joker.[59]

As this passage demonstrates, Camilla is depicted though the distorted lens of the male gaze, asserts little agency within the narrative and is ultimately reduced to an object of sexual and romantic desire (a reduction she does not challenge) by Richard, Charles and Henry. Similarly, minor female characters, including Judy Poovey, Laura Stora and Bunny's girlfriend, Marion, are essentially flat, peripheral characters that serve only as inconvenient obstacles for the patriarchal clique.

Tartt's depiction of women caused a stir. At the time of *The Secret History*'s publication there was a spike in 'feminist' literature, as Anthea Taylor observes: 'In the 1990s, including in Australia, there appears to have been an internationally marked growth in texts marketed as feminist by mainstream publishers.'[60] According to Ruth Starke, when Tartt attended Adelaide Writers' Week in 1994, which had a strong feminist focus, 'she was hurt and surprised that certain women writers at the festival gave her the cool treatment.'[61] Among other things, Tartt's prolific use of intertextual references in *The Secret History* suggests she was more interested in paying homage to the work of T. S. Eliot, Fitzgerald, Poe, Plato and Aristotle among others, than observing the concerns of her female contemporaries.

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[59] Tartt, 252.
[60] Anthea Taylor, *Mediating Australian Feminism: Re-reading the* First Stone *Media Event*, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008) 100.
[61] Ruth Starke, *Writers, Readers and Rebels*, (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 1998) 64.

However, it is not merely in its political agenda, or lack thereof, that *The Secret History* subverts the traditional campus crime formula. In fact, it can be read as an almost perfect inversion. Where the campus crime novel employs an academic protagonist to solve a crime, Tartt's narrative follows an undergraduate student and his friends, who commit several crimes. Where the academic-turned-detective uses research skills and often specialised knowledge in a chosen field to uncover the criminal, it is the classics students' precocious wealth of knowledge, weighted against their lack of practical life experience, that, in part leads them to commit their crimes. Finally, where the traditional campus crime novel ascends from a state of chaos to that of order restored, *The Secret History*'s narrative maps a journey of descent, from bright anticipation and promise to hopeless despair.

1.4 The Clique and Campus Clique Crime Novels

After the commercial success of *The Secret History*, the Bennington Brat-packers grew up. Eisenstadt vanished into near-obscurity, while Ellis moved on to tackle other elitist cultures, including Wall Street in *American Psycho* (1991) and the Hollywood film scene in *Imperial Bedrooms* (2010). Donna Tartt bought a plantation in Virginia where she shut herself away for ten years to write her second novel, the Orange Prize-nominated, Southern Gothic epic, *The Little Friend* (2002). The delinquent antics of America's student elite, it seemed, were no longer a subject of literary interest.

Over a decade later, campus culture was again in vogue. Given that teenagers spend much of their time at school, the campus setting and student culture have always been staple elements of Young Adult (YA) fiction. However, in the early 2000s when YA readers were beginning to look beyond Hogwarts but were yet to fall prey to sparkly-skinned vampires, YA fiction narrowed its focus from depictions of adolescent life that coincidently occur, in part, on a campus, to a specific exploration of elitist

student culture, not unlike that in Henry Handel Richardson's early Australian novel, *The Getting of Wisdom* (1910). Series detailing the lives of America's preppy elite, including Cecily von Ziegesar's 'Gossip Girl' (2002-2009) and its spin-offs, 'Gossip Girl: The Carlisles (2008-2009) and 'The It Girl' (2005-2009), Kate Brian's 'Private' (2006-present) and 'Privilege' (2008-present) and Lisi Harrison's 'The Clique' (2004-present) flooded the market.

Contributing to this renewed interest in young America's *crème de la crème,* in 2004, Tom Wolfe, published his satirical *I am Charlotte Simmons*, a fictional, but heavily researched, account of Ivy League student culture in the first decade of the 21st century. In 2005, Curtis Sittenfeld published her debut novel, *Prep*, an account of life at an elite American boarding school, as narrated by scholarship student, Lee.

Another group of novels, positioned between the clique novel's celebration of elitism and Wolfe's and Sittenfeld's more cynical approach, began to appear from 2005. Harkening back to *The Secret History*, their plots were shaped by murderous twists, and their narratives employed Tartt's confessional style and intertextual underpinnings. The campus clique crime novel had arrived. As stated, this sub-genre is a predominantly American form, although a spate of British novels might arguably be included under this label. They include Richard Mason's *Us* (2004), Ivo Stourton's *The Night Climbers* (2007), Naomi Alderman's *The Lessons* (2010) and (to a lesser extent) Lucie Whitehouse's *The House at Midnight* (2008)[62]. However, unlike their American counterparts, the plots of these British novels occur over an extended timeline with only part of the narrative taking place during the clique's time at university. The remainder of the plot typically concerns a reunion of the clique several years later and plays out the consequences of their behaviour at university in a series of flashbacks. In following this narrative structure, these novels appear to borrow more from Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) than *The Secret History* and are targeted at a clearly adult

[62] Jennifer McMahon's *Dismantled*, though American, also fits within this category.

rather than YA crossover market.[63] Consequently, they should be considered as a separate, though related, form and provide a subject for further study, which is beyond the scope of this thesis. There have also been campus clique crime films, many of which were released around the time of the Bennington Brat Pack novels, including *Heathers* (1988), *Flatliners* (1990), *The Last Supper* (1995) and *Gossip* (2000), but a discussion of film texts is also beyond the scope of this thesis.

In Australia there have been occasional titles that bear some similarity to *The Secret History*, but cannot be classed as campus clique crime novels. For example, Sonya Hartnett's *All My Dangerous Friends* (1994) features an easily influenced protagonist and a morally corrupt clique that commits a crime, but it does not employ an elite campus setting. Andrew Hutchinson's *Rohypnol* (2007), in which a group of private school boys drug, rape and eventually murder a teenage girl, also features a student clique and several major crimes. However, as in *All My Dangerous Friends*, the campus is not a primary setting and, stylistically, *Rohypnol* has more in common with the work of Ellis, Chuck Palahniuk, and Christos Tsiolkas. Simmone Howell's *Notes From the Teenage Underground* (2006) is set largely on campus and its central characters are members of a rebellious clique; however, no major crime is committed. Rebecca James's *Beautiful Malice* (2010) employs a campus setting and a major crime, and the narrative follows a cycle of repression and return. However, conflict arises between two friends rather than a clique.

To date, Rachel Hennessy's *The Quakers* (2008) is the one Australian novel that might be considered part of the campus clique crime sub-genre. In *The Quakers* an unusually close and delinquent school clique remain friends through their undergraduate years. When the group leader, Narinda, discovers her long-term boyfriend has been cheating on her with her best friend, she murders him, and the other members of the

[63] Although *The Secret History* has often been dubbed 'American *Brideshead*', and there are similarities between narrators Captain Charles Ryder and Richard Papen (see section 3.1) and portrayals of elite student culture, the Oxford scenes make up a very small part of Waugh's overall narrative.

clique act as accessories. The story is based on the real life murder of Joe Cinque by his girlfriend, Anu Singh—both students at the Australian National University. Singh was Hennessey's primary school classmate and *The Quakers* initially appears to fit within the campus clique crime sub-genre. It would also make for an interesting comparative study with Helen Garner's *Joe Cinque's Consolation* (2004), which, though a non-fiction account of Cinque's murder, shares the campus crime novel's concern with politics and detection. However, while *The Quakers* shares a similar narrative structure with other campus clique crime novels, it appears to do so out of coincidence rather than intent. It does not use the same overt intertextuality, there is no destructive authority figure and both the school and university are incidental settings and do not feature prominently as they do in the American novels. There does not appear to be a recognisable Australian subset of the campus clique crime novel, such as exists in British fiction. Reasons for why this trend has not appeared in Australian fiction as it has in American and British fiction is a subject for further study, but beyond the scope of this thesis.

1.5 Conclusion

Despite being part of the wider body of campus fiction the campus clique crime novel rejects many tropes of this genre, in particular those of the campus crime novel. With its focus on decadent and elitist student culture and behaviour it has antecedents in the Bennington Brat Pack, but is stylistically and structurally distinct. A separate analysis of the campus clique crime novel is therefore needed.

The Motive

Thematic and Allegorical Underpinnings of the Campus Clique Crime Novel

2.0 Introduction

Campus clique crime novels are psychological narratives structured around cycles of repression and return. Characters suffer childhood trauma and seek refuge from this trauma in an elitist clique at a prestigious school or university. Their highly repressed nature typically leads them to engage in perverse sexual practices, which must in turn be repressed. When the repressed threatens to return, the clique is forced to increasingly extreme action in order to avoid revisiting sites of trauma. To escape such sites the clique creates and inhabits a private upper world which Hargreaves describes as 'surreal and unknowable'[64] to outsiders. The clique perceives this as an enlightened space, superior to that inhabited by the wider community, and a space where past traumas can be ignored and rewritten and perverse and violent behaviours rationalised.

This section examines the campus clique crime novel through a psychoanalytical framework and explores how cycles of repression and return are expressed in these narratives. It uses Plato's allegory of the men who turn from the cave wall to explain the clique's perceived journey of enlightenment and devastating return to the world they left behind. Finally it explores how my treatment of cycles of repression and return and Plato's allegory in *In the Company of Saints* is informed by and builds on their role in earlier campus clique crime novels.

2.1 Repression and Return

Each action committed by the clique is an attempt to prevent the resurfacing of increasingly traumatic, perverse or incriminating experiences. Sigmund Freud initially defined this process of experiencing trauma, repressing that trauma and its inevitable

[64] Hargreaves, 24.

resurfacing in his article *Die Verdrangung* (1915). From a Freudian perspective repression is the way the ego 'hides away the things it can't or doesn't want to include in its coherent world view.'[65] Freud states that when that which has been repressed threatens to return the subject will meet this return with 'a violent and tenacious resistance.'[66]

While Freud's theories are now considered dated, and will consequently not be lingered on here, the application of his theories in the campus clique crime novel is difficult to ignore. *The Secret History* is concerned with wider Freudian concepts, including the battle between the pleasure principle: 'the primal appeal—to lose oneself, lose it utterly'[67] and the reality principle: 'truly civilised people's' urge to 'murder [the] primitive emotive self.'[68] *The Magicians*, too, makes specific reference to Freud and his concept of 'magical thinking', discussed in *Totem and Taboo* (1913), in establishing its magic system in which words retain power over objects:

> Language and reality are kept strictly apart… Little children don't know that. Magical thinking, that's what Freud called it. Once we learn otherwise we cease to be children. The separation of word and thing is the essential fact on which our adult lives are based.[69]

Further to this, Richard's first tutorial with the Greek class[70] in *The Secret History*, is a discussion of morality, desire, aesthetics, repression, the primal self and the relationships between these, and is derivative of ideas discussed in Jacques Lacan's lecture series *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959-1960) in which Lacan criticises Freud's pleasure principle in light of Aristotle's *Poetics*, ideas which are (disastrously) translated into practice in the *bacchanal*.[71]

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[65] James S. Brown & Scott D. Yarbrough, *A Practical Introduction to Literary Study*, (New Jersey: Pearson Education, 2005) 215.
[66] Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychoanalytical Works of Sigmund Freud: Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis (Part III) Vol. XIX*, trans. James Strachey in collaboration with Anna Freud, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1963) 286.
[67] Tartt, 182.
[68] Ibid, 43.
[69] Grossman, 217.
[70] Tartt, 38-45.
[71] Ibid, 186-190.

In perpetuating cycles of repression and return, the clique aims to repress three main experiences: childhood trauma, perverse sexual behaviour and the major crime. The major crime is an attempt to prevent the first two experiences from returning. Ironically, the clique's attempt to repress the crime brings the other two experiences to light.

The clique members' childhood traumas are typically linked with unstable or absent parental figures and experiences of powerlessness. By enrolling at a prestigious school or university and joining an elitist clique, characters move from a state of disempowerment to a position of relative power and escape these sites of trauma.

Reflecting cycles of repression and return, Richard Papen's narration in *The Secret History* is heavily repressed and discovering sites of trauma and perversion requires close reading. Despite Richard's romantic description of his friends' childhoods, it is clear that their experiences were unstable and traumatic:

> Charles and Camilla are orphans (how I longed to be an orphan when I was a child!) reared by grandmothers and great-aunts in a house in Virginia… And Francis. His mother, when she had him, was only seventeen … The grandparents brought them up like brother and sister.[72]

Insight into Henry's childhood is less romanticised, but equally obtuse and heard second hand by Richard from Bunny. Henry is 'not close'[73] to his father and:

> Had a bad accident when he was a little boy… Got hit by a car or something and nearly died. He was out of school for a couple of years, had tutors and stuff, but for a long time he couldn't do much but lie in bed and read… He doesn't like to talk about it.[74]

Richard, too, feels he has been 'tainted'[75] by his childhood and his destructive relationship with his father:

> I remember when I was a kid, once seeing my father strike my mother for absolutely no reason. Though he sometimes did the same thing to me, I did not realise that he did it sheerly out of bad temper, and believed that his trumped-up justifications ('You talk too much'; 'Don't look at me

[72] Ibid, 6-7.
[73] Ibid, 179.
[74] Ibid, 58.
[75] Ibid, 6.

> like that') somehow warranted a punishment. But the day I saw him hit my mother… I realised that the childish impression I had always had of my father, as Just Lawgiver, was entirely wrong.[76]

Upon entering Hampden College and being accepted into the Greek class, Richard finds his past 'disposable as a plastic cup',[77] and is 'able to fabricate a new and far more satisfying history, full of striking, simplistic environmental influences; a colourful past, easily accessible to strangers.'[78]

However, such fabrications are largely unnecessary as the Greek class are protective of each other's secrets. With their own dark histories to hide, they ask Richard few personal questions regarding his life beyond Hampden and he, in turn, only provides the reader with scant, cagey details about their lives prior to enrolling at Hamden.

Members of *Looking for Alaska*'s Barn Night Crew, with the exception of Alaska who witnessed and is held responsible for her mother's death[79], are not explicitly traumatised. However, each has an aspect of his or her past that they seek to escape. Miles 'Pudge' Halter (hereafter referred to as Pudge) is a loner, as evidenced when his mother throws a big farewell party before he departs for boarding school, which only two of his classmates briefly attend.[80] The Colonel has an abusive, alcoholic[81] and absent father:

> He was old when he married my mom, and he *still* cheated on her. And she caught him, and she got pissed, so he hit her. And then she kicked him out, and he left… I haven't seen him since.[82]

The two minor members of the Barn Night Crew, Lara and Tukami, are both recent immigrants to America, and thus outsiders. Lara in particular finds the transition difficult:

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[76] Ibid, 588.
[77] Ibid, 5.
[78] Ibid, 5.
[79] Green, 119.
[80] Ibid, 3-4.
[81] Ibid, 10.
[82] Ibid, 117.

> I left everytheeng [in Romania]… my childhood, too, because most twelve-year-olds do not, you know have to feegure out W-2 [tax] forms.[83]

Upon enrolling at Culver Creek and forming a clique, these characters are able to repress unpleasant childhood experiences by creating new, more powerful identities for themselves. Key characters express these identities through the awarding of nicknames. The Colonel nicknames Miles 'Pudge', 'Because you're skinny. It's called irony.'[84] The Colonel (who's real name is Chip) uses his nickname to establish himself as an authoritative figure following the abuse he suffers from his father, while Mary Young renames herself Alaska because, as she explains: 'It was big, just like I wanted to be. And it was far away from Vine Station, Alabama [her hometown] just like I wanted to be.'[85]

In *The Magicians* the Physical Kids similarly share traumatic pasts as well as their talent for Physical Magic. Quentin finds 'it took a special effort to make himself visible to his parents, who always looked vaguely surprised when their phantom son requested their attention.'[86] Alice is traumatised by her brother's death[87] and is a victim of her parents' (those 'toxic monsters'[88]) dysfunctional relationship, which sends 'bad emotional energy radiating out in all directions, sterilising every available surface with its poisonous particles.'[89] Eliot explains that he was bullied in his hometown for being homosexual: 'People called me a faggot and threw me in a dumpster at recess when I was in fifth grade because my pants were pressed.'[90] While Janet's parents are 'colossally wealthy',[91] Grossman gives the impression that they are largely absent: 'she grew up in L.A. being babysat by various celebrities.'[92]

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[83] Ibid, 116-118.
[84] Ibid, 14.
[85] Ibid, 53.
[86] Grossman, 94.
[87] Ibid, 192.
[88] Ibid, 205.
[89] Ibid, 204.
[90] Ibid, 107.
[91] Ibid, 107.
[92] Ibid, 107.

The Physical Kids, like the Greek class and the Barn Night Crew, use the clique to repress these past traumas and establish more powerful identities for themselves:

> They manoeuvred around one another with the absolute confidence of people who had spent huge amounts of time together, who trusted and loved one another and who knew how to show one another off to best advantage and how to curb each other's bad and annoying habits.[93]

In the private community of the clique, characters engage in what they perceive as perverse sexual behaviour—behaviour they are ashamed of—with the exception of *Looking for Alaska*, given its significantly younger target readership.[94] As with the characters' experiences of childhood trauma, perverse sexual behaviour is not explicitly discussed in *The Secret History*. Of the *bacchanal* Richard, who is not present, asks: 'These are fundamentally *sex* rituals, aren't they?' To which Henry replies: 'Of course… You know that as well as I do.'[95] In addition to this orgy, Francis confirms Richard's suspicion that the twins have an incestuous relationship, telling Richard, 'Come now, you must have had some idea.'[96] As a whole, the members of the Greek class are caught in a complicated web of sexual liaisons. Francis and Charles have 'a lot of fun'[97] on more than one occasion, and Francis and Richard kiss on the night of Bunny's murder, with Richard revealing that 'things progressed'.[98] Richard's narration is strangely effeminate, further implying he is a repressed homosexual, though he claims to be in love with Camilla and asks her to marry him,[99] while she and Henry enjoy a secret affair. A possible sexual relationship is also hinted at between Henry and his tutor Julian Morrow, with Henry staying at Julian's house and keeping a photograph of him 'tacked on [his] closet door'.[100] The instances cited here offer the most revealing insights into the group's sexual activities. Richard willingly claims to be 'partially

[93] Ibid, 103.
[94] Although Alaska does cheat on her boyfriend and 'hook up' with Pudge on the night of her death.
[95] Tartt, 187.
[96] Ibid, 513.
[97] Ibid, 515.
[98] Ibid, 325.
[99] Ibid, 623.
[100] Ibid, 140.

responsible'[101] for Bunny's murder (for which he is merely incidentally present), but not to what he considers his and his friends' perverse sexual behaviours.

In *The Magicians* depictions of the students' perverse sexual behaviour are more explicit, though still heavily repressed. For example, when the class members are transfigured into foxes, Quentin practically rapes Alice during a class orgy.[102]

Later, when the characters return to their human forms, they are ashamed of their actions and reluctant to confront them:

> To an outside observer breakfast the next day wouldn't have looked much different than it usually did… But Quentin felt like he was walking on the moon. Giant slow-motion steps, ringing silence, vacuum all around him, a television audience of millions. He didn't dare look at anybody else, least of all Alice.[103]

The fox orgy can be read as a satirical allusion to the *bacchanal* in *The Secret History* and the ritual's power to return the Greek class to a primal, animalistic state, where they can explore perverse desires free of consequence: 'Camilla said that during part of it, she'd believed she was a deer; and that was odd, too, because the rest of us remember chasing a deer through the woods.'[104]

When faced with the threat of revisiting sites of trauma and/or exposing their perverse sexual behaviour, the clique members are motivated to commit the major crime.

In *The Secret History* this threat is Bunny Corcoran, who, according to Richard, has an 'uncanny ability to ferret out topics of conversation that make his listener uneasy and to dwell upon them with ferocity once he had.'[105] More than that, Bunny is a fringe member of the group, and resents the others for not being more inclusive—particularly in regards to the *bacchanal*—and so discovers with an 'unerring and bloodhoundish

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[101] Ibid, 1.
[102] Grossman, 155.
[103] Ibid, 155.
[104] Tartt, 188.
[105] Ibid, 207.

sense'[106] their greatest vulnerabilities and 'jabs'[107] at them to exact his childish revenge. The Greek class's motive for the murder then goes beyond a fear Bunny will have them arrested for the manslaughter of the farmer to include 'little things. Insults, petty cruelties. The hundreds of small, unavenged humiliations'.[108] This disturbingly childish motive adds to the unsettling tone of the narrative, as Hargreaves observes:

> Being badgered about the lies he tells about which school he went to is hardly in the same league as being harassed about a murder you've committed, but they seem to share equal space in Richard's mind, as though all constitute equally good reasons for wanting to see the end of Bunny.[109]

In *Looking for Alaska* past trauma resurfaces when Alaska forgets the anniversary of her mother's death, and the guilt she feels from failing to visit her mother's grave triggers the greater guilt of having failed to save her. She screams:

> I forgot! God, how many times can I fuck up? I JUST HAVE TO GO. HELP ME GET OUT OF HERE… God oh God, I'm so sorry.[110]

She drives drunk off campus in the middle of the night, with flowers on the back seat of her car, presumably with the intention of visiting her mother's grave. However, she is killed in a car crash before reaching her destination. Why her seemingly accidental death constitutes a 'crime' is addressed in Sections 3.1 and 3.7.

In *The Magicians* the Physical Kids' retreat into magic allows them to escape past traumas and recode their perverse sexual behaviour. Alice is the voice of reason that threatens their belief in the unlimited power of magic, which, as previously explained is an inherently childish belief. She insists Quentin grow up and take his place in the adult world, chiding him: 'You actually still believe in magic. You do realise, right, that nobody else does? I mean, we all know magic is real. But you really

[106] Ibid, 208.
[107] Ibid, 208.
[108] Ibid, 255.
[109] Hargreaves, 51.
[110] Green, 132.

believe in it, don't you?'[111] Later in Fillory she tells him: 'Wake up! This isn't a story! It's just one fucking thing after another!'[112] After expressing this view she is attacked by the Beast and becomes a *niffin*[113] in her struggle to defeat him. As discussed in Section 2.3, the Beast is a monstrous manifestation of Quentin's desire to remain in the magical land of Fillory indefinitely and avoid returning to sites of childhood trauma in Brooklyn.

The final act of repression is the clique's attempt to conceal their involvement in the major crime. However, this causes tension among the group and brings all the other traumas, perversions and weaknesses to light.

Relations become strained within the Greek class following Bunny's murder as they struggle to conceal the crime and come to terms with the enormity of their actions. The Greek class fail to maintain their idealised identities. They become overtly promiscuous with each other and their sexual liaisons are discussed (however briefly) for the first time. Henry loses his sense of authority and appears visibly unstable, unconsciously marking himself at Bunny's funeral:

> Slowly, slowly, with a drugged, fathomless calm, Henry bent and picked up a handful of dirt. He held it over the grave and let it trickle from his fingers. Then, with terrible composure, he stepped back and absently dragged the hand across his chest, smearing mud upon his lapel, his tie, the starched immaculate white of his shirt.[114]

He eventually commits suicide, while Charles' drug and alcohol dependency becomes increasingly problematic, resulting in charges of drink driving[115] and an attempt to kill Henry and Richard.[116] Richard claims to feel no guilt or remorse over Bunny's murder; however, when he tries to block it out he finds himself confronted with the repressed horrors of his past:

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[111] Grossman, 179-80.
[112] Ibid, 299.
[113] A magician transfigured into a disembodied soul after attempting magic beyond his or her power.
[114] Tartt, 474.
[115] Ibid, 496.
[116] Ibid, 603.

> Every cruel or fatuous thing I'd ever said came back to me with an amplified clarity, no matter how I talked to myself or jerked my head to shake the thoughts away: old insults and guilts and embarrassments stretching clear back to childhood—the crippled boy I'd made fun of, the Easter chick I'd squeezed to death—paraded before me one by one, in vivid and mordant splendor.[117]

Furthermore, following Henry's death, the surviving members of the Greek class are sentenced to return to sites of childhood trauma and or disillusionment. Charles runs away with a married woman and ends up 'living in this horrible place… Washing dishes in a diner.'[118] Francis, like his mother, has his relationships controlled by his grandparents and is blackmailed into marrying a 'stupid'[119] woman and denying his homosexuality, while Camilla becomes nurse to the grandmother who raised her:

> You should see how I live now, Richard. My nana's in bad shape. It's all I can do to take care of her, and that big house, too. I don't have a single friend my own age. I can't even remember the last time I read a book.[120]

Richard returns to California to undertake a PhD on the Jacobean dramatists and their preoccupation with 'the essential rottenness of the world.'[121] Through his nostalgic tone, discussed in Section 1.2, he harkens for an ideal life that cannot be revisited, much as his younger self yearns for an ideal life that cannot be attained.

Following Alice's death in *The Magicians*, Quentin makes a conscious effort to repress the trauma of this event: 'He couldn't think about what had happened… He didn't know how to operate in a world that would allow this to happen.'[122]

His mind is likened to:

> An icy pond constantly in danger of thawing. He trod on it lightly—its surface was perilously slick and who knew how thin. To break through would mean immersion in what was below: cold, dark, anaerobic water and angry, toothy fish.[123]

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[117] Ibid, 356.
[118] Ibid, 621.
[119] Ibid, 617.
[120] Ibid, 623.
[121] Ibid, 615.
[122] Grossman, 368-369.
[123] Ibid, 37.

However, in order to repress this trauma, which occurred in the magical world, Quentin must return to the real world: the site of his initial trauma. He revisits 'old sense-memories. Nothing from Fillory or Brakebills'[124] and takes a corporate job in New York, where he finds 'multifarious meaningless entertainments and distractions'[125] from his magical life.

In the final pages of the narrative, Quentin returns to Fillory to escape the 'sadness and shame and numbness'[126] he experiences in the real world, which echoes his motivations for enrolling at Brakebills at the start of the narrative, suggesting that cycles of repression and return will continue endlessly.[127]

In *Looking for Alaska* the Barn Night Crew similarly repress their involvement in Alaska's death, as Pudge explains: '"She got drunk… The Colonel and I went to sleep, and I guess she drove off campus." And that became the standard lie.'[128] In perpetuating this lie the Barn Night Crew, like the Greek class, begin to fight amongst themselves, with the Colonel berating Pudge: 'If she loved you so much, why did she leave you that night? And if you loved her so much, why did you let her go?'[129] This leads Pudge to acknowledge his role in her death: 'I hated myself, too, not only because I let her go but because if I had been enough for her, she wouldn't have wanted to leave.'[130] This realisation forces Pudge to revisit Alaska's death and confront the trauma surrounding this event: 'Before I could begin the shameful process of forgetting the how and the why of her living and dying, I needed to learn it: *How. Why. When. Where. What.*'[131] He and the Colonel then drive to the site of Alaska's death and re-enact her final moments.[132] In trying to discover the true cause of Alaska's death and their part in

[124] Ibid, 370.
[125] Ibid, 393.
[126] Ibid, 399.
[127] In 2011 Grossman released a sequel to *The Magicians*, titled *The Magician King*, detailing the Physical Kids' adventures upon their return to Fillory.
[128] Green, 147.
[129] Ibid, 170.
[130] Ibid, 171.
[131] Ibid, 173.
[132] Ibid, 313.

it, the Barn Night Crew confront their weaknesses hidden behind their idealised identities, with Pudge realising he failed to see Alaska as anything more complex than 'the hottest girl in all human history'[133] who taught him 'about crawfish and kissing and pink wine and poetry.'[134] He finally understands: 'I didn't know her completely… If I had cared about her as I should have, as I thought I did, how could I have let her go?'[135] Later he adds:

> I screwed up and the Colonel screwed up and Tukami screwed up and she slipped through our fingers. And there's no sugar coating it: She deserved better friends.[136]

Unlike other campus clique crime novels, this is not a return of the repressed, but rather a deliberate confrontation. In actively seeking to reconcile with past trauma, Pudge breaks the cycle of repression and progresses beyond the trauma of the major crime, learning: 'We had to forgive to survive the labyrinth.'[137] Here Pudge, despite his younger age, progresses beyond Richard and Quentin, arriving at a final revelation and maturity typical of a coming-of-age narrative.

In the campus clique crime novel cycles of repression and return are perpetuated by the characters' inability to reconcile with sites of trauma. These cycles can only be broken if the characters willingly confront the past, as in *Looking for Alaska*, and this sees them progress to a state of maturity and stability with the characters demonstrating significant development. If they fail to reconcile with their past, as in *The Secret History* and *The Magicians*, they remain in a fragmented and childlike state and fail to progress as characters over the course of the narrative.

[133] Ibid, 14.
[134] Ibid, 172.
[135] Ibid, 158-9.
[136] Ibid, 219.
[137] Ibid, 218.

2.2 Repression and Return in *In the Company of Saints*

In my manuscript I sought to establish more direct links between childhood trauma, perverse sexual behaviour and the major crime in order to further emphasise cycles of repression and return. These sites of repression are primarily experienced by Lucie and Peter.

Lucie is a victim of her parents' destructive relationship, which she describes to Peter:

> They're completely wrong for each other, but they're caught in this strange orbit that neither can break free of. Sometimes I think they only love me because I remind them of each other.[138]

This neglect instils Lucie with a need to be desired and a fear of exclusion and leads her to engage in promiscuous sexual behaviour as a teenager:

> Out of loneliness and an overwhelming need to feel wanted, I had once been the kind of girl that took guys' numbers in the pub and met them in the car park after my shift.[139]

Upon moving to the city and being accepted by the Saints she turns from this behaviour to enter a monogamous and highly romanticised relationship with Peter.

Peter has a destructive and violent relationship with his father. On the first day of classes at Mawson, he wears sunglasses to hide a black eye his father gave him after learning he had enrolled at the Mawson conservatorium instead of in a double degree in commerce and economics at Baudin University.[140] Later he attempts to break Peter's fingers to prevent him playing music after Peter humiliates him at the Old Collegians' Ball.[141] While Peter explains that his father sees him as a 'disappointment'[142] and a 'bad investment'[143] for failing to follow in his footsteps, the fact that he does not side with his son after learning Peter has been sexually assaulted by Richard Berthum, his year nine

[138] *In the Company of Saints*, 137.
[139] Ibid, 145.
[140] Ibid, 37.
[141] Ibid, 131.
[142] Ibid, 136.
[143] Ibid, 137.

English teacher, and later attempts to set Peter up with the daughter of a family friend, implies that his real issue lies with Peter's homosexuality.

As in *The Secret History*, Peter's sexuality is never explicitly discussed but is a source of conflict both for his character and the narrative. It is suggested that Peter and Bastian are romantically involved and have been since before Berthum molested Peter. When Peter describes his first suicide attempt behind the sports shed, he tells Lucie that Bastian found him there him because it was 'our place'.[144] Other than this, and Bastian's drunken attempt to kiss Peter in a game of Truth or Dare,[145] evidence of the boys' relationship is largely conveyed through Meg's jealousy whenever she learns of them spending time alone together, such as at the start of Lucie's welcome dinner,[146] and her eagerness for Peter and Lucie to become a couple, saying to Lucie, 'I think you're going to be good for him. In fact, I'm counting on it.'[147] Later she says to Lucie, 'You've never seen what it's like when it's just the three of us. Peter and Bastian are so close, and you know how it feels to be left out of things.'[148]

For his part, Peter represses his sexuality, becoming violent when Bastian attempts to kiss him, and following the incident, kisses Lucie 'so hard he left me startled and gasping for breath.'[149]

In earlier campus clique crime novels the repressed comprises actions and memories of experiences the clique wish to keep hidden. I chose to extend this by embodying those memories and actions in a character who returns time and again as a literal threat. For both Lucie and Peter, Richard Berthum becomes a symbol of repressed and, in their eyes, perverse sexual desires. He first enters Peter's life at a time when Peter is beginning to explore his homosexuality and turns it into something

[144] Ibid, 90.
[145] Ibid, 150.
[146] Ibid, 18.
[147] Ibid, 49.
[148] Ibid, 147.
[149] Ibid, 151.

traumatising and 'shameful'.[150] He makes a threatening appearance the same night Peter starts dating Lucie, prompting her to question his past[151] and lingers thereafter becoming 'a constant, if fringe, presence.'[152] After Peter breaks up with Lucie following a fight about his refusal to sleep with her, he tries to mend the relationship, but learns that Berthum has sexually abused her—the person most able to help him move beyond past traumas. He tells her: 'I wanted to keep you away from all that, Luce. I don't want to be that person—that victim.'[153]

It is evident from Lucie's first description of Berthum that he is to her a symbol of sexual desire:

> in my journal I'd crowned his name with inky hearts—reminders of the nights I'd spent staring at his picture while running my fingers over the newly formed crests and curves of my body.[154]

For her part, Lucie arrives in Adelaide determined to forget her former promiscuity and is almost immediately infatuated with Peter. However, Berthum emerges to play on her weakness to feel desired, offering her his number at his Writers' Week book signing,[155] flirting with her at Mawson and eventually kissing her in an empty classroom.[156]

He is a reminder of her past behaviour and insecurities and appears at moments when Lucie is most vulnerable, for example at the Old Collegians' Ball when Peter's parents tell her that she is unworthy of him.[157] When Peter breaks up with her, leaving her alone in her figurative and literal playground,[158] she reverts to her former promiscuous behaviour, seeking Berthum out for sex 'to feel special.'[159]

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[150] Ibid, 180.
[151] Ibid, 105-107.
[152] Ibid, 146.
[153] Ibid, 133.
[154] Ibid, 26.
[155] Ibid, 31.
[156] Ibid, 66.
[157] Ibid, 126.
[158] Ibid, 159.
[159] Ibid, 169.

Peter, like Henry in *The Secret History* and Quentin in *The Magicians*, physically destroys the threat of the return of the repressed by murdering Berthum and, with the help of the Saints, submerges his body in the campus lake. As in earlier campus clique crime novels, the rising tension around the possibility of Berthum's final and literal resurfacing brings other secrets to light, specifically Lucie's willing participation in her relations with Berthum, and ultimately destroys the group, with Peter drowning himself as the other Saints watch Berthum's body being pulled from the lake.

For Lucie the threat of the return of the repressed, specifically Lucie's fear of exclusion, is further represented by Ebony Blake, a friendless student who the Saints learn committed suicide by hanging herself from a tree on campus. Lucie discovers the Hanging Tree on her first day at Mawson when she is 'a buzzing mess of nerves'[160] and anxious about fitting in with the other students. Ebony and the Hanging Tree continue to feature at moments when Lucie feels insecure, for example after initially rejecting Peter and getting the cold shoulder from Meg and Bastian:

> I got into a routine of staying late after classes, holing myself up in one of the study carrels… [and] looking out across the campus to where the uppermost branches of the Hanging Tree waved above the roof of the creative arts building.[161]

Using Berthum, Ebony and the Hanging Tree as symbols of repressed trauma and perverse sexual desire is derived from the Gothic where the 'monstrous' is often a fragmentation of the self or a frightening externalisation of repressed fears and desires, as Fred Botting explains: **'**fear and its darkly obscure object is externalised and limits are reconstituted between inside and outside.'[162] William Patrick Day elaborates, 'Freudian critics transform its monsters and demons into the id.'[163]

As discussed in detail in section 3.2, Lucie uses vampiric imagery and allusions to Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) in describing Berthum. I chose Count Dracula as her

[160] Ibid, 33.
[161] Ibid, 94.
[162] Fred Botting, *Gothic*, (London: Routledge, 1996) 9.
[163] William Patrick Day, *In the Circles of Fear and Desire: A Study of Gothic Fantasy,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) 13.

monster of choice as the Count, like Berthum, is a symbol of repressed and perverse sexual desire. As Ken Gelder states: Dracula 'is coded as promiscuous, perverse, sexually fluid… [and] seems to literalise internal (and hence "unspeakable") desires.'[164]

Typically members of the clique are aware of each other's past traumas and perverse behaviours and may even share them. They work as a group to keep these secrets from outsiders. While the Saints are, however unconsciously, aware of each other's past traumas, particularly Peter's suicide attempt and the abuse he suffered from Berthum, the clique can only remain together so long as Lucie, Peter and Bastian are able to hide their perverse desires from each other. Giving the Saints opposing perverse desires (Peter's trauma around sex and his sexual identity, Lucie's need for validation through sex and Bastian's desire for Peter despite his relationship with Meg and Peter's rejection) balances the Saints on the brink of destruction from the beginning and creates an additional site of early tension within the supposed refuge of the clique.

Lucie, unlike Richard and Quentin, does eventually confront and repent her actions. However, unlike Pudge, her confrontation comes too late. To redeem herself she would need to confess her lie about her relations with Berthum to Peter, but she continues to blame others for her actions until after Peter's suicide, when she finally laments:

> I think of Peter and the Saints and everything I've lost and I feel the future as an absence… I can't make the memories go away and there's nothing I can do to prove how sorry I am. But I owe it to the Saints—to Peter—to figure out which parts were real in the stories I told myself.[165]

Combining the outcomes of earlier campus clique crime novels allowed me to create a more despairing ending for Lucie, as while she develops to a point where she regrets her actions to the extent of expressing guilt and remorse, she, unlike Pudge, is denied forgiveness and must carry her guilt through her adult life.

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[164] Ken Gelder, 'Introduction to Reading the King Vampire', *The Horror Reader*, (London: Routledge, 2000) pp.145-147, 145-146.
[165] *In the Company of Saints*, 233.

2.3 The 'Upper World' as refuge

In order to escape sites of trauma and to rationalise their perverse and destructive behaviours, the clique seek a new perspective or 'higher truth' in their studies. In Book VII of *The Rebublic*[166] Plato includes an allegory concerning the hierarchy of learning. A group of men live chained to a cave wall. There is a fire behind them that casts shadows on the wall. As the men see only the shadows, the shadows comprise their reality. When some men are freed, they turn and, though initially blinded by the fire, see that the fire is real and the shadows are illusions. Upon leaving the cave they are blinded again, this time by the sun. When their sight recovers they see what Plato terms 'the upper world',[167] a place of divine enlightenment. With this new knowledge, life chained to the cave wall appears absurd. However, upon returning to the cave the men are blinded again, having become accustomed to the sun's light. They stumble and appear ridiculous and their explanations are mad ravings to the other cave dwellers who cannot conceive a reality beyond the cave wall.

This allegory reflects what the protagonist views as his journey through the narrative, with the shadows on the cave wall representing what he perceives as the limited perspective of the wider community, the fire the new knowledge and 'truth' he discovers upon enrolling at the campus and the 'upper world' as the exclusive intellectual space inhabited by the clique. Over the course of the narrative, the protagonist travels from the wider community, to the campus and eventually gains entry to the clique's upper world.

The clique members justify their involvement in the major crime by filtering their actions through what they perceive as the higher ideology of the upper world. However, the crime sees them cast out from this space and back to the campus and

[166] Plato, *The Republic*, (Trans. Benjamin Jowett) (Project Gutenberg, 1998). Posted 27 August 2008, EBookk #1497, kindle edition, location
7 577. Available: http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1497. Accessed: 15 March 2012.
[167] Ibid, location 7 608.

finally the wider community where their actions are coded as criminal and they are unable to resume a satisfactory life, much in the manner of Plato's philosophers.

Ironically, while the clique considers it has entered the upper world by attaining knowledge greater than that possessed by the student and wider communities, it ultimately proves a site of ignorance and illusion.

Plato's cave wall allegory is a fitting frame for Richard, a classics student, to bend his story around and his upper world comprises the knowledge and custom of the Greek philosophers he and his friends so fervently study. They practise ancient rituals, including the *bacchanal*, and observe ancient superstitions. Camilla thinks it 'bad luck'[168] to leave Bunny's corpse unburied for fear that he will haunt them like 'poor Palinurus in the *Aeneid*.'[169] Henry sometimes leaves 'a saucer of milk outside his door to appease any malevolent spirits',[170] and his final meal is lamb chops,[171] which Plato, in reference to Homer, describes as among 'the food most convenient for soldiers'.[172] The Greek class as a whole cleanses itself in pig's blood after killing the farmer, as, to it, 'Murder is pollution. The murderer defiles everyone he comes into contact with. The only way to purify blood is through blood.'[173]

They study the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle[174] and use these philosophers' ideas as the basis for action. For example, Julian's lecture on Plato's 'four divine madnesses… The burden of the self, and why people want to lose the self in the first place'[175] appeals to the Greek class's collective desire for reinvention. They are particularly intrigued by the initiatory madness offered by Dionysus[176]—the madness

[168] Tartt, 403.
[169] Ibid, 404.
[170] Ibid, 406.
[171] Ibid, 600.
[172] Plato, *The Republic*, location 5430.
[173] Tartt, 404.
[174] Ibid, 36, 45.
[175] Ibid, 38.
[176] Plato, *Phædrus*, location 1 317.

'entered with holy prayers and rites' offering 'deliverance for those who are in need'.[177] To experience this 'madness' they partake in the *bacchanal*, during which they:

> Escape the cognitive mode of experience… [and are] born to the principle of continuous life, outside the prison of mortality and time.[178]

Observing these rituals and practising these philosophies opens the Greek class to what they perceive as a higher truth, as Richard explains through the following linguistic analogy:

> Our shared language is a language of the intricate, the peculiar, the home of pumpkins and ragamuffins and bodkins and beer, the tongue of Ahab and Falstaff and Mrs Gamp.[179]

His description of ancient Greek, the language of the clique, draws a distinct contrast:

> Innocent of all quirks and cranks; a language obsessed with action, and with the joy of seeing action multiply from action, action marching relentlessly ahead and with yet more actions filing in from either side to fall into neat step at the rear, in a long straight rank of cause and effect toward what will be inevitable, the only possible end.[180]

This movement between languages, and the clear regard Richard has for Ancient Greek and his patronising attitude towards American English, could be read as cultural insecurity—Richard's yearning to throw off his American identity for one he perceives as more sophisticated. However, if this were the case, why would he and the rest of the clique not pick a living culture to fixate upon? Why not, like their oft quoted idol T. S. Eliot, turn their sights to England and anglophilia? That Tartt has her characters move from a living to a dead culture further emphasises their desire to disassociate from reality altogether—to move from the tangible to the theoretical.

Richard further explains that in crossing from one 'language' to another, 'certain common ideas become inexpressible; other, previously undreamt-of ones spring to life,

[177] Jowett, 'Introduction', *Phædrus*, location 934.
[178] Tartt,182.
[179] Ibid, 224.
[180] Ibid, 224.

finding miraculous new articulation.'[181] In this space the world of Hampden College, which Richard initially romanticises, becomes two-dimensional and cartoonish after he enters the clique, with Richard shifting to the hyper-real narrative style of Tartt's contemporaries, as discussed in Section 1.2.

Early in the story Henry summarises Aristotle's discussion of art and beauty from *Poetics*: 'Objects, such as corpses, painful to view in themselves, can become delightful to contemplate in a work of art.'[182] Furthermore, Richard identifies his fatal flaw as 'a morbid longing for the picturesque at all costs. *A moi. L'histoire d'une des mes folies.*'[183] In contrast to his depictions of Hampden campus culture, his descriptions of the clique and the upper world are highly intertextual and romanticised, with Richard eager to reframe his harrowing story as high art and its characters as full of heroic purpose. As Hargreaves confirms, his narration is, 'so strewn with allusions to the Western literary canon that the extent of the borrowing is difficult to ignore.'[184] Richard uses quotations from ancient Greek texts to foreshadow key events and give his modern story a tone of Greek tragedy. For example, he translates the following Callimachean epigram following the farmer's death, pre-empting Bunny's murder, Henry's suicide and the clique's ultimate destruction:

> At morn we buried Melanippus; as the sun set the maiden Basilo died by her own hand, as she could not endure to lay her brother on the pyre and live; and the house beheld a twofold woe, and all Cyrene bowed her head and wept, to see the home of happy children made desolate.[185]

He draws parallels between Bunny's murder and the opening lines of T. S. Eliot's 'The Burial of the Dead' in *The Waste Land* (1922):

> April is the cruellest month, breeding
>
> Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
>
> Memory and desire, stirring

[181] Ibid, 223-224.
[182] Ibid, 41.
[183] Ibid, 5.
[184] Hargreaves, 26.
[185] Tartt, 255.

> Dull roots with spring rain.
>
> Winter kept us warm, covering
>
> Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
>
> A little life with dried tubers.[186]

Bunny is murdered in April, his body remaining 'covered' in snow for ten days before it is discovered. Henry (who comes from Missisippi, like 'old Tom Eliot',[187] and bears uncanny physical resemblance to the poet) replants ferns from the site of Bunny's murder in his garden when the weather warms, 'stirring dull roots with spring rain', while Richard, in his nostalgic narrative, appears to be 'mixing memory and desire.' Linking the murder to Eliot's poem masks the horror of the crime by reframing it as art and demonstrates how the Greek class see their actions as meaningful and poetic, in a way that cannot be understood by the wider community—a community in which the members of the Greek class, like Plato's philosophers, find they can no longer successfully function following the murder. It also hints at Richard's yearning to ascend to a higher artistic culture—to transcend the sordid reality of his tale. Ironically, intertextual references in *The Magicians* are to popular children's stories, namely C. S. Lewis's 'Chronicles of Narnia' and J. K. Rowling's 'Harry Potter' series, though Quentin regards them with the same reverence as Richard shows Aristotle and Eliot.

In *The Magicians* magic is the stuff of enlightenment, and the upper world accessible only to the Physical Kids, is Fillory—a literal fantasy world twice removed from the non-magical community and more real to the Physical Kids than Brooklyn. In Fillory:

> Things mattered in a way they didn't in this world. In Fillory you felt the appropriate emotions when things happened. Happiness was a real, actual achievable possibility.[188]

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[186] T. S. Eliot, 'The Burial of the Dead', *The Waste Land* in *The Complete Poems and Plays 1909-1950*, (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1952) 37-55, 37.
[187] Tartt, 57.
[188] Grossman, 6.

The Physical Kids believe it will 'to save them from the ennui and depression and meaningless busy work that had been stalking them ever since graduation.'[189]

However, far from the superior site of divine enlightenment Plato describes and the Greek class perceive themselves to inhabit, it is a fantasy land from the children's book series 'Fillory and Further'—a parody of C. S. Lewis's 'Chronicles of Narnia'—which the Physical Kids discover to be real. As such, Fillory is a satire of the 'upper world', the place to which Quentin retreats 'when he couldn't deal with the real world. Which was a lot.'[190] In discovering Fillory the Physical Kids initially believe themselves superior to the wider community, but furthering the satire, the experience proves disappointing: 'For all the glory of their high and noble purpose, it felt like they were going on a summer camp nature hike, or a junior high field trip.'[191] The Physical Kids are quickly disillusioned:

> With every step they took they half expected a marvellous apparition or revelation to come trotting out of the woods. But nothing much presented itself… The trees around them remained still and stubbornly inanimate, even after Penny in the spirit of exploration and discovery formally introduced himself to several of them.[192]

Here Grossman further uses the upper world to criticise children's and YA fantasy series, such as the 'Chronicles of Narnia' and J. K. Rowling's 'Harry Potter' that offer dissatisfied young protagonists an easy escape from their real lives and problems by transporting them to magical worlds where they reinvent themselves as heroes. Indeed, the campus clique crime novel as a form would seem to criticise this kind of easy escapism, which is always offered to but never delivers for its characters.

In *Looking for Alaska* the Barn Night Crew's turn from the cave wall is more complex. Plato's cave is reframed as a 'labyrinth of suffering'[193] after Alaska introduces the group to Gabriel García Márquez's *The General and His Labyrinth* (1989) and they

[189] Ibid, 224.
[190] Ibid, 6-7.
[191] Ibid, 314.
[192] Ibid, 288-289.
[193] Green, 82.

embark on a mission to 'find a way out of that maze.'[194] The upper world is what Pudge terms 'the Great Perhaps'[195] and he believes he attains it in the company of the Barn Night Crew.[196] However, when Alaska discovers the way out of the maze, the Barn Night Crew realise that theirs is a false superiority born of repressed trauma rather than enlightenment, and Pudge sees that his understanding of Alaska and the Great Perhaps is an illusion or shadow on the cave wall:

> You left me Perhapsless, stuck in your goddamned labyrinth. And now I don't even know if you chose the straight and fast way out, if you left me like this on purpose. And so I never knew you, did I?[197]

Directly following this, Pudge's religion teacher tells the allegory of the Sufi saint

> seen running through the streets of her hometown, Basra, carrying a torch in one hand and a bucket of water in the other. When someone asked her what she was doing, she answered, 'I am going to take this bucket of water and pour it on the flames of hell, and then I am going to use this torch to burn down the gates of paradise so that people will not love God for want of heaven or fear of hell, but because He is God.[198]

The allegory demonstrates that before Pudge can learn the truth about Alaska, he needs to reconsider his motive for doing so. He needs to want to know her not because she's 'hot'[199] or dead, or because he needs to reconcile with their relationship and his part in her death, but because she's a person who deserves to be viewed completely. Altering his motive requires a more mature perspective that takes Pudge the course of the narrative to attain. He explains:

> I thought for a long time that the way out of the labyrinth was to pretend that it did not exist, to build a small, self-sufficient world in a back corner of the endless maze and to pretend I was not lost, but home. But that only led to a lonely life accompanied only by the last words of the already dead.[200]

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[194] Ibid, 121.
[195] Ibid, 5.
[196] Ibid, 103.
[197] Ibid, 172-173.
[198] Ibid, 174.
[199] Ibid, 14.
[200] Ibid, 219.

Pudge's final religion essay demonstrates he has reached a more mature perspective to understand Alaska and that a true upper world still awaits:

> When she fucked up, all those years ago, just a little girl terrified into paralysis, she collapsed into the enigma of herself. And I could have done that, but I saw where it led for her. So I still believe in the Great Perhaps, and I can believe in it in spite of having lost her.[201]

While Pudge merely stands on the brink of the true upper world, his is a true enlightenment, not an attempt to justify perverse or criminal behaviour or escape past trauma, which leads the characters in *The Secret History* and *The Magicians* to false enlightenment, disillusion and the clique's ultimate destruction.

Although the upper world is derived from the clique's studies and reading, it is not always, as the clique members believe, something they discover. Rather it is something they create—a convenient retreat from the student and wider communities where new and more idealistic 'truths' may be explored and others ignored. As the clique members primarily wish to escape childhood trauma, in turning from the cave wall they seek out an alternate, more satisfying childhood. Consequently, and ironically, the upper world is distinctly childlike.

In *The Secret History* Richard's lofty descriptions of the Greek class are interspersed with child-like imagery. Richard is unable to view the plot to murder Bunny as 'anything but a game'.[202] The other members of the Greek class also participate in this make-believe. Henry describes them as 'Wendy and the Lost Boys',[203] the perpetual children in J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1904), and with their almost costume-like styles of dress and arbitrary accessories ('dark English suits',[204] tennis whites[205] pince-nez,[206] umbrellas when it's not raining[207]) they give an impression of children playing dress-ups. Additionally, there are multiple references to 'games' and

[201] Ibid, 219.
[202] Tartt, 311.
[203] Ibid, 180.
[204] Ibid, 17.
[205] Ibid, 67.
[206] Ibid, 18.
[207] Ibid, 17.

'playing' throughout the novel, particularly in anticipation of the murder. For example, Henry, like Richard, admits that he finds the idea of killing Bunny 'so repellent that I haven't been able to think of it as anything but a chess problem. A game.'[208]

The child-like elements of their private world make it possible for members of the Greek class to further disassociate from the horror of their crimes and blind them to the consequences of their actions, as Richard recalls of Bunny's murder:

> It was many hours before I was cognisant of what we'd done; days (months? years?) before I began to comprehend the magnitude of it… An air of unreality suffused even the most workday details, as if we were plotting not the death of a friend but the itinerary of a fabulous trip that I, for one, never quite believed we'd ever really take.[209]

In *Looking for Alaska* the Barn Night Crew express their immaturity by committing childish pranks. Their major prank is the Barn Night Prank, in which they break into the school office at night and send bad performance reports to the parents of students they don't like. While executing the prank Pudge observes that they feel powerful and untouchable:

> Our watches synchronised, our clothes black, our backpacks on, our breath visible in the cold, our minds filled with the minute details of the plan, our hearts racing, we walked out of the barn together once it was completely dark… The Great Perhaps was upon us, and we were invincible.[210]

This sense of play and false invincibility are encoded into the crime with Pudge and the Colonel re-enacting part of the prank by setting off fireworks to distract the Eagle (the Barn Night Crew's code name for Culver Creek's principal) to help Alaska leave campus on the night of her death. Despite Alaska being distraught and inebriated, it does not occur to them that she is vulnerable or that their actions will have serious consequences. Even when Pudge learns of Alaska's death he finds it hard to accept and initially convinces himself it is just another prank:

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[208] Ibid, 281.
[209] Ibid, 310-311.
[210] Green, 103.

> She's just playing a trick on us. This is just an Alaska Young Prank Extraordinaire. It's Alaska being Alaska, funny and playful and not knowing when or how to put on the brakes.[211]

However, in keeping with the redemptive theme of the narrative the Barn Night Crew ultimately use their love of pranks to express what they've learnt from Alaska's death by staging the Alaska Young Memorial Prank. For the prank they hire a stripper to pose as a psychology professor and speak to the student body about teenage sexuality and the way boys turn 'girls into mere objects'.[212] The prank demonstrates that Pudge understands his real crime to be his failure to see Alaska as 'Greater than the sum of [her] parts'.[213]

While magic in *The Magicians* has connotations with exclusivity and higher knowledge, it is also a symbol of childishness, as Dean Fog muses: '

> Can a man who can cast a spell ever really grow up? … I think you're magicians because you're unhappy. A magician is strong because he feels pain. He feels the difference between what the world is and what he would make of it.[214]

The characters' decision to study magic is both a search for enlightenment and a retreat from childhood traumas suffered in the real world into the idealised childhood they have imagined for themselves.

Though university students, the Physical Kids, in keeping with the implied juvenility are introduced through childlike descriptions. Quentin is seen acting 'like a sulky child'.[215] Eliot is (unflatteringly) likened to 'a child who had been slightly misdelivered',[216] while Alice is described as 'a small, sullen girl',[217] and later depicted standing 'at the edge of the circle, her hair unwashed and adrift, like a sleepy child who

[211] Ibid, 140.
[212] Ibid, 208.
[213] Ibid, 120-121.
[214] Grossman, 217.
[215] Ibid, 3.
[216] Ibid, 19.
[217] Ibid, 51.

wakes in the middle of the night and appears like an uncertain spirit at the edge of a grown-up party'.[218]

Both the Brakebills campus and Fillory are distinctly childlike settings that allow the Physical Kids to escape into an extended childhood. Though a university, Brakebills appears more like a boarding school, as discussed in Section 3.3. Quentin believes Fillory will be even more idyllic than Brakebills and the Physical Kids will 'be picked up, cleaned off, and made to feel safe and happy and whole again'.[219]

Initially the Physical Kids are excited to arrive in Fillory, where they imagine 'there was conflict, and even violence, but it was always heroic and ennobling'.[220] However, Fillory is 'a nightmare nursery fairyland'[221] where Grossman demonstrates the damaging implications of the Physical Kids' refusal to grow up and take their places in the real world. In Fillory the Physical Kids encounter the Beast (formerly Martin Chatwin, one of the children in the 'Fillory and Further' series who fails to return to the real world), a monstrous manifestation of Quentin's driving desire to escape the real world and remain a child in Fillory forever. Martin's sister explains that, like Quentin, Martin comes to Fillory to escape childhood trauma: 'Plover used to diddle him whenever he could get him alone. I think that's why he went to Fillory in the first place… He was looking for somewhere to hide.'[222] Martin remains 'in Fillory so he won't have to go home. He's the child who doesn't want to leave the playground, or who won't go to bed. He's Peter Pan'.[223] However, unlike Peter Pan, Martin makes a perpetual childhood appear unnatural and uncanny:

[218] Ibid, 146.
[219] Ibid, 287.
[220] Ibid, 118.
[221] Ibid, 380.
[222] Ibid, 379.
[223] Ibid, 168-169.

> It was disturbing to see a middle-aged man with the mannerisms of a little English schoolboy… He hadn't grown up at all. He even had a curiously miniature, asexual quality, as if he'd stopped growing the minute he'd run away.[224]

By juxtaposing the Physical Kids' traumatic experience in Fillory with the idyllic world of Brakebills, Grossman demonstrates that a perpetual childhood quickly transmutes from enchantment to disillusionment and, through Martin Chatwin, highlights the consequences of pursuing such fantasies.

As the clique members believe they have progressed beyond the student and wider communities, they consider their new reality separate and superior. Freed from the laws and social norms governing these communities, they develop their own moral code and perverse and violent behaviours, which were previously unacceptable, become permissible. For example, in *The Secret History* members of the Greek class reframe their orgy as a *bacchanal* and Henry describes the experience as sacred and religious: 'I had a feeling that I'd never had, that reality itself was transforming around us in some beautiful and dangerous fashion'.[225]

The orgies in *The Magicians* are similarly recoded, firstly as a means to satisfy a desperate need for contact when the students are magically silenced and forced to spend their days in solitary confinement during their semester at Brakebills South:

> Their higher functions were so numb and exhausted they became animals, desperate for any kind of contact that wouldn't ask words of them. Impromptu orgies were not unheard of.[226]

Secondly, as previously stated, an orgy takes place when the students are transfigured into foxes. Again, this is coded as understandable, if not acceptable behaviour with the students acting on their newly discovered animal instincts, as Quentin observes:

> A bunch of teenagers cooped up in the Fortress of Solitude for two months, then stuck in the bodies of stupid horny mammals. Of course we were going to go crazy.[227]

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[224] Ibid, 358.
[225] Tartt, 185.
[226] Grossman, 157.

After graduation, the Physical Kids continue engaging in these behaviours with Quentin cheating on Alice in a drunken threesome with Eliot and Janice. Quentin's initial response is that 'He was living life to the fullest… Wasn't that the lesson of the foxes? If Alice had any blood in her veins she would have joined them!'[228] However, he later begins to consider, if only briefly, that his magical training may have skewed his moral perception.

> He couldn't understand, couldn't quite believe what he'd just done. It just didn't seem like him. Maybe Fogg was right, maybe magic had inhibited his moral development.[229]

Ostensibly, turning from the cave wall world offers the clique an escape from past trauma, sanctions perverse behaviour and allows the clique to move within a heightened, enlightened space where the problems and consequences of the wider world can be ignored. However, this space ultimately proves destructive as it absolves them of their perverse and criminal actions and prevents them from foreseeing the real-world implications of their actions, which they must eventually face.

2.4 The 'Upper World' as Refuge in *In the Company of Saints*

As in earlier campus clique crime novels the Saints are all exceptional students: Lucie and Meg are talented writers, Bastian an inventive chemist and Peter a gifted composer. They naturally find themselves isolated from their lesser peers and dedicate themselves to study, as Lucie describes of her high school years:

> I'd had nothing in the way of a social life… The nights I didn't work at the pub I spent reading. It made me a better writer and if I hadn't pushed myself, I wouldn't have earned my place at Mawson. Books had taught me other things, too: how words could transform simple, ugly moments into sites of wonder and art.[230]

Their time at both St Augustines and Mawson initially appears to remove them from the wider community to a higher plane, a place where they not only advance their

[227] Ibid, 156.
[228] Ibid, 238.
[229] Ibid, 238.
[230] *In the Company of Saints*, 28.

education, but where they are protected from the wider community. For Meg and Lucie their enrolment at St Augustines and Mawson respectively equals a means to escape Cootbowie. For Bastian and Peter, St Augustines is initially a place where they can explore their sexuality and Mawson is a fresh start after the eventual trauma of St Augustines.

These scholarly sanctuaries are, in both cases, made sites of trauma by Berthum, and the Saints are forced to retreat into themselves. However, they choose to reframe this retreat as a final elevation, seeing themselves not as cast from but rising above these communities.

As in earlier campus clique novels, the Saints' upper world is carefully constructed. From their affected style of speech,[231] the way Meg and Lucie dress 'like the flapper girls described in F. Scott Fitzgerald and Evelyn Waugh novels'[232] and the boys 'in collared, button-down shirts and pants, or occasionally well-pressed shorts',[233] with Lucie explaining, 'I don't think either of them owned jeans',[234] to the 'pile of books on [Lucie's] desk… arranged, spines facing out, so someone walking past the door could read the carefully-selected titles'[235] and Peter's collection of vinyl records, everything about their image as 'bright young things with a taste for decadence and jazz'[236] is contrived—a longing for an unattainable paradise.

The Saints model the aesthetic of their upper world on the Bright Young People—a group of artists and socialites that D. J. Taylor describes as 'the mid-twenties cult of youth… [Who] secured a great deal of publicity by throwing wild parties and indulging in kindergarten orgies of gin, sex and drugs'.[237] Members of this 'cult' included Evelyn Waugh, Brian Howard, Stephen Tennant, Elizabeth Ponsonby,

[231] Ibid, 8.
[232] Ibid, 48.
[233] Ibid, 48.
[234] Ibid, 48.
[235] Ibid, 72.
[236] Ibid, 48.
[237] D. J. Taylor, *Bright Young People: The Lost Generation of London's Jazz Age*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Grioux, 2007) 24.

Tallulah Bankhead, Bryan Guinness, Cecil Beaton and Nancy Mitford, all of whom were members of London's social elite in the 1920s (and inspired the characters in Waugh's *Vile Bodies* (1930)). Taylor describes their style as, 'Brisk, affected, outwardly impersonal, inwardly often deeply vulnerable'[238]—a style well suited to accommodate the Saints' outward precocity and hidden insecurities.

Despite their 'upper world' being contrived, the Saints perceive their affected lifestyle places them outside the wider community, as Peter explains through an analogy of his love of jazz music:

> It's not just the music, it's the whole era… Women cut their hair and skirts short, men wore eyeliner—the whole decade was one big party and jazz was the soundtrack… All those pointless restrictions of the Victorian period were finally breaking down… The world belonged to the underground—artists, writers, gangsters—and the underdog was king.[239]

As in earlier campus clique crime novels, inhabiting the upper world places the Saints in a dangerous state of play in which they fail to comprehend the seriousness of their actions and view their destructive interactions with the wider community as unreal or games. For example, Lucie describes their attitude to their plot to blackmail Berthum:

> It didn't seem real and all of us, even Bastian, now that he'd agreed to it, approached Meg's plan like a child's game of make-believe.[240]

As in earlier campus clique crime novels, the upper world is, ironically, a childlike space, although the Saints do not initially perceive it as such. They view themselves as 'sophisticated and unapproachable'[241] and rush into an adult lifestyle and engineer situations they lack the maturity to handle, specifically Lucie's relationship with Berthum, the blackmail and the murder. However, as in *The Secret History*, their affected mannerisms and style of dress create a mood of children playing dress-ups, and

[238] Ibid, 9.
[239] *In the Company of Saints*, 86.
[240] Ibid, 189.
[241] Ibid, 98.

when they mingle with the grown-ups at the Old Collegains' Ball, they are made to feel as such, as Lucie explains:

> At Mawson, wearing Meg's vintage dresses made me feel sophisticated and mysterious, but when these women looked at me I felt like a child in a gaudy costume.[242]

Later, as the upper world begins to deconstruct, the Saints shed their idealised personas and Lucie depicts them as distinctly and deliberately childlike in a plea for the reader's sympathy discussed further in Section 3.2. In the lead up to the murder Lucie describes Peter holding her 'in a tender, yet fiercely protective grip, the way a child clings to a beloved toy, as if to say: *Mine*'.[243] And in the aftermath of the murder Lucie finds Meg

> sitting in the window seat in the library with her knees drawn up to her chest, sobbing. She was wearing one of Bastian's jumpers. It was far too big for her and with her usually styled hair still wet and tangled from her bath, she looked like a small child crying for her mother.[244]

In reverting to childlike behaviours in the later stages of the narrative, the Saints finally reveal themselves as vulnerable and immature, acting on a perceived power they have not yet learned to control.

In earlier campus clique crime novels, it is typical for the protagonist to briefly descend from the upper world alone to the wider community—usually during the term or semester break—and this return serves to remind him of all he has gained through his friendship with the clique and all he stands to lose. This scene typically ends with the protagonist being rescued by a member or members of the clique. For example in *The Secret History*, when Richard is almost killed by the Vermont winter he spends alone, Henry appears as a sinister, yet heroic figure who literally carries him back to the upper world:

> A figure in a long black overcoat was standing motionless across the room by the windows, hands clasped behind the back; near one of the hands I saw the tiny glow of a cigarette coal…

[242] Ibid, 117.
[243] Ibid, 188.
[244] Ibid, 218.

> Things had got too bright. I reached for the door frame, and the next thing I knew I was falling, and Henry had jumped forward to catch me.[245]

A similar return to the wider community occurs in *In the Company of Saints*, with Lucie spending the semester break in Cootbowie. However, unlike earlier campus clique crime novels, rather than rescuing her, the Saints join her in Cootbowie where their affected personas are striped away. I used this return to force the Saints to confront some of the truths they have been hiding from each other and, in doing so, establish the conflict that drives Lucie to seek out Berthum. It is in Cootbowie that the Saints learn about her first boyfriend—stolen from Meg[246]—Bastian kisses Peter[247] and Peter breaks up with Lucie when she tries to initiate sex.[248] It is also in here that Lucie and Peter are forced to confront the reality of their relationship, and for both it is a disquieting realisation. Lucie observes:

> I saw the stick figure Prince Charming of Mum's fantasy life fleshed out with Peter's face; he and I returning as graduates to this windblown bay, I with a ring on my finger and he with seeds for a veggie garden of our own; the two of us growing steadily apart from each other to become my parents.[249]

And later, when attempting to seduce Peter:

> He looked out at the silvery surface of the water and our two sets of footprints marking the otherwise untouched sand, but something in his expression told me he wasn't seeing it. Instead, I sensed he'd caught the smell of rot beneath the salt and, though he tried, he struggled to look beyond the drifting knots of seaweed and broken crab shells.[250]

This reality overwhelms Peter and he leaves Lucie alone in the literal and figurative playground:

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[245] Tartt, 136-137.
[246] *In the Company of Saints*, 148.
[247] Ibid, 150.
[248] Ibid, 156-159.
[249] Ibid, 142.
[250] Ibid, 157.

> It was as though Peter had drawn all the enchantment out of the air and carried it off with him, leaving only the cold stinging my skin and the dark shapes of the play equipment still and lifeless around me.[251]

Having the entire clique return to the wider community pulls them from the illusory upper world, forces them to confront the reality of their dependence on each other and prompts the return of repressed desires and past traumas that drive the narrative's second half.

2.5 Conclusion

Understanding cycles of repression and return identifies the major crime as an act of repression that must in turn be repressed. The clique members' need to repress traumas experienced in the wider community explains their desire to escape this community and enter first the campus and then the upper world and ultimately reveals this idealised site of enlightenment as illusionary, childlike and destructive.

From this understanding I chose to focus and heighten cycles of repression and return by focusing the threat of the return of the repressed through a single character and having the Saints forced to deny each other's past traumas and perverse behaviours in order to maintain the group's happy dynamic. I created an upper world that is seemingly sophisticated but highly constructed, nurturing the Saints' immaturity and blinding them to the consequences of their destructive actions.

However, this section does not explain how key narrative devices, such as characterisation, stylised settings and narrative structure, support cycles of repression and return and the protagonist's journey to and from the upper world. Therefore, a further exploration is required to identify and analyse the role of such devices and how they appear in *In the Company of Saints*.

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[251] Ibid, 159.

The Execution

Identifying and Applying Key Narrative Devices in the Campus Clique Crime Novel

3.0 Introduction

Campus clique crime novels use four key narrative devices to perpetuate cycles of repression and return and support the protagonist's journey to and from the upper world: an ambitious protagonist, isolated and stylised settings and characters, a destructive authority figure, and a major crime as the central turning point. This section offers an analysis of these devices and further considers how this analysis informed how they appear in *In the Company of Saints*. Specifically it explains where and why I have expanded or altered the typical functions of these devices.

3.1 The Ambitious Protagonist

The campus clique crime protagonist's driving ambition is to move from a site of disempowerment to one of relative power, and by doing so escape sites of childhood trauma and a perceived inadequacy. He[252] begins the narrative as an outsider and experiences feelings of isolation and neglect. He seeks the acceptance of his peers and, typically being from a lower socio-economic background, harbours higher class ambitions. He believes the key to self-improvement is through education and applies to an exclusive school or university. At this institution he becomes enamoured of a clique of students who represent the social and intellectual status he aspires to. Though he is accepted as a member of the clique, he continues to view them as his superiors and remains an 'awed observer' rather than an active participant in the main action of the story. He has antecedents in similarly removed protagonists of modernist fiction, such as Nick Carraway in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Captain Charles

[252] I refer to the protagonist as 'he' given my three key texts feature male protagonists. However, this is coincidental, not typical, as other campus clique crime novels, including *The Bitch Goddess Notebook*, have female protagonists.

Ryder in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), Mick Jenkins in Anthony Powell's *A Dance to the Music of Time* (1951-1975) and Leo Colston in L. P. Hartley's *The Go-Between* (1953). With the exception of *The Magicians*, the campus clique crime novel is narrated in the first person by the protagonist, and, as in Fitzgerald's, Waugh's, Powell's and Hartley's texts, the narrative perspective is that of an outsider looking in on a closed world to which he seeks to gain entry.

In *The Secret History* Richard Papen comes from a working class family and suffers a lonely, abusive childhood: 'My father was mean, and our house ugly, and my mother didn't pay much attention to me; my clothes were cheap and my haircut too short and no one at school seemed to like me very much.'[253] He is eager to separate himself from this early life, stating: 'I don't think I can explain the despair my surroundings inspired in me.'[254] Hampden College, by contrast, appears 'like a country from a dream'.[255] In high school Richard has a copy of the Hampden College brochure and spends 'dozens of hours studying the photographs as though if I stared at them long enough and longingly enough I would, by some sort of osmosis, be transported into their clear, pure silence.'[256]

Upon arriving at Hampden Richard becomes obsessed with the members of his ancient Greek class: an 'arresting party'[257] who embody 'a variety of picturesque and fictive qualities',[258] like 'characters in a favourite painting.'[259] However, while Richard is welcomed into the group he remains something of an outsider, as he recalls after one of the group's frequent dinner parties:

> Though I didn't do anything stupid, exactly, or say anything I shouldn't, I felt dejected and bilious, and I talked little and ate even less. Much of the talk centred around events to which I was not privy, and even Charles's kind parenthetical remarks of explanation did not help much

[253] Tartt, 6.
[254] Ibid, 8.
[255] Ibid, 11.
[256] Ibid, 10.
[257] Ibid, 17.
[258] Ibid, 17.
[259] Ibid, 21.

> to clarify it… I left early. Both Francis and Henry offered to drive me home, which for some reason made me feel even worse. I told them I'd rather walk, thanks, and backed out of the apartment, smiling, practically delirious, my face burning under the collective gaze of cool, curious solicitude.[260]

As Richard views Hampden College as his escape from a dissatisfying childhood, Pudge enrols at Culver Creek in search of a Great Perhaps[261] and hopes it will offer 'real friends and a more-than-minor life'[262] At Culver Creek he befriends the Barn Night Crew, but like Richard, remains on the fringes of the group, as he explains after being snubbed by Alaska, the group's leader:

> It wasn't the first time Alaska had left me out of the loop, certainly, but after we'd been together so much over Thanksgiving, it seemed ridiculous to plan the prank with the Colonel but without me. Whose T-shirts were stained with her tears? Mine. Who'd listened to her read Vonnegut? Me. Who'd been the butt of the world's worst knock-knock joke? Me… This never happened to me in Florida, this oh-so-high-school angst about who likes whom more, and I hated myself for letting it happen now.[263]

Like Richard and Pudge, Quentin in *The Magicians* aspires to something greater than his life in Brooklyn:

> The life he should be living, had been mislaid through some clerical error by some cosmic bureaucracy… It had been diverted somewhere else, to somebody else, and he'd been issued this shitty substitute faux life instead.[264]

Brakebills offers Quentin the fantastic life he has spent his childhood fantasising about. After passing the entrance exam:

> A vast stony weight lifted suddenly off Quentin's chest. It felt like it had been there his entire life, an invisible albatross, a granite millstone holding him down, and all at once it just dropped away and disappeared without a splash. His chest expanded… They were going to make him a magician.[265]

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[260] Ibid, 75.
[261] Green, 5.
[262] Ibid, 219.
[263] Ibid, 99.
[264] Grossman, 5-6.
[265] Ibid, 40.

It is further explained: 'Brakebills had rescued him. He was no longer the shoe-gazing fuckup he had been.'[266]

In Third Year Quentin is accepted into Brakebills' most elite Discipline, Physical Magic. However, being placed there by default, he feels like an outsider amongst the Physical Kids and does not want 'to let on how much he wanted to belong… Even now that he did, officially, belong.'[267] Furthermore, even as one of the Physical Kids it never fails 'to astonish him… How much of the world around him [is] mysterious and hidden from view.'[268]

As the protagonist considers himself inferior to members of the clique, he is hesitant to question their actions, even when they are clearly irrational and destructive. Consequently, his involvement in the crime(s) is passive and he becomes an accomplice through his failure to stop or report his friends' actions.

In *The Secret History* Richard realises there was a moment following Henry's confession to the farmer's death where he might have convinced him not to murder Bunny:

> I suppose if I had a moment of doubt at all it was then… Who were these people? How well did I know them? Could I trust any of them, really, when it came right down to it?... Thinking back on it now, I realise that this particular point in time, as I stood there blinking in the deserted hall, was the one point at which I might have done something very different from what I actually did.[269]

Furthermore, Richard witnesses Bunny's murder, and while he does not aid Henry in pushing Bunny into the ravine, he makes no move to stop him.

In *Looking for Alaska* the extent of Pudge's responsibility for Alaska's death is ambiguous, as it remains unclear if the incident is an accident or suicide.

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[266] Ibid, 72.
[267] Ibid, 102.
[268] Ibid, 193.
[269] Tartt, 223.

> The accide [sic], the suident [sic], would never be anything else, and I was left to ask, *Did I help you towards a fate you didn't want, Alaska, or did I just assist you in your wilful self-destruction?* Because they are different crimes, and I didn't know whether to feel angry at her for making me a part of her suicide or just to feel angry at myself for letting her go.[270]

Either way, Pudge acknowledges that in failing to prevent Alaska driving drunk and distressed off campus, he and the other members of the Barn Night Crew are partly to blame for her death:

> We did not say: *Don't drive. You're drunk.*
>
> We did not say: *We aren't letting you in that car when you're upset.*
>
> We did not say: *We insist on going with you.*
>
> We did not say: *This can wait until tomorrow. Anything—everything—can wait.*[271]

Furthermore, Pudge admits his failure to stop Alaska stems from his submissive attitude towards her: 'I let her go because she told me to. It was that simple for me, and that stupid.'[272]

Of all the campus clique crime protagonists, Quentin is the most actively involved in the crimes: the deaths of Amanda and Alice. Though it is the Beast that kills these characters, the Beast, as discussed in Section 2.3 is a monstrous manifestation of Quentin's driving desire to escape his 'mundane and domestic'[273] reality and become a hero in a fantasy world. In the case of Amanda's death, Quentin is responsible for summoning the Beast and is left wondering if he has 'committed the perfect crime or a crime so public and unspeakable that nobody could bring themselves to confront him about it.'[274] However, as the Beast is responsible for the acts of murder, Quentin, like other campus clique crime protagonists, is ostensibly a passive bystander, admitting that

[270] Green, 212.
[271] Ibid, 132.
[272] Ibid, 149.
[273] Grossman, 72.
[274] Ibid, 118.

'in a cowardly way he was glad he couldn't move [during Amanda's murder]. It spared him from having to do something brave.'[275]

Given the protagonist's ambitions to rise above his station, his passivity is initially puzzling. However, in gaining admittance to the upper world he believes he has achieved his driving ambition as he finds acceptance and his past traumas are ignored and rewritten. In each text the protagonist reaches a point of absolute happiness. Richard experiences his at Francis's country house:

> The idea of living there, of not having to go back ever again to asphalt and shopping malls and modular furniture; of living there with Charles and Camilla and Henry and Francis and maybe even Bunny; of no one marrying or going home or getting a job in a town a thousand miles away or doing any of the traitorous things friends do after college; of everything remaining exactly as it was, that instant—the idea was so truly heavenly that I'm not sure I thought, even then, it could ever really happen, but I like to believe I did.[276]

For Pudge it's two days before Alaska's death:

> Best day of my life was today… The way the light is right now, with the long shadows and that kind of bright, soft light you get when the sun isn't quite setting? That's the light that makes everything better, everything prettier, and today, everything just seemed to be in that light.[277]

For Quentin it's entering Fillory:

> This was what every one of them had been waiting for, looking for, their whole lives—what they were meant to do! They'd found the magic door, the secret path through the hidden garden. They'd gotten ahold of something new, a real adventure, and it was only just beginning.[278]

The protagonist's passivity is an attempt to maintain this happiness. He lacks motive to commit the major crime himself, but acting to prevent the major crime would place him in conflict with the clique and see him expelled from the upper world.

The protagonist's driving ambition for acceptance and self-improvement and to escape sites of childhood trauma is also his major flaw as it makes him too weak to

[275] Ibid, 113.
[276] Tartt, 113.
[277] Green, 115.
[278] Grossman, 293.

stand against the clique, and consequently party to the crime that ultimately casts the clique from the upper world.

3.2 Lucie Dawson as Ambitious Protagonist

In developing a protagonist for *In the Company of Saints* my primary concern was to remain true to the campus clique crime protagonist's driving ambition and major flaw: a desire for a life greater than that which fate has determined for him. Lucie Dawson, like earlier campus clique crime protagonists, comes from a dissatisfying background and seeks to improve her situation by furthering her education. She grows up in a small coastal town, with a depressed mother and an adulterous father. She moves to the city when she is offered a place in the highly competitive creative writing program at Mawson University, deciding: 'I'm not going to spend my life pulling beers and waiting tables in some backwater town nobody ever passes through. I couldn't bear to be that ordinary.'[279] In the city she befriends the Saints and while she is welcomed into the group, she initially finds herself excluded from their more private affairs, asking Peter when they first start dating:

> Do you have any idea how hard it is for me sometimes? You, Bastian and Meg all know each other so well. You have this whole collective history binding you together. Don't I get to share in that now?[280]

Also like other campus clique crime protagonists, Lucie is not directly involved in the major crime. However, she is largely responsible for the crime as her lies regarding her sexual relationship with Berthum motivate Peter to commit the murder. Here Lucie differs from other campus clique crime protagonists as her actions have a significant and direct impact on the story. As a reader, I found the passivity of other campus clique crime protagonists frustrating as they essentially play a supporting role in their own story. While this is a useful tool in establishing their character, and a stylistic

[279] *In the Company of Saints*, 11.
[280] Ibid, 110.

choice rather than a failing on the part of the writers, I wanted to experiment with a protagonist whose choices drive the narrative, in the hopes that aligning the reader with a character who actively seeks her desires would raise the stakes and heighten narrative tension. This meant perpetually refusing to satisfy her driving desire for acceptance and even seemingly idyllic moments, such as when she and Peter say 'I love you' for the first time,[281] contains an underlying tension, in this instance Peter's declaration is hesitant and he ends the relationship soon after.

In giving Lucie an active role I also sought to more overtly demonstrate that her driving ambition for acceptance is also her major flaw, as she becomes largely responsible for the clique's destruction. This decision was informed by other crime novels in which the protagonist commits immoral acts in order to satisfy similar desires. In particular, I studied Patricia Highsmith's 'hero-criminal',[282] Tom Ripley, as he appears in *The Talented Mr Ripley* (1955).

Ripley is both amoral and an aesthete, and, like the campus clique crime protagonist, comes from a dissatisfying background and seeks a place among the elite. Ripley's ascent from the working class begins with small lies and manipulations, which foreshadow his later crimes. He has a talent for impersonations and appears 'intelligent, level-headed, scrupulously honest, and very willing to do a favour,'[283] which prompts millionaire, Herbert Greenleaf, to send him to Europe to bring his son, Dickie, home. However, Ripley privately admits Mr Greenleaf has made 'a slight error'[284] in his judgement, as Ripley encourages Mr Greenleaf to believe he and Dickie are close friends, though they are mere acquaintances.[285] Once in Europe Ripley begins to adopt Dickie's habits and mannerisms and is eventually caught dressed in Dickie's clothes[286] before murdering him and assuming his identity. Having attained an elite social position

[281] Ibid, 152-153.
[282] Patricia Highsmith, *Plotting and Writing Suspense Fiction*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983) 5.
[283] Highsmith, *The Talented Mr Ripley*, (London: Vintage, 1999) 8.
[284] Ibid, 8.
[285] Ibid, 9-11.
[286] Ibid, 68-69.

through Dickie's death, Ripley is forced to commit further crimes, including the murder of Freddie Miles, in order to maintain this position.

Furthermore, Ripley justifies his actions through his ability to believe his own lies. For example, to prove his friendship with Dickie to Mr Greenleaf he describes some of Dickie's ship designs:

> Tom had never seen them, but he could see them now, precise draughtsman's drawings with every line and bolt and screw labelled. He could see Dickie smiling, holding them up for him to look at, and he could have gone on for several minutes describing details for Mr Greenleaf's delight, but he checked himself.[287]

Ripley's lies and his ability to believe them make him both the driving force behind the dramatic action and an unsettling protagonist for the reader to follow.

Lucie, too, quickly assimilates herself with the Saints, 'pick[ing] up their mannerisms and little quirks'[288] and frequently borrowing Meg's clothes and make-up. She foreshadows her major lie, that Berthum forces her to perform fellacio—when in reality she initiates the meeting and gives her consent—by withholding the fact that Berthum has previously kissed her after class. She also fails to correct Peter's belief that he is the first boyfriend:

> I probably should have corrected him on that point. True, there had been no boyfriends—no handholding in the back row of the local cinema, no awkward introductions to parents, no whispered declarations of love. But there had been guys.[289]

Like Ripley, Lucie is also capable of believing her own lies and continually blurs the line between fantasy and reality, and like Richard in *The Secret History*, this distortion informs her narrative style. Where Richard filters his story through rosy nostalgia, Lucie reframes hers as a Gothic romance, firstly as a means of recoding and romanticising Peter's trauma in order to justify her relationship with him, and later to mask her immoral actions by recasting herself and the Saints as victims.

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[287] Ibid, 10.
[288] *In the Company of Saints*, 48.
[289] Ibid, 145.

To reframe her story as such, she draws on the campus clique crime novel's use of intertextuality, primarily using Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938) and Stoker's *Dracula* as points of reference.

Rebecca is her favourite novel and she wants a boyfriend like du Maurier's hero, Maxim de Winter. She introduces Peter as 'the troubled hero with a dark past'[290] and uses the heightened, romantic language to describe him:

> Beneath the bright chaos of his hair, his skin was chalky pale, and insomniac rings marked the hollows around his eyes… But it was his eyes that held me, their deep grey seeming almost black in the candlelight and striking such a contrast to his skin as to give him a disquieting, preternatural look.[291]

She refers to Peter's parents' estate as 'Manderley' and views him as a 'vengeful hero'[292] when he commits acts of violence, such as breaking his father's nose in her defence. As discussed in Section 2.2, this romanticising leads to a wilful and destructive ignorance regarding Peter's past.

In the first half of the narrative Lucie mentions she has *Dracula* on loan from the library.[293] In the second half of the narrative she begins to present Berthum and his actions as vampiric, and by doing so frames Berthum as a monstrous and perverse sexual aggressor and herself as an innocent victim. For example, she describes Berthum kissing her neck as being like a vampire bite:

> His kiss drained the last of my sensible thoughts, leaving me with only base, animal impulses. Berthum pushed me to my knees and I imagined myself as Mina Harker kneeling at the mercy of Count Dracula.[294]

Following this incident she echoes Mina Harker's cry of 'Unclean! Unclean![295] stating, 'I still felt unclean, Berthum's pollution spreading deep beneath my skin.'[296]

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[290] Ibid, 3.
[291] Ibid, 19.
[292] Ibid, 124.
[293] Ibid, 94.
[294] Ibid, 168.
[295] Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, (London: Vintage, 2007) 316.
[296] *In the Company of Saints*, 172.

When the Saints decide to confront Berthum she again employs the villain/victim dichotomy, imagining Berthum as 'the evil vampire stalking the hallways of Casa de Mawson' and the Saints as 'the golden heroes banded together in [their] quest to destroy him.'[297]

Furthermore, she rejects any evidence that undermines her heightened and romanticised worldview. For example, Meg displays a photograph of herself, Bastian and Lucie in which Lucie is 'half-visible, seated at Meg's side and looking like her kid sister, grinning manically and proud to be included in the big kids' fun'.[298] Lucie responds to the photograph:

> It made me feel slightly sick to see myself captured like that. I slipped the photo out of the frame and folded down the edge to hide myself from view.[299]

Following this incident, she goes to the cinema wearing Meg's clothes and make-up and describing herself as Meg's 'dark twin'.[300]

Furthermore, her heightened narration accentuates her aesthetic drive and highly self-reflexive nature. Here again she is modelled on Ripley, who gives the impression of 'watching every move he [makes] as if it were somebody else's movements he were watching'.[301] For example, Lucie becomes aware of a woman watching her and her friends at Writers' Week and

> had a vision of the pleasing tableau we must have made for her: Meg and I in breezy summer dresses, diligently jotting notes in our Moleskines, with Bastian stretched out between us and a bottle of champagne sweating beside him. I felt like a subject in a painting, captured in my most favourable light.[302]

While initially such observations appear merely self-absorbed, in the later stages of the narrative they highlight Lucie's disturbing obsession with appearances. Immediately following Berthum's murder Lucie expresses no guilt or remorse, but

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[297] Ibid, 189.
[298] Ibid, 71.
[299] Ibid, 72.
[300] Ibid, 72.
[301] Highsmith, *The Talented Mr Ripley*, 12.
[302] *In the Company of Saints*, 27.

instead creates a romanticised image of herself and the Saints as 'four dark-clad figures standing solemn at the end of the pier with the rain soaking through our clothes.'[303] Later, when watching the news to see if the police are investigating Berthum's disappearance, she imagines 'what people would think of the four of us if we appeared on their screens… And what our headline would be.'[304]

By focusing on such images rather than displaying emotions at critical points in the narrative Lucie shows herself to be more concerned with the poetics of her story rather than the horrific crimes she and the Saints commit.

By actively pursuing her ambitions Lucie, like Ripley, continually raises her personal stakes. This further heightens narrative tension, especially in the *dénouement* when the typical campus clique crime protagonist is mourning his lost happiness, rather than continuing to fight for his place within the clique. Though it is unlikely readers will sympathise with Lucie, her determination gives them a reason to invest in her as a character.

3.3 Isolated and Stylised Settings

The campus clique crime novel uses three primary settings: the wider community beyond the campus, an elite campus setting and the clique's 'clubhouse'. These settings both reflect the protagonist's journey through cycles of repression and return and the cave wall, fire and upper world respectively. Their stylised rendering by the narrator reflects the stage each represents on his cyclic journey.

The wider community beyond the campus where characters experience their initial trauma and dissatisfaction is presented as a harsh, gritty environment. In *The Secret History* Richard has four primary encounters with this site: his childhood in Plano, California, his winter spent alone in Hampden, Bunny's funeral following the

[303] Ibid, 199.
[304] Ibid, 206.

murder and the ambulance ride after Charles has shot him. Richard describes his hometown: 'Plano. The word conjures up drive-ins, tract homes, waves of heat rising from the blacktop.'[305] He further notes in his journal:

> There is to me about this place a smell of rot that ripe fruit makes. Nowhere, ever, have the hideous mechanics of birth and copulation and death—those monstrous upheavals of life that the Greeks call *miasma*, defilement—been so brutal or been painted up to look so pretty; have so many people put so much faith in lies and mutability and death, death, death.[306]

Ironically, given the events that occur at Hampden, this reads as a more accurate description of the upper world than Richard's hometown and further highlights the bias of his narrative.

When Hampden College closes for the winter and Richard is separated from the rest of the Greek class he experiences a very different side of Hampden, one that is

> worlds away from the part I knew—maple trees and clapboard storefronts, village green and courthouse clock. This Hampden was a bombed-out expanse of water towers, rusted railroad tracks, sagging warehouses and factories with the doors boarded up and the windows broken out.[307]

Bunny's gravesite appears equally bleak:

> A green striped canopy, of the sort used for lawn parties, was set up over the grave. There was something vacuous and stupid about it, flapping out there in the middle of nowhere, something empty, banal, brutish… Somehow I thought there would be more than this. Bits of litter chewed up by the mowers lay scattered on the grass. There were cigarette buts, a Twix wrapper, recognisable… Traffic washed past up on the expressway.[308]

Finally, Richard describes the ambulance ride with the dying Henry as a

> dark ride to the underworld, the tunnel illuminated by Shell Oil, Burger King… Neon lights: Motel 6, Dairy Queen. Colours so bright, they nearly broke my heart.[309]

Descriptions of Brooklyn, where Quentin spends an unhappy childhood in *The Magicians*, echo and satirise Richard's descriptions

[305] Tartt, 12.
[306] Ibid, 9.
[307] Ibid, 123.
[308] Ibid, 471-472.
[309] Ibid, 611.

> with tableaux of misery… Crows perched on power lines, stepped-in dog shit, windblown trash, the corpses of innumerable wet oak leaves being desecrated in innumerable ways by innumerable vehicles and pedestrians.[310]

Green typically favours harsh environments (suburban sprawl, abandoned strip malls, closed theme parks, empty highways and roadhouses) that challenge his young protagonists. Depictions of the wider community in *Looking for Alaska*, are particularly bleak and sites of major trauma. For example, the Barn Night Crew visit Alaska's hometown for her funeral:

> I followed Lara into the A-frame chapel attached to the single story funeral home in Vine Station, Alabama, a town every bit as depressed and depressing as Alaska had always made it out to be. The place smelled of mildew and disinfectant, and the yellow wallpaper in the foyer was peeling at the corners.[311]

The campus is isolated from the wider community, and open only to a select few. Hampden College is located in rural Vermont and places at the college are competitive and expensive—Richard can only afford to attend with a scholarship. Culver Creek is similarly exclusive and situated fifteen miles from the nearest town.[312] Brakebills, while located in Brooklyn, is inaccessible and invisible to the non-magical community. In fact, Brakebills follows a different calendar to this community, so that when Quentin initially enters the campus in Brooklyn's winter he is greeted by summer sun.[313] The completeness of the campus' separation from the non-magical community is most clearly demonstrated when Quentin and Eliot approach the point where the two sites intersect while rowing on the Hudson:

> They were passed by a few other boats, sailboats and cabin cruisers and a hard-charging eight-woman scull out of West Point, which was a few miles upriver. The occupants looked grim and

[310] Grossman, 52.
[311] Green, 151.
[312] Ibid, 5.
[313] Grossman, 15-16.

> bundled up against the cold, in grey sweatshirts and sweatpants. They couldn't perceive, or somehow weren't a part of, the August heat that Quentin and Eliot were enjoying.[314]

Given the campus' exclusivity and isolation from the wider community, it functions as a microcosm, operating under an independent set of social norms and immersing the student body in its particular culture. For example, in *The Secret History* Richard observes:

> Hampden College, as a body, was always strangely prone to hysteria. Whether from isolation, malice or simple boredom, people there were far more credulous and excitable than educated people are generally believed to be, and this hermetic, overheated atmosphere made it a thriving black petri dish of melodrama and distortion.[315]

In *Looking for Alaska*, the student body is isolated further still, operating under an independent, self-governing system:

> One of the unique things about Culver Creek was the Jury. Every semester, the faculty elected twelve students, three from each class, to serve on the Jury. The Jury meted out punishments for non-expellable offences, for everything from staying out past curfew to smoking.[316]

The students approve of this system and resist calling on adult authorities to resolve their disputes, as the Colonel explains to Pudge, 'That's not how shit gets dealt with here. And besides, you don't really want to get a reputation for ratting.'[317] 'Ratting', the Colonel explains, is among the worst offences a student can commit against his or her peers, demonstrating the students' desire to segregate from the wider community:

> You're going to get in trouble… When you get in trouble, just don't tell on anyone… Pretty much the only important thing is never never never never rat.[318]

Pudge, however, is quick to see the obvious flaw in this system:

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[314] Ibid, 47.
[315] Tartt, 425-426.
[316] Green, 56.
[317] Ibid, 28.
[318] Ibid, 17.

> I wondered: *If someone punches me in the face, I'm supposed to insist I ran into a door?* It seemed a little stupid. How do you deal with bullies and assholes if you can't get them into trouble?[319]

In *The Magicians* Brakebills is a satire of Hogwarts, the magical school of witchcraft and wizardry in J. K Rowling's 'Harry Potter' novels. It is befitted with an eccentric ensemble of (seemingly arbitrary) follies, including an animated topiary maze, magic fountains that reflect other worlds and a welters[320] pitch, none of which facilitates the students' education, but which bear strong resemblance to the Hogwarts campus and delight Quentin: 'Sometimes he burst out laughing out of nowhere, for no reason. He was experimenting cautiously with the idea of being happy.'[321] Ironically, the campus' fantastic follies appear more real to him than his life in Brooklyn:

> In Brooklyn reality had been empty and meaningless—whatever inferior stuff it was made of, meaning had refused to adhere to it. Brakebills was different. It mattered. Meaning—is that what magic was?—was everywhere here. The place was crawling with it.[322]

In its similarities to Hogwarts, the Brakebills campus is not merely a site of isolation and elitism; it is a means of escape from the characters realities into an idealised fantasy childhood. As the narrator points out, 'For a college, it all looked a whole lot like a prep school.'[323] The students wear uniforms and are grouped into Disciplines, based on their magical strengths (as the Sorting Hat divides Hogwarts students into 'houses'), and observe various other arbitrary traditions:

> Alice and Gretchen were prefects…The position carried with it almost no official duties; mostly it was just yet another absurd, infantilising idea borrowed from the English public-school system, a symptom of the Anglophilia that was embedded so deeply in the institutional DNA of Brakebills.[324]

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[319] Ibid, 17.
[320] Welters being a complex magical game (the Brakebills equivalent of Quidditch), which the students are, for the most part, completely disinterested in.
[321] Grossman, 41.
[322] Ibid, 42.
[323] Grossman, 49.
[324] Ibid, 197.

Rather than resisting these traditions, the students embrace them: 'Life at Brakebills had a hushed, formal, almost theatrical tone to it.'[325]

Though less fantastic, Richard and Pudge also offer heightened and romanticised descriptions of their respective campuses that strike a distinct contrast with their depictions of the wider community. For example, Richard describes an evening at Hamden College:

> Red-cheeked girls playing soccer, ponytails flying, their shouts and laughter carrying faintly over the velvety, twilit field. Trees creaking with apples… Commons clock tower: ivied brick, white spire, spellbound in the hazy distance.[326]

To which he adds, 'I was happy in those first few days [at Hampden] as really I'd ever been before, roaming like a sleepwalker, stunned and drunk with beauty.'[327]

The Culver Creek campus is less romanticised than Hampden and Brakebills. However, it is far preferable to Pudge's depictions of the wider community:

> It looked like an oversize old motel. Everywhere boys and girls hugged and smiled and walked together.[328]

The clique further isolate themselves from the student body and wider community by retreating to a 'clubhouse', or 'clubhouses'. This second removal adds another degree of separation between the clique and the trauma they experience in the wider community and supports their ascent to and residency of the upper world.

In *The Secret History* there are two such locations: the Lyceum, located on campus, and Francis's country house, located off campus. Though part of the Hampden teaching facilities, the Lyceum is situated 'on the edge of the campus'[329] and half-hidden, 'covered with ivy in such a manner as to be almost indistinguishable from its landscape.'[330] Richard likens this site to 'those little Byzantine churches that are so plain

[325] Ibid, 57.
[326] Tartt, 12.
[327] Ibid, 12.
[328] Green, 7-8.
[329] Tartt, 15.
[330] Ibid, 15.

on the outside; inside the most paradisal painted eggshell of gilt and *tesserae*',[331] demonstrating the contrast between the campus' and the clique's private upper world.

Francis' country house is yet more exclusive, as while Richard frequents the Lyceum before his acceptance into the clique, it is some time before he is invited to the country house, and this invitation signals his initiation into their private world:

> Prior to this first weekend in the country, my recollections of that fall are distant and blurry: from here on out, they come into a sharp, delightful focus. It is here that the stilted mannequins of my initial acquaintance begin to yawn and stretch and come to life. It was months before the gloss and mystery of newness, which kept me from seeing them with much objectivity, would wear entirely off—though their reality was far more interesting than any idealised version could possibly be—but it is here, in my memory, that they cease being totally foreign and begin to appear, for the first time, in shapes very like their bright old selves.[332]

In *Looking for Alaska* the Barn Night Crew frequent the 'smoking hole', a secluded part of the campus hidden from the wider student body:

> On the far side of the bridge, there was a tiny path leading down a steep slope. Not even a path so much as a series of hints—a broken branch here, a patch of stomped down grass there—that people had come this way before… And there beneath the bridge, an oasis. A slab of concrete, three feet wide and ten feet long, with blue plastic chairs stolen long ago from some classroom.[333]

'Cooled by the creek and shade from the bridge'[334] the smoking hole is a refuge from the 'unique sort of heat'[335] that presides over the rest of the campus, similar to the contrast between the Lyceum's interior and the Hampden campus. It is also where the Barn Night Crew go to escape school rules, such as 'no smoking', that govern the wider student body.

In *The Magicians* each Discipline is awarded a site within the larger Brakebills campus. However, while some Disciplines occupy public spaces, such as the library or

[331] Ibid, 28.
[332] Ibid, 87.
[333] Green, 42.
[334] Ibid, 42.
[335] Ibid, 6.

the clinic,[336] the Physical Kids have the Cottage, 'a small Victorian outbuilding about a half mile from the House',[337] protected from trespassers by strong enchantments, which can only be broken by Physical Magic, practised exclusively by the clique. Gaining entry into the Cottage marks a student's initiation into the clique, as Quentin and Alice realise: 'If they were going to be Physical Kids, apparently they would have to prove it by getting through the front door.'[338]

By inhabiting these elite and isolated 'clubhouses' members of the clique believe they exist both outside and above both the student body and wider community in the upper world, or in the case of the Physical Kids, it leads them to eventually seek out the upper world of Fillory. In fact, Richard explains that the Greek class are almost completely segregated from the wider community:

> I read papers and watched television from time to time (a habit which seemed to them an outrageous eccentricity, peculiar to me alone; none of them was in the least bit interested in anything that went on in the world, and their ignorance of current events and even recent history was rather astounding). Once, over dinner, Henry was quite surprised to learn from me that men had walked on the moon.[339]

Upon his acceptance into the Greek class Richard experiences a similar feeling of disconnectedness, describing a scene in the student dining hall:

> Next to me was a table of art students, branded as such by their ink-stained fingernails and the self-conscious paint splatters on their clothes; one of them was drawing on a cloth napkin with a black felt marker; another was eating a bowl of rice using inverted paintbrushes for chopsticks. I had never seen them before. As I drank my coffee and gazed around the dining room, it struck me that Georges Laforgue had been right, after all: I really was cut off from the college—not that I cared to be on intimate terms, by and large, with people who used paintbrushes for cutlery.[340]

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[336] Grossman, 102.
[337] Ibid, 90.
[338] Ibid, 95.
[339] Tartt, 98.
[340] Ibid, 163.

The Barn Night Crew likewise consider themselves to exist both outside and above the Culver Creek student body and, through their smoking habits and pranks, show a disregard for the school rules, or as Alaska puts it, 'a shared interest in booze and mischief.'[341] Upon joining the group, Pudge, like Richard, finds himself isolated from the wider Culver Creek community: 'After three months I knew most people, but I regularly talked to very few—just the Colonel, Alaska and Tukami.'[342]

The Physical Kids, too, perceive themselves as the elite among the Brakebills community, as Eliot states, 'Physical Magic always gets the best ones.'[343] They are more visible and flamboyant than the Greek class and the Barn Night Crew, though no less exclusive:

> A highly visible clique, always earnestly conferring and having fits of obstreperous laughter, conspicuously fond of themselves and uninterested in the greater Brakebills populace. There was something different about them; though it was hard to say what. They just seemed to know who they were, and they weren't constantly looking around at everybody else as if they could tell them.[344]

Quentin describes the group as the 'warm secret heart of the secret world'[345] and, like Richard and Pudge, quickly loses touch with the wider Brakebills community and his initial fascination with the campus following his acceptance into the group.

As discussed in Section 2.3, the Physical Kids also have a second 'clubhouse', Fillory, which as Brakebills is impenetrable to the wider community, is inaccessible to both the wider and student communities. It is in Fillory, as in Francis' country house in *The Secret History* where the Physical Kids not only break from the other students, but enter a new world governed completely by an ideology (in this case magic) separate from the wider and student communities.

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[341] Green, 20.
[342] Ibid, 86.
[343] Grossman, 105.
[344] Ibid, 56.
[345] Ibid, 103.

It is this separation between the clique and the student and wider communities that leads members of the clique to consider they have entered the upper world and rationalises their perverse and destructive behaviours.

The protagonist's movement through these three settings further serves to highlight his journey through cycles of repression and return. Typically he begins the narrative in the wider community, which he associates with trauma. He is then accepted into an exclusive school or university where he escapes that trauma, and finally he is initiated into the clique where he can rewrite that trauma. In the aftermath of the crime, as further discussed in Section 3.7, he is isolated from both the clique and the campus and returned to (what he considers) the inferior wider community and the site of his initial trauma—with the exception of Pudge in *Looking for Alaska*, who manages to break the cycle by confronting his role in Alaska's death. This experience is doubly distressing, as Plato explains returning to the cave wall after knowing the upper world is overwhelmingly frustrating and upsetting: 'He [who has inhabited the upper world] would rather suffer anything than entertain these false notions and live in this miserable manner.'[346]

3.4 Isolated and Stylised Settings in *In the Company of Saints*

As in earlier campus clique crime novels, action in *In the Company of Saints* is divided between the wider community beyond the campus, the campus and the clique's two 'clubhouses'. Lucie views the inhabitants of Cootbowie and the city as unsophisticated—chained to the cave wall. She describes the people in Cootbowie as 'dictated by the tides and rains, and my life was attuned to different rhythms now.'[347]

[346] Plato, *The Republic*, location 7, 621.
[347] *In the Company of Saints*, 140.

To reflect her low view of the wider community, Lucie depicts both wider community settings as unappealing. For example, she describes an afternoon in Cootbowie:

> The air reeked of seaweed and rotting fish and the sun had sunk into everything, making steering wheels and garden taps too hot to touch. From my window I could see that the tide was out, the water lying flat and far away like a heat mirage in the middle of the bay.[348]

Lucie is removed from this scene, standing behind a window looking out demonstrating that she does not consider herself to belong in this landscape. She similarly sets herself apart in her unfavourable descriptions of the city. Here she observes the city's nightlife from Meg's balcony:

> Down on the street taxis sped past, horns blaring as they spirited late-night partygoers back to the suburbs. Guys called after scantily clad girls as they tottered past in their stilettos. Beneath their laughter the night pulsed with the menacing throb of techno beats from a nearby club and a sudden wind gusted burger wrappers and stomped-on chip packets along the footpath.
>
> But where I sat the sounds were muffled and the night clear. The occasional star winked through the haze and the wind blew sweet and warm across my cheeks.[349]

Lucie believes furthering her education will raise her above these wider communities and describes the early part of her first semester as 'those first enchanted weeks, when the world seemed bathed in new light.'[350] Consequently, her descriptions of Mawson University are idyllic, romanticised and strike a distinct contrast to her depictions of the wider community.

Echoing Richard Papen, she describes Mawson as being

> like something from a dream. First came the neat rectangles of the sports' fields rolled out between the trees and glittering with morning dew. Then the gymnasium, full of energetic figures on treadmills and ergo machines overlooking the hockey pitches and lower car parks, which, despite the early hour, were already filling up. As we rounded the final bend, the trees

[348] Ibid, 13.
[349] Ibid, 23.
[350] Ibid, 60.

> suddenly cleared and the main buildings rose tall and white against the morning sky. My excitement muddled with apprehension; it was almost too perfect.[351]

Prior to the final draft of the manuscript, Lucie grew up in Coobowie, a small town on the 'heel' of South Australia's Yorke Peninsula and moved to Adelaide to study. When beginning work on *In the Company of Saints*, I anticipated that establishing an isolated Australian campus setting would be problematic. While some Australian students do move away from home for school and/or university, this is not the norm as it is in the United States. Furthermore, unlike many campuses in the US, the majority of Australian boarding schools and universities are located in major metropolitan hubs and, consequently, students remain connected to a wider community beyond the campus. I considered that this would perhaps partly explain why the campus clique crime novel had not been developed in Australia.

However, this problem was easily overcome. I located Mawson University on the fringe of Adelaide (one of Australia's smaller capitals), looking down on the city and literally raising students above Adelaide's general population, as Lucie notes: 'Mawson University isn't in the city. It sits on a hill above it'[352] … 'guarded by a fortress of trees, invisible from the main road'.[353]

As Tartt fictionalised Bennington College as Hampden College, I gave myself creative freedom by giving fictional names to real (and imagined) places. However, the overwhelming response from my supervisor, Dr Ruth Starke and Hardie Grant Egmont editor, Karri Hedge; and my Writers Victoria Business Mentor and editor, Katie Evans, was that the Adelaide setting wasn't the right fit. As Hedge pointed out:

> for much of Australia, the perception of Adelaide (correctly or not!) is that it's more like a large country town than a big, cosmopolitan city… For a majority of your readership, Lucie's

[351] Ibid, 33-34.
[352] Ibid, 33.
[353] Ibid, 33.

> response to Adelaide may seem unrealistically awe-struck… Ideally, I think a bigger change, like moving to London, New York or Paris, would work better.[354]

At my Writers Victoria Business Mentorship session Evans suggested, given the size of the Australian YA crossover market, a non-specific setting would make the manuscript more saleable and accessible to an international readership.[355]

Hilton suggested focusing more on atmospherics than geographic specifics, as in the invested settings I had more freedom to play with mood:

> Manderley, Peter's home, works well. It sits into the landscape of Gothic – distant, remote, imposing – all the things that work visually. With the city settings perhaps more emphasis on darkness and shadow within these places might help sustain the imposing atmosphere. Even in daylight parks and university coffee shops, could be filtered through the ominous Gothic light.[356]

Consequently, I removed specific references to Adelaide and focused on externalising Lucie's psychological landscape in the setting.

From the first day of classes, Lucie suffuses the campus with Gothic imagery, as a means of foreshadowing the sinister events to come. For example, her first description of the campus lake, where the Saints eventually sink Berthum's body is described as:

> far bigger than I'd imagined, it's surface dark and unnaturally still, like the menacing eye of a storm amid the first day, pre-class chaos erupting on its banks.[357]

Gothic imagery becomes increasingly dominant Lucie's descriptions of the campus, particularly after Berthum first kisses her, and often precede the appearance of Berthum himself, such as in the moments leading up to their first meeting by the lake, when Lucie describes the campus as 'shrouded in an unnatural stillness, broken only by the slow creep of shadows inching out from the buildings.'[358] These descriptions culminate in the storm that breaks the night of the murder and continues throughout the investigation into Berthum's disappearance. In the hours before the murder Lucie notes:

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[354] Karri Hedge, email correspondence (27 April 2012).
[355] Writers Victoria Business Mentorship session with Katie Evans (Melbourne: The Wheeler Centre, 5 June 2013).
[356] Nette Hilton, mentor's report (18 September 2012).
[357] Ibid, 35.
[358] Ibid, 104.

> All afternoon clouds had been gathering, their vaporous white thickening to an angry grey. Now they blocked the sky completely, nudging against each other and giving the night a static charge that caused the hairs on the back of my neck to stand on end.[359]

In the moments leading up to Berthum's death:

> Thunder cracked overhead—a single, deafening *boom* to herald the arrival of the storm. Wind screamed through the trees and the sagging clouds dropped their load; the rain became a downpour.[360]

Infusing her descriptions of Mawson with Gothic imagery not only heightens tension by foreshadowing the ominous events to come, but demonstrates Berthum's increasing dominance of what should be a place of refuge for the Saints; as Botting explains: 'Gothic atmospheres—gloomy and mysterious—have repeatedly signalled the disturbing return of pasts upon presents and evoked emotions of terror.'[361]

Berthum's infiltration of the Mawson campus necessitates the Saints' retreat to their 'clubhouses'. As in *The Secret History*, the Saints have two such retreats: Meg's inner-city apartment and Manderley—the Sinclair's country estate. Given the Saints do not reside at Mawson and as Mawson becomes an increasingly hostile site for them, it is unlikely and impractical for them to have a clubhouse on campus. The Saints primarily occupy Meg's apartment in the first half of the narrative when they still maintain some links to the student and wider communities. However, the apartment's interior is modelled on Richard's descriptions of the Lyceum[362] and strikes a distinct contrast to Lucie's depictions of the city. It is:

> the kind of place where I imagined writers might meet for secret salons. The air was sweet with incense and a hint of cannabis. There were overlapping rugs on the floor, sagging couches plump with cushions, mismatched side tables hidden under a tasteful mess of scarves and scattered books, and on one a vase of dusky roses catching the afternoon light. Two of the walls had floor

[359] Ibid, 190.
[360] Ibid, 195.
[361] Botting, 1.
[362] Tartt, 28.

> to ceiling shelves, with various knick-knacks and photographs cluttered between rows of books.[363]

Following Lucie's humiliation and Peter's attack against his father at the Old Collegians' Ball, the Saints spend increasing amounts of time at Manderley, and following Lucie's sexual encounter with Berthum, make it their permanent retreat. It is here that they break from both the student and wider communities, as Lucie notes: 'Life beyond the gates of Manderley began to slip into the abstract, while the world we built within its walls took on new and heightened meaning.'[364]

The Saints, like the Greek class, complete this segregation by refusing to engage with the wider community: 'The Saints detested television. They didn't read newspapers or magazines and they had no Facebook or Twitter accounts.'[365] And Lucie admits:

> In my early days at Mawson I made a half-hearted effort to get to know some of the creative writing and English majors, but I found their opinions to be largely ill-informed … Without realising it, I found myself associating almost exclusively with the Saints.[366]

Consequently, she, too, becomes further disconnected from the wider community, as she discovers late in the narrative when watching television for updates on the investigation into Berthum's disappearance:

> Watching the news updates I began to realise the extent of our isolation. A man accused of breaking into homes and butchering family pets had been apprehended after a search lasting several weeks; large sections of the east coast had been flooded for over a month; a federal election had been called; we'd had no idea.[367]

By isolating themselves from the communities where they experience trauma, the Saints free themselves to develop a new (and to their way of thinking) superior community in the upper world.

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[363] *In the Company of Saints*, 9.
[364] Ibid, 135.
[365] Ibid, 134.
[366] Ibid, 47.
[367] Ibid, 205.

As in earlier campus clique crime novels, Lucie's progression through these sites reflects her movement through cycles of repression and return. She begins the narrative in Cootbowie, her primary site of trauma. She then progresses to the more ideal locations of Mawson and Meg's apartment and when Mawson also proves dissatisfying, she moves beyond the city to Manderley where she describes her experiences as among 'the best in my memory'.[368] However, following Berthum's murder and Peter's suicide she is expelled from Manderley, Meg's apartment and Mawson (in that order) and returned to the wider community where she is finally forced to confront the consequences of her destructive behaviour.

As in earlier campus clique crime novels, Lucie uses styled settings to indicate the Saints' various levels of removal from the student and wider communities and how the Saints perceive each of those communities. However, she takes this a step further by using a Gothic rendering of Mawson to indicate increasingly persistent threat of the return of the repressed Berthum poses to the clique.

In drafting the manuscript I found the Australian setting problematic, though not in the way I anticipated. Rather than finding my original Adelaide setting a difficult cultural fit, I found using a real setting inhibited my ability to create a sensational narrative. Adelaide has a reputation for infamy. Unofficially, it is often referred to as 'the murder capital' and Salman Rushdie in his 1984 Writers' Week speech said it would make 'a perfect setting for a Stephen King novel or horror story'.[369] However, in order to tap into the city's darkness, I found I needed to twist it slightly out of focus. Ultimately I found nothing to be gained by relocating the campus clique crime novel to an Australian campus setting, as removing the specifics of this setting did not detract from the manuscript.

[368] Ibid, 188.
[369] Salman Rushdie, Adelaide Writers' Week address (1984).

3.5 Destructive Authority Figures

According to T. S. Eliot:

> To be trained, taught or instructed above the level of one's abilities and strength may be disastrous; for education is a strain, and can impose greater burdens upon the mind than the mind can bear.[370]

While members of the clique are precocious in their own right, one of their teachers typically encourages them and presents them with powerful and complex ideas beyond their grasp. Such ideas encourage the clique to abandon the governing philosophies and morality of the wider community and practice a new, destructive ideology. This teacher develops a special relationship with the clique, acting in *loco parentis* and encouraging the students' heightened sense of self worth. However, when the clique attempt to translate the destructive authority figure's teachings into practise, he[371] abandons the group, leaving them unequipped to deal with the consequences of their actions.

Julian Morrow in *The Secret History* is the most complex and villainous of these destructive figures. As his antecedent, Jean Brodie, in Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961) grooms her *crème de la crème*, Julian handpicks his students and mentors them as his protégés, accepting, 'only a limited number of students. A *very* limited number', and 'conducts the selection based on a personal rather than academic basis.'[372]

Indeed, Julian's relationship with the Greek class, and with Henry in particular, is more personal than professional. He attends their dinner parties,[373] lunches with them,[374] calls them at home[375] and even allows Henry to stay at his house for several

[370] T. S. Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1962) 100.
[371] As with the protagonists, the destructive authority figures in *The Secret History, Looking for Alaska* and *The Magicians* are coincidently male.
[372] Tartt, 13.
[373] Ibid, 100.
[374] Ibid, 268.
[375] Ibid, 225.

days after Henry returns from Italy.[376] Furthermore, Richard explains that Julian casts his students in a highly romantic light, encouraging them to indulge in their false sense of superiority:

> He refused to see anything about any of us except our most engaging qualities, which he cultivated and magnified to the exclusion of all our tedious and less desirable ones…There was never any doubt that he did not wish to see us in our entirety, or see us, in fact, in anything other than the magnificent roles he had invented for us: *genis gratus, coropre glabellus, artre multissius, et fortuna opulentus*—smooth-cheeked, soft-skinned, well-educated, and rich.[377]

Richard admits he is drawn to Julian for, 'That flattering light in which he saw me, for the person I was when I was with him, for what it was he allowed me to be.'[378] Furthermore, Julian functions as a replacement father figure to his students:

> As my own parents had distanced themselves from me more and more—a retreat they had been in the process of effecting for many years—it was Julian who had grown to be the sole figure of parental benevolence in my life, or, indeed, of benevolence of any sort. To me, he seemed my only protector in the world.[379]

As young children learn by imitating their parents, the Greek class's shared and 'intensely cultivated'[380] behaviours are learned from Julian. Their isolation from the wider community reflects Julian's own disconnectedness, as Richard explains:

> By his own choice, he had so little to do with the outside world that he frequently considered the commonplace to be bizarre: an automatic–teller machine, for instance, or some new peculiarity in the supermarket—cereal shaped like vampires, or refrigerated yogurt sold in pop-top cans.[381]

However, Julian's relationship with his students is selfish and egotistical and he feeds on their youthful company and attention like a vampire, ultimately having a destructive influence. The first sentence he teaches Richard in Greek is: '*χαλεπά τα*

[376] Ibid, 151.
[377] Ibid, 365.
[378] Ibid, 576.
[379] Ibid, 570-571.
[380] Ibid, 33.
[381] Ibid, 559.

καλά. Beauty is harsh.'[382] He is responsible for suggesting the *bacchanal*, leading the clique in a discussion of Plato's four divine maddnesses:

> We don't like to admit it, but the idea of losing control is one that fascinates controlled people such as ourselves more than almost anything. All truly civilized people—the ancients no less than us—have civilized themselves through the wilful repression of the old, animal self.[383]

To which he adds:

> What could be more beautiful, to souls like the Greeks or our own, than to lose control completely? To throw off the chains of being for an instant, to shatter the accident of our mortal selves?... If we are strong enough in our souls we can rip away the veil and look that naked, terrible beauty right in the face; let God consume us, devour us, unstring our bones. Then spit us out reborn.[384]

In this dialogue Julian is convincing his students that they are among the select few capable of turning from the cave wall. However, while he gifts his students with heady ideas and a heightened sense of self-worth, he abandons the clique by taking an indefinite leave of absence from Hampden College when he discovers that his teachings have indirectly led to Bunny's death.[385]

In abandoning the clique, Julian reveals his true character, as Richard states:

> It was as if the charming theatrical curtain had dropped away and I saw him for the first time as he really was: not the benign old sage, the indulgent and protective good-parent of my dreams, but ambiguous, a moral neutral, whose beguiling trappings concealed a being watchful, capricious, and heartless.[386]

However, the most convincing evidence of Julian's destructive influence lies in Richard's description of Henry's suicide:

> The business with Julian was heavy on his mind; it had impressed him deeply. I think he felt the need to make a noble gesture, something to prove to us and himself that it was in fact possible to put those high cold principles which Julian had taught us to use. *Duty, piety, loyalty, sacrifice*. I

[382] Ibid, 612.
[383] Ibid, 43.
[384] Ibid, 44-5.
[385] Ibid, 580.
[386] Ibid, 574.

> remember his reflection in the mirror as he raised the pistol to his head. His expression was one of rapt concentration, of triumph, almost.[387]

In *Looking for Alaska* the Eagle and Dr. Hyde are less destructive than Julian in that they do not knowingly abandon their students in their time of need. However, like Julian, both teach complex ideas that the students lack the maturity to translate into practice in time to prevent and cope with Alaska's death, leaving the students to feel as though they have no support from the adult community.

Rather than taking charge of disciplining wayward students, the Eagle implements the Jury, encouraging the students to take responsibility for themselves as a group. However, the students are not yet mature enough to do so. Instead, this system discourages students from seeking advice, even when it is clear that their problems are beyond their control. For example, when Pudge and the Colonel light firecrackers to distract the Eagle so that Alaska can drive off campus, when, given Alaska's clear distress, they should have gone to him for help.[388]

Dr. Hyde, the religion teacher, is perhaps a closer match to Julian than the Eagle. However, in keeping with *Looking for Alaska*'s redemptive theme, he ultimately plays a constructive rather than destructive role. Over the course of the narrative he explores various philosophies with his students, but fails to understand that such ideas are beyond their comprehension, for example he explains the Buddhist philosophy that:

> Everything that comes together falls apart… The cells and organs and systems that make you you—they came together, grew together, and so must fall apart… Entropy increases. Things fall apart.[389]

In the weeks following Alaska's death Pudge finds these ideas despairing:

> *Someday no one will remember that she ever existed*, I wrote in my notebook, and then, *or that I did*. Because memories fall apart, too. And then you're left with nothing, left not even with a ghost but with its shadow.[390]

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[387] Ibid, 612.
[388] Green, 132-133.
[389] Ibid, 197.

Pudge is unlike the Greek class in that he acknowledges his failure to see this higher truth rather than acting on his partial understanding of it. Consequently, he is not too proud to seek out redemption for his destructive actions and in doing so is rewarded with a fuller understanding of Dr. Hyde's teachings, as is demonstrated in his final religion essay:

> I will forget her, yes. That which came together will fall apart imperceptibly slowly, and I will forget, but she will forgive my forgetting, just as I forgive her for forgetting me and the Colonel and everyone but herself and her mom in those last moments she spent as a person.[391]

The Physical Kids in *The Magicians* are mentored by Professor Bigby, a paranoid pixie with a fondness for Victorian-era fashion. However, Bigby is a minor character and exerts little influence over the narrative. Much more influential as a destructive authority figure is Dean Fogg, who initially entices young magicians to Brakebills by appealing to their sense of elitism, explaining: 'Admission here is quite competitive… I doubt there's a more exclusive school of any kind on the continent.'[392] He elaborates:

> Most people are blind to magic. They move through a blank and empty world. They're bored with their lives, and there's nothing they can do about it. They're eaten alive by longing, and they're dead before they die.
>
> But you live in the magical world, and it's a great gift.[393]

He bears resemblance to Julian, in that he encourages students to believe that his is an area of scholarship for the select few and studying magic raises them above the wider community. What he fails to tell potential students is that there will be no practical application for their studies once they graduate from Brakebills and, moreover, the highly disciplined education they receive will in no way prepare them for life in the non-magical community. In fact, it will put them at a severe disadvantage. It is not until

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[390] Ibid, 197.
[391] Ibid, 219.
[392] Grossman, 39.
[393] Ibid, 88.

the eve of their graduation that he finally admits that a magical education is worthless, if not highly destructive:

> Sometimes I wonder if man was really meant to discover magic. It doesn't really make sense. It's a little too perfect, don't you think? If there's a single lesson that life teaches us, it's that wishing doesn't make it so… I sometimes feel as though we've stumbled on a flaw in the system, don't you? A short circuit? A category error? A strange loop? Is it possible that magic is knowledge that would be better off foresworn?[394]

Upon re-entering the wider non-magical community the Physical Kids drift directionless and disillusioned, as Alice explains to Quentin:

> You don't have to do anything. That's what you don't understand... I know you think it's going to be all quests and dragons and fighting evil and whatever… But it's not. You don't see it yet. There's nothing out there.[395]

After nearly a year in the real world, Quentin comes to share her point of view:

> Something like a panic attack came over him. They were really in trouble out here. There was nothing to hang on to. They couldn't go on like this forever.[396]

Both Tartt and Grossman experienced economic difficulties and significant periods of unemployment following their graduation from Bennington and Harvard respectively, as Grossman recalls he:

> Spent several aimless years wandering around reading and temping and trying and failing to learn various foreign languages while my cleverer classmates accumulated money and houses and such.[397]

Consequently these destructive authority figures who gift their students with knowledge, but abandon them when they fail to apply their learning to their lives outside the classroom, can be read as a criticism of the academy's (particularly elite universities') failure to prepare arts graduates for practical careers and their adult lives, in addition to being instruments for setting the clique on a destructive path.

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[394] Ibid, 216-217.
[395] Ibid, 205-206.
[396] Ibid, 236.
[397] Grossman, 'Bio' *LevGrossman.com*. Available: www.levgrossman.com/about. Accessed: March 31, 2011.

3.6 Richard Berthum as Destructive Authority Figure in *In the Company of Saints*

In the Prologue to *In the Company of Saints*, Lucie introduces Berthum as the 'villain', but states, 'I wish I could blame him for robbing us of our happy ending, but the labels I applied to each of us have become unstuck'.[398] In building Berthum's character and his relationship with the Saints I sought to upset the traditional power relationship between teacher and student in order to avoid an easy villain/victim dichotomy, and to hold Lucie accountable for her destructive behaviour. Rather than functioning as a criticism of the academy's failure to prepare graduates for the work force, Berthum is a comment on the abusive power structures that can occur within educational institutions. He is more devious than previous destructive authority figures in that he abuses his power over students, in particular Peter and Lucie, with malicious intent. In relation to Peter this abuse is straightforward in that he sexually molests a minor under his care. His relationship with Lucie, however, is more complex. He initially abuses his power over her, giving her his number,[399] playing on her ambition to be a writer in order to kiss her[400] and later by complying with her desire to be sexually intimate with him.[401] However, unlike fifteen-year-old Peter, Lucie is an adult, capable of giving and withholding her consent and is partly, if not wholly, aware of the consequences of her final liaison with Berthum before she actively pursues him:

> with his eyes on me I felt like a goddess—but I hesitated, thinking of Meg and Bastian. They would be mortified if they ever found out my reason for coming here… But, I reasoned, Meg had known about my appointment with Berthum and hadn't stopped me, and as far as I knew, she'd never breathed a word about the kiss. Besides, no one would find out. It would be my secret.
>
> I tilted my head to Berthum's and pressed my lips to his mouth.[402]

[398] *In the Company of Saints*, 3.
[399] Ibid, 31.
[400] Ibid, 66.
[401] Ibid. 168.
[402] Ibid, 168.

Here I sought to reflect the often-complex nature of sexual relationships between teachers and students and to deflect a significant portion of the blame for the Saints' eventual downfall back onto Lucie. As Barbara Covett, Zoë Heller's unsettling narrator in *Notes on a Scandal* (2003), observes of the affair between Sheba Hart and her student, Stephen Connolly, that if their genders were reversed:

> I would have been just as wary of appropriating simple 'predator' and 'victim' labels to the two parties. Goodness knows, I have seen quite enough concupiscent girls in my time to be familiar with the sexual manipulation of which young females are capable.'[403]

Therefore, in constructing Lucie and Berthum's relationship I considered fictional texts depicting morally complex teacher/student liaisons, including David Mamet's play, *Oleanna* (1992), George Miller's film, *Gross Misconduct* (1993), J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999), Francine Prose's *Blue Angel* (2000), Emily Maguire's *Taming the Beast* (2006) and Eleanor Catton's *The Rehearsal* (2008). To a greater or lesser extent, all of these texts involve a female student using her sexuality to bring about the downfall of a male teacher. I also considered real life cases, such as the sexual harassment charges brought against Dr. Colin Shepherd at Ormond College in 1991, as well as critical examinations of these cases and their political implications, including Helen Garner's *The First Stone: Some Questions About Sex and Power* (1995).

Creating this more complex power relationship between the destructive authority figure and the protagonist allowed me to construct Berthum as a malicious, antagonistic figure, while avoiding an easy distribution of blame for the various criminal acts committed throughout the narrative.

[403] Zoë Heller, *Notes on a Scandal* (Penguin Contemporary Classics ed.), (London, Penguin, 2011) 85.

3.7 The Crime as Major Climax

As discussed in Section 1.3, one of the ways the campus clique crime novel distinguishes itself from the campus crime novel is in the role of the major crime. Rather than serving as the inciting incident, it takes on the role of major climax.

In fact, in the campus clique crime novel there are two crimes: a minor crime and a major crime, with the minor crime, being typically an immoral or rule-breaking act on the part of the clique, which serves as the minor climax and foreshadows and sets in motion the chain of action resulting in the major crime, a grossly immoral or violent act resulting in a death and which serves as the major climax.

In *The Secret History* the minor crime is the *bacchanal*, in which the Greek class murder a farmer and make it look like an accident. The major crime is Bunny's murder, which they similarly engineer to appear accidental and which they are, in part, motivated to commit when Bunny blackmails them over the farmer's death. In *Looking for Alaska* the Barn Night Prank constitutes the minor crime through which the Barn Night Crew learn to distract the Eagle with fireworks while breaking into the school office, and also discover Alaska's guilt over her mother's death. The major crime, a car crash causing Alaska's death, occurs two days later. Pudge and the Colonel again use fireworks to divert the Eagle's attention so that Alaska can drive off campus, drunk and distraught with renewed guilt after forgetting the anniversary of her mother's death.

In *The Magicians* there are two minor crimes. First, the Beast kills Amanda Orloff, demonstrating his violent potential. Second, Quentin, Eliot and Janet have a threesome. This is a desperate act on Quentin's part to refuse to settle in a stable relationship with Alice in the non-magical world. The tension caused by this act sees the Physical Kids retreat further into the magical world to Fillory where Alice fights and is destroyed by the Beast.

The major crime is made possible by the clique members' belief that they have broken from the cave wall and is a key point in the cycle of repression and return, being an act of repression that must in turn be repressed. It also plays a pivotal role in the narrative's structure. The narrative's rising action details how the clique are driven to commit these crimes and the dénouement deals with their attempt to conceal their involvement in the crime and the psychological effects the crime has on members of the clique. The crime further marks the point where clique members cease to draw together and begin to move apart. For example, in *The Secret History* Richard describes how members of the Greek class seek space away from the group following the murder:

> We were all a little sick of one another… I suppose there was much less to talk about, and no reason to stay up until four or five in the morning.
>
> I felt strangely free.[404]

The group grow increasingly detached before disbanding altogether in the wake of Henry's suicide: 'It was as if some thread which bound us had been abruptly severed, and soon after we began to drift apart.'[405]

Similarly, one of the key themes in *Looking for Alaska* is: 'That which comes together will fall apart.'[406] In the lead up to Alaska's death while staging the Barn Night Prank the group are at their closest, sharing their biggest secrets in a game of Best Day/Worst Day.[407] However, following Alaska's death, the Barn night Crew become isolated from one another, 'stuck in our heads, the distance between us unbridgeable.'[408]

After graduating from Brakebills the Physical Kids are dissatisfied with their life in Manhattan, but regain their former intimacy upon entering Fillory in the days leading up to Alice's death. However, after Alice is destroyed by the Beast, the group disband with Quentin wishing

[404] Tartt, 479.
[405] Ibid, 614.
[406] Green, 219.
[407] Ibid, 114-120.
[408] Ibid, 156.

> he had died, and if he couldn't have death, at least he had this, the next best thing: total isolation… He was broken in a way magic could never fix.[409]

Further supporting this, campus clique crime novels are often divided into two parts, using the major crime as the splitting point, for example Book I of *The Secret History* ends as Henry prepares to push Bunny into the ravine, and in *Looking for Alaska* the narrative is divided into the periods 'Before' and 'After' Alaska's death.

Given the major crime is also the major act of repression, making this act the major climax draws further attention to the cycles of repression and return that rule the clique and diverts attention away from the criminal act itself to the clique's motivations for committing it.

3.8 The Crime as Major Climax in *In the Company of Saints*

In *In the Company of Saints* Lucie and Berthum's sexual liaison and Lucie's lie about this indiscretion, being a deeply immoral act on Lucie's part, constitute the minor crime and directly results in the major crime, Berthum's murder. As in earlier campus clique crime novels, the major crime signals the major climax for the clique. As Lucie explains in the days before Berthum's murder:

> My encounter with Berthum had the effect of tightening a drawstring around our little group. We were in the process of creating a secret that would bind us together for the rest of our lives.[410]

And in the hours following the murder:

> All our excitement was now spent, and we found ourselves exhausted, facing the long downward crawl through the dénouement. We slumped on the chesterfields in the library, barely able to look at one another.[411]

Casting Lucie as an active participant in her story meant that she needed to take greater responsibility for the major crime than her antecedents. However, having her personally commit the murder would have been clunky and out of character and, as

[409] Grossman, 370.
[410] *In the Company of Saints*, 189.
[411] Ibid, 200.

discussed in Section 3.6, I wanted to avoid an easy villain/victim dichotomy. My solution was to make Lucie solely responsible for the minor crime, which propels the Saints to committing the major crime. Because I did not wish to make Lucie an outright villain, her liaison with Berthum is not a malicious act, but rather motivated by anger, hurt and her major drive to be desired and accepted. While whether she understands just how deeply her actions will affect Peter and the Saints as a whole remains deliberately ambiguous; she never intends for them to learn of her indiscretion: 'It would be my secret.'[412]

Unlike her antecedents, as an active narrator, Lucie narrates her own story rather than the story of her friends. Consequently, the minor crime, being her major indiscretion, becomes if not the major climax, the major turning point marking the shift from Lucie's enchanted life with the Saints to the nightmare return of undeniable traumas and perversions. To emphasise the significance of this action I, like Tartt and Green divided my narrative into two parts: Semester One and Semester Two, with the split occurring between Lucie's conception of the minor crime and its execution that sets her story on its downward trajectory.

Dividing the narrative into an idyllic first half and a tumultuous second initially proved problematic. An early draft of the manuscript was long listed for Hardie Grant Egmont's Ampersand project and received detailed feedback from editor Karri Hedge, who wrote that:

> the setup was perhaps a little misleading—I really had no idea to expect such a brutal turn of events from reading the sample [of the first five chapters], and I was quite shocked to read the synopsis!... I thought this was setting itself up to be a nice, romantic, coming-of-age tale, and I was actually a little disappointed to realise that this wasn't where it was heading.[413]

[412] Ibid, 168.
[413] Karri Hedge, email correspondence (27 April 2012).

To address this I followed Tartt's example and added a prologue to establish the dark tone of the narrative and explain that the romance is a construct of Lucie's devising, and that she is in some way responsible for two of the characters' deaths:

> At the fringes of my happiest memories are shadows I've long ignored. They narrate an alternate history, painful to acknowledge and so at odds with the one I convinced myself was true, that I'm no longer sure where or with whom the blame lies for what we did.[414]

There is also some foreshadowing in the first half of the narrative, but, like Tartt, my focus in this section is on building nostalgia and romance in the first half to create a more dramatic contrast with the criminal events and guilt in the second and to demonstrate the enormity of what Lucie stands to lose and how far she eventually falls.

3.9 Conclusion

The campus clique crime novel's use of four key devices supports cycles of repression and return and the protagonist's transition from the 'cave wall' to the 'upper world' and back. They achieve this by establishing the protagonist's driving desire for self-improvement and to escape past trauma that motivates him to turn from the cave wall and seek acceptance into the upper world, having the protagonist move through increasingly isolated and stylised settings that reflect his view of the communities they support, establishing an authority figure who (mis)guides the clique into the upper world and using the minor and major crimes as climactic events that draw attention to the desire to repress past traumas and behaviours that motivate them.

I used this analysis to inform the narrative of *In the Company of Saints*. In doing so, found that locating the novel in a distinctive Australian setting added nothing significant to the manuscript and was, in fact, inhibiting. This perhaps explains one reason why Australian writers have not sought to add an Australian sub-set to the campus clique crime novel. However, by analysing these key narrative devices, I

[414] *In the Company of Saints*, 3.

identified another area for innovation in casting Lucie as an active rather than a passive narrator. This complicated her power relationship with the destructive authority figure and necessarily altered the structure of the narrative, making her actions rather than the actions of the clique the story's focus and the minor rather than the major crime the major turning point.

Conclusion

This exegesis establishes that the campus clique crime novel exists as a small but significant sub-genre of campus fiction, originating with Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*. It identifies the sub-genre as predominantly American, though acknowledges a similar group of British novels and a handful of Australian novels that share strong commonalities with this sub-genre and suggests that these are a subject for further study.

It locates the campus clique crime novel in the wider genre of campus fiction, specifically acknowledging its antecedents in the Bennington Brat Pack novels and (with the exception of *the Secret History*) YA clique fiction of the early 2000s, and finds it has surprisingly little in common with traditional campus crime fiction.

An analysis of three primary texts establishes the campus clique crime novel's concern with cycles of repression and return and the clique's ascension to a perceived 'upper world'. This analysis further identifies four key narrative devices common to these novels and considers how they support the sub-genre's key themes.

I then used this analysis to guide the writing of *In the Company of Saints* and to identify areas where I might challenge the limits of the form. Given the lack of Australian campus clique crime novels, I initially experimented with an explicitly Australian setting. However, a discussion of a potential Australian sub-set of the campus clique crime novel and of those existing novels which are similar yet distinct from the American group is a large enough subject to deserve a separate study and is beyond the scope of this thesis. On the advice of both my supervisor and my mentor I revised *In the Company of Saints* to a generic setting.

I found scope for innovating the campus clique crime novel by creating an active protagonist who not only influences the events of the narrative, but also manipulates her retelling of those events. This necessarily affected other areas of the

narrative; namely it transferred some of the negative power of the destructive authority figure to Lucie and shifted the major turning point from the major to the minor crime. Therefore, it is through Lucie's character as an active and manipulative narrator that *In the Company of Saints* extends the campus clique crime sub-genre while still incorporating its key themes and narrative devices.

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