A Grim Fairy Tale: A Mythopoetic Discourse on Taboo, Trauma and Anti-oppressive Pedagogy

by

KEVIN HARVEY KIRKLAND

B.Mus., The University of Alberta, 1985
M.A., California State University, 1999

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
Faculty of Education
The Centre for Cross-Faculty Inquiry

We accept this dissertation as conforming to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
March, 2004

© Kevin Harvey Kirkland, 2004
ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a critical, performative exploration and analysis of mother-son incest as a site for educational inquiry. Particular attention is given to the sexual abuse of gay males. The text challenges and re-enacts personal and social perceptions of taboos as spaces of silence, trauma, and transformation, drawing on discourses of anti-oppressive pedagogy and narratives of healing. My views of anti-oppressive pedagogy, influenced by Freire, Kumashiro, and others, trouble taboos as personal, political, and cultural narratives.

This inter/play of texts serves to acknowledge painful histories associated with incest and, on a conceptual level, to explore secrets, silences and shame around sexual abuse inbedded in cultural curriculum. Curriculum stems from currere meaning “to run,” as in a course, and narrative stems from narrare meaning to make known. When both terms are juxtaposed they suggest a running from knowing. What if traumatic sexual abuse histories were placed at the center of pedagogical inquiry?

Presented as a work of fiction, my dissertation is informed by an extensive literature review of mother-son incest. The image of a mother as a perpetrator of sexual abuse is antithetical to mythohistoric constructions of motherhood. Literature on incest reveals that men are less often viewed as abuse victims, that gay men experience much higher histories of abuse than heterosexuals, that homosexuality and early childhood sexual abuse may be correlated, and that both homosexuality and sexual abuse remain acutely silenced topics in education. All of this generates a lifelong sequelae of problems for male survivors.

Trauma necessitates a critical and creative reconsideration of educational research as a site of narrative inquiry and healing. The methodology I employed is mythopoetics presented in the form of a fairy tale within a play. Drawing on the fairy tale genre’s tradition as a vehicle for imparting moral and ethical messages, the encompassing play creates a forum for dialogue and disruption of the tale. Music, art, and photographs are integrated into the text to augment the mythopoetic presentation. Mythopoetics becomes an avenue of make believe and a framework for anti-oppressive pedagogy. If education is about learning new ways of being and becoming in the world, we need to re/collect difficult subjects in order to transform lived experiences of learners.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract................................................................................................................... ii

Table of Contents ................................................................................................. iii

List of Tables ........................................................................................................ iv

List of Figures ........................................................................................................ v

List of Songs .......................................................................................................... vi

Preface .................................................................................................................... vii

Acknowledgments ................................................................................................. viii

Dedication ................................................................................................................. xi

ACT I: On a Clear Day ........................................................................................... 1
Program Notes ......................................................................................................... 61

ACT II: A Grim Fairy Tale ....................................................................................... 65
Program Notes ......................................................................................................... 115

ACT III: The Manifesto: Out Spoken ................................................................. 116
3.1 Prince Eddy’s Manifesto ................................................................................. 142
3.2 The World is Language ............................................................................... 143
3.3 The Undiscovered Country ......................................................................... 144
3.4 The Myths Behind Incest Myths ................................................................. 149
3.5 Problematizing Traditional Myths ............................................................... 160
3.6 Mythologization ........................................................................................... 161
3.7 Medicalization .............................................................................................. 161
3.8 Disappearance .............................................................................................. 162
3.8 Taboo ............................................................................................................ 165
3.9 Mothers as Perpetrators ............................................................................. 167
3.10 Table 1: General characteristics of female perpetrators of sexual abuse ... 172
3.10 Table 2: Problems Stemming from Mother-Son Incest ......................... 174
3.10 Table 3: Key Factors Deterring Treatment of Sexually Abused Gay Males . 180
Program Notes ..................................................................................................... 289

ACT IV: The Moral of the Story .......................................................................... 190
Program Notes ...................................................................................................... 226

Works Cited ........................................................................................................... 230
LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1. General characteristic of female perpetrators of sexual abuse .......................172
TABLE 2. Problems stemming from mother-son incest .............................................174
TABLE 3. Key factors deterring the treatment of sexually abused gay males ............180
LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Prince Eddy at the Threshold</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Playing the King</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Long live the Queen</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Captive Audience</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Speak No Evil</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Gently Down the Stream</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>The Spell of the Pomegranate</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>The Happy Prince</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>The Wanderer</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Returning to the Source</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>The Coronation</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF SONGS

1. Young at Heart ................................................................. 45
2. I Want a Girl ................................................................. 81
3. I Don't Want to Know ..................................................... 101
4. The Open Window (instrumental) ....................................... 105
5. On a Clear Day .............................................................. 191
6. River Bed ................................................................. 201
This is a work of fiction informed by social taboos and pedagogical silences. The illustrations and poetry are the original works of the author, and all photographs are from the author’s personal collection of himself as a child. All persons, places and events depicted herein are imaginary. Any resemblance to actual incidents or to persons living or dead is purely intentional.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Deepest love and gratitude to my partner Brent Hocking who has sailed with me through both the smooth and stormy rivers of life. It was your influence and belief in me that I could embark on doctoral studies, your idea that I could explore these issues as a dissertation, and especially your courageous support that inspires me and teaches me the beauty of your love. You mean everything to me.

Dr. Carl Leggo (Department of Language and Literacy Education, UBC, committee chair): poet, performer, pioneer, pen pal, purveyor, paragon, preceptor, paraclete—from parakletus, literally meaning "to call alongside of", advocate, comforter. Certainly, a holy man. Thank you for walking alongside me through this journey. Thank you for bringing my life to words.

Dr. Erika Hasebe-Ludt (Faculty of Education, University of Lethbridge, committee member): for your wisdom, warmth, compassion, inspiration, thorough editing, for your humanity and kindness, your scholarly imagination, for seeing before and beyond.

Dr. John Xiros Cooper (Department of English, UBC, committee member): for not batting an eye when I walked into your office and said I wanted to do a dissertation on mother-son incest, for knowing the undercurrents of Shakespeare's Hamlet, for your love of Rilke and of music, for wondering about what is not seen.

Dr. Sonya Corbin Dwyer (Faculty of Education, University of Regina, external examiner): heartfelt thanks for challenging my thinking, deepening my engagement with the text, and asking questions that will linger long beyond the 'finished' product.

Dr. Rita Irwin (Curriculum Studies, UBC, University Examiner): thank you for sharing your personal and academic experiences, for knowing the importance of dialogue in creating knowledge.

Dr. Norman Amundson (Educational & Counselling Psychology & Special Education, University Examiner): thank you for thought-provoking queries, insights, ponderings, for knowing the interplay between therapy and education.
Dr. Peter Gouzouasis (Curriculum Studies, UBC, Chair of the Defense): for your enthusiasm over my “frozen improvisation,” your passion for music, and for facilitating what was a wonderfully memorable defense gathering.

Dr. Karen Meyer (Curriculum Studies, UBC): for your visionary spirit and vocation in creating the Centre for the Study of Curriculum and Instruction, for opening up the possibility for other areas of study to occupy a space within education, for welcoming me in and calling me to do the work that sought expression.

My sister Carol: for proclaiming "I'm not keeping secrets anymore" on that fateful Remembrance Day, 1999. You have been a lifeline, ally, confessor, advocate—we've been able to rant and rave, cry and laugh, and most of all, grow closer than ever.

My brother Glen, who has always looked out for me as a father would, with love and kindness and concern, for exploring the undiscovered country of our childhoods, for your poetry and love of language.

My brother Bill, for deepening our connection these past few years and being willing to talk about even the most difficult of subjects; for believing.

My sister Julie, for believing, for surviving and thriving as you do.

Leah Rosling, sister of the Sacred Order. Dearest friend, confidante, sage, mystic, holy woman, compassionate soul, embodiment of hallowed sound and image.

Rolf Brulhart: dear friend, colleague, conspirator, yodeler, coffee pal, insurer. Thanks for being such a good friend!

Dr. Sharon Ronaldson, who traversed the waters of the dissertation from day one to finish with wit and wisdom. Thanks for sharing three amazing years of studies with me.
Dr. Eva Knell: for all the many compassionate roles you have played in my life—from physician to “sister,” ally and friend. Thank you!

Dr. Lynn Fels: for opening spaces of possibility in your class on performative inquiry; for your enthusiasm, validation, and honouring that is embodied in your teaching and your presence.

Dr. Kogila Adam-Moodley, for opening me up to the politics of memory, the parallels of the personal and national, on speaking the unspeakable.

Dr. Susan Edgerton, for intersecting trauma and education and inviting connections between lived experience and pedagogical approaches.

Avraham Cohen (therapist/counselor): for seeing me as I truly am, for not pathologizing my process, for being an advocate and ally beyond the days of our weekly interactions.

Dr. Cynthia Lopatka (psychologist): for asking the unaskable, for naming the unnamable, for speaking the unspoken, for transforming the immutable.

Doug Matear (therapist/educator at the B.C. Society for Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse): thank you for seeing me to the other side; for your influential guidance, the EMDR, even the Body for Life. You brought invaluable growth and thriving to my life.


Kata Sapic: you may never know how deeply connected we are. May your spirit shine and soar!

For the financial support from the following, I am deeply indebted:
University of British Columbia's University Graduate Fellowship
Canadian Music Therapy Trust Fund's Michael Cohl Fellowship
Health Sciences Association of British Columbia
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all of those who have endured the trauma of childhood sexual abuse and who are writing/righting themselves into wellness.
Paul: Burning incense. Yes, that’s what it is. Can you smell it? I’m burning incense. I’m trying to set the right mood for tonight’s reading and analysis. Do you like it?

Jack: [grimacing] Smells like a Catholic Church.

Paul: Do you think so? Funny you should say that, I got the censer at St. Paul’s bazaar last Saturday. I was hoping it would smell more exotic than this—more evocative. I detect the essence of star anise, so very fragrant. There’s something else too, something that’s vaguely reminiscent of something or somewhere I’ve been. Humph, I can almost remember it. If I had more time I’m sure I could tell you. But, I’m getting off track, aren’t I? So, welcome again to this little lecture series of mine. I may be tired and retired but I can still teach you a lesson, as it were. We make a quaint quintet. We should wait before getting started—there might be a couple more to arrive on this “dark and stormy night.”

Esau: [shivering] It’s nasty outside all right—the weather’s been unforgiving lately. But how are you doing, professor?

Paul: Why don’t I light a few candles in case the power goes out? Um, I’m just dandy, Esau. I’m glad you came forward to say you wanted to sit in on these talks. [To the others] Esau was the janitor at Providence for forty-four years.

Esau: Yup. Forty-four years. Would have been forty-five in August if my cataracts hadn’t gotten so bad that the docs had to operate.

Paul: So after he retired I hired him at the library. We’re not letting them put us out to pasture just yet, eh?

Esau: No siree. Forty-four years. At the retirement service the Monsignor gave me this gold pocket watch.

Edsel: Oh, it’s gorgeous!

Esau: I was never more proud.
Edsel: Who's that on the back? The Virgin Mary?

Esau: No, St. Lucy.

Paul: And Jack! It's a pleasure to have a former student who's still interested in my research and who's willing to make the two-hour trip from the city just to hear me repeat myself. You're looking well with your shock of black hair and ruddy complexion. How are you finding Memoria? ¹

Jack: Well, it's um...it's a sleepy little town considering it's the self-proclaimed Bingo capital of Canada. But as I said last week, you look well, professor. Still have your flaming red hair, I see! I'm balding and you've still got a full head of hair!

Paul: Ah, thank you. I don't know how much I'm professing these days. But doing well, indeed, apart from a little arthritis. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Paul. Are you Penny, who called me about tonight?

Penny: Yes. Penny Stillwell. I teach grade 6 in Centralia.

Paul: Yes, yes. A fine school. Last week—let's see—yes, all of you were here except for the lovely—

Edsel: Edsel. Edsel Rose.

Paul: Ah. Edsel? Like the car? Same spelling?

Edsel: Yes. My father was a car salesman. It was his favourite, and so was I.

Jack: 1957.

Edsel: [blushing] Eeek! Yes! Shush you! It always gives away my age! That was Henry's vehicle, you know.
Penny: Henry's?

Esau: Ford. He named the car after his only son, Edsel.²

Penny: His son? He gave you a boy's name?

Edsel: [blushing] No. Well, sort of. As I said, Dad named me after the car. I mean, at the time he didn't know it was going to be such a flop and the laughing stock of the car industry.

Paul: Well, there you have it: Edsel's auto biography. Welcome all of you! I'm the librarian here. That's my official title anyway in this huge, musty old schoolhouse. I prefer to think of myself more as an archivist or a curator. Oh sure there's books. Books everywhere. Up to the bloody ceiling. And here am I barely five feet tall. Short arms and stubby legs, a tiny, matchstick head. Just an old curmudgeon, they call me. Eye to eye with most of the grade school students that used to come here before the schoolhouse closed and the whole thing was converted into the town library. This used to be Providence School. Then they built that new one on the bog land the town donated, so now it's 'Providence Library.' I'm too short to reach the third shelf but I make do with a footstool or that old wooden ladder on its squeaky wheels. Books everywhere there are. In the basement, in the attic. Texts that have never been signed out. The stories you're missing! Call me a pack rat, I just love to acquire more books. When the day is done I love nothing better than to pick something off the shelf and read it. I don't care what it is, you know that? Really I don't. Sometimes I just close my eyes and wander along, feeling the surfaces of the books, the leather bindings, trying to read the embossed gold lettering as if it were Braille. I have films and fictions, novels and novellas. I have pamphlets and brochures, documents and records, collections and...recollections. Yes, I like that. Collections and recollections. That could be the theme of tonight's offering. I prefer to think of my collections here as archives: public records and historical documents that should be accessible to all. Unless of course you're the Surrey School Board. Did you hear about the big brouhaha over some kindergarten children's books that the Surrey School Board in B.C. wanted to ban?

Penny: Hmm, yeah, the whole thing was silly.

Edsel: I didn't really follow that. What happened?
Jack: It ended going all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada and they ruled that the Board was wrong to ban three children’s books from the library depicting same-sex families. James Chamberlain and Murray Warren fought the case to the bitter end. I went to a fundraising dance they had for the case when I was in Vancouver. It was a very expensive legal battle.

Edsel: Those books were for kindergarten? Seems kind of young to start teaching little kids about those people. Is that why they wanted to ban them?

Jack: Those people? I’m one of “those people.” Those people could be your child or your niece or nephew.

Edsel: Oh, I didn’t mean to sound negative. Don’t listen to me!

Jack: It’s OK. Let’s see…um, the School Board was trying to ban the books because of complaints from parents—parents of Christian, Sikh and Muslim traditions. It was obvious from the get go that they were in the wrong, but they stubbornly took it all the way.

Penny: What a waste of money. I don’t even have the basic supplies I ordered in September and then they spend hundreds of thousands on this! The School Act is based on principles of secularism and tolerance and yet they were deliberately excluding these books on the basis of homosexuality. And you know, I know of many schools that don’t have copies of those books. But, it’s like, until someone makes an issue of it and has the money to actually take it to court that things change. It’s only one city and one school board.

Jack: One at a time, I guess. And you know what the School Board’s lawyer said when it was all over? He insisted that it didn’t mean they were in the wrong, only that they were found to be wrong.3 Go figure! What does it take for people to learn?

Esau: Typical legal doubletalk.
Edsel: I'm sorry, maybe I don't understand. I guess I've lived a sheltered life. Are there that many homosexuals out there with children, who want to read them these books? Is that the problem?

Jack: [chuckling] The books are meant for anyone to read so that children grow up understanding that there are many varieties of families. When I went to school in the '60s homosexuality was never talked about, nor were there any books on the subject.

Edsel: What are the books called?

Jack: Um...

Paul: One dad, two dads, brown dads, blue dads by Johnny Valentine. Then there's Asha's Mums by Elwin and Paulse. And uh, Belinda's Bouquet and I'm forgetting the author right now.

Penny: Newman.

Paul: Right!

Penny: I read them to see what the controversy was all about. Belinda's Bouquet is about a girl who is teased about being fat and she's helped by a friend who has two moms. They're all really nice books that speak to social issues well beyond sexual orientation. And you know something, 18 of 20 families in Chamberlain's class—he teaches kindergarten—read the books and they presented a petition to the board in favour of their use. It was their classroom, their children!

Paul: Really? I hadn't heard that. It begs the question as to what rights teachers have in their classrooms. Whose voices are being given expression in the class? The students' voices? The students who speak better English? The teacher's? The school board's? The parents'? There's much more at stake here than three little books. There's an entire unspoken silence about issues like this that directly affect curriculum and instruction. But, I guess we could easily spend the evening discussing these important issues of the day but I should probably get on with our lecture for this evening. We had several more people last week but the weather's so foul tonight I expect everyone's huddled indoors. Still, I thought there might be one more coming. Maybe we'll keep an empty chair for a latecomer.
Edsel: Like the Friendly Giant. “A chair for two or more to curl up in…”

Paul: Yes, so inviting. Well, I guess no one else is coming but I’m so glad you’ve all come by.

Paul: So, the lesson last week was on the poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke.

Edsel: Oh, good. I love poetry—as long as it rhymes. I haven’t heard of her.

Jack: Him.

Edsel: Hmm?

Paul: Him. Rilke was a man.

Edsel: Oh, I thought you said “Maria.”

Paul: I did.

Edsel: Oh. I’m confused already! So…is he the one who wrote those children’s books you’re all talking about? My goodness, whatever happened to “Jack and Jill” and “Peter Pan”? I …oh Heavens to Murgatroyd, listen to me! I probably sound so ignorant. I’m just here to learn something tonight. I just got divorced 15 months ago. I’ve mostly been just a housewife all my life. I’ve got too much time on my hands and was getting bored with myself sitting at home crocheting afghans and puttering around in the greenhouse.

Paul: Wonderful. So glad that I can accompany you—all of you—on our little venture tonight. Please, please, gather round! Last week we looked at Rilke’s poem “Archaic Torso of Apollo,” followed by my interpretation of it. But you know, I’m going out on a limb tonight. I always lecture about Rilke. That’s all I know. And I know it very well, if I do say so myself. I’ve dedicated my life to the analysis of his works in the context of his life and times in Prague. One of my significant papers examined the fact Rilke’s mother made him dress in girls’ clothing and how this impacted his masculinity as reflected in
his writings. I even published a book on him in 1979. And I was going to talk more about him tonight, but you know, when I saw Jack come in last week I realized he's heard this stuff a million times before.

Jack: Always worthy of another listen, professor. Could we hear the poem again—for those who missed it?

Edsel: Oh, yes, please!

Paul: Well, certainly. I never tire of it. Jack, would you do us the honour of reading it aloud like last time? I have the book here.

Jack: My pleasure!

ARCHAIC TORSO OF APOLLO

We cannot know his legendary head with eyes like ripening fruit. And yet his torso is still suffused with brilliance from inside, like a lamp, in which his gaze, now turned to low, gleams in all its power. Otherwise the curved breast could not dazzle you so, nor could a smile run through the placid hips and thighs to that dark center where procreation flared.

Otherwise this stone would seem defaced beneath the translucent cascade of the shoulders and would not glisten like a wild beast's fur:

would not, from all the borders of itself, burst like a star: for here there is no place that does not see you. You must change your life.⁹
Paul: Thank you, Jack. His works are amazing.

Penny: Beautiful. It's a very spiritual poem.

Edsel: I'm sorry I missed last week!

Paul: But tonight I digress! I mean, it's not like I don't read anything new. I am the archivist here, after all, ancient as I am. But I guess I'm a bit of a traditionalist in my tastes and like to stay within the realms of what I know. Maybe it was this whole thing around the Surrey School Board's book ban. If they didn't succeed in court, they did succeed in inadvertently getting numerous people to read three little books that probably very few had actually read before. I have copies of them here and do you know that no one took them out until this story made the news?

So tonight I'm going out on a limb. I was reading in the Post Colonialist that there was some sort of scandal about a new text and lo and behold that very same book arrived in today's mail! Talk about kizmet. I'd ordered it at least three months ago and it finally came. It seems the powers that be didn't want it published.

Penny: Sometimes anything new is frightening.

Paul: Indeed. I thought I'd do something daring. It's kind of exciting—I feel like a giddy schoolboy anticipating it! I thought I'd read the story to you and offer my interpretation as we go along. You're all nodding, so I'll take that as a yes.

Esau: Careful, professor, they might just storm in here and start another book burning! The fathers would never have allowed books about homosexuals under their roof.

Paul: Ha! Indeed! They'd toss me on the pyre and roast me alive until the northern lights sing an eerie tune while the night sky does the danse macabre in streaking shades of blue and green.

[pause]
Edsel: You're giving me the heebee geebees!

Esau: So, what's tonight's story about?

Paul: Well, I only know two things about it. One is that it's a fairy tale. The second is that every word of it is true.

Penny: What? Are you joking?

Esau: A fairy tale? How can a fairy tale possibly be true?

Edsel: Fairy tales are about other people. Nobody writes a fairy tale about themselves. Do they?

Jack: I guess it's hard to know in anything you read or learn whether someone's being ruthlessly truthful or ruefully trueless. Culture can be intolerant of Truth in all her naked glory.

Paul: Well said. Maybe Alan Block is right: "I am all fiction. Narrative fiction. Historical fiction." Who knows where the line can be drawn as to what is truth or fiction, fact or friction. One person's truth is another one's lie.

Edsel: A poet in our midst! Still, it doesn't make any sense that fairy tales could be true! That's like saying there really was a Snow White and that you're one of her—

Paul: Dwarves?

Edsel: Oh my God! I'm so sorry! Ha ha ha! I don't mean to laugh. I just—

Paul: [chuckling] That's quite all right, Edsel. I think you've partly answered the question, which is the same one I come up against when I think of it. After all, how can a fairy tale be true? Aren't they just silly myths? Are myths based on an original event? You see, when you tell a story—or a poem—and listen to it—I mean really listen, with your ears and your heart and your spirit—you come to know
yourself and the world around you a little bit better. *Extrospection,* I call it. I realized only last week that that’s why I do these little talks. That’s why I climb all the way to the bloody top step of that creaky old ladder with my osteoarthritic old legs—only because knowledge is within grasp if you’re willing to reach for the fruit and pluck it off the tree. I’m much more than some old curmudgeon who checks books in and out in the journey of my day.

In truth, I’m a pedagogue. Oh I know, I know! Don’t start frowning, Edsel! It sounds like pedophile. Must everyone jump to that thought nowadays? The term is ruined. Really it is. Pedagogy seems to be losing its center as a place in education. It belongs at the center of curriculum and instruction. Penny here is a teacher and therefore a pedagogue. Perhaps we all are, in our ways. Or have that potential. Pedagogy isn’t just for those high-browed folks of the academy, you know. It’s for all of us—teacher, housewife, poet, musician, janitor.

So what, or shall I ask, *who* is a pedagogue? Or maybe you already know. You might be one yourself, for all I know. It’s hard to tell just looking at someone. Well, it’s a very old word. It’s an old world word. It stems from the Greek *paidagogos* where *pais* and *paidos* refer to *boy* and *agogos* is leader or teacher. In the old days, of course, it was only the males who generally had the privilege of an education. The pedagogue was usually the household servant who escorted the young lads to school. Of course *peda* was later used to mean children in general, as in *pediatrics.* If I look in the dictionary it says that a pedagogue can also be a narrow-minded or pedantic teacher. And *pedantic* means displaying one’s knowledge more than is necessary. Goodness! I hope beyond hope that this isn’t the case. You see, I do have knowledge, but I’m trusting it’s humble knowledge. Otherwise I constitute wonderings and ethical meanderings and philosophy. Yes, lots of philosophy! Philosophy makes me cringe. And theories. Treatises. Positions and paradoxes. Pitfalls and palindromes. Give me the simple life!

It’s through texts that we come to know ourselves better. But not just the texts of others. We need to be doing our own writing. “As humans, we draw on our experience to shape narratives about our lives, but equally, our identity and character are shaped by our narratives.” That’s the message I finally got in Rilke’s poem. There he is, beholding this ancient statue of Apollo. It’s got no arms, no head, no legs. And yet it’s more alive, more vibrant than he is. He is humbled in its presence. Images of light and illumination abound until he arrives at this shocking conclusion: *You must change your life.* Every time
I read it, I am stunned by his words. I think we all felt it last week—the shiver upon hearing this moment of awakening. I—I must sound like a dementing old fool. I felt like weeping. I—even now, when I talk about it, for some reason it's very emotional for me, it was that evocative.

Jack: It was a profound moment, professor. Illuminating.

Paul: Thank you. You see, all along I thought Rilke was talking about himself. That he was sharing this self-reflexive moment as he beheld this stonework. After all, he'd studied at artists' studios. He knew Rodin. He was inspired by them. Rilke said that the sculpture had a more powerful effect because it was fragmented. The curiosity of what's missing, the discovery of wholeness out of that which has been damaged. I cite the ending again:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{would not, from all the borders of itself,} \\
\text{burst like a star: for here there is no place} \\
\text{that does not see you. You must change your life.}
\end{align*}
\]

Bursting like a star—the power it has! Even his poem uses fragmentation and yet is complete in its own right.

Jack: So many people have translated his works.

Paul: Yes! Yet only one interpretation speaks so profoundly to me—that of Stephen Mitchell. The translation is everything!

Jack: Indeed, and the interpretation is everything.

Paul: Yes. I don't know…I'd just never thought of it any differently. And then, last week, when Jack offered to read it aloud I heard it anew, as if for the first time: You must change your life. And he was speaking to me. For the first time, I heard Rilke speaking to me and not necessarily about himself or some other reader.
All through my story, I invite you to take in the sights, hear the music, taste the poetry, and to breathe in the essence of it all. Well, I shouldn't say my story. It's not my story. My life would be far too dull to make a book out of. Perhaps a short story given my stature. I don't know what I would have to tell. Ha! I say that and yet I love to weave a symphony out of a minute waltz! Life is anything but simple. Like music. When I play the button accordion it sounds so beautiful, so simple. And yet the mechanisms involved are complex. It takes years to truly acquire the skill to give the instrument language and to let the accordion breathe like you would the chilly air on an autumn morning after someone's been burning leaves. Ah, the fragrance! The memories! Red and gold, sparks soaring up into the sky, and the smell! Heavenly! Burning them in a heap or a rusty old barrel. In those days you didn't worry about burning down the neighbourhood or the fire department coming by to give you a fine and read you the Riot Act. If you were lucky enough you got to light the match. I love lighting matches. Burning leaves. Incense. Candles. And I see I'm not the only Apollonian here—someone's brought a guitar.

Jack: Mm, yes. It's mine. I've been taking guitar lessons and didn't want to leave it in the car.

Penny: Oh, I hope you'll play us something!

Edsel: I'll say!

Paul: Wonderful! Did you see? There's also a piano here.

Jack: Yes, I was noticing that—an old Mason & Risch. In a library!

Paul: Isn't that funny? A juxtaposition if ever there was! It was part of Providence but once the whole thing was converted to the town library there was nowhere to put it. This area here used to be the gymnasium: you can still see the black lines on the floor that marked the basketball court. Mind you, the piano's never been played...except for official ceremonies and such when we sing O Canada. After all, people need to read and study in silence. Anyway, let's get down to it! I've got the book right here.

Penny: What's it called?
Paul: A *Grim Fairy Tale*.

Esau: Grimm? As in the Brothers Grimm?

Paul: No, grim with one 'm'.

Edsel: Oh my. It sounds depressing.

Paul: Perhaps. It remains to be seen. I guess the first thing we should look at is what the definition of a fairy tale is.

Esau: I'll grab a dictionary!

Paul: Excellent.

Edsel: You know, I never really thought about it. Does anybody write fairy tales any more? There must be new ones! Where are they?

Paul: Oh there are plenty, but we traditionally tell the long known ones. They’re so well known, there’s almost an oral tradition to them.

Penny: I’m sorry, but this seems kind of ridiculous. You’re going to tell a fairy tale tonight? I thought we were going to enlighten our minds with some illuminating poetry or short stories. I need practical ideas for my classroom. Fairy tales…this isn’t a kindergarten.

Jack: I think they’re meant to be child-like rather than childish.

Penny: Even so, they’re for children. I mean, what are we going to learn? That Aesop’s fables were the foundations of democracy or something? I don’t get it. This isn’t scholarship.

Paul: OK, fair enough. All I ask is to explore this a little further with me. Since it’s a contemporary fairy tale, perhaps there’s much more to it than we realize.
Penny: OK.

Paul: I think it was Britzman who just a few years ago suggested that we unconsciously desire learning only that which affirms what we already know and which affirms our own sense of self.\(^{16}\) Newness and strangeness and discomfort can be unsettling.

Edsel: Me, I always loved fairy tales. My dad used to tell me them at night on the odd occasion. They weren't traditional fairy tales, as one would expect. He made them up. I don't know why. In retrospect, I guess we just didn't have those books or couldn't afford them.

Jack: What kind of stories did he tell?

Edsel: Oh, all kinds of nonsense stuff! Pee-pee ca-ca humour—those kinds of stories—about a cat named Minnehaha and her misadventures and the climax of the story was our dog having to go across the street to the doctor, my godfather, because it had something stuck up its bum. [laughs]

Penny: What?!

Edsel: Oh I know! It's so ridiculous, but it was soooo funny! He used to laugh just as hard as I did. We laughed 'til we cried! Did your dad ever tell you bedtime stories, Penny?

Penny: Oh, he wasn't nearly as entertaining as yours sounds.

Edsel: Didn't you read fairy tales in school too? In Grade 2 Mrs. Lamont always read us one every Friday afternoon. I loved her!

Penny: I don't remember Grade 2.

Edsel: You don't remember? Didn't you read stories in school?
Penny: I don't think so. I don't know. I don't really remember much about school. I can tell you who the teacher was, but that's about it.

Edsel: Really? You don't remember school but you became a teacher?

Penny: Yeah. Go figure!

Esau: Here it is: “Fairy tale: 1. a story about fairies or other beings with magic powers; 2. an untrue story, especially one intended to deceive; lie.”

Jack: Well, there you go. If it's about—ahem—fairies with magical powers, how on earth can that be about humans? It's a fantasy life, not reality based. I think it's actually the second definition. It's an untrue story. If an author claims that every word is true then there's already an intention to deceive.

Penny: Well, who's to say it's not true, then. If we weren't there to see it...

Jack: [singing] “Fairy tales can come true, it can happen to you…”

All: “If you're young at heart…” [laughter]

Edsel: “For it's hard, you will find, to be narrow of mind…”

All: “If you're young at heart…” [more laughter]

Esau: I know of many Indian legends from my friends and my people and they're full of magic and we don’t doubt them for a moment as to that's how things actually happened. Same with my faith. The miracle of the resurrected Christ and the infallibility of the holy Catholic Church—I've never really doubted the teachings of the Church.

Jack: Well, there you go. If you believe in, say, the miracle of the virgin birth and in Assiniboine myths and legends, then why not fairy tales?
Esau: Um...hmm...good point. I guess because fairy tales weren't part of my upbringing. They're not my history or my people. I wasn't residential schooled like a lot of folks I know.

What band are you part of?

Esau: Uh, I'm not. I'm Métis. Too watered down with white man's blood to qualify. So I'm not white or Indian, just in limbo really. I mean, in 1982 we were finally recognized as one of Canada's Aboriginal Peoples, but that's translated into no benefits or support for us. And then the famous section 12.1(b) of the Indian Act pretty much clinched it.

Penny: That was so patriarchal! You know, I'm ashamed to say it but when I was young we referred to you as *breeds*.

Paul: Thanks for your honesty.

Penny: It was only years later that I discovered the people from my home town were Cree. Are you part Cree?

Esau: No, though I do speak some. I'm Assiniboine. I know some Michif too. But I was schooled in English. We're losing our languages. Some have been lost for good, never to be rediscovered because our teachings were oral not written.

Paul: That's a crime.

Esau: "Esau," if you spell it with a "w" is a tribe, and of course a character in the Bible.

Jack: So, Esau, it sounds like you're waiting for a little magic and miracle from the government.

Esau: [chuckling as he rolls his eyes] Yes siree, that's for sure. Politicians are good at telling many a tale. The thing is, they're the only ones who believe it. I have to wait for them to decree that I'm somebody. Someone else is supposed to tell me who I am and what my rights are. It makes me mad when I think about it.
Paul: I agree. I don’t think any of us realize just how strongly we’re shaped by the powers that be. Right from the time we enter Grade 1 they’re socializing us to behave certain ways, to act according to the way gender has always been played out, to go into professions that they deem us capable of. When I was in school I was told I should stick to woodworking and the industrial arts, that I wasn’t cut out for academics.

Penny: That’s something I’m really mindful of now that I’m a teacher myself. I try to encourage my students to explore new things and to learn for themselves what things they might be interested in. How should I know if someone might be a champion figure skater or a mathematical theoretician? Until I open them up to a broad range of experiences, I’ll never know. My memories and experiences can be the limits of my teaching.

Jack: But we’re always limited ourselves by the experiences we’ve had or even the opportunities that are out there. We’re so conditioned to follow certain rules. I mean, think of it! Here we are in a library, talking and laughing! Until we step outside of boundaries like that, imagined or otherwise, we don’t know what the results could be.

Esau: I’d say you’re kind of a rebel rule breaker.

Jack: Maybe! And maybe that’s the difference between the mundane and the magical.

Paul: I wonder what happens, then, if we don’t believe that life can be magical or miraculous.

Penny: Well, you’ve also got to be realistic. I mean, life is what you get. You know. We get our share of suffering. I don’t expect the tooth fairy to come along and leave me my retirement nest egg under a downy pillow.

Paul: Hmm, OK. So, I thought before we jump into the fairy tale itself that it would be a worthy discussion to examine why this author has chosen to write in this format. What is the value of fairy tales and what has the device been traditionally used for? I’ll say a little about that and maybe we
could share our experiences with fairy tales in our own lives. Edsel’s already established that I was one of the seven dwarves.

Edsel: [blushing] Oh Paul! I’m mortified!

Paul: [laughing] It’s quite all right. I take no offence. I like to think of myself as ‘Doc.’ A doctor of philosophy and writings, ancient and new. I just need to get a pince-nez. I’ll tell you right now that when I was little and I first read *Jack and the Beanstalk* I identified with the character right away.

Penny: Jack?

Paul: No, the giant. I, um, my growth was stunted from early on. It’s a genetic thing. And I always wanted to be big. I was bullied in school ’cause I was small and different and maybe because I was such a loner. I was always in my bedroom reading. And it’s served me well. But I always wanted to be the giant, to be the big bad ogre who stormed around like a wrestler and taught those nasty kids a lesson.

[laughter]

Fairy tales and myths serve as metaphors. Just like how the Giant is ultimately outwitted by Jack in the tale, so too are we presented with larger struggles of oppression and revolution, domination and submission, knowledge and acknowledgment.

When you think about it, fairy tales are often the first forms of stories that we encounter as children, and they leave deep and lasting impressions. In Germany the tales were called *Märchen*, which stems from the word *Maere*, meaning messages that are important and that are to be remembered. Fairy tales have a quality that sounds magical or far-fetched and yet they also read as if they *could* happen. There’s often a deep moral or ethical principle embedded in the text. I’m thinking of a story like *Rumpelstiltskin* where the young girl from a poor family is stuck trying to spin straw into gold because her father was trying to impress the king. The wizardry comes when Rumpelstiltskin saves the day by magically transforming the straw into gold, night after night. And in turn, you’ll remember, he demands her firstborn after she has become Queen. Only in being able to name him does she spare her child. And if we look for morals?
Penny: Don’t lie.

Jack: Yes, and don’t try to pretend to be something you’re not.

Edsel: But it worked out in the end. Good conquered over evil.

Jack: It seems to me Bruno Bettelheim said that that was the purpose of fairy tales—that good would be vanquished over evil, that there’s hope for tomorrow then even through the hurdles life deals us, we can triumph in the end. And most tales have this kind of hero’s journey—the hero succeeds through the help of others. Sure, he—or she—is brave and such—but always needs the help of others to get there.

Paul: Yes, all of that. Writers of fairy tales have made use of that form as a means of anonymously voicing their views without fear of attack. The same is true of the monk who wrote The Cloud of Unknowing, not that it’s a fairy tale. It’s more of a religious treatise, but one that surely would have been regarded as heresy in its day. So he wrote anonymously and in such a way that even if it were traced back to him, there could be excuses as to why he wrote, namely that it was intended as advice for a young man considering answering his call. Writers of fairy tales and other such texts seek to alter the dominant discourse, and to gain understanding from the discourse itself. Fundamentally, the fairy tale is a story we can relate to. I’m sure we’ve already been burned or reaped the rewards from pretending to be someone we’re not. We’ve probably all been the victims of other people’s lies. So even though fairy tales seem like they’re about a time period long ago and far away, they’re also about the present. Many of the tales the Grimm brothers gathered actually address contemporary social issues and cultural concerns of their day, ones that continue to resonate with us. You’ll find elements of political protest, social commentary, and wish fulfillment in these folk tales. There’s also a common thread of the subaltern—um, the oppressed—withstanding and overcoming exploitation. That is what happens in Rumpelstiltskin. She’s from a poor family, she’s threatened to be put to death by the king if she doesn’t produce gold. After all, as king he should have plenty of wealth, so this is an example of greed and his exploitation of her. An exploitation of her father also engaged in by lying and putting her into harm’s way.

Edsel: Yeah, why didn’t he say he could spin straw into gold?
Jack: Typical patriarch!

Jack: Then Rumpelstiltskin helps her out, but he wants something out of it too. He’s exploiting her as well!

Edsel: Sounds like my ex.

Paul: Could be. Certainly women have had a long history of oppression, in her case at the hands of her father, the king, and her wicked little helper. She is betrayed by family, wealth, power, and allies, all of them male. It’s a cautionary tale. Feminist thought masked in a story that is accessible to everyone. Her success shows how the fairy tale can function as a device for anti-oppressive pedagogy. The heroine is able to empower herself, altering the domination or patriarchy she lives under. We may not know if she gained this self-understanding, but we can participate in her experience and better come to know our place in the world. The fairy tale is an educative gambit for conversations—discourses—and therefore is intended to function as an avenue of social transformation.

Edsel: You mentioned discourse—can you please pardon my ignorance—what is that? You said conversations?

Paul: Yes, certainly. Conversations, talks, lectures, sermons, speeches, writing, or the sum of them all. One interpretation of Rumpelstiltskin could be that the dominant discourse is one of male privilege and that the fairy tale seeks to disrupt that.

Penny: How interesting. I never really thought of fairy tales as being anything more than a nonsense story. I’ve always hated them. Like Red Riding Hood. What kind of mother would send her child all by herself through the woods? I’d be calling social services!

Paul: Exactly. Terri Windling said that the symbols found in fairy tales and myths “provide useful metaphors for grappling with the hard truths of our existence.” And Penny’s example is one such hard truth: you can’t let your children walk somewhere unaccompanied. I’m sure it was dangerous then, and it seems even more dangerous today.
Jack: There are wolves lurking in the forest primeval: the unconscious. Many of us have learned the moral of the story the hard way: beware of a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Paul: Yes! It's also a tale about sexual awakening and that there are men—wolves—out there who will devour you given the opportunity. The colour red symbolizes passion and sexuality in our naïve main character. The nice thing about most fairy tales is that there's a happy ending. In some way, by some means, order is restored. A lesson is learned. In this regard the fairy tale is a pedagogical device: it educates.

Jack: Well, I don't know how happy the endings are. It depends on the version you read. I had a children's literature course last year and I remember reading a 1908 version of Little Red Riding Hood and in it the wolf was only one of the villains.

Penny: Oh, how so?

Jack: Well, like you said, Penny, what kind of mother sends a little girl on a journey by herself through the woods? And when the woodman rescues her they tell in gory detail how the axe lobbed off the wolf's head. They tied his carcass to a pole and carried it back into town in triumph. Little Red Riding Hood was forced to tell again and again the nightmare she had lived through: where she met the wolf, where she was heading, just how he looked, etc., saying, "until it seemed as if she never got out of the woods at all, not even in her dreams."

Penny: She was traumatized. This is very upsetting. Actually, it makes me mad. That little girl is being blamed for going out into the woods by herself and for the troubles it got her into. It's not her fault that her mother sent her into the woods alone. It's not her fault that there's a predator lurking behind the trees. And then they made her tell it again and again.

Paul: You're so right. It's as if it's meant to strike terror in the child. She was traumatized.
Esau: It’s a curious thing. The tales that the white folks tell about wolves are always ones of fear and terror. If they went and watched them and lived with them in nature, they’d understand the beauty of the wolves. We have a different relationship with the wolf.

Paul: Really? How so?

Esau: We see it as devoted to the pack and to its family. Like our people, wolves defended their territory and hunted and killed with cunning only in order to survive, not out of viciousness. White wolves are especially honoured and have mystical powers.

Edsel: This is fascinating. Whoever wrote these—how did they know to put all these elements in them? I mean, did they sit there and think about what kind of moral lesson they wanted to get across? How did they know, in those days, what red symbolized and that—patriarchy?—needed to be overturned?

Penny: Well, some symbols and metaphors go back thousands of years. Red, at least in Western culture, has always been associated with love, passion, blood. I think a lot symbolism ended up in fairy tales unconsciously.

Esau: And I think people were aware of the issues of their day, probably much more than we realize. Talking about it directly was likely something that would land you in big trouble. Writing metaphorically lets you get a point across in a subversive way. What do you think, Penny?

Penny: Hmm?

Esau: About the purpose of fairy tales and mythology.

Penny: Well, it sounds like these weren’t written for children at all.

Paul: Indeed. They were intended for adults.

Penny: Some of the content, when I think about it, it’s frightening for children!
Paul: True enough. But very clever in design. By using folk tales the writers of them were able to widely distribute a message that was accessible to most everyone.

Jack: Yeah, you didn't have to get published in some la-de-da journal and be subjected to peer review. The deep meaning, yet simple language and storylines, make them memorable. I'm sure we all remember some of the first tales we heard.

Edsel: Oh my, yes. I loved Snow White. Cinderella. Oh, and my absolute favourite was Sleeping Beauty. There was something so satisfying about those Walt Disney movies. I could watch 'em over and over again.

Penny: [biting her nails] Kids used to call me Henny Penny in school. I used to go home crying.

Esau: Some people live a fairy tale life, I guess, where everything works out. Maybe those folks who win the 6/49 or something.

Edsel: Yeah, like Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. I thought I'd have that kind of life. And here I am, divorced and lonely. Never had any kids. Mind you I'm comfortable enough that I don't have to get a job. Still, it's disillusioning, you know?

Jack: Her husband was shot in the head.

Edsel: What?

Jack: Jackie Kennedy. That was no fairy tale.

Edsel: Well...no. But things worked out in the end. I mean, she found another husband.

Penny: Happiness is more than finding a husband! My God!

Paul: Well, maybe it was closer to a fairy tale than we realize. Why don't we take a look at a Mother Goose tale?
Edsel: Mother Goose! I used to have a book of those!

Penny: You know, this is really something. Sorry, I don’t mean to interrupt. It’s just that...I came here expecting a lecture and we’re all sitting here engaged in an active discussion. It all seems really alive. We haven’t gotten to the fairy tale yet, and still it’s been so interesting.

Jack: Paulo Freire would say we’re both simultaneously teachers and students.\textsuperscript{30}

Esau: Yeah, it’s refreshing. I’m used to talks being all one-sided.

Paul: Hmm, thanks. I must say I didn’t always teach this way, but over the years I developed a different style and I much prefer the interactiveness of it. This way we all learn something and I don’t stand at the podium pretending to know everything about a given subject. Jacques Derrida would describe it as a classroom becoming a place of invention instead of reproduction.\textsuperscript{31}

Penny: Oh, I see what you mean, but I’m not sure I would like it myself. If you leave it open to anything happening, how do you actually teach what you’re supposed to teach? I mean, how do you teach something you don’t know about?

Edsel: Yes. What if they ask questions you don’t know the answer to?

Paul: Then you say: “That’s a good question. I don’t know.”

Jack: You learn together. Explore together. Teachers, like parents, like us, don’t know everything. If all we ever learned was from repetition we’d still be whittling sticks together to build a fire.

Paul: What we’re doing here—right now—is active participation in the learning process. Instead of the traditional role of me as the voice of authority and knowledge and you all as spectators or audience, we’re all engaged in dialogue around the framework of tonight’s plan: the fairy tale. Even if we never get to it, we seem to be making rich discoveries.
Edsel: Interesting! This is so different from when I went to school. So which Mother Goose story are we going to do?

Jack: *Bluebeard*? Can we do that one?

All: Sure.

Paul: Certainly. Any one of them would probably suit our purposes. Do you know it well enough to summarize it?

Jack: Um, yeah.

Paul: OK. So, Jack will tell us the tale of Bluebeard. This particular one, if memory serves me correctly, goes back to the 1600s when it was first published. Try to listen to it with new ears and see what social commentary it makes. See how it relates to your own experiences in your own life or what insights you could glean from it.

Jack: OK. Well, Bluebeard was an aristocrat. Very wealthy. He had a huge estate, precious gems and all. But he also had a blue beard, and this made him a rather unattractive sight. So he used his wealth and charm to try to find a wife. As it happened, there was a widow next door with two unwed daughters. He wanted either one to marry him with the promise of his wealth but they were frightened by his looks. They also knew that he had had seven previous wives and no one knew what had happened to them.

So, he asked them all over to his mansion and he wined and dined the whole family for a week and they came to see that he probably wasn't such a bad guy after all. The youngest and most beautiful of the two daughters agreed to marry him.

Soon after that he went on a business trip and he gave his new bride all of the keys to the house, even to his safe and his gold and jewels. But he also gave her one small key and told her it was for a closet in the cellar and that she was not to go in there. For if she did, she would feel his wrath.
Of course the moment he left curiosity got the better of her and she couldn’t resist making her way down to the cellar to snoop around. She found the locked closet and decided to sneak a peek. Inside it looked like an abattoir—a slaughterhouse. Body parts and curdled blood lay everywhere, the remains of Bluebeard’s seven wives. All had had their throats slashed. The girl was so shocked and frightened that she trembled and dropped the key on the bloody floor. She quickly ran out of there, running as though Bluebeard himself were chasing her.

When she saw that the key was stained with blood she tried to wash it off and couldn’t. She tried everything—scrub brushes, bleach, but nothing would remove that damned spot. And just then Bluebeard returned. She was pale as a ghost and shaking and he questioned her about her demeanor. She tried to cover up and said it was because she was so excited to see him. But he was suspicious and demanded all of his keys back. When she finally handed him the key to the cellar he knew at once what she had done and announced that she would befall the same fate as all of his previous wives. She begged and wepted for mercy, but he had none to give. He did allow her a little time in her chamber to make peace with God. From her window she called to her sister to hasten her brothers to come and rescue her. And just as Bluebeard pulled her head up by the hair to slit her throat, her brothers stormed in and [jabbing the air] sliced him through the middle, killing him.

Everyone was so relieved, of course. She shared her wealth with all of her family because she inherited his estate. And they all lived happily ever after.\(^{32,33}\)

Penny: [biting her nails] Oh my God! It’s a horrible tale! It sounds like Ted Bundy!

Esau: Sounds like it could have been in yesterday’s newspaper.

Penny: God, something like that just happened in Fresno, California.

Paul: What?

Penny: This guy was arrested for murdering nine of his family members and he stuffed them all in a room in the house.\(^34\)
Jack: Oh, I saw that on the ‘net. He was apparently into polygamy and incest and had fathered two of the victims by his own daughters. A modern day Bluebeard. Have times changes at all?

Edsel: It’s gruesome!

Jack: It was gruesome. Some of the officers had to be placed on administrative leave and immediately get counselling.

Edsel: Who was he?

Penny: I forget name. Wesson or something. I’m always dismayed at how everyone wants to know all about the perpetrator but rarely the victim. Only when the media finds it a lip-smacking salacious story.

Edsel: Oh, can’t we talk about Sleeping Beauty? No one gets murdered in that. She finds the man of her dreams at the end.

Paul: You’re forgetting that it ends with the wicked fairy having to wear shoes of hot iron and do a danse macabre ‘til she drops dead.

Edsel: [frowning] Oh! Is that…? Is that right? Is that how it ends? Gosh, I guess I don’t remember that. What a strange ending!

Jack: Not really. Justice was served. It’s kind of similar to the Fitcher’s Bird, but in that one she’s clever enough to go into the forbidden room without getting caught. And she’s able to put the body parts back together which restores them to life.\textsuperscript{35}

Paul: Recurring themes. Penny said he sounded like serial killer Ted Bundy, so there’s a contemporary parallel there. What else stands out?
Penny: Well, there is the fact that people knew that he had been married seven times before and they’d all mysteriously disappeared. I mean, why didn’t anyone question that? Why didn’t the police—or whatever they had in those days—investigate?

Paul: It’s the invisibility of women. 36

Penny: Yes! And more importantly, why on earth would anyone marry someone like that when people already had suspicions about him! Jesus Christ! It reminds me a bit of Tom’s mother. She was mentally ill and they sent her away to an asylum—it used to be St. Philomena’s—and she was barely mentioned again. Like she disappeared.

Esau: Why would a woman marry someone so dangerous? It’s like those women who marry prisoners.

Jack: They turn a blind eye to the facts.

Paul: They’re attracted to the danger and maybe to the dream that they can change him.

Esau: Well, they must have their reasons. I mean, there’s always a chance things might change, you know. They might change and, uh, and they’d have a happy life.

Paul: Bluebeard had the charm of a sociopath. Using his wealth, his hospitality, and a false front of kindness, he lured them, one by one, into his trap.

Penny: And he deliberately provoked them, giving them all the keys. He knew what he was doing. It wasn’t like he could blame it on drinking or something.

Edsel: Like he was testing them.

Penny: Exactly. You know, it doesn’t say much for women at all. Everyone seemed to know his reputation but their mother let one of them get married to him. Once again, it’s like marriage was the only option in their lives. Either that or it’s “Get thee to a nunnery!” 37 Just like Sleeping Beauty and Snow White. All it takes is a man!
Edsel: [laughing] Goodness, you should be single!

Penny: [chuckling] I think I'd give him a run for his money!

Edsel: Oh, your poor husband!

Penny: Bluebeard's wife sounds like you, Edsel.

Edsel: What? Me?

Penny: You've been lost since you got divorced 15 months ago. You've talked about wanting another husband.

Edsel: Well, what's wrong with that? I was happy getting married. I mean, sure I was young. I was 17. But a lot of my friends got married at that age. We didn't finish high school then. You marry, you have kids—well, I couldn't have kids it turned out—but, you know. You make a home. I don't want to spend the rest of my days by myself.

Penny: No, I didn't say you HAD to. It's just that there's more to you than being defined as a wife or named after a car by your dad. I'm sorry...

Edsel: No, that's okay. I see what you mean.

[pause]

Jack: What really bugs me is that people knew that something was wrong. Even though in the tale they said "no one knew what had happened to them," how could they not know that seven women were missing? I think—I think the most important element to this story is the missing women. It speaks volumes.

Paul: Wow, yes. Gergen would call it "a presence of the absent."
Jack: “A presence of the absent…” Hmm, I like that.

Paul: Yeah, like in art, when someone’s looking beyond at something but it’s outside of the frame of the picture—to some place of unknowing for the viewer. Or the open window motif. That you could look beyond what surrounds you, into possibility.

Edsel: Hmm, their absence says—and correct me if I’m wrong—that men are more greatly valued than women.

Penny: It’s like all those women who went missing on Vancouver’s Eastside. Because they were prostitutes their lives didn’t seem to matter. They were largely invisible too.

Jack: Good point! I mean, even his name—Bluebeard—gives it away. He had a blue beard. There was something out of the ordinary about him. A signifier.

Edsel: A signifier?

Esau: What’s that—something significant?

Jack: Well, yes. It’s a sign. Saussure said that language, and therefore culture, is made up of signs. They can be arbitrary, but they’re there none the less.39

Paul: And I guess there are some signs we ignore. Lévi-Strauss didn’t say culture was made up of signs or language, he said culture is the domain of rules—derived from external traditions, that is, education.40

Jack: But Foucault said the world was language, not signs. I think his emphasis was on the realism of the sign rather than the thing itself. In fact, I’d say he looked at the larger context of language as being discourse as a system of representation.41
Paul: Hmm. I guess that makes sense. Or does it? It's certainly not the fact that he had a blue beard. It symbolizes strangeness, perhaps, or difference, but it doesn't necessarily have the meaning that he is dangerous or deadly. Though in the context of this tale, that is the clue.

Jack: The thing is, there aren't always overt clues like that. Many serial killers don't have any obvious signs of abnormality or depravity. I think that's what people expect, though. We do look for an overt sign to explain why someone is evil.

Penny: I don't get it.

Esau: Neither do I. You've lost me. What is realism then?

Paul: Well, applied to literature, its aim is one of interpreting the actualities of any aspect of life without subjectivity or romanticism or being idealistic.

Penny: Isn't it a contradiction to talk about realism regarding a fairy tale? Aren't those opposites? Or, no, I guess not. Because we've been looking at the grim realities underneath the tale. It exposes social evils if carefully looked at through a new lens, doesn't it?

Paul: Yes, I believe you're right. Good old Lacan! "The grimace of the real."

Esau: So, the realism of his blue beard is probably just that: that his beard was blue. It really shouldn't be taken to mean anything more than that?

Paul: Yes. Fiction and realism can be bedfellows.

Edsel: Realism! His first seven wives just disappeared. It's a grisly tale! My God, who would read it to their kids? I think you're right—these are definitely for adults. And even then. I mean, why read stuff like that? It gives me the creeps.
Paul: It is disturbing. But why is it we don't want to hear about it? Even today, are we any different than the unknown characters in *Bluebeard's Cellar* who turn a blind eye to seven women who disappeared.

Edsel: Well, I guess we don't want to hear about it because things like that *do* happen.

Paul: Yes. I think because it falls within the realm of being possible that stories like *Bluebeard* evoke fear in us.

Penny: Paul, I see what you're trying to get at here, but I still think it's all a lot of make believe.

Paul: Exactly.

Penny: So what does this have to do with reality? Or teaching? Why on earth would I ever teach something like *Bluebeard* in my classroom? It's an awful story. Parents want them to have the basics. As I said, it's all make believe!

Esau: Haven't you ever wanted to make someone believe you about something important?

Penny: [gasps]

Esau: That's what make believe is all about. Getting a message across, no matter how difficult, and having someone believe you. I know. I've been there.

Penny: "Make believe"... That's, um... that's heavy.

Paul: That's the whole purpose behind fairy tales, I've come to be convinced of. They are intended to make people believe a different way of being or knowing. Writers of them use these broadly known themes such as kings and queens or witches and magic as the foundation for plot and character development. The hero's journey is another such script that appears in many a fairy tale. Jungians would say that fairy tales are rife with meaning on the symbolic and archetypal levels, that they allude to a deep psychological reality generally hidden from view. This is exactly what we saw in *Bluebeard*. 
The fact that he had murdered seven wives was literally hidden from view from others and yet was an unconsciously known fact. For some of us, it was right on the surface. We knew something was wrong! I always think of language in terms of Lévi-Strauss. He says when we talk about *language* we really mean *message*, "with the implication that the artist is addressing himself to a spectator or a listener."44

Jack: As we're doing right now.

Edsel: It gives me the chills to think of those Vancouver prostitutes being murdered and no one really paying attention to that.

Penny: Over 50 went missing.

Paul: Their lives are devalued. Prostitution's just something they don't really teach about in school. Certainly not in my day.

Edsel: Oh! Mine neither. We all *knew* about it, we just didn't dare talk about it.

Jack: Agh! There's so many things schools don't talk about! When I went to school you certainly never heard mention about gays except in extremely negative contexts.

Esau: Hmm, yeah. Well, you're dealing with a very small town. Even smaller since the railroad line stopped coming through after the Americans bought it out. Even the railway station was burned down.

Paul: Burned? You mean torched.

Edsel: Yeah.

Penny: Really?

Esau: Yup. They were sprucing it up and turning it into a railroad museum but somebody burned it down.
Edsel: That was terrible. I hear the town wants to rebuild, but there's a big squabble about where the money's going to come from. All they need is another Bingo. And you know Jack, it's very Catholic here. I don't think there are any homosexuals. And certainly no Mary Magdalene's here.

Paul: Small town or not, important issues like homosexuality and even prostitution are silenced in many schools. I mean, these are our students' lives we're talking about. It's not like this only happens to other people. Topics that...Mary Magdalene? She wasn't a prostitute.

Esau: What? Sure she was.

Paul: No, no, no. In 1969 the Catholic Church finally repealed what they'd long held was true, but of course by then the damage had been done. They'd ruined her reputation and established her as a woman of ill-repute.

Esau: Is that right? Are you Catholic?

Paul: No, but I remember hearing about it at the time. I was teaching at a Catholic University.

Edsel: I've never heard that either. I'm Baptist, mind you. We don't pay the same attention to Mary Magdalene as the Catholics seem to.

Paul: Pope Gregory around 600 AD decided that Mary Magdalene was the unnamed prostitute in the Bible and labeled her as the penitent whore. In truth, she was the first to see the risen Christ. She anointed him. She was considered the Apostle of the Apostles. The church did recant it, but after 1400 years it was like putting a correction notice in the newspaper: nobody really paid attention to it.

Jack: I think they deliberately said that to make it look like Jesus wouldn't have had anything to do with her if she were a prostitute rather than a woman of strength and integrity or even his lover.

Penny: You know, I'm just thinking—

Edsel: Hmm?
Penny: If Gregory made her into a prostitute then that makes him a pimp.

Jack: [laughing] The Pope is a pimp!

Esau: Tsk! That’s not a very nice thing to say.

Penny: Well, was it any better what he said?

Esau: No, but... well... I’m speechless. You know, I remember hearing something along those lines once but I asked Father Grouard and he said no: “She was a sinful whore.”

Penny: Well, hello?! What else did you expect him to say?

Esau: What do you mean?

Penny: He’s a priest! He’s Catholic! He’s not about to change his story or challenge his beliefs. Pope said, “All seems infected that th’ infected spy, as all looks yellow to the jaundiced eye.”

Esau: Huh? The Pope said that?

Penny: No, silly! Alexander Pope.

Jack: She means you’ve got to consider the source of your information. Especially when it comes from so-called authorities like the church.

Paul: Or parents or educators or government...

Esau: Wow. I’d like to read something more about that. But, I’m sorry, I still don’t get it. What does it matter if she was a whore or not?
Penny: Because! Look at how it has made women look over the centuries—as if they weren’t worthy of being around Jesus or any man. It perpetuates the idea that because she was supposed to be a prostitute that Jesus wouldn’t have had anything to do with her, i.e., that he was celibate. And the good old fathers have always maintained that celibacy is a foundation of the priesthood and that only men qualify for it. Heaven forbid a woman could be a priest. Not with the likes of the unworthy Mary Magdalene running around!

Esau: You sound like a spurned Catholic.

Penny: Ex-Catholic! Is it that obvious? Slated for excommunication! [laughs] A heretic—just call me “Joan of Arc.” That poor thing. She brought Charles VII to the throne, then was sold like a piece of meat to the English and tried by a church court for being consumed by the devil. It was the church that didn’t like her—fighting like a man in battle, dressing as a male, taking communion as only men did then. Tried by men. She was doomed before it all began. They’ll be burning me at the stake next. Burning me alive as I face the holy church and steadfastly shout my truth even until my flesh is peeling off and the stench has cleared the market square...

[pause]

Jack: Blame the victim. Well, hey, cross-dressers face the same hostilities today. A guy I went to school with was brave enough to show up for class in drag. It created a HUGE controversy. People really hate uncertainty. He ended up getting knifed in the hallway.

Edsel: Oh my God. That’s terrible! Did he die? Maybe he shouldn’t have gone around dressed up like that.

Jack: Well, why not? I mean, the guy was preparing for gender reassignment, so—maybe you don’t know—they often make you dress the part for a year before you undergo the surgery. It’s part of making sure it’s something you want to go ahead with, part of the psychological assessments. He survived, yeah. I mean, they sliced his spleen and he ended up missing the rest of the semester and then I heard he transferred to a different university. But they never caught who did it. There’s this whole code of silence around stuff like that.
Paul: FYI, Joan of Arc's case was re-tried in 1456, 23 years later, and she was acquitted. I'll show you some time a couple of books I know about the life of Mary Magdalene. There's also her Gospel—the Gospel of Mary in the Nag Hammadi Library.

Jack: Oh? Which library is that?

Paul: Nag Hammadi.

Jack: Is that around here?

Paul: [smiling] Oh, no, it's not a place. It's a collection of scriptures that were discovered in 1945 and only recently translated into English. Texts that have long been missing, like forgotten memories, have surfaced. The Gospels of Thomas and Philip are in there, among many others. It's fascinating reading.

Penny: It goes to show you what we're told or taught shouldn't be taken as gospel, if you'll pardon the pun. I find myself questioning everything these days. It's interesting who gets blamed or labeled in order to upgrade the reputation of someone else. I remember I grew up thinking homosexuals were all perverts and that they were somehow less than human. And you're right, the teacher wouldn't have talked about homosexuality, even in the tiny segment on sex education we got, even if her own husband was gay, which I found out years later he was.

Esau: All I knew was that it was a sin, but, um, you could go to confession and be forgiven. But—well, it's in the Bible, you know, but...I, uh...

Jack: Yeah?

Esau: Well, it's, uh, you know. Times are changing, and that's a good thing, I guess. I never heard about homosexuality except for when they preached about the Bible and what it says about it when I was in school, and all I knew was that it was mighty bad. But I was always told God forgives the sins of those who do it.
Jack: The first time I heard about it, I remember I had to stay late after school because I wasn’t doing well in math. A couple of other girls had to stay late too. This must have been grade 8. Barb was talking about this guy in my class and he was of First Nations descent like you, Esau, and Barb said she thought he was gay. He was handsome and older than all of us and quite muscular, and in the same grade. And I was so naïve I didn’t know what “gay” meant, so I asked her and she flicked her wrist and stuck out her tongue and said, “You know.” And I didn’t know. I thought, “What does she mean?” And I just figured it was something gross. Frank! That was his name. And he dropped out of school after that year. I guess he failed, I don’t know. By the time I got to high school there were no First Nations people in school with me at all and nobody thought anything of it. We didn’t expect them to go on.

Edsel: Do your parents know you’re gay?

Jack: Yeah. You know, lots of people these days are finding it’s not a big deal, but for a whole lot of others it’s still a problem. I was raised Catholic and so my folks think I’m going straight to hell. They’re very traditional in their beliefs. One of my sisters is cool with it. I’m their only son, so maybe that’s part of it. I’ve ruined the family line, or so they think. No heirs to the throne for them unless I arrange something or adopt.

Edsel: How sad.

Jack: It’s not, really. I just don’t talk to them. It’s been four years. It’s not worth it. I’ve come to realize it doesn’t matter if you’re related or not. You don’t have to have negative influences like that in your life, no matter who they are. I tried sending them letters and books to read. It was all for naught. Even the priest in our parish told them I was going to hell. Imagine!

Penny: Hey, I’m with you. I don’t talk to my parents either. And it’s been twelve years.

Esau: Boy, you’ve hit a nerve about First Nations people not finishing school. How true that used to be. I dropped out of school too. I couldn’t do it. My folks weren’t educated. Both of them drank. We lived on welfare. I was lucky to get the janitor job at 15 and worked at Providence for 44 years. The fathers here—the teachers—they didn’t see me. People are more respectful now, but there’s a long
ways to go. They still think we’re all a bunch of bingo playing alcoholics and welfare bums. They don’t expect anything else from you. The more everybody else believes that you’re only a certain way, the more you become that way.

Paul: Wow! “The more you become that way.” You’re right. We’re molded by the belief systems of other people. Their knowledge—no, their limited and presumed knowledge of others ends up defining who we are.

Penny: Conforming to the culture.

Jack: “Resistance is futile!”

[laughter]

Paul: Right, Jean-Luc!

Jack: Erased like chalk off the blackboard.

Edsel: I’ve been invisible since the divorce. My God! All our friends were couples. I can’t go to bridge club by myself. My ex told everyone I was having an affair on him, and people believe him because he’s so god-damned charming. He was the one fooling around with his secretary.

Penny: His secretary?

Edsel: I know, I know. It sounds like a cliché. But I swear, it’s true.

Penny: We believe you, Edsel. That asshole! He’s portraying you like a Mary Magdalene.

Jack: You’re caught in a reenactment of the myth.

Paul: Exactly. You see? That’s how myths, fairy tales, and legends manifest themselves in our daily lives. People like myths because there’s a mysterious quality about them, like life itself. It’s often a
story that can’t be reconciled with facts. For example, we can’t necessarily go to the history books and find that there really was a terrible man with a blue beard, but we nevertheless feel the impact of the tale on many levels. I believe it was Gadamer who said that a myth eludes both confirmation and refutation. I think that’s what perpetuates them. It’s neither here nor there, but occupies that space in-between.

Edsel: Fascinating!

Paul: Remind me to talk about mythopoetics.

Jack: Will do. Sorry to hear that Edsel, you deserve better.

Edsel: [wiping a tear] Thanks, you guys. And what about you, professor?

Paul: Hmm?

Jack: Invisibility. Are you ever out of sight, out of mind?

Paul: Ah, well, what can I say when I qualify to be one of Snow White’s seven dwarves? At five feet tall I’ve been on both ends of the spectrum all my life. People either stare at me because I don’t fit the normal range of height, or they try to pretend not to see me because they don’t want to embarrass me. All I get is a furtive glance. In the end, people are afraid to talk to me at all. In school I was bullied all the time. There’s little tolerance for anything or anyone different.

Penny: I must have a cranky bladder—I’ll be back in a jiffy.

Edsel: Oh wait! You haven’t told us your story—of invisibility.

Penny: Oh, well, there’s not much to tell. Well, except that, you know, if we’re talking about school, I always noticed that the boys were favoured over the girls. Not always, that’s for sure. But sometimes it seemed like it didn’t matter what they did, it was just boys being boys, but girls were expected to be much better behaved. We were raised to be young socialites. The thing is, and this really bugs me, I
still run into that in my job. I teach, I've been V.P. for six years, but can't seem to get promoted to Principal in the school system and I know I do just as good a job as the male Vice Principals.

Jack: Equal pay for equal work!

Penny: [standing] Well, yeah, that too! I know I'm making less than the men. I had to read it in the paper to find that out!

Paul: Thanks, Penny. [Exit Penny]

Jack: The Disappeared. The cellar represents forbidden knowledge and awareness: consciousness. That's what happened to people killed for political reasons in revolutionary countries or countries where there's atrocities going on—like in South Africa during Apartheid or in Chile under Pinochet. Without a body, there's not much evidence to go on. People just disappeared. Their families never knew what happened to them. Even after some places had truth commissions, the ones who had committed the crimes were tight-lipped. Those in power use denial, blame the victim, minimize what happened—all in the name of refusing to admit that something traumatic had occurred.53

Edsel: Wow! That's like what people did around the Holocaust. I just saw that on the news: Ernst Zundel. He sounds like such a racist.54

Jack: He is, and he's succeeded for years in spreading his propaganda. He's trying to erase history or re-write history. It makes me furious. That's what Turkey does around the Armenian genocide.

Paul: Hmm, interesting. Invisible. Disappeared. They all leave a sound: silence.

Esau: Hey, Jack, you should run for office.

Paul: I read an author named Bollas and I believe he would call knowing something occurred but denying it as 'the unthought known.'55

Edsel: [thinking] The unthought known...
Paul: Or what Ira Progoff would call *The Cloud of Unknowing*. That which has not yet entered consciousness is nevertheless known. It’s known because it stems from past experiences.

Jack: Sort of a dysfunctional consciousness.

Paul: That’s it, exactly! I read an article in the *Journal of Negro Education* that spoke about *dysconscious racism*. It’s a fascinating term.


Paul: Exactly. And there were no aboriginals in high school.

Penny: [returning] Did I miss something?

Edsel: I think I get it.

Esau: Should I make some coffee?

Paul: Oh! I’m sorry, I had it ready to put on before you arrived. Would anyone care for some? I’m assuming decaf.

All: Yes.

Paul: Great. Be nice to have something hot on a nasty night.

Edsel: I hope everyone’s hungry: I brought along some Rugalech.

Jack: Rugalech?

Edsel: Cookies.
Penny: Oh yum!

Jack: They look like little croissants.

Penny: And they look like a lot of work.

Edsel: Oh, not really. I've made them dozens of times. My husband loved them—he was Jewish.

Penny: You mean he is Jewish.

Edsel: Huh?

Penny: That's okay. Mmmm! They're wonderful! I'll have to get the recipe!

Edsel: Thanks, they're very simple, really. All you take is half a pound of butter, 2 cups of flour, half a cup of raisins, 2 cups of cottage cheese, 1 tablespoon of cinnamon, and 2 tablespoons of sugar.59

Penny: Okay.

Edsel: Then you—well, I'll write it out. Do you have a pen? No? I guess I should write it down. Saul's mother taught me how to make them, and she'd learned the recipe from her mother. She'd have a fit if she knew I used cinnamon sugar, but she died of colon cancer last year so I figured what the hey. She never liked me anyway. You know, 'cause I'm not Jewish. There's no exact measurements, just a pinch of this and about a cup of that. I imagine it's on the internet, but it's probably not the same as the way I make it, the traditional way. You've got to use real butter, not margarine, or it's just not worth it.

Esau, have one!

Esau: Oh I'd like to but I'm diabetic. Gotta watch my sugars.

Edsel: Oh dear! I would have made a diabetic recipe had I known.

Esau: You're very sweet.
Edsel: Next week!

Esau: Well, don't go fussing just for me. So Jack...

Jack: Yes sir.

Esau: How 'bout tickling the ivories a little for us?

Edsel: Oh yes!

Paul: Please do! While I get the coffee going. After all, the library's technically closed. We're breaking the rules tonight!

Jack: Well, all right. Let's do the one we were singing.

[CD Song #1: Young at Heart]

Fairy tales can come true, it can happen to you
If you're young at heart
For it's hard, you will find, to be narrow of mind
If you're young at heart

You can go to extremes with impossible schemes
You can laugh when your dreams fall apart at the seams
And life gets more exciting with each passing day
And love is either in your heart or on its way

Don't you know that it's worth every treasure on Earth
To be young at heart
For as rich as you are it's much better by far
To be young at heart

And if you should survive to 105
Look at all you'll derive out of being alive
Then here is the best part
You have a head start
If you are among the very young at heart.80

[applause]

Edsel: Oh what fun! That was great, Jack. You're very talented!

Penny/Esau: I'll say!

Edsel: I'm so glad I decided to get myself out of the house!

Jack: You must change your life.

Paul: Jack! Are you poking fun at little me? That was marvelous! I never even knew you could play and here you were, a student of mine once upon a time. Help yourself to coffee, everyone. That's cream and that's 2%, and there's brown sugar or the Ersatz.

So we looked at the Mother Goose fairy tale of Bluebeard and it was really interesting how we were all able to interpret it, to understand it, and to relate it to our lives. Just like the conclusion of Rilke's poem: You must change your life. If we truly reflect on a poem or a song or a book, I believe it can be life-altering.

Jack: Transformative.

1 Recorded through licensing provided by the Canadian Musical Reproduction Rights Agency Limited and Cherio Corporation, copyright holder of the song 'Young at Heart.'
Penny: Yeah. I think I finally see what you mean. When I was in school we were given assignments about interpreting a poem and there was only one way to do it and that was the teacher's way. It didn't have anything to do with how we related to it or responded to it. I was determined not to teach that way and here I am, doing the same thing. I don't know what it is. It's like the curriculum doesn't leave space for anything else. There's all these other things we're supposed to teach, but if we get into a big discussion about everything then I can't cover it all. But still, there must be ways of creating space for that. I mean, look at the dialogue we've had tonight! I'll be right back—I just need a quick bathroom break.

Edsel: And those damned book reviews they made us do. I remember doing a book review about a book I didn't like and the teacher was so surprised because everyone always wrote nice reviews about books they liked. But I'm a slow reader and it was the only book I had time to read for the assignment, so I figured, what the hell, I'll just say I didn't like the book and why.

Paul: This is where the work of Paul Ricoeur comes in. He wrote about hermeneutics, which is basically a fancy word for the process of interpreting a text. What he meant by it was that "the ideal meaning of a text must be engaged as real meaning grounded in the life of the reader." 61

Esau: Wow! Just like we're doing.

Paul: In earlier days the approach to interpretation was concerned with the author's message, like Penny was saying about traditional analysis of poetry. This view of trying to figure out what the author was trying to say can be valid, but it lacks the relationship or dialogue that goes on when you consciously interact with what you read. 62

Jack: Yeah, yeah, that's neat. So that's what we're going to do with the fairy tale—relate to it and interpret it as it speaks to our own lives?

Edsel: But we all haven't been through the same experiences. I mean, the Bluebeard story—we haven't been married to a brute like that, right?
Esau: No, but we've all been relating to the story because of our own experiences with oppression.

Paul: Yeah. And it also gives is knowledge of others who have endured difficult experiences. I think we begin to understand the experiences of another if we open ourselves up to knowing such texts. I wonder if we realize the full extent that a text can impact upon our lives even when we think it has nothing whatsoever to do with the life we're living. We're interconnected more deeply than we acknowledge.

Jack: You mentioned mythopoetics earlier.

Paul: Right, thanks for reminding me!

Edsel: Mythopoetics?

Paul: Yes.

Edsel: You don't see that word on "Wheel of Fortune."

Paul: It's along the lines of everything we've been talking about: how a fairy tale can reveal something about ourselves, how a Mother Goose story can speak to our present day lives, how mythic or archetypal figures like Mary Magdalene or Cinderella or Genghis Khan or Coyote can be active in our existence. I wonder if they can be negative influences sometimes, or if we can also draw upon them to live a more deeply spiritual journey or a hero's journey. Someone named Shepherd Bliss spoke about mythopoetics as "the creation of new myths in our own lives." It's argued that a person can embrace a more positive, hopeful, and inspired life by intentionally letting go of destructive attitudes, practices, and values through the mythopoetic interpretation of texts. It can be a means of reinventing social traditions and beliefs. Rising again from the ashes after having tossed me on the banned book pyre.

Esau: The Phoenix!

Jack: Sounds like therapy.
Penny: [entering] Sounds like Robert Bly.

Paul: [nodding] Yeah. Bly used mythopoetics to begin the men’s movement. They draw on myths like *Iron John* to promote long-forgotten or suppressed notions of masculinity, of the gentle warrior. It’s been very popular. And of course it’s much more than that.

Penny: [smirking] Tom—my husband—went on one of those retreats. I’m sorry, guys, I had to laugh. They had them dressing up in the costumes of the myth they were enacting. Using props and stuff. Getting into sword fights and other kinds of macho male conflict. He said he felt like a professional wrestler. They pounded drums and sounded the war cry and bonded and cried, catharted and farted. I shouldn’t make fun of it but it sounded like a whole week-end of playtime for the big boys. I think it takes more than two days of that kind of stuff to be life-altering.

Jack: [wryly] Well, who knows, Penny. Maybe you’ll be donning a glass slipper and hurrying to catch your stagecoach before it turns into a pumpkin before the night is over.

Penny: [laughing] Right! Not bloody likely!

Paul: I like to think of mythopoetics as being anti-oppressive or post-foundational, if you can bear with the big Scrabble words. In some applications of mythopoetics an individual enacts or reenacts a myth, such as with Bly’s *Iron John*. *Poiesis* means ‘making.’ Psychoanalyst James Hillman said the act of meaning making is done by way of the imagination cast into language, or the art of speaking and hearing, writing and reading. . . .

Jack: Singing and dancing. A text is anti-oppressive if it challenges the foundations of thought that are generally accepted as being true. That’s where music ties in for me. Texts can be the lyrics to a song, a dance, a sculpture, a painting, a poem. I find songs are mythopoetic in their own right. They promote a constructed way of understanding the world, whether that be idealized love or heteronormativity or propaganda war tunes. And in literature, if you’ve read anything by Toni Morrison or Jamaica Kincaid, they are just two examples of people who render what I would call a mythopoetic text that
challenges the foundations of ways of knowing and being, or as Mary Doll would say, the “constructed fictions of tradition.”

Esau: Singing and dancing I can relate to. In Assiniboine culture—and other tribes—we use a lot of mythopoetics, I think. We just don’t call it that. We just do it. To invoke the spirit of the White Wolf, we wear a White Wolf skin. Then I would have good fortune in battle. In the old days that meant a war. Today we use it for battles that are political, or social, or health related. There are specific songs and dances that go with it. The whole community takes part in it. When I’m Wolf, I don’t separate who I am from the Wolf spirit. We become one.

Paul: You behave like the archetype you want to access.

Esau: Yes.

Edsel: I remember the word archetype from the vocabulary list in Reader’s Digest but I forget what it means.

Paul: Hmmm, how can I best explain it? It’s more than a symbol. I would say it’s the underlying content of a symbol. Perhaps the underlying form or structure of it that gets manifested through a symbol or an image. Like wholeness might be symbolized through the circle. Or infinity. This is all Carl Jung’s area. We might consciously recognize the circle as a symbol of wholeness or the infinite or totality, but the origins of the symbol of the circle stem from the unconscious archetype. If we’re talking about myth, I’d have to cite Joseph Campbell: a myth is an artistic achievement relevant to the society through the functions it performs. So a myth might reflect a culture’s desires, fears, concerns, wonderings, worries. Yet, as I said, it evades being pinned down as true or false, as fact or fiction.

Edsel: “A myth is an artistic achievement relevant to the society through the function it performs....”

Paul: Yes, does that make sense? We viewed Bluebeard through the lens of a myth. Its artistic achievement is the fairy tale genre, the illustrations the book would have, and the symbols it uses: the locked cellar, the keys, the number seven (for the wives he once had), and the triumph of good over evil. And as we saw from discussing the tale, there is relevance to society through the meaning of it:
the invisibility of women, of crime and punishment, of wealth and privilege over poverty, of knowledge and acknowledgment. The function it performs ties in with Jung. There are four basic functions myths serve: the first is pedagogical, that is, it's an educational device. I mean, look what we've learned by reading and discussing what would seem like such a simple tale from a *Mother Goose* book. Secondly, it serves a social function in that the tale is a social commentary and may be intended to improve social conditions and draw awareness to issues. And as we've found out, fairy tales are widely and broadly known and told, a wonderful means of conveying social causes. Third, myths open our minds to the mysterious, that in-between space, and lastly, they bring us into relationship with that mystery through the function of our art. And the art can be the telling of the tale, the fairy tale format; it can be songs or fictions, fables or poetry. In essence, our creativity.  

Jack: I guess the difference between what Penny's husband did and what you do is that you are involved in myth-making more regularly. Living the myth.

Esau: Yes.

Paul: Aristotle wrote about *mythos* in his text, *Poetics*. Interesting that the combination of terms produces "mythopoetics." When he spoke about mythos, he spoke about plot. So it seems to me that in order to understand the plot of a story, or the plight of someone's life, we need to examine the myths that are active in the story.

Edsel: Well, if it's a myth, doesn't that mean it's false?

Esau: I think in the modern use people say that myths are false beliefs. But, for myself anyway, a myth is a story that is held as sacred.

Jack: It doesn't mean the original story is untrue.

Esau: No.

Paul: My understanding of the myths of native North Americans is that they are ones of explanation—of how things came into being, of understanding the world, and of ways that the gods or
elements of the sacred interact with ordinary humans.\textsuperscript{74} Like Rilke beholding Apollo: here we have Rainer encountering a divinity which he is able to come into relationship with and have an experience of the sacred. Such connections can be life changing. What do you think, Penny?

Penny: Hmm? Sorry, I was lost in thought.

Edsel: About encounters with myth and things that are sacred or extraordinary and what that means in our lives. ‘Cause I don’t know—I’m certainly looking for something. I just don’t know what it is.

Esau: I guess myths are no different than religion.

Penny: We have been given beliefs that Adam and Eve were our parents, that the world was created in seven days, Jesus ascended unto heaven, yada yada yada.

Edsel: We know from science that the world wasn’t created in seven days, but, I don’t know, it gives a context to our lives. It’s an explanation for how things came to be when it boggles our minds as to how we even got here. I think we—or maybe I should say “I”—need to have an idea of where I came from and where I’m going. I mean, I don’t necessarily believe everything I was taught about Christian or Baptist faith. And my husband—my ex—he was Jewish, though non-practicing. And now I just found out tonight that Mary Magdalene wasn’t a prostitute, so I guess that goes to show there’s certain realities even to things we call myths.

Esau: “In the beginning…”

Edsel: Yeah. How things began. Maybe fairy tales are miniature versions of the way things work. Like \textit{Sleeping Beauty}—magical and wondrous.

Jack: Of what’s creative and powerful.\textsuperscript{75}

Penny: Yeah, well, that’s all la-de-da, but what if your own beginning wasn’t so great.

Esau: What do you mean?
Penny: Well, if we're talking mythopoetics and how myths and mythical figures relate to your own life, and how creation stories relate how things came into being with all this wonder and mystery and creativity—well, what if you had a crappy childhood? What if your own bible started, "In the beginning my mother was severely depressed and attempted suicide six times. On the second day my father crashed the car while driving drunk. On the third day he drowned my kitten because the whole house smelled like cat shit. On... {[tearing up]}

[pause]

Jack: Oh, gosh. Penny, I'm so sorry. You're absolutely right. Some of us have had shitty upbringings. You're right on the money.

Penny: [sniffling] Thanks. I'm not going to cry! Um... I've got to go to the washroom. Excuse me.

Paul: Of course. I'm just thinking...

Edsel: Yeah?

Paul: The Bible starts with "In the beginning..." but it ends with Revelation and its apocalyptic content. I always thought of those books as being future oriented, but now I'm thinking about them as insights into our pasts. "Apocalypse" means an uncovering.

Jack: The dissipation of the cloud of unknowing.

Paul: If stories and poems and myths are the ways by which we construct meaning in our lives, then we need to recognize what those stories are and how they function in our lives.

Jack: Or maybe more importantly, how they dys-function in our lives.

Esau: I think myth connects our world, no matter how happy or terrible it is, to a greater reality.76
Edsel: I don’t know, you guys. Why doesn’t Penny just put it all behind her? I mean, it sounds so awful. Why dwell on it? There must have been *something* good about her childhood.

Esau: But that’s her story. She has lived a painful myth and I don’t think you can sweep it under the carpet, as we janitors say. You live what you were initiated into, good or bad.

Edsel: Yeah, I guess I’d better wake up. My goodness, this is turning into some kind of group therapy. We’re here to talk about a fairy tale, for God’s sake. We’re supposed to be having fun. Poor Penny! Maybe I should go and see if she’s okay.

Jack: I don’t know. I think she needed a bit of time alone. I think she had a really good point there, though. What do you do when you grew up with awful parents like that? What happens when there’s no prince charming to come along and rescue you? How would you know that life is any different from the despairing ways of being you were taught? When your *axis mundi* revolves around painful memories? It’s a lonely way to be in the world.


Jack: But we never really talk that much about the kinds of life stories like Penny has had, or I’m sure what many of us in a given group like ours might have had. I certainly have my demons. In school and at home all I ever heard were the usual tales about *Little Red Riding Hood* and *The Three Little Pigs* and that syrupy Walt Disney crap. What about the life stories that don’t fit those tales?

Paul: Being a pedagogue, I’d blame it squarely on the dominant cultural curriculum. It contains stories that are acceptable, certain religions that are promoted, stories about other peoples’ lives, other times and situations, but there’s little or no space for telling our own myths, and I’m not entirely sure why that is. If *Bluebeard* has been told and retold since 1600 or so with all its blood and gore, why not Penny’s story of a suicidal mother and a drowned kitten?
Esau: I guess she just needs to write it down or find a way to tell it. We won't know her story unless she tells it. Maybe later on we could pass around the talking stick.

Penny: [returning] I think I've said more than enough.

Edsel: Are you okay?

Penny: Yeah. I'm fine. Pay no attention to me—I just got carried away.

Esau: You're very brave, Penny.

Penny: Oh, thanks. Not that brave. But, enough about me. What's next?

Edsel: Could you say something more about mythopoetics? If I'm understanding this right, the fairy tale we're about to hear is this fellow's way of telling a social message in a way that is accessible to readers.

Paul: Yes, you could say that. Probably by casting himself as the main character and drawing on myths and archetypes in order to tell his story.

Edsel: Because fairy tales have a moral to them.

Paul: Often, yes. There's some kind of moral or ethical lesson to be learned. Sometimes it's stated in the summary at the end. Other times it's left for the reader to comprehend.

Esau: So if a fairy tale tells a story with a social message to it, what do you call it when someone writes a contemporary fairy tale but it still has a social message to it? It's mythopoetic in using the fairy tale format, right?

Paul: Yes.
Esau: And it's written as a fairy tale so that people can understand it better, because we all tend to relate to myths and symbols and to tales in general.

Penny: It sounds more like a manifesto.

Paul: Yeah, maybe. We're going to weave the subject matter of a contemporary fairy tale into the biographies of our lives. Pinar said it well when pointing out that curriculum is not comprised of subjects, as if education is solely about a course in math or geology or poetry. It's also about Subjects with a capital “S.” People. Living beings who are engaging with these topics. And therein lies the subjectivity of it all. Because when we try to teach a subject, we're trying to teach a set of facts, of rules, of ways of being and knowing that have been handed down. We try to objectify everything and in that way we produce Objects rather than Subjects. Institutions like school, family, and church seek to produce a personality, an objectified, fixed being. We know this from Foucault: “Certain impulses are permitted expression, accorded status; others are not.”

Jack: Fascinating.

Paul: Oh, listen to me! I'm getting started on a rampage. My point is that critical thinking and writing are at the root of disrupting the personality that has been produced by institutions.

Penny: Tom would call it anti-oppressive education.

Edsel: Oh?

Penny: That's his big kick these days.

Edsel: Your husband?

Penny: Yeah.

Esau: How is it defined?
Penny: Well, it's—how can I put it? It's an education viewpoint that critically examines traditionally held approaches to learning. It is founded on the notion that oppression in schools and society is so well hidden that we tend not to even recognize it. We might think we're democratic in teaching, for example, but are actually marginalizing a lot of voices.79

Edsel: Marginalizing?

Paul: On the periphery or not included.

Edsel: Oh, like Jack being gay.

Jack: Totally! And probably any one of us here in some aspect or another. The idea, I think, is to work at recognizing whose stories are told. Do we follow the majority and ignore minorities like the Métis?

Jack: Each generation contradicts the “curriculum” of the preceding one.80

Penny: You need to be able to have the skills to look back and realize how institutions like school, family, and church, to name a few, produce standard ways of being and knowing. That kind of shift in consciousness means you have to question or learn from someone else that the traditional knowledge you've been given is not what it seems.

Jack: It's like Jane Goodall.

Esau: The monkey lady?

Jack: The chimpanzees of Gombe. She went out into the wild African jungles to study them in their natural habitats. Jane would record their interactions, observe their social practices, communication styles, and nuances of living. That's ethnography. Writing about a different culture or group. But when I went to a lecture of hers when she was town I also heard how she included herself in the research. She shared about her thoughts and feelings and spiritual growth as she watched and learned from the chimps, told about her concerns for the preservation of their species, and even about times when she herself was interacting with them.81
Penny: So it's kind of an integrated approach. I never did see how anyone could just be an objective observer, to see that something's going on and not really being part of it.

Paul: Like the proverbial fly on the wall.

Edsel: Yeah, sometimes we see the fly. Doesn't that change the whole situation?

Esau: You never know who's watching when it comes down to it.

Jack: It's really how you write about it, and recognizing your own story as part of the world story. We're interconnected whether we realize it or not. It's not 'us' and 'them' though we often act that way, especially when there are differences between us. If we don't respect our own story, I don't think we have the ability to appreciate or truly understand someone else's story.82

Paul: Last year I read a chapter by Carolyn Ellis called Evocative autoethnography: Writing emotionally about our lives. She's truly a master in her field on the subject. It's all about what Jack was saying about Jane Goodall: voice connects the personal to the social, from the one to the collective.83 You can tell from the title that she advocates writing emotionally, that is, not distancing yourself as some objective scientific researcher who thinks she's collecting data only or studying the behaviour of viruses in a petrie dish. There's much more to research methods than interviewing or observing others or dissecting animal parts. Academia can be very oppressive about other ways of coming to know the web of life.

Penny: From my understanding the Grimm Brothers collected the tales. I think they had a hand in re-writing some of them and such, but few, if any, of the stories were actually written by them.

Jack: True. Maybe Hans Christian Andersen could be called an autoethnographer because he wrote his fairy tales, among other works. His works used psychological insight and social experience to comment about the reality of every day life.84

Esau: Right! I forgot about him! I'm forgetting what he wrote.
Edsel: *The Ugly Duckling*.

Penny: *Thumbelina*.

Jack: And *The Princess and the Pea*, which I used to think was spelled p-e-e.

[laughter]

Paul: Tales like *The Ugly Duckling* are memorable because we identify with the characters. Andersen uses the power of metaphor to tell a tale about overcoming adversity. Anyhow, I think I’ve wet your whistle enough to lead into our feature presentation. Are there any other questions or shall we read the fairy tale? You’re all shaking your heads, so let’s continue. Esau, would you mind being our raconteur?

Esau: Me? Reading it aloud? In a library? Um, I guess! Me, the janitor, doing a reading! Get cozy everybody, it’s time for a fairy tale.

Penny: Oh, do we have to? Can’t we read it to ourselves? I’m not a kid anymore.

Jack: Oh, um, well, I’m guessing there’s only the one copy.

Paul: Yes.

Edsel: Does it seem too childish, Penny?

Penny: No. I’m…it’s just that I really don’t like someone reading to me. I guess I like following the text myself. Maybe it’s a teacher thing—always wanting to be in control!

Esau: Well, would you like to read it for us? I don’t mind.

All: Yes, go ahead.
Penny: Oh! All right. I guess. I didn’t mean to hog it.

Esau: Not a problem! We’re all ears.

Penny: Okay. This is the story. It’s called *A Grim Fairy Tale*. 
Program Notes


10 Block, A. A. "If I forget thee...thou shall forget": The difficulty of difficult memories. In M. Morris & J. A. Weaver (Eds.), *Difficult memories: Talk in a (Post) Holocaust Era* (Vol. 165, pp. 25-44). New York: Peter Lang, p. 25.


12 Ibid., p. 1559.


15 Mitchell, op.cit., p. 28.


17 Dodds de Wolf, op.cit., p. 559.


26 Idem.
27 Dodds de Wolf, op.cit., p. 445.

Idem.


Idem.


Doll, op.cit., p. 47.


Idem.

Idem.


Hillman (1983), op.cit., p. 4.

Doll, op.cit., p. 10.


Hillman, op.cit., p. 11.


Pinar, op.cit., 265.


Metzger, op.cit., p. 196.


ACT II

A GRIM FAIRY TALE
Once upon a time Prince Edward was on the cusp of leaving home in a land that time had forgotten. His father, the old King, had said nothing about his son’s impending departure. It wasn’t until the entire family: King Caster, his wife, Queen Estra, and young Prince Eddy were at a commemorative ceremony that it was at last acknowledged. It was yet another elaborate banquet and most of the weary townsfolk were there. His father was being commemorated for his 75 years on the throne. And, oh, the pageantry of it all! Silver platters and colourful streamers, cream filled desserts of every kind, and a door prize of a hand-made birdhouse. Even Old Mrs. Willowby made an appearance and she rarely left her house except for funerals and when the train came to town, which was an even rarer event indeed. Her husband had been killed in a railway accident, but when she heard the whistle heralding the train’s arrival she would dress up in her Sunday best—her lavender coat and red floral hat with its lacy veil that hid her blue eyes. She would head out to greet the iron horse, watching and waiting eagerly as every last sleepy passenger got off. And without a tear or a sigh she’d quietly return home. Today though, she had come out for the commemoration, or perhaps she knew the real reason: that it was Eddy’s turn to leave home and part of her worried that he might never return just as her husband never did. Perhaps she would see him to the train as well. Or would she anxiously await his return? For Eddy was soon to leave his home, that grey house with black lattices and trim. Leaving the house with birch trees in the yard with their Dalmatian skin. Leaving the overgrown garden of yellow poppies and bitter rhubarb. He was standing at the threshold.
Figure 1: Prince Eddy at the Threshold
He was born into a Royal family of the Colony. Though he lived in a hamlet, it still had a King and a Queen, and they were his parents, Eddy being youngest of their ten children. They were loved and admired by all, for his father had ruled in a kind and just way. No townsfolk knew that the crusty figurehead was a philosophical fellow, so much so that he named the cat *Spinoza*. No one knew he was a master of firewater. Those who did know shared in the thirsty art.
Figure 2: Playing the King
And though Eddy was a prince his parents did not ruin him with the promise of an indulgent life. To this end they treated him like a commoner, a handmaid, and oft times a fool or a jester. But above all else he was a loyal subject. So too were his siblings. One of Eddy’s older sisters lived just nine miles away. One of his brothers was a dreamer of dreams and a mystic poet. Yet another brother was the keeper of the finances of the entire land, which was an enormous chore indeed. He even minded the monies of some of the family. Eddy’s mother—why, she could tell you herself—she had many loyal friends and visitors, though she’d often insist she was bored and lonely. And of course Eddy was well loved by the town because he was goodly natured, obedient, and a talented musician. Oh sure, there were those who said he was born à main gauche, but jealousy is a nasty vice and the Archbishop would set them straight in a Sunday sermon if he ever caught wind of such malice.

The Queen regnant was both portly and slim, lusty and gaunt. She had been terribly ill most all her days and often needed much tending to.
Figure 3: Long live the Queen!
“Fetch me a cold cloth,” she would insist as she flailed in the throes of a dizzy spell on the wrinkled couch of luxury, its gold embroidered pillows falling hither and thither, the cat scurrying away with a bewildered frown upon her face, ears folded back. “Call on the doctor, I’m dying!” she would insist. “I’m dying!” And at once they fetched Doc who would hasten over from across the street with his little black bag, and with his wizened features would listen to the heart beat close to her cleavage, checking her pulse. He would frown as he felt her forehead. She insisted she could not go on, that the infirmary would be best, but he would not have it so. He stroked his moustache, tipped his cap, checked her tongue, felt her forehead, checked her pulse, and advised bed rest in her royal bed, for surely she had been overwrought from all the responsibilities of being the Overlord’s wife and from all the duties of raising ten talented children. And as with every visitor who came by, friend or family, worker or political guest, she would beg Eddy to play the lyre for them, for she was boastfully proud of him. If the truth be told, Eddy did love music so. When nothing else could console, he would turn to his music and it spoke a language all his own. And when he played, as he always did play, she would beam from ear to ear. And their polite guests would gracefully sing his praises and insist that they had never heard such wondrous music in all the land. “Surely the swan song of the Silver Cygnet was sure to make the swallows yawn! Surely the shawm of an abecedarian avatar was but a belch from a bloated camel!” And with that Empress Estra would glow with a radiance that spoke to her true divinity as a descendent of the Royal line of Clemency. Estra often told the townsfolk how she had descended from Jesus himself. She loved the shocked look on their simple faces as she explained how Jesus had gone to sunny Tarascon with Mary Magdalene after a fraudulent resurrection. After all, hadn’t the papal residence been in that very town for a while? Mary and Jesus had children there and this is where Estra’s Royal line descended from—from that very clime with its sunflower fields and wild tarragon and a bevy of cloistered ancestral nuns. Sometimes she told the story at bridge club. Sometimes she told it at the butcher’s when she stopped in to buy blood sausage. Other times she told it at Saturday night mass. You see, she was proud of that fact: “I descended from Jesus.”

And though she had been feeling poorly that day, especially in anticipation of the grand ceremony the evening would bring and the many social demands imbued with it, she was well enough the night before to host the Royal bridge club. The crème of the town’s ladies gathered for butter tarts, tepid tea, and a discussion of the affairs of the day. “How they love their bridge game,” thought Eddy. He remembered a time when he was a wee lad of about five years of age when it was soon time for the Royal bridge club to gather. One of the ladies, Mrs. Noseworthy, traditionally remarked on how pale
Eddy looked. “Is he well?” she would inquire. “He looks so pale!” And this irked the Queen of Spades to no end. She would insist that he was tired though conceded he was somewhat of a sickly child and required extra care. Indeed, she’d bore him much too late in life and the pregnancy was hard on her. How she hemorrhaged! She had never been the same.

Estra could not stand to have Mrs. Noseworthy comment on his pale little cheeks again, so she instructed Eddy to go and put on some of her rouge so that he should appear quite happy and healthy before he went to sleep in his crib. They were gathered around the rickety bridge table and Eddy made his usual mandatory appearance in his night garb. Mrs. Noseworthy said, “Oh aren’t you just the cutest thing in your little night robe!” Eddy blushed. And then she added, “And you’re all rosy cheeked...or has someone been into his mother’s rouge?” At which point his cheeks grew redder than ever before and he was so flustered that he hurried off to his crib, only to hear a further nasty comment from Mrs. Noseworthy, who just had to open her big mouth and say, “Isn’t he a little old to be sleeping in a crib?”
Figure 4: Captive Audience
It was a good thing his father was not there to hear that. For his father wanted his son to be a manly prince, to play the sport of kings and to be an athlete. But alas he was a prince of uncommon pallour. Certainly he would have insisted his son had outgrown the brass crib. His father had been King for 75 years. Seventy-five years he was King, for he was greatly devoted to the hamlet and all of its citizens. Some would say he ruled with a rod of iron. Others said he was but a puppet. But only true and loyal friends and those who cheered his politics would say that he was every inch a King. It was he who had had the elderberries planted along the lakeshore. It was he who had the infirmary built for those who had lost their way in the pasture. It was King Caster who sought redemption through every helpful gesture he made, for he firmly believed that the value of life lay in service to others. He fashioned himself to be a holy man. Why, he would have been a preacher if his wife hadn't talked him out of it. “What will people think?” she demanded. “When your own mother was such a harlot? Getting married less than a year after your father’s death.” And that would be the start of a great row. It was something they seemed to enjoy. As others enjoy a game of chess or making paper out of pressed flowers, so the Queen and King seemed to enjoy a good fight. They must have, or else why would they continue it with such zeal? And even though the King believed the meaning of life lay in the service of others, he expected to be served at home by his wife. For you see, they were of nobility, but not so noble that they could afford a maid or a cook. Caster could often be heard chastising the Fair Madam, “I’ve been Monarch for 75 years and you never once made my breakfast!” To which his wife would scowl and reply, “Well, poor you! As if you can’t boil yourself a bowl of oatmeal!” And so they fought most every day and because of this Prince Eddy’s mother had her own bedroom downstairs and his father had his own upstairs. The children slept upstairs too and there were no doors to any of the rooms. Only the Queen had a makeshift door to her lair, and it wasn’t really a door. It was a long braided crimson cloth that could be rolled aside. Some peasant had crafted it by hand and the sly sultana snatched it up at a poor man’s sale at the church.

With the ceremony drawing to a close and Eddy beginning to yawn with boredom from the repetition of such events, the old King revealed a surprise. He announced to one and all that Eddy was leaving home, that he would be set adrift at dawn with most wicked speed. To the sea! Cutlery fell to the floor and old Felix de Bruce spit out his ale. It was unheard of! Everyone took the train.
There was surely no other way but by passenger car, or if you had an in with the engineer, a ride in the caboose. But before the din settled down the King had the Royal council members draw back the dusty silver curtains from the stage and there it was: a little red rowboat. It was charming and pathetic at once. Hand carved as if hewn with a dull axe, then painted a bold shade of red. Red as Eddy’s rouged cheeks. Red as the lips of Salome as she spun the dance of the seven veils. Red as the passion flower when its life is at its apogee. And yet it possessed a magical quality about it that made Eddy catch his breath. He was captivated. Here it was, a gift from his gray-eyed father, the old philosopher king. His son was to set sail the next morning on the River of Life. Queen Estra, having had no idea that such a plan had been covertly undertaken, pursed her lips for the briefest moment in disapproval, but then quickly caught herself when she remembered that all of the townsfolk were there, watching and waiting.

Old Ezra Smith bellowed, “A toast! To Eddy! May your adventures take you far and away, but always keep the fondness of the home of your birth in your heart, and may you return one day as Czar, Samaritan, and Sage!”

“Here, here!” everyone shouted as they rose to their feet.

“And if the Fates will have it,” added Ezra in a serious voice, “may you find the undiscovered country.”

The town matriarch pursed her lips again. If looks could kill! And with that everyone fell silent, for none had found it. Not from this small town, that’s for sure. Or if they had, it was not spoken about. It was the undiscovered country—the very one that was missing from all the maps in school. “Why is it so elusive?” mused Eddy. Surely there was a geographical survey hidden somewhere about this legendary land. Perhaps somewhere, like the Dead Sea Scrolls, a scroll of the undiscovered lay hidden in a wombat’s cave or sprawled as a tablecloth across the stump of a tree for a forest gnome? Or was there indeed such a place? Perhaps it was simply nonsense, as most of the townsfolk said. Like the Fountain of Youth or fool’s gold with no alchemist in sight, a legend awaiting science’s disapproval. Yet why does it seem to stir the heart with thunder?
All through the wet and dreamless night Eddy imagined himself in his little red rowboat and reveled over the adventures that awaited. The River of Life! The possibilities! What was he thinking? He had only heard about it in passing, but oh to embark on it! It was mentioned in storybooks ancient and new but all were missing from the Library. For everyone wanted to drink of the River. That Great River. If only to behold it on gilded paper under museum glass. If only to trace its sacred outline with a fingertip. He had heard its waters could be dangerous to traverse. They could be wild and cold as the breath of Medusa in her moment of fury. They could be listless and caressing as a mother’s gentle hush as she pressed you to her bosom.

The aged Queen and the drunken old King and his entourage took him. It was a River of great renown. One-eyed Drucilla with her ripe green garments and hair grey as a goose’s belly said that the River flowed “right ‘round the world.” “Right ‘round the world,” she said and no one questioned her authority. The locals called her The Synopse, for she could see things together, like a quilted pattern. And most of the hamlet believed her because she was a seer. It flowed ‘round the world, through valleys choked with blackberries, through man-made canals that changed its natural course, and even through the Great Mountain Range that bore silent witness to its watery passage.

Tall and lanky, pale and nervous, he rode in the carriage with his aging father. Catching the midnight green, almost black, of pine trees and muskeg as he rode past, he quietly cried to himself, thinking how Spinoza would miss him, but especially his mother. How would she cope without him, the last one to leave? How would she care for King Caster, whose memory was entering the blizzard storm? He felt tremendous guilt. The last to leave. The first to return? Only time would tell. But he had gone, as he must. He was going to skim along the River of Life, meandering and wondering, desperate for a map of the world yet somehow grateful for not being encompassed.

Weaving through village after village, through farmland and brush, past the blueberry fields, the rickety old carriage stumbled into the woods of the green monkeys, who swirled and swam in an emerald pond like sperm into an egg. Deeper and deeper into the primordial jungle they went, thick with the night, the noisy carriage with its little red rowboat in tow disturbingly quiet. Not even the suffocating canopy would yield the screech of a green gibbon. Eddy shivered as he yearned for the sun. As the carriage ached to a halt he could see he had reached the end of the jungle where the lime trees grow, where the sand and sea-beaten rocks provided a brief footing before the long River of Life.
Figure 5: Speak no Evil
What would he say to the old King, whose breath was spirited even this early in the day? Certainly he was not going to embrace him farewell or choke back a tear. No. Obedient as Eddy was, he dreaded the good-bye and wished he could make a hasty cast-off into the rippling waves. King or not, Eddy was not about to forget the nasty words that poured like silt each time the King filled his gullet with firewater. Would not forget the philosophical words that dribbled down his chin to Estra: “You haven’t got the milk of human kindness.” Would not forget how his mother had lain crying on the floor of the Great Hall, the demonic King standing above her with clenched fists. But all the townsfolk were there, eagerly awaiting the departure, so he smiled and embraced him followed by a Royal salute. Some said of his journey that an oracle had spoken about it long ago and that the prophecy was at last being fulfilled. Some said he was but a King’s Fool and that he’d soon be back with his tail between his legs. Still others watched in silence, biting their lips, nearly bursting aloud: “Hold fast! Please, I beg! Take me with you!” But none broke the silence. In the awkwardness of the good-bye his father smiled sheepishly and muttered, “Don’t come back married.” He wouldn’t.

Suddenly in the corner of his eye Eddy spotted his small red rowboat sitting on the shore. The townsfolk had detached it from the carriage and brought it to a sandy knoll. He had never noticed before that the boat had a name: The Vidyaat.
Figure 6: Gently Down the Stream
Curious, he asked his father about it, to which he replied: "It's a very old word, my boy, rarely spoken. It's sometimes known, taught and told, fickle as women, lame as an old goat. It is both found and lost, distant yet dear, within and without, neither here nor there. It is memory." Neptune himself was painted at the bow to guide this ancient vessel through the endless jade-coloured waters. Eddy climbed the ladder with his satchel, a bundle of dried figs and green olives stuffed with almonds, a jar of chrysanthemum honey, a tiny blue velvet satchel of gold, and some red wine from the King's private reserve that Eddy had secretly spirited away. Before he left his mother beseeched him to seek out the great goddess of grain, Demeter, to bring the goodness of her blessings to her when he returned, as all heros must return. Surely he could bring the royal queen something that would lift her energies and calm her nerves. For it was said of Demeter that beauty breathed about her and that light shone from her so that the place was filled with brightness.

Many townsfolk agreed. "Demeter will bless us with the bounty of earthly greenery and the soil will yield an abundance of roots and grains and edible flowers. Our harvests will be plenty! The honeybees will make the sweetest nectar from the sun kissed blossoms of the fields and the wild purple yams will grow large as riverbed stones. We will gather rosemary and calendula from the edge of the woods to make wreaths in her honour, and a great chorus shall rise up to sing a hymn to Demeter." Eddy was mystified and asked of them, "How do you know that she will bestow me anything? And how shall I know where to find her? There are so many rivers to cross in my hand-hewn punt." "So many rivulets and rills, channels and canals, whirlpools and watersheds. I'm lost before I begin."

They replied, "Remember your teachings and traditions! You have been taught all that you need to know to navigate in this world." One of his teachers stepped forward and said, "Go to the land of Sicily that lies across the Tyrrhenian Sea and seek her out in the nomadic pastures of that fair island. Call her by name when you stand in the grove of the sacred elm. Listen for her in the whispering grass on the hillsides of Messina." His mother, standing among the throng, appeared bewildered.

Eddy said to his teacher, "Ah, then you know of her! You have been there! You have felt the fragrant breath of Demeter caressing your neck and have harvested the bounty of her golden corn. You have wept with the joy of Spring budding in your heart." And she replied, "No. I know these things because I have read them in our sacred texts, which have been handed down to us. This is the written word and as it is said, so it must be." "Oh," his mother added, "and bring a small portion of ambrosia that I may
eat of it and thereby have a taste of immortality. After all I have done for you, that is all I ask. Nothing more.”

“But sing me a favourite song before you go!” she added.

“Yes! Sing!” cried the crowd.

[CD Song #2: I want a girl¹]

I want a girl just like the girl
That married dear old dad!
She was a pearl and the only girl
That daddy ever had.

A good old fashioned girl with heart so true
one who loved nobody else but you.
I want a girl just like the girl
That married dear old dad!

And so it was that on that day he took wing in his little red rowboat down the River of Life, the townsfolk cheered and waved colourful scarves for luck, shouting “Godspeed!” His father proclaimed it a national holiday and promised a round of ale for every scarf bearer, causing them all to dash away quickly to the public house.

Eddy sallied many a day across the great rivers and streams, passing lands and sights never before seen until such time that he passed Corsica and Sardinia into the Tyrrhenian Sea where the island of Sicily lay awaiting his arrival. But the winds were not kind to his travels and he soon found himself tossed and blown. The crash of the waves made a loud “Husshhhh” and he quickly lost his oars to the sea-foamed waters that swelled with salt. A scutter passed by as he cried and waved for help, but they didn’t seem to hear him. Or maybe they ignored him. In desperation he clung to the sides of his boat as

¹ Recorded through licensing provided by the Canadian Musical Reproduction Rights Agency Limited and Redwood Music Ltd. c/o Carlin Music Publishing Canada, copyright holder of the song ‘I want a girl.’
it crashed and crested, creaked and cracked, splitting in two and descending to the murky depths, passenger in tow. Ice cold and deep, he held his breath as the rough waters carried him along. Carried him along into that sable-vested night where only the palpable obscure is sensed, never known.

Descending into the caverns, down and down he went, deeper than the depths could be, where the faintest of light gave shadow to red rock. Down the ribbed esophagus of Mother Earth he lurched deeper and deeper until he got to the bottom of it. And here he knelt on the cold surface retching and spewing a mess of afterbirth, of red and pink from deep inside his being. It felt cleansing and disturbing at the same time and left him bewildered. He started crying without consolation, heaving all that could be heaved. He lay on the floor curled up as a fearful babe in the womb, believing he’d gone mad, writhing like a seething green-eyed serpent poisoned by its own venom. Why? he wondered. Why this? But no answer came. He could find no trace of Demeter herself bathing in a woodland fount or anointing the olive trees with pearls of rain. Instead he found rivers of lava and seas of mud flowing from Mt. Vesuvius and on this steaming red regurgitation he descended into the forbidden realm, just as Odysseus had done by sea in the long ago.

At last he arose and crossed the river Lethe, terribly thirsty from the salty air, drank of its forgotten water. Then ferrying his boat across he docked on the other side where Persephone, daughter of Zeus and Demeter, lay weeping and yearning. How pallid and sunken eyed she looked! How lonely her existence in her underground prison, the dark crib of her uncle’s lair where only the sun god Helios bore witness to her plight. It would be ten days before Helios would bring light to her fate. How Persephone ached to be reunited with her kindly mother! Eddy knew her agony as if it were his own and decided to embark on his exodus for home immediately, for he too unlocked his own desperation and loneliness and longed for his mother. He was filled with an angst that would not let him go and a melancholy that enveloped him with a lifelessness only the tallow-faced dead could echo. Pale Persephone bid Eddy not to eat of anything whilst he was there or it would surely mean that he would always have to return. “I was made to eat a pomegranate seed,” said she, “which has bound me here season after season. My mother has searched the world for me and ‘no one would tell her the truth, no man nor god, nor any sure messenger from the birds.’” So when the old hag servant of Hades came to feed him pomegranates for lunch, young Eddy did as she bid and ate of it. But when she was gone he spit the bitter red seeds that he had tucked in his cheek out of his mouth. And the spell could not be cast. “Go,” Persephone hastened him, “and do not look back. And if you should find my mother, I beg
of you, be my messenger of truth." And as he listened to her story he understood the penalty of silence.
Figure 7: The Spell of the Pomegranate
Returning home would not come easily, for he had no vessel. His boat, The Vidyaat, lay in pieces on the bottom of the dark plasma, not even a hint of red visible to the naked eye. Eddy sat on the barren earth for the longest time, wondering what to do and what would become of him. He thought about how his father had hewn the boat for him, and then it dawned on him that perhaps he might have some of the same talents. So he began to whittle away with a little pocket knife, carving out a boat for himself from a fallen tree. The boat was just large enough to hold him and a few possessions and some water and food. He could not fashion the likeness of Neptune on the front of it, but he did decide to christen it with a name: Luce. A Sicilian farmer’s wife gave him a broom since no oars were to be had, or none that he could afford, and he gratefully accepted it and set sail like a witch upon the water.

He arrived at the water’s edge of his township to a great fanfare. Drucilla had foretold his impending return and Ogling Olga confirmed the prophecy when she spied him with her brass telescope as his boat wearily groaned ashore. And, oh, the pageantry of it all! A hero’s welcome he was granted. No one noticed his new boat. Even his father, who had been boastfully proud of it, didn’t seem to recognize it. Perhaps he was too excited to see Eddy home. As the carriage wheeled him into town there gathered an enormous parade behind him. It seemed as though every person had joined in the festivities. Some did cartwheels again and again until they could barely walk straight. Some wore their hunting trophies on their heads and danced like a drunken deer or a silly bear. Lizzie Oleander made hot oatcakes on the top of her wooden stove that was tooted by her mule and tossed them to the hungry crowd as she wiped her nose. Even Mrs. Willowby stood at the street’s edge under her linen veil and quietly wept. And everyone gathered in the Great Schoolhouse, clapping and cheering as Eddy was carried high above their heads to the podium. The antiphonal choir assembled that they might sing a song in his praise and in praise of the blessed gods who had remembered them. His mother was bursting with pride. He was known as the Happy Prince.
Figure 8: The Happy Prince
“Sing!” they cried. “Sing your hymn to Demeter! Tell us of all your journeys through the becks and burns of life. What blessings of Demeter did you bring to share with us?” And Eddy stood silently. He did not have the words to speak of sorrow and pain, of loneliness and darkness so heavy that he thought he would never emerge. For they would not want to hear it. He was mute. He could not tell of his spiraling descent into madness on the earthen floor, for none would understand. He was alone in his journey, for he knew of no other who had floundered in the brooding depths of night that would afford no day.
Figure 9: The Wanderer
The crowd was clearly disappointed, but not nearly as much as his parents, especially his mother. He had embarrassed her in front of everyone. To the Royal household of Clemency he was quickly whisked to sleep the night. After a good rest, he would try again and embark on a second journey. Queen Estra begged him to stay on, though, for the old magistrate had fallen into the sere and yellow leaf. Eddy felt pangs of guilt and said he would sleep on it and decide in the morning. And so he settled into his lumpy bed across the hall from his father who now had no knowing of him. Eddy saw that both his parents were aging and even his mother said she was at that hoary age.

Surely less than an hour had passed on this hot summer night when a flickering light caught Eddy’s eye. Then his ears pricked up. It was his father. Old Bacchus himself was creaking around his room, the candlelight illuminating ghostly shadows on the wall. He began to creep down the stairs. *He must need to empty his bedpan*, thought Eddy. Fearfully he listened. Suddenly there was a scream. His mother! “What are you doing? Help!” Both were shouting. Eddy ran downstairs to find his father standing over Estra, threatening her with his cane and candlestick, yelling and hurling jealous accusations for her transgressions with the stranger in the house. He was wild as the wildebeests of the African Serengeti, mad as the Mad Hatter over a broken teacup, but for the crazed King it was real as the realm of Kubla Khan’s icy pleasure-dome. He was incensed!

Edsel: Incest? Heavens to Murgatroyd, did you say incest?

Penny: [frustrated] No. Edsel! “He was *incensed,*,” as in furious.

Esau: Well, I don’t know – it sounds like the king thought his wife was having sex with—with her own son.

Penny: Oh come on! Women don’t do that!

Esau: Yeah, that can’t be right. I mean, I’ve heard of it, but isn’t that awfully rare? But it sounded like it ‘cause he said the old man no longer recognized Eddy.

Edsel: So his father was jealous? Is that it? Jealous of the stranger?
Paul: Is this some kind of Oedipal complex story?

Esau: Who's Kubla Khan?

Penny: You've lost me.

Jack: The so-called Oedipal complex just blames the child for wanting sexual activity with his mother. They don't have one for girls who supposedly want sex with their father.

Paul: They called it hysteria—Freud gave in to peer pressure and fictionalized it.

Jack: They're blaming the victim! It makes me so mad! The Oedipal complex is the vernacular for what kids called me in school: mother-fucking queer.

Esau: Ouch.

Edsel: Jack! Such language! Is that how kids talk nowadays?

Jack: The Oedipal complex wouldn't exist "without the cultural rules which include the incest taboo." Both "are rooted at once in the culture and the individual."¹⁵

Penny: It's been constructed by society to be a taboo.

Esau: Why?

Penny: So that we won't have to talk about it!

Esau: Why did Eddy say that for the crazy king it was real?

Edsel: Well, if he was crazy, he wouldn't know the difference between, um—

Paul: Psychosis and reality.
Esau: Yeah.

Edsel: But earlier—when he found Persephone—he said something to the effect that she was being kept in her uncle’s lair.

Penny: What are you saying?

Edsel: I’m just saying it sounds like this story has undercurrents of incest. I don’t know. I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to interrupt. I was shocked. I don’t remember my Greek mythology.

Jack: Wow, I think Edsel’s right.

Esau: Maybe we should read something else.

Penny: Incest? What is wrong with you people? For God’s sake! What on earth could a woman do to a child? It’s men who fondle and molest. What kind of bizarre sickening story is this? This isn’t literature!

Jack: This is real life.

Paul: One and the same.

Edsel: Penny! What’s the matter, honey? I’m just trying to figure out what the story’s about.

Jack: Yeah, it seems like something’s going unsaid.

Esau: In the story?

Jack: Well, both, yeah. And with Penny. You’re visibly shaken.

Penny: Wouldn’t you be? [crying] My father sexually abused me, all right? Is that what you wanted to hear? Are you satisfied?
Edsel: Oh, Penny. It's not all right.

Penny: [weeping] He used to say he was going to read me a bedtime story and then—and then—he’d—he’d fondle me. And later—I mean, I didn’t know. I thought everybody’s dad did that. The last thing I need is to read about it and have it shoved in my face. [sobbing] I told my mother and she didn’t believe me. They disowned me. Me! She sided with him over me. She said I’d always been a tramp. It’s unbearable!

Edsel: [embracing Penny] Oh, sweetheart. I’m so sorry. I believe you!

Jack: I’d say we all do, Penny. Thanks for telling us.

Penny: [sobbing] Thanks, you guys. That means a lot.

Tom: Who’s there?

Paul: [standing] Nay, answer me...¹⁶

Tom: It’s Tom. Paul! [frowning] What’s going on in here? Candles...incense...Why does everyone look so upset? Penny, what’s wrong?

Paul: We’re in the midst of a literary reading.

Tom: And it’s made my wife cry? What, did the dog die or something?

Penny: Oh, Tom, shut up!

Edsel: You’re interrupting!

Paul: Did you come for the reading? It’s a little late—
Tom: No, no, I came to pick up Penny. I thought this would be over by now.

Paul: Oh. Everyone, this is Tom, you know, Penny's husband.

Penny: Tom, can we go home now?

Tom: Of course. What is going on here? Paul, you shouldn't be upsetting people like this. This is a library.

Edsel: Oh, Penny, please don't leave.

Jack: Yes, stay.

Penny: I can't. I can't take it. I never would have come if I'd known what you were going to talk about.

Tom: You still haven't answered me, Paul. What's this all about? What did you guys read?

Esau: We're not finished it. We've just read a piece of the tale.

Jack: A fairy tale.

Tom: [incredulously] A fairy tale? And you managed to get my wife so upset that she wants to leave. What kind of grisly tale is it?

[pause]

Tom: Well?

Paul: Um, it seems to have a dark theme to it.

Jack: We're not sure what.
Edsel: Incest.

Tom: [to Paul] You have this book in the library?

Paul: Uh-huh.

Tom: Knowing what it was about?

Paul: Well, sort of, yeah. You’d probably like it—it’s an anti-oppressive text.

Tom: Incest is hardly the stuff of Paulo Freire. And what if some child took this fairy tale out? Or some parent? What if a mother wanted to—heaven forbid—read it to her child at bedtime? It’s highly inappropriate. Who on earth would want to read it?

Paul: Well, we are. It’s adult reading.

Jack: But it’s about children’s lives.

Tom: I don’t think so. That topic has no place in school. Do you want to upset everyone? Frighten the kids? You’d better screen your materials carefully before spending the town’s library budget on X-rated books. I am shocked.

Jack: Maybe if you’d been here for the whole discussion you’d understand it better.

Paul: Yes. I mean, sexual abuse does happen to children. It’s not like it hasn’t happened in Memoria.

Tom: If you’re talking about when the Fathers used to run Providence that was some years ago. That’s over now.

Esau: For you maybe. You’re new here. It’s not over for the rest of us.

Edsel: How do you mean?
Esau: I saw them.

Tom: You saw them?

Esau: [weeping] I saw them.

Jack: You witnessed the abuse? Is that what you're saying?

Esau: Yes...

Jack: You saw them...

Paul: ...and didn't say anything?

Esau: No, I did! I couldn't take it any more. They used to keep kids after school, you know, sometimes for no reason. And I was janitor, so I was around a lot but after a while, you know, they just don't see you or forget that you're around. I went to wax the floor of the rectory and I walked in on Father Lacombe with one of the boys. He was making him—you know—he had his... anyway, I saw it. More than once.

Paul: Oh my God! Who did you tell?

Esau: The Monsignor.

Edsel: What did he do?

Esau: He didn't do anything. He told me he'd handle it. That I shouldn't say anything. That I should pray for Father Lacombe and Father duBoeuf.

Edsel: He knew?
Esau: [nodding] And then he made those boys go to confession. As if, as if they were the ones who had sinned! [gritting his teeth] The bastard!

Paul: I wasn’t living here then. What happened with the case?

Edsel: Nothing happened. Those priests were transferred by the Monsignor.

Jack: Man! A typical cover up. Why does this sound so familiar? How many times does history have to repeat itself before we get it?

Paul: [to Esau] The same man who gave you the gold watch for your years of service?

Esau: Yeah. I’ve never been so ashamed. It was the worst day of my life.

Edsel: It finally went to trial three years ago. It’s costing the diocese a fortune. They might have to sell the Bishop’s Residence.

Tom: And that was built in 1912.

Edsel: I hear a developer wants to convert it to condos.

Tom: Such a shame.

Jack: So it went to trial. Didn’t you testify?

Esau: I wasn’t asked.

Jack: Well, you know, I’m an ex-Catholic myself. I was schooled at a Catholic boys’ school. In fairness, none of that stuff went on where I was schooled, not that I’ve ever heard of, anyway. The priests and a few nuns who taught us there were all excellent.

Edsel: So, do you mind if I ask how come you’re not Catholic anymore?
Jack: Because homosexuality is a sin to them. I'm not even worthy of communion. I'm not going to be part of something where I'm not accepted. At church, school, or work. But Esau, why didn't you go to the police?

Esau: Church law was foremost. They said they'd take care of it. They made it look like repentance and prayer were going to fix it.

Paul: Yeah, like saying they could prevent future abuses by more carefully screening for homosexuals who want to be priests.

Jack: People always think all homosexuals are pedophiles!

Paul: I know. And of course, some are, but the majority of pedophiles are actually identify as heterosexual.

Edsel: Is that right? I always thought I would have to be nervous if a gay person was around my children.

Jack: It's a widely believed myth. I read that many pedophiles were themselves sexually abused as children.17

Paul: Years of enforced silence and celibacy are not going to fix it. That's the problem. The Catholic Church is repressing the sexuality of many of their clergy.

Esau: Poor Penny! I'm so sorry! I just thought of your mother denying she's ever seen or known anything and I realized I'm not any better.

Paul: You thought you were doing the right thing.

Jack: You did. At least you spoke up and broke the silence. They lied to you.
Tom: My God, is this what you’re all doing tonight? Crying and confessing? That scandal is in the past. It’s time to move on.

Paul: What, you think it doesn’t go on anymore? When even today about one child in ten is abused?

Tom: Stirring it up like you folks are doing isn’t going to do anyone any good.

Esau: It’s doing us some good. These are secrets that need to be talked about. I’ve been biting my tongue for so long. It’s made me sick. Really it has.

Tom: It’s late. You’d better wrap this up. Paul, I’m going to call you tomorrow and talk to you about this. This concerns me a lot.

Paul: Very well.

Penny: No, no. Tom, you don’t understand. Sorry everyone, I’ve got to go. Good night. [exit with Tom]

Edsel: Goodness gracious, Godness guide me, what an unexpected evening.

Paul: Indeed.

Jack: I hope you’re not going to get into trouble for this, Paul. I think what we’re doing and discussing is exciting.

Esau: Yeah, same here. We’ll support you if there’s any trouble.

Edsel: Why don’t we finish up the story. I’m curious about how it ends.

Paul: Uh, sure. Let’s go for it. We’ve lost our reader, though. Oh!

Esau: What?
Paul: Now I understand why Penny got so agitated when it came time to read the story and why she insisted on reading it.

Jack: Oh! Because her father abused her when he read her bedtime stories.

Paul: She didn't want to be back in that situation.

Edsel: How terrible! I don't know what I would have done if that had happened to me growing up. I never heard about incest at all until I decided to read the Bible one summer, when I was 19.

Jack: Among the lists of "Thou shalt nots"?

Edsel: No, not that I remember. No, they were adult situations. I don't know, maybe it was okay in those days. I forget what it said but I remember being shocked that so-and-so had married his own sister.

Esau: Interesting stuff, Edsel. I don't remember it either. So who's going to be our reader now?

Paul: Be my guest.

Esau: Me? Um, OK.

And when Prince Eddy left the second time the townsfolk again poured down to the water's edge of that Sacred River and implored him to return with good fortune and tales of wonder and blessings. His mother beseeched him to find the Muse named Terpsichore, for she dances splendidly with the lyre that Eddy played so well.18

"Terpsichore is one of the Muses of the sacred nine," his mother said. They are the sacred incarnation of grace and beauty and it is said the gods delighted in them when they danced to Apollo's lyre. And you, being such a noble and efficient player of the lyre, shall surely draw them nigh when you play. The Muses will dance the dance of the blessed spirits, and they will send you home to us with one of
them as your bride in order to give my life its bloom. For she will be so enamored of your beautiful music when you pluck the lyre that certainly Terpsichore will immediately become betrothed to you. Women want nothing else but to marry a man of good heritage. Remember that your father, the old king, is feeble-minded and you were destined to take his place before your time."

“Oh what a wedding feast we will have!” said the townsfolk. “The birds will raise their carols on high and we will reap the splendor of the blessings of the three Graces at our banquets, commemorations, and holidays. We will savor their mirth in every song of our gatherings. You will spread good fortune through the land, and everyone shall be very pleased.”

“That is all I ask,” said his mother. “Nothing more.”

Eddy said, “How shall I know where to look for them? For surely I haven’t a clue!” And one of his teachers stepped forward and said, “Tradition tells us they will be in the forest primeval, for such is the land of splendor—with rivers that foam with mirth and aromatic chickweed and lupins that are sure to bring good cheer.” But before he could leave, the townsfolk begged him for a song. “Perhaps a song about your night of reverie,” cried Olga, for she was curious what his dreams might foretell. Or did she know already and was trying to bait him, knowing he had slept in a strange and familiar bed? And so he sang about the possibilities of life and love, of rivers and streams, of longing and languor, languish and language.
[CD Song #3: I don't want to know]\(^2\)

If music is no longer lovely,
if laughter is no longer lilting,
if lovers are no longer loving,
then I don't want to know.

If summer is no longer carefree,
if children are no longer singing,
if people are no longer happy,
then I don't want to know.

Let me hide every truth from my eyes with the back of my hand.
Let me live in a world full of lies with my head in the sand.

For my memories are all exciting,
my memories all are enchanted,
my memories blur in my mind with the river's flow.

So if the world is not what it seems
I don't want to know.\(^3\)

Off he went, waving good-bye and smiling cheerfully as Olga bade him luck in finding a land where they speak his mother tongue. Off he sailed into the churning rapids that meandered through rivers mythical and mapped, sacred and snagged, past gush and groyne. He plowed the waves of the Indus, the Brahmaputra, the Karnali and the Sutlej, leading him deep into the forest primeval.\(^2\) Eddy was navigating a stream that seemed familiar and wondered to himself if he had been here before. It was then he came upon a dam and could drift no further. There were no beavers around and he wondered aloud, "Is this the true end of the stream or does more lie beyond?" Hungry, he decided to stop and rest a little while, hoping to find some acorns and loganberries for a meal. What a surprise it was when he heard a familiar voice calling his name! Startled, he looked about and there was Professor Sonuski

\(^2\) Recorded through licensing provided by the Canadian Musical Reproduction Rights Agency Limited and Jerryco Music Co., copyright holder of the song 'I don't want to know.' Lyrics were adapted by the author.
from the School of Music! Eddy remembered Professor Sonuski fondly, for he was a famous and world-renowned teacher. He was at once charming and eccentric, pensive and verbose. He had a slight beard that resembled goat-fur, cataract eyes that danced like jewels or like those little steel balls that you try to jostle and jiggle into their slots. His clothes were wrinkled and drab, which only rendered him more distinguished. His eyelids were drooping, as if in a state of meditative bliss or daydreaming of the music of far-away lands and sinuous rills. Five years had passed, perhaps seven, and still he was no different as if but a moment had passed since their last encounter, just a whisper away. He was immutable. And his speech pleased the ear just like his tone poems: with phrasing and familiarity, with great pauses and significant rests. His wheezing gasps of breath seemed to say more than the sum of frothy words. It was mesmerizing. He said, “Bid me discourse, I will enchant thine ear.”

And so it began, and before long young Eddy had completely forgotten about Terpsichore. He swirled with the giddy phrases that haunted his soul. He bent and contorted with the colour of the lines, with the tangible beauty of music that was at once invasive and sacred. And the music caressed him with great fondness. It was sweet as the honeycombs of the summer bees who gather the nectar of wild clover. Songs of praise and adoration that could soften even an iron cold heart. What was this music that enveloped his being? That regardless of the listening ear penetrated his rigid corpus? Sweet agony, how the music played him so! He was enchanted!

He was horrified! He stole away into the jaws of night with thoughts of violent murder and bludgeoning. He ran and ran through the rainy forest, down the muddy paths. Ran desperately to the edge of the town, past the cracked and weathered fences and the railroad tracks, past the yellow rape fields. He ran desperately to the border, to the forest’s edge. As in a dream when hardly able to move he ran desperately to the meandering river where his little blood-red rowboat sat waiting for its companion. He climbed in and there he cried harder than the rain, heaved heavier than when he rowed, raged like the rapids, and the river ran desperately, desperately, desperately.

Running and raging in the rapids, violently out of control. Swept away. His father—his father was lost in the blizzard of madness. No, his father was dead and his mother didn’t care. She didn’t even cry at the funeral. The open casket. How pale and waxed he looked! He was dead, the old philosopher king. Where was Confucius now? Where Genghis Khan and Omar Khayyam? Who would surrender the answers now? Who would chart the coastline? Who would champion the cause?
The waters raged on and on and Eddy kept thinking, *Surely this must lead somewhere! I never seem to reach my destination.* And with that he saw something out of the corner of his eye—a trout! A rainbow trout! Leaping! And in the peacock blue currents below—more rainbow trout. Swimming against the cold, cold river. *They’re going upstream,* Eddy marveled. *Going to spawn. Going back home from whence they came! Back to the Source! Back to the Source!* Fish! Leaping and bounding in rhythm with the Seeker of Knowledge. I am a fish! Determined innately to return to the Source, the exhilarating ice-cold waves frothing with exuberance. Almost flying! Wiggling and squirming their way against the flow. Upstream he went with his floundering fish alongside. There was no stopping them. Eddy paddled and rowed relentlessly, incessantly, with a fierce determination. And as he rowed back and back he saw familiar sights of places he’d been, forests he’d wandered, flowers he’d gathered. Back to the Source he rowed until he felt he could row no more.
Figure 10: Returning to the Source
His mother somehow knew that he would return unbridled. This being his second return to the village the townsfolk were quite perturbed and had all but given up hope that Eddy would bring them great fortune and tales of high adventure, for their own sad and bitter lives sought a ray of sun in the midst of winter. But then they cheered up because they remembered that thrice is the trick, and surely plenitude and cords of barley would come their way this time. Tradition dictated it must be so. Even before he could say “Nay, no more!” his mother beseeched him to go down to the River of Life once more to seek out Eros. “You will find him bathing in the Euphrates with the nymphs,” said she. “Or maybe he is borne upon wings and will be found on the highest mountain where love knows no boundaries.” And the townsfolk echoed her sentiments and begged him to make the third and lucky journey. They cried out for a map of the world so that they could follow in his footsteps. They begged him for a morsel of a song.

“Stop!” said the Prince. “I need not go anywhere but here. If it is Love you seek, go and seek it out yourself. If it is a map of the world, you must create your own. I cannot be your guide. You are witnessing my journey and so I say to you: “Go, and chart your own undiscovered country.” Then he sat to play his music and the crowd looked relieved. And he began to play a song without words, yet one which spoke a language all its own. It was a song never once heard, yet felt disturbingly familiar. It was a song that raged like the rapids, that ebbed like the sea, that bled from the land.

[CD Song #4 (instrumental): The Open Window]

And with that he left the townsfolk standing there, mouths hanging open in disbelief. He headed out of the Great Hall and down the road to his home where his mother had already gone and was waiting. They stood watching him, hands on their hips, dismayed with his decision, wondering if they should try to stop him, annoyed with his independence. Finally, Lizzie Oleander muttered, “He don’t know chalk from cheese.”

Estra was very disappointed that his journey had not been successful. But then again, she said she did not really want him to marry. Rather, she hoped he would stay with her and take care of her for she was getting on in age. He would be King once the ceremony was held in just ten short days. And she began a bitter tirade about the old philosopher king just as she had done a thousand times before. The
things he had done. How he said he was helping Eddy's sister at the inn after she left her brutal husband. What they did. Drunken. Carrying on like Lot and his daughter.  

And at last he found the undiscovered country. Almost by accident, almost by divine revelation. He saw what he had never wanted to see. He thought the unthinkable. He knew what he had always known. He told of a putrid land, an ancient territory of crusted hills and valleys, of coagulated streams. He recounted the taste of bitter pomegranate, of desperate days when the wind would call its sickly siren song. He told about the wounded earth and how he had put his fingers in it to soothe it. And, oh, how Mother Earth groped and rubbed that young stem in futile desire to milk the sugar sap before its spring. Like a blackbird in the throes of death she anguished, she celebrated, she died, she lived. And the words became a great poem that swirled thickly in the air, opened a miasma of lost language, moaned in fierce contortion as Truth wrestled the demon liar to the ground.

3 'The Open Window' is an original composition by the author.
I am not Thomas
but I know the disbelief of
putting my fingers in your wound
desperate in your passion
your self-adorned nimbus
an effigy in gilt and I
the axis mundi of your needs

fermenting
rancid fruit
the sacrificial lamb
anointed in your blood

I am not Thomas
I have no doubts;
I bore witness to your martyrdom
at the stations of your transgressions

I have pressed the milk of Bathsheba
tasted the sediment of the Nile
induced your transfiguration

My insurrection is at hand
All the people of the hamlet were an hour early for the coronation, which was a momentous occasion indeed, even though Eddy broke from tradition. The old philosopher king was dead, the queen had been banished, and Eddy was now ruler of his domain. He didn’t want a crown or a robe of royal crimson made of ermine and muskrat. He had no use for the staff and orb. He knew the people would want a speech or a royal edict, and this he was eager to give. He went out among the people, foregoing the balcony, and entered the throng below. They bore witness to his testimonies about the meanings of his life, of the awakening to the sunrise, of testimony and truth telling. He addressed the tyranny of silence, the history of oppression, myth and reality, knowledge and acknowledgment, the liminality of being, and illuminated the darkness of sexuality. The people called him Edward the Emigrant, for he had been to the undiscovered country. He had emigrated and he had returned. And somehow everything was different. And somehow everything was stagnant. For it begins with one voice. The revolution begins with one voice. And he was at once peasant and ruler, King and page, victim and victor.
Figure 11: The Coronation
He became a way for those who were lost
and knowledge for those who were ignorant,
a discovery for those who were searching,
and a support for those who were wavering,
immaculateness for those who were defiled.26

He recorded his manifesto, which will be spoken on the hilltop to all directions—east, north, west and south, for all to hear:
Esau: Um, that's all there is. It's blank. Maybe we're supposed to make it up.

Edsel: Blank? Let me see that. Right when we're at the best part.

Paul: Well, actually, we're going to hear the manifesto.

Edsel: Really? When? You know something!

Paul: Next week. The author himself is coming here to deliver it.

Jack: Excellent!

Edsel: I can't wait. Maybe someone can tell me what a manifesto is. I know when you manifest something, you bring it into being. I've heard the word used, but forget what it is. Is it like a treatise? Like the writings that Martin Luther nailed to the door?

Esau: Yes, I think so. A manifesto is a statement that demands social action, doesn't it?

Paul: Yes, it reminds me of Arthur Frank's book, *The Wounded Storyteller*. A manifesto is a declaration of a suppressed truth and it often carries demands for social action. Like in this story, there's a suppression around themes of sexual abuse and homosexuality, and a manifesto is a call to action that uses an individual's or a group's suffering to move others forward with them.\textsuperscript{27}

Edsel: OK. Cool.

Jack: Cool?

Edsel: Yes, I'm catching up with the times, thanks to you all. Incest is such a taboo but I can see why it needs talking about. You know, I never would have come to listen to this story tonight if I'd known it was about incest, to tell the truth. I mean, who wants to hear about it?

Esau: I guess it's not surprising that Penny left.
Jack: I know what you’re saying. I took a course a couple of years ago and one of the books we had to read was about the atrocities committed in Apartheid South Africa and I really squirmed because I didn’t really want to know the gory details about what went on. But once I started reading it, I was both shocked and absorbed by it. These are such important issues for humanity and yet often so absent from our schooling.

Esau: It makes you want to make sure that this kind of thing doesn’t happen again.

Jack: Exactly. The big question is how to do that.

Paul: I think it begins with texts and then with dialogue. Until we encounter texts—and by that I mean written or oral, fairy tale or poems, songs or fiction—until we encounter and engage with forbidden texts and begin to make seen the obscene there can be no revolution. Maybe we’ll get some clues to the answers to that next week. I wonder if we’ll be able to meet here, though!

Esau: Maybe you should all come to my place or something.

Paul: No, no. I’m just kidding. I’m not going to be kicked out of a public place. This is the library, for heaven’s sake! For what they pay me, I don’t need this job, if it comes down to that. We’ll meet here. Unless of course they launch a book burning before then. Can we open our imaginations to the mythopoetics of others—the stories made and lived by others and our own connections to those stories and experiences? Can we teach beyond ourselves? That’s what really calls us to being. What do you think the main points of the manifesto would be, given the fairy tale?

Esau: Well, there’s all those references to Greek mythology and one from the Bible. It would be nice to explain those. And what they have to do with modern day problems I don’t quite get. How does something written 3,000 years ago have much influence any more?

Paul: OK. There also seems to be a thread about schooling and education. As if to say pedagogy and curriculum play a role in the perpetuation of taboo subjects and oppression. I wish Tom would be here for that discussion.
Esau: I'd even like to know what taboo means. I mean, I know what it means. But, where does it come from? Why are some things taboo?

Edsel: Things like homosexuality. Sexual abuse. Goodness, I remember when it was a big crime not to wear a hat to church. Who the hell decided what's taboo? Even the word itself sounds funny! I wonder if there are statistics about mother-son incest? It sounds like something so rare, but who knows...

Jack: And there's Eddy's use of music too. Such an important part of his life. The songs he sang. Stuff like that. I'm also thinking of the guy who wrote this fairy tale and if the writing of it was somehow therapeutic. You know, from telling his story, the so-called 'breaking the silence.'

Paul: Hmm, yes! That's a big one. I would want to know more about the use of mythopoetics. I know we talked about it, but I'd like to hear more.

Jack: I'm thinking of the writing as not only beneficial for the self for recovery from traumatic events but as social commentary. I'm sure there's more, so we'll see.

Edsel: This is fun! Next Saturday night should be really interesting. I'll bake!
Program Notes

3 Shakespeare (1601/1963), op.cit., p. 45.
10 Ibid., p. 22.
16 Shakespeare (1601/1963), op.cit., p. 33.
19 Idem.
27 Frank, op.cit., pp. 120-21.
ACT III

THE MANIFESTO:
OUT SPOKEN
The group has gathered in a sparsely furnished activity lounge at St. Philomena's with 1970s furniture and décor: colours of orange and brown and striped couches accent the setting. Wilting plants hanging in macramé adorn the room. An old, badly scratched and worn piano hides in the corner. A fireplace brings a source of warmth to the room.

Paul: [stoking the fire] I wonder if it’s okay to light this? I won’t set off the sprinklers, will I?

Esau: I dunno. Should be okay. It’s chilly in here—might as well be comfy.

Edsel: I was so—I don’t know—excited and disturbed at the same time—if that makes sense—from last week’s talk that I haven’t been able to sleep.

Jack: Once you have awakened, you can slumber no more, my beauty.

Esau: So, Paul, when was Penny put in here?

Paul: Um, four days ago.

Jack: From the traumatic memories that have opened up?

Paul: Sort of, yeah.

Edsel: Opened up! Opened up a Pandora’s Box. Oh, poor thing. And she looks so frail.

Paul: That’s part of the problem. She’s got an eating order.

Esau: She’s anorexic?

Paul: Bulimic.

Jack: Purging her food. I’ve heard of that. Aren’t some eating disorders related to sexual abuse histories?
Edsel: I think so.

Paul: Yes. And Edi, you brought baking!

Edsel: "Edi!" Oh for goodness' sakes! Where did you get that from? My granny used to call me that! How sweet! Maybe I'll change my name! Baking? Oh God, yes. I brought peanut cookies. Is that wrong? Will I make her sick?

Jack: Ha ha! "Edi" it is. Don't worry about it. It's the thought that counts.

Edi: It makes sense in a weird way—trying to control what goes into your mouth, into your body. I'm surprised they're letting her take part in our gathering.

Paul: Well, her doctor thought it would be okay. And besides, it's the week-end and there's no activities for the patients, so it's basically free time for them anyway. She said this group has been therapeutic for her. I guess from what she told me on the phone she's been treated for bulimia before but they just slid over the sexual abuse history as being not that relevant. She called me on Monday and had quite a discussion with Tom. She said it was okay if I tell you about it. It seems that the two of them had never talked again about, um, the incest she experienced after she first told him and the reaction she got from her family. He didn't want to upset her. But she's realizing now how much pain she has been keeping inside and that the silence is doing her more harm than good. And she thought about her students and that in a class of 30 there can easily be 4 or 5 or more who have been sexually abused too. And if she stays quiet, they'll stay quiet, and the whole bloody cycle will keep repeating itself. She wants to deal with the root of it.

Edi: I hope she can do that here. I don't know what kind of care St. Philomena's can provide. You know, I looked on the internet and it said approximately one in every three girls is sexually abused.³

Esau: It—I—it leaves me speechless. It's astounding. As if I wasn't silent enough, it's so shocking that it's hard to even respond to.
Paul: Goodness! And I know it’s about one in six for boys.

Esau: I still feel ashamed. Can’t believe we’re just now talking about this openly. And what about Tom?

Jack: I didn’t think Penny would come back, never mind Tom. Remember, she said she would never have come if she’d known we were going to talk about incest.

Paul: Well, let me answer both your comments. I mean, it’s not as if she didn’t have misgivings about returning, that’s for sure. I used a line from Paul Ricoeur where he was talking about narrative identity and it seemed to sink in. Ricoeur said, “If the subject were given at the beginning, nothing would be learned.”

Esau: Who’s Paul Ricoeur?

Paul: Um, well, he taught philosophy but had diverse interests, including narrative.

Edi: Aha. Of course. If I read a mystery novel I don’t want to know the ending right away. If the best part is revealed right away it spoils it.

Jack: And besides, most of us probably wouldn’t have showed up at all!

Esau: How true! Who wants to spend an evening talking about incest?

Paul: We do!

Esau: [chuckling] Apparently so.

Paul: Point taken, though. I bet the room would be empty except for anybody who has a personal or pedagogical reason for being here. Or maybe a therapist. But, back to Penny and Tom. She got through to him because of her experience. He knows what a problem it is not to address bullying, that suicide can result. There are so many things, he said, that never get addressed and he was embarrassed
for trying to shut it down. He's interested in anti-oppressive pedagogy so was surprised at his own reaction when it came to a topic that he had personal associations and experience with.

Esau: Those seem to be the toughest.

Paul: It's just that he feels protective of Penny. But the last thing he wanted was to go around with his head in the sand lest abuses like his wife has been through will reoccur. After all, he's a fan of Paulo Freire's anti-oppressive education. Go figure!

Jack: Yeah, there's hope for humanity yet. Hey, here they are!

Tom: [shaking group member's hands] Paul! So glad we talked this week. I think I owe everyone an apology for having a hissy fit.

Paul: No problem. And this is "Edi"—she's renamed herself.

Penny: Edi! Oh, I like that! You go, girl! And thanks for including us, Paul, and for faxing us a copy of *A Grim Fairy Tale*. We've both re-read it carefully.

Paul: The dialogue would be incomplete without your testimony.

Penny: Thanks.

Tom: It's a disturbing read, yet speaks volumes. It's going to be a very informative evening.

Penny: I brought my Kleenex box just in case. This isn't easy, but I know I'm doing the right thing. I want to know.

Paul: You're in the right place.

Penny: I just want to apologize to everyone in person for leaving so abruptly last week. I just never expected all of this to get stirred up.
Edi: It's very understandable. You're very brave.

Penny: [nodding] Ever since my retched parents disowned me for telling the truth, I've never said anything to anyone else except Tom.

Tom: Well, you told your doctor.

Penny: Well, yeah, but all he said was, "Hmmf, that's not very good," and gave me anti-depressants. I've always felt I should talk to someone—a professional skilled in this area—but never did. And then last week—God!—after I had some time to cool down I realized how much this is affecting my life.

Jack: No doubt.

Penny: And then I thought about myself as a teacher and the fact that I never talk about sexual abuse in class and I know there's probably kids in my class who are going through what I endured when I was a kid. And I realized it was criminal to teach in silence. No, not teach in silence. To teach silence.

Tom: A culture of silences.\(^5\)

Paul: Paulo Freire.

Jack: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Penny, are you aware the Red Cross has a program for abuse prevention?

Penny: No.

Jack: They do presentations for school-aged children. Some school districts require teachers to attend an in-service before a presentation can be delivered to their class because the teacher must be present during the presentation and it's not uncommon for disclosures after the presentation. It's a great resource.\(^6\)
Penny: Umm, gee, thanks. I'll have to follow up on that. I mean, my God! What are my priorities here anyway? Isosceles triangles or more than that? If I can't be a model for my students about things they're going through—be open to talking about it and finding solutions for it—then there's something wrong. And Esau, when you told about witnessing the abuse at the school and not being heard. We both had a similar experience.

Esau: [nodding] We have an obligation to speak up.

Jack: To give testimony.

Penny: Yes. It's our duty. Really and truly. I mean, I don't feel ready to march into the classroom tomorrow and delve into it. I need to do my own work first. I've been through counseling before for depression and anxiety, but never dealt with the abuse. My old doctor didn't even ask about it. She just started me on anti-depressants.

Jack: Your symptoms: depression, anxiety, fear, panic attacks, vomiting—that's your body talking. That's where narrative begins. That's where the breaking of the silence begins.

Penny: How true. That's profound.

Edi: What's a culture of silences? I missed that.

Jack: It's like—it's where those individuals who are on the margins of society have their voices silenced because the majority or the dominant forces don't leave space for them.

Edi: Oh, of course. Like Esau being labeled Métis and denied treaty status.

Esau: And Jack being gay.

Penny: Funny thing—it's like everyone of us can identify with a voice that's being oppressed. I wouldn't have thought of it that way. Sometimes just being white you assume that you're in a position of power...
Tom: Or privilege…

Penny: And that’s not necessarily true.

Tom: When Penny and I talked about the sexual abuse this week it was really hard, and—and I realized that Penny was right. So, so right. After all, here I am, a school trustee. Trustee! Trust should be a key component of that. And yet the educational system fails a child every time we give the message that talking about certain subjects is not okay. I think I’ve been very narrow-minded about things. And I’m not saying I’m comfortable with nasty subjects like this, but I’m here and I’m going to try to listen and take it in. For Penny’s sake if no one else’s.

Penny: Aw!

Edi: How sweet.

Tom: It’s weird being here. My mom was in St. Philomena’s years ago when the whole thing was an institution for the insane.

Edi: Really? Your mother? It’s had quite a reputation. They used to think that having a place in the country with lots of open air and grounds to walk on was healthy for recovery. But there’s certainly been some horror stories.

Esau: Who’s Philomena the patron saint of?

Tom: Um, I don’t know.

Paul: I read it in the foyer. She has a bunch of miracles attributed to her though they know little about her life. She was more famous after her death, and of course she was martyred. Pope Gregory XVI canonized her after several miracles and healings were attributed to her shrine in Mugnano, Italy after 1805. Her remains were found in 1802 in the catacomb of Saint Priscilla on the Via Salaria. The bones were exhumed, catalogued, and basically forgotten about because so little about her life was
known except that she was martyred at around age 14. Anyway, she's supposed to be the patron saint of desperate or impossible causes, forgotten causes, children, infants, and others.\(^8\)

Tom: Hmmph! How cheerful!

Penny: Yeah, a forgotten cause. That's me.

Esau: Your mother was in here?

Tom: Oh gosh, yes.

Penny: Tell them the story, Tom, it's kind of funny in a warped way.

Paul: Oh my! Do tell!

Tom: Well, I don't really know much about her. I was too young to remember her before she was committed to "The Nut House"—that's what my dad called it. I didn't know until years later it was actually St. Philomena's. Funny to call it "The Nut House" when he was talking about his wife. I guess there was no love lost there. When they—my dad and his new wife—told me we were going to visit her—I was about eight—I expected this peanut-shaped building or that we were going to get peanut butter sandwiches for lunch or something, and eat them with her. It was a long drive for us. We lived in Medicine Hat at the time. They brought us into this barren room where she was sitting by herself in a wheelchair. She had these horn-rimmed glasses on and food stains on her dress and just kind of sat there shivering. And my dad talked to her a little bit and I kept staring in amazement. And finally my step-mother said to her, "Do you know who he is?" and kept pointing at me. "Do you know who he is?" And my mom looked over and said, "Yes! He's your mother." And I was so shocked because I thought she was going to say "Tommy!" and my folks started snickering. And then she took some Scotch mints out of her pocket and started licking them all. She wouldn't put one in her mouth, she just kept licking them like this [protruding his tongue and flicking it up and down in exaggeration] and then she reached her hand out to me and offered me one and I was too polite to refuse so I just took it and kept in my hand and it was stuck to my fingers and all I could think about was her old tongue drooling all over them. And then we left. And she died a couple of years later when she got tangled up
in a bed sheet they were using to restrain her and even so I still felt this kind of loss at the funeral because I knew she was my mother and that it should be a sad occasion that she died or that I was missing out on something, but it wasn’t. I mean, not for anyone else.

Penny: It’s so quirky. It’s a wonder Tom and I are even half functional given our upbringings. Isn’t it funny?

Edi: No.

Penny: No?

Edi: No, it’s rather desperate. I get this sense of longing that can never be filled. A deep emptiness and yearning. You have to wonder, if that longing is never fulfilled in childhood, can we ever feel complete?

Penny: Well! Aren’t you getting philosophical! So...why don’t we gorge ourselves on some peanut butter cookies. Tom, your wish has come true. Peanut butter cookies! Ha ha ha! Welcome to The Nut House!

Esau: She was strangled in the bed sheets? Didn’t they do an investigation?

Tom: Um, I don’t know.

Penny: You got the M.E.’s report last year.

Tom: Yeah, I ordered her death certificate last year and the Medical Examiner listed the cause of death as “Suicide.”

Edi: Suicide! It sounds like they were negligent. There should have been a law suit. Didn’t your father sue?

Tom: Him? Oh God no, he couldn’t have cared less, really. I don’t know if she was schizophrenic or what. She had a lot of problems. It—I don’t know—it was quite bizarre, I guess. All I remember my Dad
saying was that it was kind of appropriate that she died on April 1. You know—April Fool's Day. And then they used to cackle throughout the years every time they offered me a Scotch mint.

Penny: Yeah. It wasn't that funny.

Tom: Well, it is in a warped way. I don't know. You've got to laugh at these things sometimes.

Esau: Goodness. You'd think we have nothing to talk about except traumatic experiences.

Penny: Esau's right. Is this what it's all about? How did we get from Bluebeard to the grim fairy tale to all these awful stories? Don't you wonder what the value is in digging it all up? I mean, it's fascinating. And things like incest have to be talked about and written about, but, where does it all end? Do we make ourselves more miserable digging and digging? You've got to wonder.

Edi: Well, I do wonder. I mean, some of you have had really tormented experiences and my life wasn't like that. I had a happy childhood. Reasonably. I mean, things happen to everyone eventually. If we focus on the negative all the time, isn't it going to be harmful in the long run? It's like Vietnam.

Paul: The war?

Edi: No. Just recently, the Ministry of Information and Culture banned inappropriate TV commercials during supper time.

Jack: Inappropriate?

Edi: Toilet paper, medication for skin diseases, tampons. They said it spoiled people's appetites. And I thought to myself, "Maybe they're right." I don't really think about it any more. How much nasty talk can we endure?

Jack: Until we've named the unnamable.
Paul: Indeed we need a balance in our lives. It's stories like Penny's and now with what Tom told us about his mother. And of course I'm interested in all of this from an educational perspective.

Tom: Oh! I was told to tell the kids at school my mother was dead. We never talked about the fact she was in an institution, a sanitorium. Too embarrassing for Dad, I guess.

Paul: If we don't critically examine the culture of silences we were raised in, schooled in, and ultimately continue to live in and embody, I swear we condemn ourselves to repetition of the traumas throughout our lives.

Jack: Hear, hear!

Paul: Saradjian and Hanks go further than calling it a culture of silence. They call it a conspiracy of silence.\(^9\)

Esau: A conspiracy? Interesting! That implies that there's a scheme—

Tom: —consciously or unconsciously—

Esau: —to keep things quiet.

Paul: Makes you think, doesn't it? Knowledge is power, and those who have the power can define what constitutes research, education, and practice. So, I've put the coffee on already. Decaf. We'll be buzzing enough. Tom, [nodding, shaking hands] this is Esau, who, as you might know, was janitor at the old Providence school—the town library—for 44 years. And this is Jack, one of my former students and now a doctoral student and musician. Edi here was named after her father's favourite car and makes the most wonderful Jewish pastries imaginable and no, she's not Jewish. And of course you know me, the little curmudgeon who runs this place and who promised to stock the shelves with books other than those by Rilke, which has only landed me in hot water.

Tom: Now, now.
Edi: Oh, I hope you’re not disappointed. I didn’t make a Jewish recipe tonight. I mean, I like the treats and such, but that’s my ex-husband’s tradition, not my own. I was so used to catering to his tastes that even after being divorced for 15 months I still cook what he would want to eat. So tonight I made peanut butter cookies!

Penny: Hooray! The revolution has begun!

Edi: [blushing] Oh, Penny! Esau, help yourself. These ones here are sugarless.

Esau: You’re too kind! It’s not that I can’t have sugar, it’s just a matter of watching my blood sugar, but this is extra special ‘cause I won’t have to worry.

Edi: Penny? Um, or maybe you don’t—

Penny: It’s okay, Edsel. Edi, I mean. Really. I’d love one. I promise not to rolf it up during our gathering.

Paul: [tasting one] And they’re delicious!

Edi: My dad ran over a boy on his bike.

Penny: [spitting out her cookie] What? Fuck, are you serious?

Edi: Well, since we’re all telling things...

Esau: Was he killed?

Edi: Yes. I mean, not at first. He lingered in hospital for a good two months and then gave up the ghost.

Paul: This is terrible. How did that happen?
Edi: Um, well, my Dad was a car salesman. I guess you know that. And—I don't know the details well—I was only four or so—but Dad was showing my Mum's brother the new Ford Fairlane 500 and driving it around town and to the outskirts and—I guess the streets weren't paved then, right? It was such a pretty car. Robin's egg blue. So anyway it was dusty and hot and I guess this kid on his bike was riding on the edge of the road or crossing it or something and they didn't even see him.

Penny: Oh my God! How awful. Did they know these people, his parents?

Edi: No. They had bought farm land in Donnelly Heights and I had friends who went to school there, oddly enough, but they were new in town. And the boy—I don't know his name—he ended up going to the city for care and his folks went in with him. And then he went into a coma and died and by that time I guess pretty near two months had passed and they just couldn't come back to the area again because of the memories and so they sold the farm right away and had their stuff shipped to the city. And uh, yeah, we never heard anything about them again.

Penny: That's it?

Edi: Yeah, that's my big family secret. I can't help feeling ashamed and it wasn't even me who ran him over. And it was an accident. Just one of those terrible things. To tell the truth, I had forgotten about it. I used to be reminded of it every time I saw one of those pretty robin's egg blue Ford Fairlane 500s, but of course you don't see them much anymore.

Esau: Were you in the car?

Edi: Oh, yes. On my uncle's lap. I mean, it's not what you think. You know, they didn't have car seats and such back then. It was like a sandstorm. It was windy, I guess, or maybe there was a tractor ahead of us or something. I don't know. I still dream about it sometimes.

Penny: Sometimes I feel like I live my life that way. Or that memory is like that. Blurry and unclear and uncertain until all of a sudden you hit something and you have to stop and figure out what's going on, I suppose. Or maybe you just get back in the car and keep on driving.
Edi: That's what my father said! He just kept on with things, I guess. I mean, it was an accident and a terrible one at that. But uh, you know. Father said, “You've just got to get behind the wheel of life again and keep driving. That's what life's all about.”

Esau: I guess that's kind of true, if you look at it philosophically.

Penny: Donnelly Heights? Never heard of it.

Edi: It's not there anymore. The families that lived there—the Dimsdales and the MacGuires and such, they died off and the whole area just kind of faded away. We went looking for the cemetery about twenty years ago and it took us two hours to find it. We kept driving right by it, it was so shrouded in blackberry bushes and shrubs. I remember it well because my husband said, “What the hell do you want to see an old cemetery for?” And here I was, writing down all the names and dates on the tombstones. I thought someone should record it and write a book about it. It's a ghost town and nobody even knows about it.

Paul: There's the recurring theme in our experiences when we really start to talk about them: silences. There's such a significant present of the absent, the collective unconscious. When historiographies are taboo, where do you find your life experiences in the text? It ranges from homosexuality to mental illness, from sexual abuse to death. I can't help having the feeling that these stories are vitally important. That they ache to be told. That these lives we talk about are important and that silence renders them valueless and meaningless. There's no moral to the story when the story isn't told. But before I get on a big rant, we're going to hear Prince Eddy's manifesto, and then we'll have time for some questions and answers. But I was thinking, before we start, I thought we should probably look at the etymology of incest.

Edi: Isn't that the study of insects?

Edi: [blushing] Didn’t I do this before? How embarrassing! I must need a hearing aid. Hey! Paul! You haven’t shared your past with us. We want to know about all your skeletons.

Paul: I’m sure you do, and I’ll get to it yet, I promise.

Esau: It must be Latin.

Paul: Incest? It is, though the exact origins are a bit murky. I looked it up this week. *Castus* means pure and chaste, and *incestus* means impure or immodest. But an interesting alternative notion holds that it comes from *cestus*, which means the girdle of Venus. According to Greek tradition, losing one’s girdle was a symbol of sexual activity.

Penny: Hmm, interesting. *Cestus*. Like a chastity belt. Similar words.

Edi: Aren’t you smart!

Paul: And as far as a definition goes, I dug one out from a book we have here by Tanya Lewis, a Canadian writer and incest survivor. She’s citing Sandra Butler’s book *Conspiracy of Silence*. It reads:

> …any manual, oral, or genital sexual contact or other explicit sexual behaviour that an adult family member imposes on a child who is unable to alter or understand the adult’s behaviour because of his or her powerlessness in the family and early stage of psychological development.

Penny: Mmm. Well said. I brought a definition with me, too, and this one defines mother-son incest.

Jack: Oh my.

Paul: Well, let’s hear it.
Edi: I don't know about all of you, but this certainly is hard to talk about openly, isn't it? It just seems so inconceivable, and yet, why not?

Penny: I know. Last week I said that only men do this. It's much more complex than that. I was speaking from my experience of things, and yet this fairy tale is clearly the voice of someone else—a man—speaking to the same issue. It's an atrocity regardless of gender. Anyway, I digress. This definition is from a booklet called *Mother-Son Incest: The Unthinkable Broken Taboo* by Hani Miletski. She says:

Mother-son incest can...be defined as inappropriate intimacy and/or sexually related contact between the mother and son. It involves the mother satisfying her own emotional, physical, intimacy, and/or sexual needs.\(^{13}\)

Edi: Oh! Okay. Well, maybe it was unintentioned then. I wonder if we can ask the author any questions.

Paul: We certainly can.

Tom: But it's a manifesto. Doesn't that mean an interrupted speech?

Paul: But remember, we're undoing the usual ways of doing things. The author has asked us to interrupt, to disrupt, to interact with him, to ask questions. He's not here solely to push his theories and ideas and experiences on us. That's oppressive. Eddy's repeated return home in the fairy tale represents the dysfunctional spell the family has cast over an incest victim. A spell of being unable to speak, of being enmeshed with the family of origin, and experiencing life as a traumatized child rather than a thriving adult. In the fairy tale, the hero makes two voyages but refuses to go on the third. Many tales and jokes have events that come in threes, with the third time being the success or the punch line. By not embarking on a third voyage he breaks the pattern. Disruption comes with it. A change in the way of being comes with breaking the pattern. Bill Pinar speaks of returning home as being connected to being brought nearer to a central truth. "Returning home means being relatively conscious of origins, being 'open' to the disclosure of unconscious material...and integrating those
origins with present circumstances.” He believes this uncovering is rich with three contents: political, epistemological, and pedagogical.¹⁴

Tom: Heh! That’s what teaching’s all about! Retelling information, imparting my wisdom. Hey, I did some reading during the week. I wondered if incest was considered okay in some cultures and not in others or what, but it turns out it’s almost universally taboo, and is especially an abomination between parents and children.¹⁵

Edi: Oh! I just realized something.

Esau: What’s that?

Edi: In the fairy tale, his name is Eddy.

Esau: Yeah?

Edi: An eddy is something that goes against the current. Like in the River of Life—he’s the eddy that goes against the way everyone else wants things to go.¹⁶

Esau: Hmm, neat.

Edi: So that relates to other words, like edify, to uplift morally.

Jack: A symbolic name.

Edi: That’s my Reader’s Digest vocabulary!

Tom: Going against the current. Going against current belief systems. For me, viewing it from an educational perspective, it has to do with the cultural curriculum.

Esau: Curriculum?
Tom: Yeah. *Currere*, Bill Pinar showed us, is the Latin root of curriculum, meaning to run, or running. Like a course, or a river.\(^{17}\)

Paul: And *discursive* means to write with a running hand. Interesting that narrative stems from the verb *narrare* and the root *narro* which means ‘to make known, say, speak, explain, expose.’\(^{18}\)

Jack: But when it comes to books about lesbian moms and many other often silenced topics in education such as domestic violence or alcoholism or heterosexism, we need to ask ourselves: if *currere* means running, what are we running from making known?

Paul: We run from making it known. In essence, we running from knowing, from telling what we know—these deeply troubling, taboo topics. Don’t want anyone to be a tattle tale. But if the river runs to the sea, can we also consider a running to knowing, or running with knowing?

Tom: Hmmm. Easier said than done. The silencing begins early on, doesn’t it? In covert ways.

Penny: Ah! Forbidden knowledge! Ever since Eve got blamed for tempting Adam to eat the forbidden apple in the Garden of Eden, it’s caused us trouble. Hmm, I wonder if that myth means don’t go looking for trouble.

Paul: Like Pandora’s Box.

Jack: Right! And Bluebeard’s cellar. Don’t go looking into the dark realms, or you’ll regret it. That seems to be the message in those stories.

Paul: The apple as a symbol of knowledge.

Tom: An apple for the teacher.

Paul: Tom, I like your term: cultural curriculum. What all does that mean to you?

Tom: Well, you know. A curriculum is a given outline—
Penny: Usually established by some authority figure.

Tom: It’s established with good intentions. A curriculum for grade 7, for example, tries to meet various learning objectives for the students.

Penny: We’re seeing that the problem is what gets left out.

Jack: And who decides what gets included. Whose voices are they? Are they parents? Teachers? Professors?

Esau: Are they all white people?

Jack: Heterosexuals?

Edi: The Catholic Civil Rights League?

Jack: An oxymoron!

Paul: School trustees?

Tom: [chuckling] Yeah, yeah, take another jab at me! I mean, you can’t include everything. But still, look at our situation here. I thought I was pretty liberal minded. I’ve been into all the Paulo Freire stuff about, you know, his classic Pedagogy of the Oppressed, and yet when it came to Penny and her upbringing I didn’t want to talk about it. I still don’t.

Penny: It’s your upbringing, Tom.

Tom: My alcoholic father. It was a family secret. My mom apparently drank too, like a fish. It was a family secret—both the drinking and the mental illness.

Penny: You learned not to talk about your feelings.
Tom: Yeah, it was quite dysfunctional. My step-mother drank too.

Penny: They both died of liver cancer.

Paul: Didn’t you find your teaching training the same?

Tom: Hmm? You mean don’t talk about personal feelings? Oh, totally. Learning seems to be about everything else except the self in relation to the world.

Paul: That’s what I found, for years and years. It’s traditionally based on performance and productivity. It’s not wholistic—looking at the whole person. It’s changing, mind you, but it’s certainly a rolling stone that gathers little moss.

Tom: So, why is that counsellors in training have to talk about themselves so as not to harm their clients, but teacher training isn’t the same?

Penny: When I did my teacher training we were asked to keep journals. Journals upon journals that had to be handed in, so I carefully edited what I was said and tried to write what I figured the prof wanted to read. We know it’s not doing anyone any good. Not me. Not Tom. Certainly not the students I teach. The last thing I want to do is emulate my parents.

Paul: Yeah, in order “for us to change how we teach requires us to change who we are as teachers.”19 It’s that simple. It demands self-reflection.

Tom: It’s just—how do you begin to teach about this stuff? I mean, the parents will have a fit. Do you just say: “Today’s lesson is about incest and here’s your homework for tonight.”

Jack: Well, why not?

Paul: It’s not as if the topic isn’t out there. We’re hearing about it in the news more often. There’s getting to be a body of literature about it. Lots of Virginia Woolf fans. Some of it has to do with the
medium used. Our guest author tonight has achieved this through the fairy tale by casting the unspeakable into a form that is familiar to us. Some of us have positive associations to fairy tales. Some of us, like Edi, would like to live the myth of characters like Sleeping Beauty. And there are those of us, like Penny, for whom fairy tales represent moments of terror and transgression. The author has made a nasty subject more accessible to us through the use of imagery, myth, symbolism, music, and metaphor. For long silenced subjects like incest, narrative offers a powerful medium for breaking that silence.

Esau: It's like what Edi said. Instead of running from things, we should be running against them. Like an eddy, running counter to the stream.

Jack: The stream of unconsciousness.

Edi: Against the current! Like those trout that he saw! He wasn't alone on his journey. The fish were making their ritualistic return to their home. It seems like once he trusted his instincts, his own nature, he knew where to go. You can't run away from your problems.

Paul: Very true. So before our guest speaker arrives, I'll talk about the intersections between trauma and narrative in the form of mythopoetic storytelling. As we said earlier, mythopoetic writing involves "the creation of new myths in our own lives." Not re-writing the past so as to pretend it didn't happen, but to re-right it (r-i-g-h-t) so that it can be used as a voice for the oppressed, as an avenue for healing, and as a vehicle for social edification. Isak Dinesen said, "All sorrows can be borne if we can put them into a story."

Mythopoetics is the transformation from a personal trauma into a collective experience. We must take a broader view than questioning what is wrong with a damaged individual. Rather, we must examine what's wrong with the suffering psyche of the world. The author's personal story of mother-son incest is one that crosses the borders of education within society. It is not a story that serves anyone if unshared. Pedagogically, it dooms others to muteness because of kept silence. Academically, it produces automatons. Historically, it forces repetition. Performatively, it is a reenactment, a mimicry of "how the collective is inscribed, as in a mirror, in the individual." The necessary response, Langer would posit, is active involvement on the part of a hearing audience. This we have created right here,
with the audience—us—as witness. Where history has left few texts and testimonials to our traumatic experiences, we must write ourselves into existence.\textsuperscript{25}

One of the many values of narratives told in the third person is that it separates the present from the past and offers up a universality to the experience. That’s the value of the mythopoetic fairy tale. By casting a terrible story about mother-son incest into a different time and place, into a character other than that of the author’s, it provides distance from the original trauma, gives it a sense of resolution rather than continuity. It doesn’t mean it’s all in the past and therefore said and done with. \textit{A Grim Fairy Tale} has a quality that is neither here and now, nor ‘once upon a time,’ but in between.\textsuperscript{26}

For James Hillman, successful therapy involves a collaboration between fictions, incorporating the sense of mythos (plot) into the story.\textsuperscript{27} This doesn’t mean, of course, that a person’s traumatic history becomes a flight of fancy and a trumped up narrative. It means that activation of mythos, of imagination, of revisioning the story, of reconceptualizing the river’s flow, is the paradigm needed for a gnostic text, i.e., a text that illuminates knowledge of the self. It’s our Rilke theme: You must change your life.

The author of \textit{A Grim Fairy Tale} has written an \textit{opus contra historiam}—a text that goes against the historical grain of truths he was enculturated into. Culture can connote good breeding, the fine arts, things and people that are refined. People have cultural societies to promote and maintain their customs and traditions.\textsuperscript{28} But a culture can be like a bacterial specimen in a petrie dish. Left alone and untreated, it will multiply and infect, it will breed and infest.

Tom: It begs the question: whose histories are we teaching in school? What subjects are we treating and what others are being avoided? Whose poetry is favoured over others? Whose songs are privileged over others? Whose autobiographies? Which prisoners of war?

Jack: Think of it in fairy tale terms. What if \textit{Sleeping Beauty} were disrupted like so many of our lives are? What if she awoke and rejected the prince? She might awaken to not wanting the prince but rather a princess. Where are the homosexuals and lesbians in fairy tales, myths and legends? Perhaps \textit{Sleeping Beauty} might choose a career in law over becoming a stranger’s property. After 100 sleepy years had passed things could unfold entirely differently than the predictable, fixed way it unfolds. She
could become a drug addict to deal with the culture shock and trauma of having lost all her friends and relatives to a century of being comatose. She could contract HIV from injecting needles. The notion seems preposterous because she has been attributed a fixed identity. Anything else is arguably more realistic but is outside the borderland of familiar territory. After all, the undiscovered country is a fearful place, and “makes us rather bear those ills we have than fly to others that we know not of.”  

Shakespeare’s Hamlet was right: conscience does make cowards of us all, especially when it comes to the oppressor’s wrong.

Etherington echoes Arthur Frank in saying that the abused person who turns the abuse into a story transforms fate into experience. When Frank wrote about it, he was referring to illness. Either way, I must contest the notion that illness or sexual abuse is a matter of fate. No, no, no. It is a matter of circumstance. For those who abuse, it is often a matter of choice. Writing about incest doesn’t transform it into experience. It’s already been experienced. I believe that writing mythopoetically transforms trauma into narrative—narrare—to know. It transforms tradition into possibility. It turns passivity into action. It turns the personal into the social. And it turns oppression into empowerment.

Jack: It sounds like you’re saying writing is a kind of therapy.

Hey, I’ll be right back—gotta skip to the loo.

Tom: So, why don’t we leave that to the professionals then? Why not leave therapy to therapists? Teachers have enough to do.

Jack: Ah, tough question.

Tom: I do agree with you. I’m just playing devil’s advocate.

Jack: What’s your answer then, Tom?

Tom: You can’t separate the two. All learning, I believe, involves growth and change. Look what’s happened here, among us. The shock of the topic of sexual abuse has challenged everything we knew until now. I think psychologists would argue that the therapeutic process is largely an educational one.
I'm not saying that all classrooms have to be group therapy and crying and wailing every day. Not at all. But there must also be space for that to happen, should it happen. If teachers are afraid of emotion, then that's what we teach to our students: not to express feelings. Not to feel impassioned about a subject. Not to care if there are social injustices in the world.

Esau: Well said!

Tom: I know that there have been studies done on the benefits of writing. I read something once about a study and those participants who showed the greatest improvements in health were those who wrote about topics that they had actively held back from telling others. Research reported in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* showed that patients who wrote about stressful life experiences “had clinically relevant changes in health status.” In another study from 1990, college students were asked to write evocatively with sensory details for four days in a row for 20 minutes about past trauma. Results showed an increase in immune function.

Jack: Hmm, funny, I think I read the same article. Writing stimulates and facilitates the motoric and sensory regions in the brain, sometimes enabling one to recall fragments of the former traumatic events. A narrator has three kinds of data: first, what s/he saw/experienced; secondly, the accounts of others; and lastly, documents that subsequently came into her/his hands. I was reading MacCurdy last week and she mentions Judith Herman and how she echoes this belief in stating something to the effect that a narrative is incomplete if it doesn’t include the traumatic imagery and bodily sensations that accompanied the original event. Therapeutic narration, as evidenced by the personal essay, poetry, song lyrics, and telling one’s story verbally to classmates, are some of the avenues that must be incorporated into educational settings, regardless of histories of personal trauma or not.

Anne Hunsaker Hawkins uses writing as healing through what she terms the writing of pathography-autobiographies and biographies about illness [trauma] as a means of reconstructing experiences in order to promote healing. The process is one of discovering patterns, imposing order and structure, and creating meaning, often through metaphoric means, not unlike the fairy tale. Pathographies, like autoethnographies, do more than simply record what happened. Instead, they interpret experience “in a way that discloses underlying cultural and cross-cultural mythic attitudes about illness and
treatment.” “Actual” experience takes on transformative potential through the creative narration using metaphor, image, archetype and myth.38

Well, we're about to complete the voyage of the fairy tale. After traversing the River of Life our hero has returned. He has come to deliver a manifesto to the people. Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to introduce Prince Eddy.

From the shadows a figure emerges. He is cloaked in a long robe of deep sapphire blue with burning crimson trim. A fiery crown of gold anoints his head that seems to glisten with luminescent gems. He carries a radiant orb in his right hand that is reminiscent of the jewelled sphere carried by ancient seers and kings from long forgotten dynasties. In his left hand is a magnificent white gold scepter inlaid with bronze and red oak with serpentine figures entwining its length. The group squints as they try to discern the face. A mask. “The entry of the masked other.”39 A noble, expressionless image for a face. He appears one-dimensional, like a playing card. There is a noticeable silence and sense of anticipation within the group. No one is breathing.
Prince Eddy's Manifesto

“One of our most difficult duties as human beings is to listen to the voices of those who suffer.”

“...and as the drama intensifies, the catharsis occurs; we are purged from attachments to literal destinies, find freedom in playing parts, partial, dismembered, Dionysian, never being whole but participating in the whole that is a play, remembered by it as actor of it.”

Underneath the mythos of prince and loyal subject, of Ganymede and Persephone, of rivers and maps, lies a basic truth. A basic truth under the lies. Beneath the roles that we play, the identities we perform, there exists a more genuine self. We know that the past cannot be re-written. We cannot change the details of what occurred. We cannot write them out of existence. We can, however, re-write the past by telling what has not been told. By framing it in a context that is accessible and therefore malleable. I can change my life, as Rilke demanded. I can re-write my traumatic history as hero instead of victim. I can write it so that others may participate in my being. That is the power of narrative testimony: to hear the voice of knowing from the source. And that source is me.

[Prince Eddy puts down his orb and scepter, removes his robe and crown, unveils the mask to reveal his true identity as one of the group members: Paul]

[singing] “Fairy tales can come true, it can happen to you...”

The troubling question is: what can happen to you? Can a fairy tale come alive? Could you be one of Bluebeard’s wives? Might you, much like Penny, have lived the myth of Persephone? Could Esau have been Ganymede to the coal-lusted goddess called Nyx? That is what is so frightening about a myth or tale: it might be true. It is within the realm of possibility. Fear sets in where possibility sits crouched in hiding. Those who have endured trauma embody our deepest fears. The manifestation of myth into reality, of symbol into experience, has the potential to strike terror in us. Those who have endured traumatic histories of mythic proportions are people who cause us the most discomfort, for they have been there. Like a ghost they haunt us with their return to testify, to bear witness, to point fingers. Tal
cites Des Pres saying, "they have descended into Hell and emerged transformed to remind us that the content of our nightmares can burst into the world and consume us." 42

The World is Language
If, as Foucault writes, the world is language 43 then where is the landscape when you cannot speak the unspeakable? Why have I blended two issues of a sexual nature together: why male homosexuality and incest? Why mother-son incest? For the following reasons, which I will explain as I go:

1. both are oppressed topics in education
2. society tends not to view men as victims 44
3. society resists seeing women as perpetrators of sexual crimes 45
4. sexual abuse histories are much more prevalent in homosexuals than heterosexuals, 46 and
5. people believe that childhood sexual abuse causes homosexuality.

Where there is no language, there is invisibility. There is a great void and emptiness. When God in our Biblical mythic origins, spoke the words, "Let there be light," the world came into existence. Language is the world. The world is spoken. The world is sound. The topic of incest, however, especially in education, is a long held silence. How could I be if parts of me were unacknowledged, were unspoken? When I was in school the same was true of being gay. The recurring theme of the unmentionables of homosexuality and incest suppressed much of my identity. Bill Pinar affirmed this in writing that if our history and our culture is distorted by deletions and denials, then the nexus of our identity, both individually and collectively or socially, is distorted. This distorted, repressed self produces a partial, fictionalized identity. 47 Toni Morrison makes this point in some of her later novels: when the dominant culture conspires (consciously or unconsciously) to silence or ignore your presence, your selfhood is lost. 48

Foucault said that educational establishments function "to perpetuate the repression of excluded groups and possibilities." 49 Those who have experienced the silencing of their language must write themselves into existence through narrative devices such as creative fiction, mythopoetics, song-writing, poetry or plays, to name a few. They must chart their personal maps of the undiscovered country. I can't chart it for them. I can only show them the route I have taken so that they can be witness to my experience and hopefully have a better idea as to how to map their own world. Arthur Frank said, "Storytelling is for an other just as much as it is for oneself." 50
The Undiscovered Country

A high school reading of Hamlet left me hungry for more Shakespeare and I proceeded to read many of his plays. His famous soliloquy always stood out and I memorized it for some unknown reason. "The undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveler returns, puzzles the will...." I was never certain if Shakespeare meant heaven or hell or the unknown unconscious regions of the psyche. In the fairy tale I saw the undiscovered country as a hidden domain of the mind that contains the potential for hell and heaven. The traumatic feelings and further memories stored there about incest are hell to discover and process. Hamlet speaks of the undiscovered country as a territory "from whose bourn no traveler returns," but this fairy tale upsets that notion by having the hero return from his travels. While Des Prees says we fear the return of survivors because their nightmares might burst through and consume us, it does not need to consume us. It can release us. There is terror in the unknown. There is pain and fear and panic. Freedom from it is the "consummation devoutly to be wished." We must prevent conscience (and consciousness) from making cowards of us all. Yet in this tale bravery is required to address an issue that most people are unwilling to tackle, so taboo is it.

Metzger's analysis of fairy tales refers to the recurring theme of the descent to the underworld to gain wisdom. Thus, in the tale, Eddy must descend into the imaginal depths of his unconscious—the undiscovered country—to gain wisdom. It parallels what Marcel Proust, cited in David Gross, called an "unknown region" of the psyche where forgotten memories remain available for later recollection.

As Eddy traversed the undiscovered country of his psyche, it became apparent that learning, as an educational process, is also a therapeutic process. Writing and therapy processes can inform each other. Felman and Laub write about traumatized individuals as almost preferring silence “...so as to protect themselves from the fear of being listened to—and of listening to themselves.” This silence, they say, can serve as both a sanctuary and a place of bondage.

Penny: Silence. It seems too inviting. So peaceful. In music silence cues the ear to listen for what’s next. On the island of Samui in Thailand I sat on the beach watching an afternoon monsoon roll in. It was silent at first, then visible, with dark oppressive clouds looming on the horizon. It was sensed as the wind picked up and the sun disappeared. Those dark oppressive clouds began in silence until felt, made visible, and interestingly, as the nasty winds and heavy rains arrived, were fled from.
Jack: How can silence—something which hardly *is*—be so imposing and heavy? The love that dared not speak its name was about breaking a silence. In families incest is often a long held silence.

Penny: The New Year heralds five days of holidays for many Thai. The first two days of it saw over 157 motor vehicle deaths and over 7600 injuries according to the Dec. 30/02 *Bangkok Post*. As Tom and I made our way by air-conditioned mini-bus from Krabi to Phuket we saw several accidents. In Canada the police would have created a road block for a period of time until the ambulance arrived and people had been transported to hospital.

Tom: Not so in Thailand. Here several motorbikers, car drivers, and locals lined the road—where drivers drive on the left side of the road steering from the right side of the car. The police were there. We saw a small truck that had been torn apart in an accident. It was hard to tell how it happened. It seemed to be a single vehicle accident. How the truck got so torn apart and crushed was a mystery. Perhaps it had something to do with the telephone poles, which are made of concrete there. The monsoon rains were heavy that morning. And many people drink and drive.

Penny: The female driver was lying on the road. Bloodied. Eyes closed. Lifeless. Uncovered. We don’t witness these kinds of events in Canada unless we’re right on the scene. Who wants to see it? you might ask. Spare me from the blood and gore! We’re shielded from witnessing such events first hand.

Tom: It’s ironic. It seems barbaric that they just let the traffic flow by while a corpse lay in full view on the highway. And yet, we shelter ourselves from such seeing and knowing in the West all the time. Some call it propaganda. Others would call it editorializing. I call it oppression.

Paul: Oppression is the blanket of night that smothers the burgeoning day. The recurring theme of the undiscovered country unfolds only in relationship—whether that be teacher/student, therapist/client, brother/sister. It is not a trek Eddy could have taken alone. The secondary witness—i.e., a person who was not at the original traumatic scene—this person must listen to and hear the silence, function as guide and explorer, as "...a companion in a journey into an uncharted land, a journey the survivor cannot travel to or return from alone." In the fairy tale Eddy’s life journey is that of the sleeper who awakens. He awakens to his homosexuality. He awakens to acknowledging his incest history. He does this in solitude. Traditional myths would have helper figures along the way. The point I wanted to
emphasize is that this is sadly often not the case in the real world. Such is the case in the fairy tale when his boat runs into trouble and begins to sink while a passing ship seems to ignore his pleas for help. This is a clear metaphor for those who know, yet refuse to see. In a culture of silences many such journeys never begin but remain in painful isolation or exile. The success of overcoming suppressive environments such as the classroom is in dialogue. It lies in bearing witness to a listening audience. Teaching and learning is done as a joint venture.

Journeying into uncharted territory means crossing a border. As a parallel, the image—both real and suggested—of thresholds, borders, margins and limens occurs throughout the fairy tale. Eddy rides through the woods to the border of the jungle where the lime trees grow, a pun reference to limen, another word for a threshold of a physiological or a psychological response. A limen is a threshold between ideas, cultures, or territories that must be crossed if the other side is to be explored. It serves as a recurring reminder of the initial transgression of a sacred border between mother and child—the incest that leaves a damaging sequelae of troubles. As in many fairy tales, crossing thresholds is a significant means of personal growth, of encountering new dimensions. The incest experience is also, by necessity, a call to personal growth. Such growth demands that borders be crossed. One must speak the unspeakable, teach what is often deemed unteachable, heal the wounds that have festered.

Transformative acts require of us to step outside the box, the container, that has held everything in place for so long.

Alice Miller wrote, “The repression of injuries endured in childhood is the hidden cause of our later suffering.” If we take into account the role of culture in repression—so hostile to incest memories—another term for it might be motivated forgetting. While there remains some controversy about the repression or motivated forgetting of traumatic childhood events, there is much more evidence emerging that traumatic events are pushed into hiding from the mind’s eye. A woman who has been violently raped can experience this fugue state where she can’t recall details and images because of the trauma to the body and psyche. Some people call it denial. Either way it is a natural survival function of the human animal. Such is the case of the gazelle on the Serengeti when tackled by a lioness. It will flail and fight but will also freeze as it is slowly dragged across the parched grasslands. The momentary distraction of the lioness, as demonstrated by images we’ve seen on National Geographic episodes, will result in the gazelle making a sudden bolt for it, and, if successful, she’ll rejoin the herd and go on about life as if nothing had happened. Humans try to do this under the
guise of denial or repression or dissociation. Judith Herman in her book Trauma and Recovery echoes the understanding that “the ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness.” To vanquish these banished episodes one must speak the unspeakable. Sadly, as is well known, secrecy prevails and the narrative that yearns to tell itself is announced instead as a symptom. The pedagogical importance of memory and incest is seen through the pages of Herman who observes that “denial, repression, and dissociation operate on a social as well as an individual level....Like traumatized people, we have been cut off from the knowledge of our past.” Sue Grand, in her article on mother-son incest, calls this collective erasure of memory “traumatically induced disorders of knowing.” Felman writes that “analysis appears on the scene to announce that there is knowledge which does not know itself.... This is the intersection between psychotherapy and education.

Jack: If the world is language, what happens when early childhood traumatic events leave you inarticulate? How then, as David Smail once asked, do you “eff” in the ineffable?

Paul: “When victims speak of the moments of their trauma, they do not produce clear narrative lines but instead describe pictures and sounds....” Schacter reported that even those individuals who deliberately tried to forget their traumatic histories, some of whom had Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), were less able to suppress trauma-related words such as “incest” because of their experiences and associations with such emotional and memory charged words. The world is language and begs to be spoken. MacCurdy writes that, “PTSD memories lack verbal narrative and context. Early childhood sexual abuse can produce traumatic images that are stored in the brain in the amygdala, a center for emotion including anger. Such images are known to be hard to access, difficult to verbalize, fixed in a pre-verbal state of memory.” A victim of trauma loses his or her language because

...traumatic events produce a shift away from verbal encoding of information toward encoding via “emotional, pictorial, auditory, and other sensory-based memory systems.” ...researchers argue that traumatic memories may not be encoded or retrieved linguistically unless that retrieval encourages the survivor to integrate the emotional memory with the description....

Language and literacy of sexual abuse is not a panacea, but it is a necessity. Foucault said that “madness reveals better than anything else what the limits of literature are.” Incest is not a mental
illness yet leaves the adult feeling as if he or she were crazy. Early onset of sexual abuse often means a child does not have the language skills to relate what happened and how it felt. Early onset of abuse and knowing the abuser personally was found to impact recall of the abuse.\(^\text{74}\) Cavanagh Johnson reported on a client who, after one year of treatment, was still unable to talk about the sexual abuse she went through because of her father. Her cousins and brother have told her what they witnessed him do. Her eyes and affect speak to knowing, but her only verbal response is, “I don’t remember.”\(^\text{75}\) The indelible impression it leaves on the body and the psyche does not erode despite the lack of language to express it. The body begins the narrative process, but the body is often misinterpreted. Doctors and psychiatrists may listen to the list of symptoms and then produce a concise summary of it, a hermeneutic diagnosis that, though well intended, defines your identity and history from a place of authority and presumption. The same thing happened when I was in grade school. On every report card a teacher would comment, “Jack works quite well but needs to concentrate more”; “Improvement in personal attitude is still required”; “Jack could do better if he was more conscientious”; “Needs more confidence”; and “Jack sometimes has trouble in keeping his thoughts on his school work.”

Today we’d probably say a kid has Attention Deficit Disorder because of his inability to concentrate. It can also be dissociative behaviour. Dissociation was first recognized over a century ago by Pierre Janet and is basically an altered state of consciousness. As a defense mechanism, dissociation allows the individual to be protected from overwhelming anxiety or traumatic experience. Some call it denial, though this implies a conscious choice rather than a primitive defense mechanism. Dissociation can range from an emotional numbing to complete amnesia of a traumatic event.\(^\text{76}\) In fact, people can actually dissociate more when beginning therapy, probably because of the flooding of emotions and memories that start to surface.\(^\text{77}\) Dissociation can become a life-long pattern if as a child he or she lived in an environment that fostered dissociation by a hostile perpetrator who sought to constantly reinforce not remembering and not feeling until the real becomes the not real.\(^\text{78}\) It has been found that many male survivors will dissociate in order to cope while the abuse is taking place and that this can lead to a sequelae of problems across the lifespan: fear, guilt, shame, loneliness, depression, suicidal tendencies, anger, low self-esteem, and negative self-concept.\(^\text{79}\)

In 1920 Dupre in Kleindorfer said dissociation can be a defense mechanism or a normal function of the mythopoetic consciousness.\(^\text{80}\) In reading this I came to view dissociation as more positive. It may have begun as a survival mechanism, but as a mythopoetic function it holds the key to creativity. Healing
narrative demands access to this consciousness. If traumatic experiences were the avenue into dissociation, the mythopoetic is the healing road out. Judith Herman tells us that the recovery process also follows fundamental pathways in the healing process: establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma story, and restoring the connection between survivors and their community.\textsuperscript{81} This we have achieved through our get-together at St. Philomena’s, the reading of the fairy tale, and our communal discussion and personal growth.

The Myths Behind Incest Myths
Suppose I told you about my family of origin. What if I told you my family tree began when my mother had sex with her son? And what if I said my dad was married to his own sister? He fathered many children by different women. He had sexual relations with both women and men. He was a wealthy and powerful fellow. He forced his daughter into a dismal marriage with his own brother, then wouldn't tell his wife where their daughter was. Others would describe the mother as jealous and wrathful. He might sound like an awful man, but he was known for his hospitality to strangers, as a provider of home and hearth, and had a reputation as a strong moral arbiter of justice when it came to others.\textsuperscript{82}

Nowadays we do not encounter shocking stories of brother-sister marriages, but the details are not that dissimilar from many threads that are being uncovered today: incest, power and privilege, and moral descension. It is the story of Zeus, the primary god of Greek mythology, and the foundation of familial and familiar ways of being.

If Greek myths were intended for multiple purposes: to educate, to ritualize, to celebrate, to commemorate, then the moral message originally desired was not one intended to influence incest behaviour. I am situating my research in Greek/Roman mythology and education. Incest is a large topic and a worldwide problem and I could spend a great deal of time looking at the various mythologies and conduct a comparative analysis of them, but that would take all night. For our purposes I am approaching it with a Western, democratic foundation to educational paradigms, morals, and values. I do so with an anti-oppressive, post-foundational theoretical perspective.

Gaa or Gaia (Mother Earth) began the Olympian progeny through the act of mother-son incest with her son, Uranus. She bore six males and six females from this contact, known as the Titans. One may notice that the story of Gaa and Uranus is little known. Much honour and respect, especially in today’s
ecologically minded public, is paid to Gaa as Mother Earth while overlooking and silencing the incest
fact. Do we silence that which is difficult to explain? Do we silence that which does not conform to the
icon we seek to adore? Do we overlook qualities of difficulty, that trouble deeply, in favour of images
of nature and goodness?

One of the Titans was Kronos (Time). Kronos hated his father/brother Uranus. In Oedipal fashion he
one day surprised Uranus as he was copulating with Gaa, and castrated him.\textsuperscript{83} Zeus was a well-known
god of the skies in Indo-European lore and legend.\textsuperscript{84} Zeus' father was Kronos and his mother was Rhea.
Kronos was so afraid of being overthrown by his own children—a theme common to royal
households—that he ate all of his offspring when they were born. He was especially afraid of repetition
because he had overthrown (castrated) his own father. Zeus was spirited away by Rhea and replaced by
a stone wrapped in swaddling clothes. Hidden in a cave on Crete he was nursed by the goat-nymp
Amalthea. As an adult he arranged for Kronos to be given an emetic and all of his siblings were
vomited up, including the stone which fell at Delphi and became the navel-stone of the Earth. Kronos'
fears had come true and Zeus with his brothers Poseidon and Hades divided up the world between
them. Zeus' first wife was Metis. History would repeat itself in Zeus, who was fearful that a male
offspring would overthrow him and he swallowed the infant, even though it was a girl, Athena. He
eventually gave birth to her through his forehead after Hephaestus split it open for him with an axe.
Zeus fathered other offspring by Themis, Eurynome, Demeter (often called Hera), Leto, Maia, and
Ixion.\textsuperscript{85} 86

The extent to which incest plays a recurring theme in Greek (and Roman) tales is shocking. In the fairy
tale, the first mention of a character from Greek myth is Demeter. As mentioned, Demeter was
associated with spring and renewal and plenitude. Demeter was a wife of Zeus, but she was also his
sister. Persephone was their daughter. When Eddy refers to the fact that Persephone was kept in the
crib of her uncle's lair, he's referring to Hades, Zeus' brother.\textsuperscript{87} Hades' alternate name in Roman
mythology is Pluto, which apparently derives from the Greek word for 'riches,' thus he was considered
the god of agricultural wealth and therefore influenced crops and cultivation. His association to
agriculture seems to be part of the reason he was linked with his own niece, since Demeter was goddess
of earthly abundance.\textsuperscript{88} The text reads, "...the dark crib of her uncle's lair where's only the sun-god
Helios bore witness to her plight," meaning the rape of Persephone, is often portrayed in classic art.
Note that Helios, the sun-god, bringer of light, would be the only one to illuminate what had
transpired. We find a similar event when Eddy is paralleled to young Ganymede. In Greek mythology, Zeus was so struck by Ganymede’s beauty that he—by some accounts—disguised himself as an eagle and stole him away to be the cup-bearer of the gods. Peter Paul Rubens portrayed it as “The Rape of Ganymede” and the event is caught in frightening detail on canvas. It’s apparent young Ganymede was more than a cup-bearer to Zeus by night. The “dark crib of her uncle’s lair” and the way Professor Sonuski stole him away like young Ganymede both suggest incest and the repetition of abuse in Eddy’s life. The “dark crib” refers back to his years in the crib, probably when his mother first began sexual activity with him.

I came across not one book on Greek mythology that treated the incest as disturbing and shocking. Why wasn’t incest considered taboo at the time these legends were thriving? The answers are manifold, but some clues do begin to reveal themselves once we shake the foundations they are built upon. These stories are very ancient. The earliest text version, called The Hymn to Demeter, dates from the seventh century BCE, and it is believed the myth existed for several centuries before this in oral poetry form. In many ways it’s no different than the way the Bible opens, with Adam and Eve being the first humans and their offspring inferentially committing incest in order to people the earth. When Noah and his family are spared from the Flood, the theme reoccurs. The historical mythologization of incest removes a layer of credibility and fact while at the same time successfully perpetuating the grim, lived reality.

Lucilla Burn’s 1990 book about Greek myths finds her stating that myths are traditional tales relevant to society, and that the myth of Demeter and Persephone is highly relevant to society. One imagines she would comment on the prevalence of incest in these early stories and how they tacitly support its perpetuation. Freire might say that such writings achieve subjugation by “depositing myths indispensable to the preservation of the status quo.” I expected Burn to say that sexual victimization was, and continues to be, the privilege of those with power and status, especially men. Zeus allowed his own brother to take young Persephone away even though she was miserable. Ganymede was a Trojan prince, son of Tros or Laomedon. Zeus reputedly sent the boy’s father either a pair of horses or a golden vine as compensation. Once again, the message is that power, wealth, and privilege allow for abuses to be carried out. Lucilla Burn, however, highlights the fact that because Persephone ended up only having to spend part of the year with Hades (thanks to her mother’s pleas), the result being the division of the year into seasons. She further elucidates that “myth also encompasses some of the most fundamental issues of human existence, i.e., the provision of food.” She views the rape of Persephone
as a paradigm for weddings—archetypal imagery that the girl is dragged away from her mother to get married, equating the conquest with symbolic rape and death. Such myths were promulgated and enacted for centuries. They permeated every aspect of Greek life, private, public, and educational. Most of the public religious festivals were tied to mythological events and were commemorated with rites for the various occasions. Western culture and education has been greatly influenced by Greek systems of understanding and knowing the world. This is where our vision of democracy stems from. This is where ways of being and knowing are rooted in story and in the meaning and values we attribute to them.

Zeus was known as Jupiter to the Romans and we honour the god by naming the largest planet in our solar system after him. He was a tyrannical patriarch. He had sexual relations with many people. Zeus and Mnemosyne, whose name means Memory, parented the nine muses. The three Graces were the daughters of Aphrodite by Zeus. It is noteworthy that incest, memory, power and privilege are as common to these ancient myths as their modern day episodes.

Now imagine instead of the Jovian myths, I told you a tale about a mother who engaged in sexual activities with her children, whether male or female. That one of her children was fathered by her husband’s brother. That she had had sex with his two other brothers and a brother-in-law. She also had sex with her daughter’s husband. How different does this sound from a Greek myth? The difference lies in our engagement with the text.

According to Rosaldo, stories are much more than a reflection of human conduct; stories shape our conduct. Or, more accurately, they have the potential to shape our conduct. The success lies in recognizing not only that incest is harmful, but in writing about it, in discussing it openly like we’re doing, through dialogue and drama, music and musings, poetry and mythopoetics.

When the writing connects the emotional with the images, healing occurs—and so also does good writing...once writers can find the words to express their emotional lives, intellectual growth can follow.

Jerome Bruner asked what the form of the myth is and answered that it is principally drama. Drama that speaks of origins and destinies. Myths seek to tell children why the world is as it is and why we do
as we do. "Its power is that it lives on the feather line between fantasy and reality." The power of myth living on the liminality between fantasy and reality is also ripe with danger. For that feather line is also that fragile realm where psychosis can cross back and forth like a child on a swingset. David Tacey criticizes psychoanalytic theory for privileging fantasy and the inner symbolic world above outer, lived reality. In writing about incest and archetype, he argues, the phenomenon of incest is both actual and mythological because an archetypal image can be found at the core of the lived event. The archetypal image of mother-son incest could be any number of personally or collectively meaningful images, such as the descent into the cave (vagina), in Gaa, Mother Earth.

The secrecy and silence around incest stems from the harm of seeking to contain a lived grimace of the real as a completely inner event, one that, when not released, clamors for expression through symbolic reenactments: nightmare images, psychosomatic complaints, vomiting, and retraumatization. By attempting to dwell within that psychotic territory of myth and reality, disruption and illness manifest themselves. Chaos, the mother of Night, emerges. The liminal space where fantasy and reality are indistinguishable is what presents itself in various psychotic notions that Queen Estra had, such as the idea that she was a descendant of Jesus. At the same time, her statement is profoundly symbolic when she says, "I descended from Jesus." That is to say, she lost her morality. She has fallen from grace. One could even think of the dialogue we have had and the fairy tale itself as part of an overall morality play.

Indeed, Jerome Bruner has asked whether the rise of the novel and, I would add, other literary devices as an art form is symbolic of individual meaning-making journeys because of the "failure of prevailing myths to provide external models toward which one may aspire." With the failure of prevailing myths—Greek, Biblical, classic fairy tales—to speak to the issues and consciousness of today's students of life, a search for meaning and identity occurs on an individual basis after what Bruner calls mythoclasm: the crushing collapse of traditionally held myths as reflections of thought, action, and reality. The iconoclasm of the divine mother results in the necessity of a mythoclasm.

It is not only a failure of the prevailing myths to speak to the issues and consciousnessness of individuals, it is our failure as teachers and social agents for change to engage with this material in order to deconstruct its meaning. Incest has long been more than a private fantasy: it is an archetypal fantasy—as we've seen from Greek mythology—that society is enacting every single day. Small wonder
Aristotle saw theater as the avenue for catharsis. This is why the group of us are gathered here now: we are demonstrating how a given body of learners can performatively rework oppression through the enactment of text, both lived and previously written.

One can only conclude that these traditional stories of rape, incest, and male privilege were perpetuated, mythologized, ritualized, commemorated, and enacted. But what of Eddy, who was a victim of incest with his mother? What happens to power and male privilege then? Now that patriarchy is being challenged and oppressed women and homosexuals and other marginalized groups are making gradual inroads against it, what happens then? Do the oppressed become the oppressors, as Freire cautioned? Or do even more deeply ‘inbedded’ subtexts of sexual abuse emerge that were buried further down under the blankets of patriarchy? Perhaps we must not assume that power and privilege are solely the domains of men. With any child, no matter whether they are male or female, they are in a position of powerlessness compared to the adult caretaker. Mothers are seen as the caregivers in the Greek myths, such as Demeter, who worried ceaselessly over her daughter. This makes it all the more difficult to imagine that a woman could be the perpetrator of sexual abuse, though some of the recent media attention is revealing just that. It seems that incest can occur regardless of gender. Images of a mother’s incest come to us from Greek plays. In Euripides’ Medea, the mother plans for the destruction of her children and at the same time calls the breath of her children sweet. Bidding farewell to her boys she says how she will miss their delicate, dear lips, and their generous eyes. It has the same dark undertones of Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf. Although incest was common in Greek mythology, such relationships were not always viewed as positive. Characters such as Agamemnon and Clytemnestra died and others like Oedipus were maimed. Their progeny were weak or unnatural, such as the Cyclops, Pan, Medusa, and the Centaur, perhaps a reference to the genetic problem of inbreeding producing deformities. There are mixed messages within Greek mythology as to whether incest was considered morally wrong, and the telling difference is that those with status were the ones who most often went unpunished, such as Gaa, Zeus, and Poseidon.

---

1 This is a term I coined as a trope that plays on the word ‘embedded’ where ‘inbedded’ refers to sexual abuse happening in bed, in darkness, under the covers. When topics are ‘embedded’ they are planted in a bed or fixed firmly in the mind. It speaks to issues that are buried beneath the surface and that are deeply challenging to unearth, to break ground with, and to uncover.
Of course, we don't regularly tell these tales any more, but we certainly do study them in school and we accept the content pretty much for granted. We don't have to read them anymore to get their messages, because they've been embedded in our culture for centuries. They're so well accepted that they by and large go completely unchallenged. The tacit approval of incest has been 'inbedded' in our cultural texts. In fact, in 1801, E.D. Clarke found a statue in Greece that was originally thought to be of Demeter. When it was removed there was a lot of protest from the local farmers because they still believed that its presence, "in the middle of their dung-heap, secured the fertility of their fields."  

The major problem with Greek and Biblical incest myths is that they occur between adults. One can only infer that the behaviour is rooted in childhood incest experiences. Culture struggles with comprehending or acknowledging incest because of the archetypal viewpoint we maintain of the sacred parent: God the Father, Father Christmas, Father Time, Father's Day, and Adam. It's the same with the Divine Mother, the Good Mother, Mother Earth, Mother Goose, and the Virgin Mary. It has been my experience that it is more taboo to lay claim that it was my mother who sexually abused me than the taboo of mother-son incest itself. The archetype of the mother is venerated, adored, and worshipped, bestowed with the status/statue of a goddess, thus paradoxically untouchable. A strict mindset is maintained that she must be a loving nurturer and provider. People disbelieve that women could perpetrate sexual abuse "because of women's perceived traditional roles in society." Having sexual contact with one who is archetypally divine is therefore called the ultimate taboo. Such interference disturbs our collective consciousness about the sacred mother. 

James Hillman tells us that the origins of the word 'plot' stem from the Greek word *mythos*. Plots are myths. Understand why things are as they are can be found in myths. For Hillman, mythos is more than theory, more than plot. "It is the tale of the interaction of humans and the divine." We know from mythic history what happened when Actaeon witnessed Artemis and her nymphs bathing in a wooded stream: he was turned into a stag, then torn from limb from limb by his own dogs. Semele burned to ashes at the sight of Zeus. There clearly are consequences for directly beholding the divine. Like Semele who burns to ash at the sight of Zeus, children have been damaged not because they have looked directly at the divine, but because they have been victimized by one who is regarded in their psyches as divine. What happens when someone beholds the forbidden divine? The injury is to the witness, not to the archetypally divine, the one who wields power. The same may be said of Lot's
wife, who turned into a pillar of salt for glancing back to behold the sight of God. The damage befalls those who catch a glimpse of the divine. Imagine what this is like for children, who are prematurely introduced to what is normally the divine nature of sex, with an adult who is initiating the rupture of these boundaries.

Edi: You mentioned Biblical myths but doesn’t the Bible say that incest is an abomination? The Greeks were immoral with it, but doesn’t the Bible say otherwise?

Paul: Well, yes and no. The abomination list is from Leviticus 18: 6-30 and was apparently compiled around the sixth to fifth centuries BCE from even more ancient material than that.116 We also know from the Bible incest was similarly overlooked when it involved adults or when one person was deemed to have more authority than others around him. The fairy tale makes an innuendo about Lot and his daughter. Lot, as I just said, fled Sodom and Gomorrah, the sinful cities reputedly corrupt with homosexual activity and from which the term sodomy comes.

Tom: And Lot’s wife turned into a lot of salt.

Jack: [smiling] Hardy har! Actually, that’s an interesting point. Lot’s wife is written in much the same way as Bluebeard’s wives: curiosity gets the better of them and they are punished for seeking to know.

Penny: Punishment by patriarchy.

Paul: Exactly! So in Genesis 19 Lot and his two daughters flee and settle in the mountains. The two daughters said to each other, “Our father is old, and there is no man around here to lie with us, as is the custom all over the earth. Let’s get our father to drink wine and then lie with him and preserve our family line through our father.”117

Esau: “As is the custom…” As it is written, so it must be.

Paul: Yup. You see how ways of knowing and being are more than personal?
Penny: And more than cultural.

Jack: They’re structural too—“sewn into the fabric of society through institutions that support both cultural norms and personal beliefs.” That’s Thompson’s model of oppression.¹¹⁸

Paul: By Genesis 19:36 both of his daughters were pregnant by their father and according to the text he was so drunk that he was not aware of what had transpired. Both of their sons were founders of tribes, the Moabites and Ammonites.

Penny: Especially for Lot, who was favoured in the eyes of God.

Jack: The story makes no sense from the viewpoint that they were living in such isolation that no other humans were around, apparently for years and years. Embedded in the text is the notion that women are supposed to have children. It was considered criminal for a woman to have children outside of wedlock, but these circumstances were extraordinary so they went ahead as planned.

Paul: Certainly Lot’s image remained unspoiled because he was drunk at the time and did not really know what he was doing. This false belief around responsibility is continued today when saying that a person was drunk at the time, as though her or his behaviour is excusable. It is noteworthy that the Bible only speaks against incest in terms of sexual relations between adults. The earlier writings, as with Genesis, continue stories wherein it is okay for incestuous relationships to take place, seemingly sanctioned by God. Genesis 20 continues the incest theme wherein Abraham marries his sister Sarah. He seemed to feel guilty about this and allowed for Abimelech, king of Gerar, to take her. The text tells how God came to the king in a dream and told him he was “as good as dead” for taking a married woman. Abimelech was confused and pointed out that Sarah and Abraham both said they were brother and sister, and so he believed that he was acting “with a clean conscience and clean hands.”¹¹⁹ But God insisted Abimelech return Sarah to Abraham, because Abraham was a prophet. He returned Sarah and was bewildered when speaking to Abraham. Abimelech asked him why he allowed him to be put in such jeopardy and Abraham didn’t seem to understand either. Abraham clarified that Sarah was his sister, both by the same father but having different mothers. Abimelech brought sheep and cattle and slaves and gave them to Abraham along with Sarah in order to appease God. He also granted them his land and silver (Genesis 20:14-16). Abraham, who was afforded social rank because he was a prophet,
was bound by God to be in an incestuous marriage. Sarah was treated like a piece of property—betrothed to her brother, given to Abimelech, then returned along with a donation of sheep and goods. It is fascinating that church readings never seem to draw on these shocking texts. Why is it always a letter from Paul to the Corinthians? What lessons—whether from the Bible, from mythology, or from the classroom, do we privilege over others? What kind of moral guidance is this? Does God condone incest? Is God the ultimate source of corrupt power and privilege? I think not. It appears to be an anthropomorphic attempt to suggest that myth sanctions incest.

Esau: So you’re saying that these myths actually promote or rationalize the sin of incest.

Paul: Yes.

Penny: It’s like they’re made up stories—fictions—in order to make it sound like what they’re doing is somehow okay. Just like my damned parents! It’s crazy making!

Paul: You’ve hit the nail on the head. René Girard has argued that myth is a secondary elaboration of ritual behaviour, which rationalizes victimization.¹³⁰ Myths that allow for incest behaviour thus make more sense if viewed from this perspective: they rationalize the origins and acceptable behaviour of incest. Others such as Naomi Goldenberg, Dorine Kondo and Carlos Ginzburg (cited in Miller) have labeled myths as social constructions that are learned rather than inherited.¹²¹ Festivals, rituals, and ceremonies both within Greek culture and today’s climate support this view. Occasions such as Mother’s Day and Father’s Day are meant to venerate parents with a social pressure that allows for no other relationship with a parent except for a positive one. The education system supports these commemorative days. Enforced adoration of the sacred father or mother figure leaves no room for those of us victimized and oppressed throughout life by a parent. In North America, Mother’s Day is reportedly the most popular day of the year for giving flowers. It is really no different than the commemorative ceremonies the ancient Greeks had around Demeter and other gods and goddesses. Culture, education, family, are all examples of institutions that promote the remembering and recall of certain events through commemorative acts.

There is progress being made about sexual abuse and incest. Society is more willing to believe that it occurs, more so in certain contexts than in others. Recently, we have witnessed waves of criticism and
rebellion against the Roman Catholic church for not dealing with the cases against them. By shuffling priests around, denying what happened, and dealing with the issue through canonic law rather than civil law, the church has continued the tyranny. They are finally making some what I would call minor changes because of the threat of losing members. If enough voices speak out against the church's inaction, reform must follow.

Penny: You've made me realize my own prejudice. When you brought up mother-son incest last week, I just couldn't get my head around it.

Tom: Yeah, I'd never heard of it. But it makes sense.

Jack: There are, as have been mentioned, many reasons why society has such difficulty imagining the possibility of mother-son compared to father-daughter incest. One of the most prominent barriers to the imagining that females could be perpetrators is that a woman does not have a penis. Without a 'weapon of mass destruction' people cannot imagine what would take place. It is assumed that mother-son incest is largely psychological, not sexual. How can there be harm without a penis to invade, probe, and conquer with? There is a prevailing attitude that only men commit sexual abuse crimes, that breasts and a vagina are subordinate to male anatomy. Certain writers' approaches to incest coupled with sociological factors have often negated the fact that women sexually abuse and that men can likewise be victims of sexual abuse. As much as Kali Tal's book Worlds of Hurt contributes to the literature on trauma, she continuously speaks about men as the exclusive oppressors and perpetrators of sexual violence against women and children. She says: "If the survivor community is a marginal one, their voices will be drowned out by those with the influence and resources to silence them, and to trumpet a revised version of their trauma." Yet Tal herself has done the very thing she is speaking out against by excluding men as victims of sexual abuse and violence in her book. The British Columbia Society for Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse reports that one-third of the men seeking therapy at their centre have been sexually abused by a woman.

Purdon and Ostertag list several myths and beliefs that operate at both the individual, social, and structural levels around why people may avoid sexual abuse issues, many of which readily relate to the atrocities committed by others in the name of political power:

1. a tendency to deny the existence of abuse, particularly within the family
2. a tendency to blame victims and hold them responsible for provoking or causing abuse. [Example: the proposed Masochistic Personality Disorder and perpetrators who argue that “You asked for it,” blaming the victim]

3. a tendency to excuse the actions of the abusers or not hold them accountable. [Pinochet, the butcher of Santiago, continues to be backed by those who argue that his policies are justified by the ‘economic miracle’ of his actions]¹²⁵

4. a failure to understand the inequality between men and women, adults and children, the able and the disabled and how this contributes to abuse

5. a tendency to pathologize (medicalize) the survival methods of victims and treat the symptoms rather than the cause

6. a tendency to silence victims both individually and collectively

7. a tendency to interpret abuse as a relationship problem or a problem with anger

8. a failure of societal, cultural and religious values that tolerate abuse in the name of discipline and social control

9. a tendency to understand abuse as the personal failure of the victim or abuser, rather than a phenomenon of society.¹²⁶

Problematizing Traditional Myths

David Miller argues that mythology has often functioned as a repressive and oppressive agent by stereotyping races, religions, and genders by giving them attributes that seem archetypal. We saw this in deconstructing the Bluebeard fairy tale in its portrayal of women as having one role in life: subjugated marriage. In this case, despite his hideous looks, the daughters were encouraged to marry for money. Miller says that myths refuse to problematize violence and victimization by providing other rationales and scapegoats.¹²⁷ Again, we only have to look at the story of Lot and his daughters to see how incest is depicted as acceptable, as initiated by his daughters. It suggests in Machiavellian terms that the end justifies the means. Lucilla Burn herself is mute on the dark subject underlying the Persephone myth. Prince Eddy is paralleled with Persephone through mention of the crib of her uncle’s lair, which is at the same time a reference to the crib young Eddy was kept in and seemed a little too old for. The male gender (and implied male superiority) of the authors of these Greek and Biblical accounts speaks through the text. Women and men have long been so deeply enculturated in these ancient myths that many continue to not recognize themselves as participating in, or enacting, the myth. This is the dark and dangerous side of mythopoetics. To this end, Miller asserts that myths refuse
moral engagement and responsibility and that they “become a defense against the realities of those suffering an apocalyptic culture and life.” In our analysis of culture we typically encounter three types of denial tactics: mythologization, medicalization, and disappearance.

Mythologization
Mythologization works by reducing a traumatic event to a set of standardized narratives (twice- and thrice-told tales that come to represent “the story” of the trauma), turning it from a frightening and uncontrollable event into a contained and predictable metanarrative. Tal’s concern, I believe, is that the unique events and emotional qualities of an individual’s story will be lost if we create metanarratives about them.

The silencing of those telling their personal narratives of sexual abuse is met everywhere: at work, within families, between friends, among colleagues, and within the academy. In drawing largely upon myth and mythology in my fairy tale I turn the tables on the very device that is often used to diminish the experiences of sexual abuse survivors.

Medicalization
Medicalization focuses our glance upon the victims of trauma, positing that they suffer from an “illness” that can be “cured” within existing or slightly modified structures of institutionalized medicine and psychiatry. Health services providers need to be more aware of the fact that men, including gay men, have traumatic histories of sexual abuse. We need to hear the voices of gay/bisexual men reflecting upon their experiences of the health care system and how gay culture impacts upon their self-perceptions.

Miller calls this medicalization a poisonous pedagogy practiced by many doctors, therapists, teachers, and professionals: “With medication and mystifying theories they [arguably, unconsciously] try to influence their patients’ memories as deeply as possible, in order that they never find the cause of their illness.” The majority of institutions and specialists are not interested in the source of a person’s grief, which is only achieved through the courage to confront childhood mistreatment and the sequelae of problems it causes across the lifespan. Arthur Frank views traditional medical care as a form of narrative surrender. The physician, psychiatrist, or other health care practitioner becomes the spokesperson for the disease. This is akin to modernist ethnography and traditional methods of
behavioural research wherein one studies the Other, colonizes their voices, and presents it back as a summary that promotes the researcher. There is certainly value in the stories and experiences of Others, since this is sometimes the only way in which some voices are heard. What I'm calling for is

**Disappearance**

Tal defines disappearance as the refusal to admit to the existence of a particular kind of trauma, such as the Holocaust, the Armenian Genocide, or childhood sexual abuse. This is usually achieved by undermining the credibility of the victim.\textsuperscript{133} Israel Charny, in writing about genocide points to a template of denial, which equally applies to incest. This begins by not acknowledging that the genocide even took place. If that fails, transform it into other kinds of events and portray the victims as the perpetrators. Insist there were more victims from the perpetrator’s group. Above all, relativize the genocide through whatever means possible.\textsuperscript{134} The same methods are used by sexual abuse perpetrators who will blame the victim, deny outright any wrongdoing, and employ any other tactic to discredit the victim. The following outline about perpetrator behaviour is adapted from Kali Tal’s text in which she excludes men as victims, written from the experience of women as perpetrators:

1. the perpetrator will often go to great lengths to hide the fact of her violence from the outside world
2. if confronted, she will often deny the violence has occurred. This may include attacking the credibility of the victim. She may say it never happened or that the victim is lying
3. if that fails, she will say the victim initiated the violence or brought it on him/herself
4. she may seek to get others to side with her against the victim
5. finally, she may say, “Yes, it did happen, but that was in the past. It is time to forgive and forget and get on with life.”\textsuperscript{135}

Item 5 is not unlike Desmond Tutu’s comment after the first day of testimony at South Africa’s post-Apartheid truth commission: “We should all be deeply humbled by what we’ve heard, but we’ve got to finish quickly and really turn our backs on this awful past and say: ‘Life is for living.’”\textsuperscript{136} If I don’t carefully examine my past with a critical lens then I am doomed to mindless repetition rather than a meaningful *Ecce Homo*.\textsuperscript{137}

Edi: Hmm? Oh, wait a minute here! I’m not stepping into that pothole again!
Paul: [chuckling] I'm referring to a Nietzsche book. Mythogenesis is about "how one becomes what one is." It requires a personal mythogenesis.\textsuperscript{138}

Jack: Hmm. An ongoing myth that we're always living, one that's ever changing. But for many people's lives their foundational myths keep them in stasis.

Jack: But myths are always changing. Look at the different Bluebeards over time.

Tom: Well, I'd say it's changed somewhat in the telling over time, but the inherent messages are much the same.

Penny: It's the ones that have long been silenced that need the most attention and re-working.

Tom: Yeah, like curriculum theory: always in a state of reconceptualization.

Paul: The hermeneutic circle!

Edi: Huh?

Paul: We "reinterpret our own memories, records, libraries...according to our image of the present." We read history through our current paradigm, editing the past without changing the content, but "filtering it through a new image."\textsuperscript{139}

Tom: I understand what you're saying about myths, Paul, and it makes a lot of sense to me. You know what I mean? If myth and metaphor are supposed to be avenues of social commentary and action or reform, why have they failed? Why a fairy tale? Why use a similar device for your message? If it is apparent that tales and myths may not be that successful in imparting a social message, why repeat history? Can the re-writing of a myth actually translate into social change and anti-oppressive education?

Paul: I think you know the answer is yes. Absolutely. For the very reasons listed above: to problematize violence and victimization by including it within the text. Rather than suggesting that
incest is sanctioned, the mythopoetic fairy tale reveals the dark reality of it. Removing the fairy tale from the usual contexts of charm and even humour, it hints at a terrible reality. The concept of mythoclasm comes alive in the tale and it becomes a device for anti-oppressive pedagogy through its deliberate intent to smash pre-existing concepts and styles of the ways myths, fairy tales, and similar texts are conceived, written, presented and, especially, interpreted. We have seen how myths can have a repressive and violent function. They also have entertainment functions in order to promote dominant ontologies and epistemologies—traditional ways of being and knowing. A myth can mythoclastically turn oppression and repression on its ear by disrupting the status quo and the standard ways myths unfold. The tale itself is disrupted by the outrage of the group when they recognize and ultimately acknowledge that incest is the theme of the fairy tale. Edi’s life-long love of the Sleeping Beauty story reveals her own hunger to reenact that role in her life by finding another husband. As the author Frank Herbert repeats in the saviour-themed movie Dune, “A sleeper must awaken.” Edi’s life-long love of the Sleeping Beauty story reveals her own hunger to reenact that role in her life by finding another husband. As the author Frank Herbert repeats in the saviour-themed movie Dune, “A sleeper must awaken.”

The tale she was taught from early on results in an identity based on historical ways of knowing and being that rarely get consciously challenged.

Edi: [eyes brimming with tears]. You’re right. Absolutely right. You read me like a book. I feel like I am changing.

Paul: You are...we have that potential to break out of the mould from which we’re cast. It can be achieved through several means. One is the very process we are engaged in right now, which is the deconstruction, or analysis, of the fairy tale I wrote and of previous myths and legends. The writer(s) of that story were probably not thinking that they were imparting a message to the public about the invisibility of women. It is only through our reinterpretation of it that we glean a fresh understanding of it, perhaps because of contemporary conscious thought. Someone reading Bluebeard a hundred years from now may find things in it that we would never consider now, either. In this way myths and fairy tales have an enduring quality. We have been able to go back 2500 years to Greek myths and Bible stories and still look at them through a new lens. If we read them heuristically we reveal hidden truths. It’s not about throwing out the baby with the bath water. We’re challenging the “givens” of our heritage and through this process we’re subverting power and privilege, and sounding the silences.

The damaging effects of childhood sexual abuse and incest often result in mental health problems across the lifespan. Hyde and Kaufman referred to incest as a “psychological nightmare that
continues into adulthood requiring some kind of behavioral and psychological adaptation." When the effects of the sexual traumatization are not treated, psychological dysfunction may emerge, including amnesia, phobias, anxiety states, low self-esteem, and guilt. The health care system frequently does not recognize that sexual abuse is a traumatic event.

Any adult, the mother included, who sexually abuses a child is in an obvious place of power. Children are typically dependent upon their mothers for food, sustenance, physical affection, coddling, support, and guidance. Many people find it unconscionable that a person would speak negatively about his/her mother. The concept of male victims of sexual abuse was only acknowledged in the 1980s. Kinsey encountered reports of it in 1948 but dismissed them as fantasies. Findings vary greatly, ranging from 3% to 17.3%, depending on the definition of sexual abuse and methodology used. Overall, studies suggest that one quarter to one third of all victims of child sexual abuse are boys. Recent news articles about women who abuse children has brought new awareness to the issue. Even a recent documentary called, “When girls do it (2001),” gave some balance to the gender spectrum of abuse. On the other hand films such as The Unsaid (2001), Fists in the Pocket (1965), The Damned (1969), Luna (1969), Murmur of the Heart (1971), Midnight Cowboy, Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters (1985), Spanking the Monkey (1994), and Little Big Man (1970) depict incest between adolescent or preadolescent boys and mothers, stepmothers, and grandmothers. These pictures tend to treat the subject as a rite of passage, of a boy becoming a man, sowing his oats. They portray a fantasy without the reality of the “subsequent adult dysfunction of these sexually abused males as having any relationship to their sexual and/or incestuous childhood.”

A child tends to believe in the infallibility and goodness of their parents. Old tunes from the past century reinforce this: Always respect a mother, I want a girl, and lyrics like “M is for the million things she gave me, O is only that she’s growing old…” from the song Mother: A word that means the world to me. As Kali Tal advocates, we must disregard the cultural taboo of profaning the sacred.

Taboo

The word taboo was first recorded by Captain Cook and it is of Polynesian origin. Franz Steiner says taboo is concerned with four areas:

1. with all the social mechanisms of obedience which have ritual significance
2. with specific and restrictive behaviour in dangerous situations

143
144
145
146
147
148
149
3. with the protection of individuals who are in danger, and
4. with the protection of society from the stigmatized-as-taboo—and therefore dangerous—persons.¹⁵⁰

Point one still holds true today. Taboo continues to be a social mechanism (a cultural rule) of obeying something of ritual significance. The prevalence of sexual abuse suggests it is a ritual passed down from generation to generation. Its secondary ritual is that of silence about the abuse. Incest is supposed to be taboo and the second area seeks to affirm this, though obviously unsuccessfully. Areas three and four were not applied to incest behaviour, for the protection of individuals in danger, at least when it comes to the "incested," has gone largely unachieved for centuries.

Taboo seems to have originally meant "marked off" or "marked thoroughly," and only later came to be associated with something sacred or prohibited secondarily because of the fact that sacred places and items were uniquely marked off or designated so that everyone might know that they were sacred. In Tonga it refers to things that are not to be touched. Steiner calls the sacred-profane a relation of tension and polarity, a notion that is apparently more modernist in thought since the Polynesians were alien to these concepts. It is perhaps reasonable to conclude that what has happened is that incest behaviour became ritualized through mythology or the process of mythologization. In a given culture, whether it be Tahiti of Cook's day or Canada of the 21st century, it was and still is likely that those in power—whether priests or politicians—will decide what is taboo, and thus what is negatively sanctioned and prohibited, as Margaret Mead would say.¹⁵¹ Though incest, homosexuality and other sexualized topics have been "marked off" as forbidden, taboo has come to more strongly mean that which should not be spoken about. Who is in more danger: the child or adult who breaks the silence or the individual(s) who are insisting on the silence? In order to lift the long held stigmas and oppressive connotations of homosexuality and incest, we must remove the word 'taboo' from any discussions of the topics. Without the aura of sacredness or of fear or of that which cannot be touched, spaces for dialogue are opened up. As Kumashiro says, in order to teach against oppression, we must first teach about it.¹⁵² Spigelman believes that teachers play a vital role in silencing or opening up taboo topics by creating classroom environments that promote or suppress the expression of student opinion. She writes, "ironically, the more intimate and important a topic in young people's lives, the less likely it is to be studied in schools."¹⁵³
Mothers as Perpetrators

When I initially searched for mother-son incest articles on the web I encountered lists of sites catering to pornography and fetish. I believe that fetish is the eroticized reenactment of early childhood events, including traumatic events. When I started to read some literature on sexual abuse in general I discovered a very small percentage of it was actually about men. Most of it was about women by women, albeit the majority of the gender who are sexually abused. Some articles were about lesbian women. Most were anti-male. Mother-son incest articles were written by women researchers and social workers. Then I came across articles about men abused by men. I had to dig much deeper to find articles about mother-son incest. I had to search for evidence of myself in the literature. I could not find a scholarly article suggesting or revealing mother-son incest from the personal experience of a male researcher. Several articles called mother-son incest the ultimate taboo, the unspeakable, the forbidden. Who decided it was more taboo than father-daughter incest?

Isn’t mother-son incest extremely rare? Aren’t the odds about one in a million of this happening? No. It seems to be more common than that. The problem is that it is grossly under-researched. There is currently not enough data to give us a genuine idea of the statistics. No one background, no one theory, is going to explain why a mother would sexually abuse her child. In fact, little has been studied on the phenomenon and especially the family system and the mother’s own childhood. Some progress has certainly been made in the past thirty years, for in 1972 Mathis reported that female pedophilia was so rare as to be of little significance, that women are viewed as sexually harmless to children, and basically, what harm can be done without a penis? Initially thought of as an extremely rare aberration, mother-son incest is now being recognized as perhaps the last frontier in the field of sexual abuse.

Since mothers are venerated, people cannot fathom that mothers can perpetrate this sort of criminal act. When I went to my longtime family doctor and shared with him that I had been sexually abused as a child, the doctor responded, “Oh dear, that’s terrible! Does your mother know?” I began to weep: “It was my mother.” A lack of standardization in reporting and inconsistencies in research methods and definitions bars having concrete data on the nature and extent of mother-son incest, or even female initiated abuse. Groth believes that most incest victims were themselves victims of an offender, and he singles out this factor when it comes to mother-son incest. Mayer wrote that incestuous mothers are often extremely disturbed, manifesting infantile and/or psychotic behavior.
Kempe and Kempe cited by Wakefield et al. muse that society more readily believes there is a sexual aspect to fathers who routinely let a child sleep with them more than mothers who sleep with daughters or sons. When mothers sexually abuse a child the psychological effects to the boy can be devastating. The earlier the abuse took place, the more severe the overall effect. Susan Ray reported that only 4% of men initially sought therapy for the sexual abuse. Petrovich and Templer found a mean age of 10.86 in boys who were molested by women. Tomeo's study had a mean age of 11 for boys molested by men and a mean age of 13 for girls molested by women. There is other data that the average age of incest onset with boys was seven and they tend to come from poorer families and broken homes. Perhaps children or adolescents with a higher potential for homosexual behavior are more likely to enter a situation that leads to same-sex molestation.

Finkelhor's 1984 survey found 67% of female perpetrators sexually abused girls and the remaining 33% sexually abused boys. Parental psychopathology, especially among mothers, was the most significant family adversity. We also know that 38% of male victims had no father figure in the home compared with 12% of female victims, suggesting incestuous mothers are seeking a husband figure. In surveying what has been researched to date, there is a notable tone of compassion for the backgrounds of these women compared to the generally highly negative tone that exists about fathers who perpetrate the same crime. To some degree, I believe there is fairness in these depictions. Many mothers who do engage in child sexual abuse appear to come from very abusive backgrounds themselves, backgrounds that often included sexual abuse by one or more males. The trauma of the sexual abuse can lead to Borderline Personality Disorder and other psychiatric problems that are conducive to transgenerational sexual abuse, and thus reenactments and retraumatization. However, now that awareness of female perpetrators is emerging and some cases are actually reaching the courts, women are treated with more opprobrium than their male counterparts. We become immune as a culture to the prevalence of certain violences, so it takes what people consider really abhorrent and shockingly taboo topics to get a reaction.

Hollida Wakefield, a self-proclaimed authority on matters of sexual abuse (along with her husband Roger Underwager) was recently quoted in an ABC News article about female sex offenders, saying, "And I would think it would be really difficult for a woman to become aroused by a boy." Our social construction of sexuality and gender gives people the impression that it is easier to envision men
becoming aroused by girls, but not vice versa. This barrier to possibility is one of the reasons that prevents society from recognizing and acknowledging that a woman could sexually abuse a male or female child. If men are capable/culpable of being sexually aroused by a young girl or boy, why couldn't a woman be aroused by a boy or girl?

The truth is women are sexually aroused and motivated to engage in such activities with children, including their own. Whether mental illness plays a major factor in it is premature to say. Cases involving mothers are well hidden from suspecting eyes who may not even consider that it is the female who is the perpetrator in a family setting. Charges are rarely pressed and people find it so abhorrent a notion that it is often disbelieved. Marvasti concluded that in a small sample of five cases the mothers were severely psychologically disturbed and possibly psychotic, that mother-child incest cases rarely, if ever, go to trial, and that the power and authority dynamics typical of father-daughter incest are not substantially present in mother-son cases. McCarty's 1986 study of 26 mother-child incest cases found that "all but two of the women described their childhoods as difficult and abusive. The 1983 research of James and Nasjleti suggests that incestuous mothers have infantile and extreme dependency needs, an empty marriage or absent husband, are possessive and overprotective with their children, and may have problems with substance abuse. They expect their children to meet their emotional needs. Zuelzer and Reposa in a 1983 study looked at the literature on mothers in incestuous families. While these women may not be the perpetrators of abuse themselves, their backgrounds as victim of sexual abuse and colluder speak to their own personal histories, as well as behaviours that can be found in mothers who perpetrate incest. Zuelzer and Reposa assert that such women typically have a deep childish need for nurturance and warmth and come from backgrounds that are unstable, deprived of emotion, and physical and/or psychological desertions by their own mothers. Anxiety and fear of family disintegration can pervade their being.

Cianne Longdon identified some of the prevailing myths about female sexual abusers:

1. females do not sexually abuse
2. females only abuse if a man coerced them
3. it isn't abuse, but is misguided 'motherly love'; it is gentle, loving
4. women only abuse boys
5. if a woman abused a girl, the girl will become a lesbian; a boy will become gay or a misogynist
6. if you were abused as a child you will also abuse children
7. people who say they were abused by a woman are merely talking about fantasy; it’s all an Oedipal complex
8. women only desire adolescent males
9. if a 30-year-old woman seduced a 14-year-old boy it would not be sexual abuse, but a rite of passage; if a 30-year-old man seduced a 14-year-old girl it would undoubtedly be sexual abuse
10. sexual activity between the mother and her son in his late teens/early twenties is consensual
11. it is worse to be sexually abused by a woman than by a man.\textsuperscript{172}

What Longdon identifies as myths may arguably be kernels of truth, as we will see. For example, there is some supportive evidence that early childhood sexual abuse can influence sexual orientation.\textsuperscript{173}

Recent research is bringing to light the frequency of incest and sexual abuse in the histories of women diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD).\textsuperscript{174,175} It is believed that BPD occurs up to ten times more often in women than in men and an incestuous background can be found in up to 90\% of these women.\textsuperscript{176} Childhood sexual abuse histories exist in about 34\% of the general population, and this rate soars in borderline patients.\textsuperscript{177} Richard Corelli writes, “This chronic or periodic victimization and sometimes brutalization can later result in impaired relationships and mistrust of men and excessive preoccupation with sexuality, sexual promiscuity, inhibitions, deep-seated depression and a seriously damaged self-image.”\textsuperscript{178}

BPD has many characteristics. Stone identifies some of the following features: impulsivity (excessive spending, gambling, addictions), inordinate anger, self-damaging acts, hypersexuality/promiscuity, shame, secretiveness, volatality, oscillations between adoration and vilification in intimate relationships, boredom, inability to tolerate being alone, sensation seeking, mistrustfulness, and other qualities that match Post-traumatic Stress Disorder.\textsuperscript{179} Corelli overlaps with many of these areas and also includes manipulative behaviour, depression and anxiety, brooding resentment, feelings of deprivation, feeling damaged/flawed, and having the potential for brief psychotic episodes with loss of contact with reality or bizarre behavioural symptoms.\textsuperscript{180} Tyrer’s summary of the research on it showed difficulties in impulse control, promiscuity, bizarre sexual fantasies and projection, among other features.\textsuperscript{181}
In the fairy tale various allusions are made to Queen Estra having BPD features. Her name, Estra, is used to crassly connote someone who is 'in heat,' i.e., promiscuous. The king, Caster, refers of course to one who has been figuratively castrated or 'cut off' from his children by the mother. She is given characteristics that indicate contradictions in her presentation as a hint to the abusive/loving behaviour perpetrators of sexual abuse can have in relation to their victims: she had many friends but was bored and lonely. She is described as portly and slim, lusty and gaunt. Estra is hypochondriacal. The family situation is one that is typical of households where sexual abuse is more possible: an absent father figure (separate beds) and substance abuse, in this case on the part of the father, though certainly either or both parents can be alcoholics. There are also indicators of her psychotic thinking when she muses that she is proud of the 'fact' that she is related to Jesus, and in the delusions that incest was taking place among other family members with her reference to “Lot and his daughters,” meaning her husband and their children. It also serves as a means of deflection: others are engaged in incest, too; therefore, an attempt to normalize the act.

To be borderline is what Stone describes as "occupying the 'borderland' between neurosis and psychosis," between myth and reality, which are not polarities but rather a tenuous line in the windy sand. The theme of liminality once again rears its head. Some borders are meant to be kept intact, others to be crossed. Kali Tal criticizes Shoshana Felman's text, Testimony, for making no distinction between real and metaphorical crossings. What Tal does not understand is the value of metaphor. It is rooted in the symbolic and the real, as supported by the works of Eliade or the foundations of Jungian analysis. There is a real to trauma recovery even though memories are subjective.

Table 1 lists the characteristics that have been found in women who perpetrate the sexual abuse of children.
Table 1: General Characteristics of Female Perpetrators of Sexual Abuse

low self-esteem, feelings of inadequacy and vulnerability
troubled childhoods
sexually abused as a child
lack nurturance
need for nurturance and control is prominent
early marriage
close age gap between woman and child
experiences a sense of aloneness, isolation and separation from others
women alone or her partner away a great deal
she seeks substitute gratification with the child
relationships with male peers are often negative and abusive
history of indiscriminate or compulsive sexual activity
severe psychological disturbance or mental illness
addicted to psychotropic substances
mothers who abuse children treat them as extensions of themselves
the relationship is unsatisfactory and parasitic
the child may be unwanted or the "wrong" sex
the woman is 'stuck' in the relationship with her own mother
Table 2 lists problems stemming from mother-son incest that are drawn from the literature. Compare the features of BPD with those listed in Table 1 and you will find many repeated characteristics found in victims of sexual abuse, clues that the transgenerational traumatic effects of incest are passed on from one generation to the next.
Table 2: Problems Stemming from Mother-Son Incest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lifelong mental health problems</td>
<td>185,186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amnesia, phobias, anxiety states</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low self-esteem, guilt</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care system often doesn’t view it as a traumatic event</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual dysfunction, impotence, inhibited desire</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-traumatic stress disorder</td>
<td>191,192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive and controlling behavior</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panic attacks, depression, alcoholism</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual promiscuity</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homophobic concerns</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative self-concept</td>
<td>197,198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infantile speech and play patterns in children</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dreams with themes of being chased, punished, or isolated</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somatic complaints</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual offences and violent crimes</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning difficulties or disabilities</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevalence of dysthymic disorder in a study of eight men</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Running away from home</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nightmares, sleep disturbance</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual orientation confusion</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compulsive rituals</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fright, panic, and confusion</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual language and behaviors</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-destructive behaviors</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissociation</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many incestuous fathers had stimulating relationships with their mothers</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties with intimacy</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recent media coverage about the cover up of sexual abuse within the Catholic Church has brought national awareness to a long held silence, a silence not unique to the Catholic Church, but to other religious groups, organizations, schools, families, communities, and society at large. Being gay and having been sexually abused can seem like a double-edged sword, since both topics continue to be taboo in many of the settings mentioned. Much of the focus is on male perpetrators and female victims. However, more people are recognizing the fact that many men, much more than previously imagined, have histories of childhood sexual abuse or incest.\textsuperscript{215,216}

Miletski cites five major misconceptions that appear to contribute to society’s denial of mother-son incest:
1. that sexual abuse constitutes incest only when intercourse is involved
2. boys cannot be victims of sexual abuse
3. only men perpetrate sexual crimes
4. motherly love is free of sexual intentions
5. mother-son incest is caused by mental illness.\textsuperscript{217}

Recent findings have revealed that little has been written about male survivors in a culture that resists accepting that men can be victims.\textsuperscript{218} In Canada, Badgley’s 1984 study reported that 33\% of the identified survivors were male.\textsuperscript{219} However, male survivors who admit to having been sexually abused may represent only a portion of the true numbers.\textsuperscript{220} Canada falls behind other countries in advocacy for male victims.\textsuperscript{221,222} A male-inclusive perspective on sexual abuse and victimization is clearly needed. Much of the literature tends to dehumanize and dismiss their experiences. It dehumanizes by essentializing the experience down to core elements or a metanarrative. It often deletes the emotions, the personal turmoil, the sense that this was an individual’s story and now it’s testimony to a diagnostic category or a curious rare phenomenon. The problems are further compounded when the individual is gay/bisexual. The limited research done to date shows sexually abused gay males are more likely to commit suicide, to have higher instances of HIV,\textsuperscript{223,224} anxiety, depression, panic attacks,\textsuperscript{225} Post-traumatic Stress Disorder,\textsuperscript{226} and are more likely to abuse alcohol.\textsuperscript{227,228} One study of substance abuse clients in treatment found 55\% of female clients and 29\% of male clients had histories of childhood incest.\textsuperscript{229}
Edi: So, maybe I’m missing something here. I understand that your main focus is incest, but then why are you adding in homosexuality as well? Why combine the two?

Paul: Ah, because there is a strong connection between the two. Even taken separately, both are serious topics that continue to be oppressed in classrooms. Combined, the issue is even more urgent. As mentioned, the suicide rate of young people who were sexually abused is higher among those who identify themselves as gay or bisexual.\textsuperscript{230} “It has been demonstrated that gay and bisexual youth are about six times more at risk for suicide attempts than heterosexual youth, and account for 40-50\% of male youth suicide attempts. These males, along with heterosexual males who were sexually abused, may contribute to \textit{90\% of youth male suicide.}\textsuperscript{231} Homosexuality continues to be a very unsafe topic in the school system. Where do gays go for support, especially when sexual abuse has happened or is happening to them? Coleman suggests that young gay youth often lack peer and familial support as they explore their sexuality and sexual identity.\textsuperscript{232,233} Gays fear revealing a history of abuse because others tend to think they are going to repeat the behaviour and become pedophiles.

Jack: So many barriers!

Edi: Wait a minute here. We heard that there is some literature suggesting early childhood sexual abuse can influence sexual orientation and yet gays fear revealing abusive histories because this cause and effect notion. So what’s happened here? Is the gay community afraid of looking at this issue?

Jack: I think that could be some of it, definitely. We figured we’d settled all the nature/nurture debate and that recent scientific evidence was showing that people are born gay.

Esau: I’m sure some are.

Jack: Well, yeah. Sexuality is complex. We’re more than the sum of our genetics. We have to—all of us—consider the environment we were raised in. I think we’re afraid the pendulum would swing into the realm of “homosexuality can be cured.”

Edi: If we were able to prevent sexual abuse perhaps there would be fewer cases. The issue here isn’t one of sexual orientation. It’s one of prevention and remediation of sexual abuse.
Jack: Wow! Edi, you rock!

Tom: I'm astounded at the suicide rates and health issues of sexually abused individuals. Penny, I feel so badly. You've been dealing with so much and we've just been pretending everything's okay. I should have said something.

Penny: We both bought into it. I thought it would just go away.

Tom: And then there are teachers like the one in Quesnel.

Penny: Chris Kempling?

Paul: Yeah, at least he got suspended for a month.

Edi: What for?

Tom: He's a school counsellor but writes in to the local paper about homosexuality, calling it perverse and promiscuous and immoral through his interpretation of Christianity. Esau: Just imagine what message this gives a student. Think of how he'd counsel him or her!

Tom: This guy is supposedly doing a doctorate in psychology and yet he espouses treatments that have long been recognized as ineffective "cures" for changing one's sexual orientation.

Jack: And the sad thing is such fears in schools are not unique.

Penny: Very true. I know it's a contentious issue where I work. So, Paul, do men do the same thing I did—just bottle it up? I mean, I've been a mess all week. I can't sleep.

Tom: You've often had troubles sleeping, honey. Nightmares too.
Penny: Yeah. And a lot of anger, if the truth be told.

Paul: Understandably. I think any one of us would be furious. To answer your question, men can cope differently than women about abuse. Men tend to deny or negate their feelings, try to forget about it, 'be a man,' and more men tend to turn to drugs or alcohol to numb their feelings. "Male socialization encourages men to define sexual experiences as desirable as long as there is no homosexual involvement." The reverse is also true. Male homosexual socialization encourages gay men to define sexual experiences as desirable when there is homosexual involvement. Gay culture tacitly supports abusive encounters in some of its fiction (high school coach/student, dad/son, older brother/younger brother and sexual interest categories (Sadomasochism, daddy types, family scenes, young stuff). Readily accessible reading material such as *Family Sex Tales* portray incest as normal, as fetish, and as a male rite of passage.

Jack: And lately a newer category of sexual interest has emerged, at least in the gay community, and I'm sure it's there in heterosexual circles, but I wonder if it's to the same extent. I called a free chat room for gay men the other day and a few guys on there who had recorded what their interests were mentioned 'taboo.' So I talked to one of them and in no time he told me how his uncle had introduced him to man to man sex when the caller was 11 and that he still fantasizes about it, that this caller was married now with kids about the same age and you could just hear the temptation in his voice, just waiting for me to get into some erotic conversation with him whereas I'm finding it so disturbing and dangerous.

Edi: NAMBLA?

Esau: Is that what happens? Do traumas become eroticized events? Or repeated events? It certainly seems so. God, the longer we sit silent on this the worse it gets. When I think about the Catholic Church shuffling the priests around from parish to parish when abuse complaints emerged, it makes me sick—the denial.

Jack: I think it was only about a decade ago that NAMBLA was kicked out of the umbrella of subcategories within the gay community.

Esau: Really? I haven’t heard of it.

Paul: No? They used to have a larger profile. It’s basically an excuse for pedophilia.

Jack: Don’t get me started! They promote child sexual abuse under the guise of consensual love and freedom of speech. There’s a common pattern of thought to perpetrators of crimes such as this—justifying their behaviour through any means possible and insisting that the victim enjoys and reciprocates it just as much. It drives me crazy!

Jack: There’s something you haven’t told us, Paul.

Paul: Hmm. Not now, I don’t want to get us off track.

Penny: Gee, when abuse is eroticized, a person is trapped in the loop of repetition. Thank God I don’t have any children.

Paul: It doesn’t mean you’d be abusive, Penny. About 1/3 who were abused will repeat the pattern. But I think that figure comes from studies on men who abuse. We’re lacking literature that investigates how many females who were abused become offenders themselves.

I’ve put a list of factors together that deter the treatment of sexually abused gay males. See what you think.
Table 3: Key Factors Deterring Treatment of Sexually Abused Gay Males

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lack of recognition that sexual abuse can have lifelong consequences&lt;sup&gt;237,238,239,240&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The health care system treats the symptoms rather than the origins&lt;sup&gt;241,242&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay youth often lack school, peer and familial support as they explore their sexuality and sexual identity&lt;sup&gt;243,244,245&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay culture tacitly supports abusive encounters in some sex categories and interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumption of perversion: abused gay males probably either asked for it and/or enjoyed it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High HIV rates among gay adolescents&lt;sup&gt;246,247&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men cope differently than women around abuse. Men internalize feelings, turn to drugs, are encouraged to see it as a rite of passage&lt;sup&gt;248&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance abuse is used to numb the feelings&lt;sup&gt;249&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual abuse of boys is common, underreported, underrecognized, and undertreated&lt;sup&gt;250&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying oneself as a sexual victim makes many question the victim's masculinity and/or sexual orientation.&lt;sup&gt;251&lt;/sup&gt; Being gay compounds the issues of sexual abuse victims' identity and masculinity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Much of the literature often dehumanizes or dismisses their experiences&lt;sup&gt;252&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widespread perception that an abused male will become a sexual offender&lt;sup&gt;253&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The problem of telling one's story in a climate where recovered memory is regarded with great skepticism&lt;sup&gt;254&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief that sexually abused boys become homosexual&lt;sup&gt;255&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A male-inclusive perspective on sexual abuse and victimization is rarely given&lt;sup&gt;256&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The shame of revealing the abuser was your mother or a woman, which is considered the ultimate taboo&lt;sup&gt;257&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gays fear revealing a history of abuse because it's viewed by society as cause and effect of their homosexuality, whether the perpetrator was a man or a woman&lt;sup&gt;258&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homosexual male socialization encourages gays to define same-sex experiences as desirable, regardless of age of onset&lt;sup&gt;259&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>3</sup> Problems listed without author references in Table 3 are my own observations
Difficulty is often avoided in life, especially the revisiting of old scars and wounds that haven't healed. In the fairy tale Eddy is surrounded by those who don't want to know. Myths, stories, and childhood events tend to be reflected upon as positive or with a hostility towards dwelling on anything negative. Advice these days is to “let go” and leave the past in the past. Eddy, however, like the majority of abuse survivors, keeps encountering the realities of existence: the pain of Persephone, the muses of history and memory, and his own suffering that begins by speaking through the narrative of his body when he vomits.

Through the unknown, unremembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning;
At the source of the longest river

The End

All: [clapping]

Penny: Paul, you have shaken the foundations of myths and beliefs that I have always taken for granted, that I’ve never questioned.

Tom: It’s very exciting. This is what anti-oppressive education is all about. Forging spaces for marginalized voices. Critically examining the roots of knowledge from new angles.

Penny: Etymologies of the self.

Esau: It makes me question everything I’ve been told to hold sacred. When I think about how silenced I was with what I had witnessed, I see it all in a new light.

Edi: It’s true. I never expected that what I thought was going to be an evening of poetry could turn into something so rich. Thank you Paul! You have been through an incredible ordeal and you’re so brave to share it with us.
Paul: Well, thank you. But it’s not my story.

Tom: Huh?

Esau: You mean you weren’t sexually abused by your mother?

Paul: That’s right.

Penny: [angrily] You made it all up?

Tom: Yeah, what gives you the right to stand there and teach us about something you haven’t experienced?

Paul: Someone has to teach about those things we and others have experienced and are experiencing. Isn’t that the problem? We only teach what’s comfortable? What’s known? If we only teach the books we like and the poetry we’ve read? If we only talk about what feels safe to us regardless of those you are learning with? This story has something for everyone. That’s the beauty of narrative. We’re back to what Arthur Frank said: “Storytelling is for an other just as much as it is for oneself.”

Penny: Oh, wow. You are absolutely right!

Edi: I agree. So you’re not gay either?

Paul: If I were all fiction, would I even exist?

Edi: I—hmm? But I’m still curious! Who wrote it then?

Jack: The story is mine. It was an assignment in one of Paul’s classes—to write mythopoetically about a challenging life experience.

Paul: It was a course for “all the essays you never got to write.”
Penny: You tricked us! You’re amazing. I should have known! How ever did you write it?

Jack: One of the major challenges in writing about incest is that it is an attempt to build a coherent narrative out of fragments of traumatic memories, images, and feelings. It’s like trying to rationalize the irrational. I found myself resisting telling the story in a way that flows easily, that reads well, that is creative and symbolic. How could I convey how damaging and disruptive it was? Where would the craziness be woven into the text? What about all the things that happened that have to be left out in order to tell a succinct story that gets a message across? I was determined that the tale should not flow easily or that it should be easy to decipher. I wanted the audience to wonder about what was going left unsaid. I wanted them to experience the same murkiness that the secrecy of incest is like; to experience the great discomfort of dark innuendos. Like a pressure cooker, I realized that the audience would no longer be able to tolerate sitting in silence as the story unfolded. Not with their histories and involvement in it. And this would serve as the disruption desired, when someone finally blurts out the long held unspoken taboo word: incest. In Tanya Lewis’ autoethnography about incest, she echoes the sentiment:

I worked for a long time to find a rational narrative which would explain my embodied memories....I wanted the story to bring a rational explanation to what I was feeling, to reduce the sense of being “mad.” As more of me remembers through simultaneously being less numb and less terrified, my desire for a coherent narrative is reduced. Having survived “madness” I am less invested in maintaining the boundaries between the rational and the “mad,” between explanation and feelings.364

Tom: So this grim fairy tale is your personal history? It’s devastating.

Edi: So, let me get this straight. Jack is gay, and Paul, you aren’t?

Paul: [chuckling] No, Edi. A little queer maybe, but not gay.

Edi: My God! Who’s to know what’s real and what isn’t?

Paul: Divorced twice, actually.
Esau: Jack, what was it like to write it? I would think it would be gut-wrenching.

Jack: It was narrative therapy, pure and simple. I wept, I raged, I wrote fervently, I slept poorly. I became consumed with the myths and their origins, their meanings and metaphors, combined with my own mythic origins—the fabrications and mindsets and ideologies that I grew up with. It wasn’t something I would have attempted on my own, but since I was seeing a therapist about the incest he supported me with the project. The music, the images, all became part of expressing the madness, the sanity.

Paul: One of the things I make sure of is if students write about a traumatic life experience that they either have a therapist in place or they know about the avenues they can access for help if this is the first time they’re disclosing something. I provide them with contact names and numbers and the students work in small groups. The results are often profound. The request was to write something using the fairy tale genre about a personal experience. This work, among many, touched me deeply. I felt it should be shared. It really got me thinking about what I teach and what I edit out. Even the subject of alcoholism in the story, which seems like a fairly minor theme, is actually quite important. Upon further research I found that there’s a lot of parallels between families with alcoholism and families with incest.

Esau: So you did teach more than Rilke?

Paul: Indeed!

Jack: I just wanted to say that the writing of the fairy tale was deeply therapeutic for me, but it’s what we’re doing with the writing that has me even more excited. Left alone, it helps me. But when it’s shared and dialogued about, transformation begins.

Penny: You’re so right. I’m still caught up about the alcoholism and incest connection Paul mentioned. Really? Hmpf! Both my parents drank.

Tom: Well, my dad did too but I wasn’t abused.
Paul: We could start our own club! My dad was a raging alcoholic and my mother took phenobarbitols like they were Smarties. There appear to be some key indicators linking family patterns of alcoholism with incest. Charles Barnard did a good study on it that compares alcoholic and incestuous families.265

Penny: Really? What are they?

Paul: Um, there’re at least a dozen areas. I remember some off the top of my head: One is blurred intergenerational boundaries. As the parental unit breaks down because of conflict and drinking, children can end up becoming substitute spouses, easily leading to incest. Another writer also speaking about the pathology of incest said that it often occurs in settings of multiple traumas, such as alcoholism, domestic violence, and emotional deprivation.266

Penny: I guess more than one thing has to be wrong for incest to occur. Both parents—the whole family—has to be pretty screwed up for someone not to say something! But then, who’s to know any differently? I think some parents are so dysfunctional they inevitably try to make their children their caregivers or confidantes. With me it was my father who was always telling me how difficult it was being married to my mother, that she couldn’t cook, that she was “cold and austere.” As if I was supposed to know what “austere” meant when I was five! It’s bizarre!

Paul: Yeah, that sounds in keeping with another point: deterioration of the sexual relationship between the parents. And, as with alcoholism, it tends to be a family secret, so patterns of denial and secrets are rampant in these kinds of families. Then there’s the fact that such families tend to have suppressed or distorted emotions and affect. Like in my family, anger was not okay if it stemmed from the children, but my parents could fight all they wanted and take it out on us...

Tom: Beatings.

Paul: ...giving distorted messages. There’s also the pathological assignment of family roles. Children function in adult roles and everybody maintains the same performance. Years can go by, the kids can leave home, but everybody snaps back into the same performance when they’re back together.
Penny: How true. That's my family to a tee. And the thing about the drinking—like in Tom's family too—it was such a secret...

Tom: ...the mental illness too...

Penny: ...that I ended up not having any friends. It was too risky. If someone came over and they were fighting, it would be gossip in the town. I never knew if one or both of them would be drunk and that was supposed to be a well-kept secret.

Paul: Yes, that kind of emotional and social isolation. I think it allows for the continuation of the unhealthy environment. By cutting off the outside world as much as possible, you can perpetuate the addictions.

Esau: Growing up like that—it's a wonder you folks are so successful. On the surface, nobody would guess.

Jack: Isn't that part of the problem? People have said that to me many a time. Someone once said how witty I was and that I must have had a wonderful childhood. And that I turned out to be very successful so my parents must have done something right.

Penny: God, I've heard that too. Any attempt to diminish the evidence before them. I was trained to be obedient, to listen empathetically, to put everyone else's needs before my own, to not have any feelings, to be competent from a very early age or there wouldn't have been food on the table...

Paul: ...which translates to unwell living and a myriad of problems that we're trained not to examine because that's the real taboo: breaking the silence about family secrets. We have all these intimacy and trust problems, dependency issues, emotional wounds. Yet we continue to perform the identity shaped for us as children.267

Tom: Shaped by our parents, but by others too. Friends, relatives, and, frankly enough, by the teachers in school. I mean, I did it myself. I had a fit when I saw that you'd made Penny upset by
opening up this material. It's all my stuff. You know, I think we owe Paul a debt of thanks for bringing us together with a fresh take on things. You are a luminary!

Paul: No, no. I'm just an old curmudgeon.

Jack: Paul, you are much more than an old curmudgeon. We all are. Paul, you’re the embodiment of Rilke’s poem. You are the Archaic Torso of Apollo.

Paul: [jokingly] Archaic, that’s me! Gee, thanks.

Jack: [seriously] You know what I mean! Rilke’s poem is about self-reflection as he engages with the torso in his presence. The themes of illumination and seeing are replete throughout the poem, which ends with the shocking conclusion, “You must change your life.” Seemingly out of the blue, Rilke concludes with this thought. Awe-struck by the power, beauty, and vitality of this archaic torso of Apollo, he comes to the realization that these very qualities are apparently lacking in his life, in his existence. And yet he doesn’t say, “I must change my life.” Rather, he draws the reader into the experience: “You must change your life.” A friend and I went over and over the poem for an hour, offering different interpretations, reading and re-reading it, then searching the Web for interpretations of it and finally finding a lecture about it that could be listened to. The impact of Rilke’s poem stayed in my imagination the next few days and weeks. I envisioned him concluding about himself, “You must change your life.” And I wondered, did he? Can you, as Carl Leggo asks, live poetically? This incredible poem. This dramatic conclusion. But did Rilke change his life? And if so, how? How did he dwell with the Dionysian and the Apollonian? And what about those who read it? What about me? Will I change my life because of it? I, for one, believe I already have. You have opened up a space of possibility that illuminates the dark corners of classrooms and school corridors, bedrooms and boudoirs, silences so audible they hurt the ears. You have let me bring light to long-silenced topics that not only tell us that we must change our lives, but also we have the means in which to do it.

Paul: [eyes brimming with tears] Thank you.

Jack: I think I have a theme song for us!
On a clear day
Rise and look around you
And you'll see who you are
On a clear day
How it will astound you
That the glow of your being
Outshines every star
You feel part of every mountain sea and shore
You can hear
From far and near
A world you've never, never heard before...
And on a clear day...On that clear day...
You can see forever...
And ever...
And ever...
And ever more.\(^{269}\)

\(^{269}\) Recorded through licensing provided by the Canadian Musical Reproduction Rights Agency Limited and Chappell & Co., c/o Warner/chappell Music Canada Ltd., copyright holder of the song 'On a clear day (you can see forever)'.
Program Notes


26 Hillman, op.cit., pp. 42-43.
27 Ibid., pp. 17-18.
28 Ibid., p. 28.
30 Idem.
32 Frank, op.cit., p. xi.
37 MacCurdy, op.cit., p. 172.
41 Hillman, op.cit., p. 38.
42 Tal, op.cit., p. 33.
46 Tomeo et al., op.cit.
50 Ibid., p. 17.


Felman, S., & Laub, D., op.cit., p. 58.


Garoian, op.cit., p. 40.


Ibid., p. 2.


MacCurdy, op.cit., p. 165.


McCurdy, op.cit., p. 162.

Ibid., pp. 163-70.


81 Herman, op.cit., p. 3.


84 Stoneman, op.cit., p. 184.

85 Ibid., p. 185.


88 Ibid., p. 28.


90 Idem.


92 Stoneman, op.cit., p. 76.

93 Burn, op.cit., p. 8.

94 Ibid., p. 9.

95 Philip, op.cit., p. 30.

96 Stoneman, op.cit., p. 79.


98 MacCurdy, op.cit., pp. 163-70.


100 Tacey, op.cit.


102 Bruner, op.cit., p. 41.

103 Ibid., p. 41.


105 Freire, op.cit.


109 *Into darkness*, op.cit.

110 Stoneman, op.cit., p. 61.

113 Hillman, op.cit., p. 11.
123 Tal, op.cit., p. 7.
127 Miller (1996), op.cit.
128 Miller (1996), op.cit.
129 Tal, op.cit., p. 6.
130 Miller, A., op.cit., p. 142.
131 Ibid., p. 141.
132 Frank, op.cit., p. 61.
133 Tal, op.cit., p. 6.
135 Tal, op.cit., p. 33.
139 Idem.
180 Corelli, op.cit.
183 Tal, op.cit., p. 59.
184 Saradjian & Hanks, op.cit., p. 18.
186 Wakefield et al., op.cit.
188 Idem.
194 Glover, N. op.cit., pp. 281-287.
195 Cavanagh Johnson, op.cit.


Mollon, op.cit., p. 58.

Sebold, op.cit., pp. 75-80.

Idem.

Cavanagh Johnson, op.cit.


Cavanagh Johnson, op.cit., 571-585.


Cavanagh Johnson, op.cit.


Cavanagh Johnson, op.cit.


Sebold, op.cit.

Cavanagh Johnson, op.cit.


Idem.

Cavanagh Johnson, op.cit.


Lew, op.cit.

Miletski, op.cit., p. 6.


Mollon, op.cit., p. 58.


Janikowski et al., op.cit.

Janikowski et al., op.cit.


Glover, op.cit.

*Critic of homosexuality can teach, not counsel* (June, 2003). *GALE Force (Gay And Lesbian Educators), 13*, 12. Vancouver, BC.

Wakefield et al., op.cit., p. 4


Mathews, op.cit.

Idem.

Hoppe, op.cit.

Janikowski et al., op.cit.

Mathews, op.cit.

Doll, et al., op.cit.

Glover, op.cit.

Tremblay, op.cit.

Garbo, op.cit.

Munro, M., op.cit.

Wakefield et al., op.cit.

Glover, op.cit.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Hoppe, op.cit.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Wakefield et al., op.cit.

Ibid.


Frank, op. cit.


Lewis, op. cit. p. 87.


Ibid., 136-144.


ACT IV

THE MORAL OF THE STORY
Larry King: Tonight we have a very special guest from Canada. He's the author of *A Grim Fairy Tale: A Mythopoetic Discourse on Taboo, Trauma and Anti-Oppressive Pedagogy* and has just released a new book *Confessions of a Pedagogue*, both of which have been at the center of controversy since they were published. Jack Sinclair is here to explain and defend his book that is creating a huge stir about incest and education. He's now assistant professor at Salem University where he teaches about the value of narrative. With us also from our San Francisco studio is Kevin Kumashiro, head of the Center for Anti-Oppressive Education. Judith Herman from New York, author of *Trauma and Recovery*. Joining us tonight from Boston is Bishop Martin Hedstrom, head of the Catholic Schooling Network. From Idaho Joyce King is here. She's an educator and activist against racism. Sue Grand, a psychoanalyst researcher who's done research on mother-son incest and sexuality and gender, will present her views. And Charles Bruckerhoff is also in our studio tonight—he's published on democratic education. We've got a full panel tonight, and you parents out there had better send your kids off to bed because we're getting down to some pretty nasty subject matter tonight. Jack, thanks for being with us tonight. I've read your book. Did you expect it would be this controversial?

Jack: You know, I think I underestimated just how controversial it would be.

Larry: Really?

Jack: I thought it was hard enough opening up this subject in my family. But it's been just as challenging within the gay community, within education, with friends. The difficulty people have with such knowledge is astounding.

Larry: I have to tell you, when I read the full title of *A Grim Fairy Tale* it was your mentioning of "discourse" that stood out for me. I think of a discourse as a conversation, which is what we're going to have tonight. And I could see from the text—the play, the fairy tale, even the manifesto—that a discourse was being employed.
Jack: Yes.

Larry: I looked it up before the show. Do you want to hear the definition? I mean, you probably know what it is, but our viewers don't.

Jack: By all means.

Larry: There's a few interpretations, of course, but the one I like is: "An extended communication (often interactive) dealing with some particular topic." And, "The power of the mind to reason or infer by running, as it were, from one fact or reason to another, and deriving a conclusion." The word *discourse* comes from the Latin, *discursus*, meaning a running to and fro. In French it's *discurrere*.

Jack: Right, and *currere* meaning running, which is where curriculum comes from.

Larry: Yeah, but what gets me—how do we have a discourse on a subject that is so taboo?

Jack: As I've said before, if *currere* is running, what are we running from? Mother-son incest in education, in families, in society, is an unspoken discourse. I think we have historically had a "dyscourse"—with a "Y"—the dysfunctional stream of silence around taboo topics.

Larry: Joyce King, is this your perspective? Your work is on racism but do you see a parallel to incest?

King: Certainly. Anywhere that people turn a blind eye you'll find dysconsciousness.

Larry: "Dysconsciousness." So, I take it by that term you mean a dysfunctional consciousness. Am I right?

King: Yes, you could say that. I view a distorted, unhealthy mindview of life as dysconsciousness. My work is on racism, yet the parallel is striking. In Jack's research, dysconsciousness best describes those individuals who do not want to acknowledge that incest has occurred and that its effects are damaging. There are those who have been given the knowledge and still do not want to know—an impaired consciousness, different than the unconscious which has more to do with the undiscovered country.
knowledge which is not known or is hidden from the eye/I of the self. They are those individuals who cannot tolerate the knowledge that a man or woman is gay. Felman echoes my thoughts by identifying repression as active, rather than passive, ignorance, a desire not to know.  

Larry: Jack, I read your latest book and I read your fairy tale. It's not that I don't believe the tale. I certainly do. But I'm sure a lot of people would read this incestuous fairy tale life story of yours—which is probably the tip of the iceberg—and dismiss it as hogwash.

Jack: If fewer people did, then maybe the sexual abuse rates wouldn't be so high.

Larry: How do you convince others that the events Jack experienced were true? How can we trust Jack's memories in an era that's—wouldn't you agree—hostile to memory? How do we know it's not all made up? All this turmoil about a contemporary fairy tale, and we don't even know if the text is true.

Jack: Hey, I hear you. There's a writer named Vico who sums it up best, quoted in Collingwood's book *The Idea of History*: "The important question about any statement contained in a source is not whether it is true or false, but what it means."  

Larry: If it's all lies where's the meaning in that?

Jack: It's not lies. It's a reconstruction of the past into a meaningful framework. We're talking about narrative fiction and the value of it. It has, I would argue, both a potential therapeutic and pedagogic value, in education. It really isn't that important just what kernels within it are true or false, but what it means. Ross wrote along similar lines: "The real problem, however, is not the telling of true stories from false…but the very value of narrativity as a model of making sense of reality." The fairy tale narrative reveals to us the reality that deeply silenced topics like mother-son incest take place. Are you familiar with W.G. Sebald's works?

Larry: Yes. His books are a wonderful read. They read like an autobiography and yet you know they must be fictional as well.
Jack: That's what I've done: blurred the boundaries between artifice and reality, memory and history. I want the reader to have the experience an incest victim has: existing in an environment where you don't know fact from fiction. Where what's true or not is always uncertain. Where the perpetrator literally brainwashes the child into believing that things are meant to be this way, that sexual abuse is natural, or a secret, or never happened. If the readers feel uncomfortable and unstable, they are beginning to grasp what it is like to endure such madness in childhood.

Larry: Okay, I hear you. But still, doesn't it lose credibility in an arena that's already, you know, full of doubt?

Jack: I'm not filing a police report or writing an autobiography. Take a fairy tale. We never quite know if some of them are true or not, but they impart meaning. Expressing social commentary or ethics or morality through a narrative device is performative. Pedagogy must be performative in order to subvert oppression. Trauma recovery necessitates performance to enact new and healthier ways of being. The task here is making the incredulous credible, the unspeakable spoken, the wrong written. Narrative fiction can be a fairy tale, lyrics to a song, mythopoetics, or any number of devices. Fiction accesses metaphors that speak to a wide audience of readers. Fiction deliberately disrupts the lines between what can be known and what can never be known, such as why a mother would sexually abuse her child. Fiction distances the author from the text-experience, an avenue for healing, for analysis, for objectivity. It's more than one person's story. It's the story of many individuals, of whole families, of communities and cultures. This demands that it be accessible. Most of all, it needs to teach.

Larry: So what does a story like yours mean? Or can we even know that?

Jack: I think we need to begin by dwelling in not knowing. Recognizing what we don't know. Teaching what we don't know. Teaching beyond us. That's the undiscovered country that seeks to be explored.

Larry: Mother-son incest? It conjures up horrific images.

Jack: Yet why more horrific than father-daughter incest?

Larry: Hmm, I see what you mean. It's complex. What does your text teach?
Jack: Well, you've read it. Maybe I should be asking you, Larry.

Larry [chuckling] OK, let's see: um, that so-called taboo subjects such as homosexuality or incest are educational subjects that people still adamantly do not want to know or acknowledge. Never mind teach about them. That's what you're saying, isn't it?

Jack: Yes.

Larry: So you'd call yourself an advocate? A spokesperson? An ethnographer?

Jack: Yes, all of those. And a translator.

Larry: A translator?

Jack: Translating the trauma that was written on the body into stories and narratives, into music and art, into being and becoming.

Larry: Hmmm.

Jack: I'd call myself—if I have to use a label—more of a historiographer. Or better yet, a psycho-historiographer. People have endured personal traumas—whether it's incest or general life experiences for that matter—and people are traditionally barred from doing research from a personal perspective, barred from discourse that enters the margins or the taboo. I'm interested in the unwritten traumatic experiences of peoples' lives and the psychological reasons that culture suppresses them into silence.

Larry: You're talking about academia.

Jack: Yes. I'm writing what's long been in the spaces, between the letters, outside the curriculum, worlds without words.

Larry: Is it taboo to claim your voice in university research?
Jack: Especially in absent topics such as incest.

Larry: It’s okay to write about other peoples’ lives but not your own?

Jack: For the most part, yes. Even a memoir cannot be told without a measure of fiction in recreating it. The power of mythopoetics or what could be called psychohistoriographic fiction is that it can be aimed “at creating a new reality, in the course of time, by way of the unreal,” as Sebald writes “in historiography, the indisputable advantages of a fictitious past have become apparent.”⁵ We are confronted with the abundance of suffering there is, and if we’re overwhelmed by it, we ignore it, we pretend it doesn’t exist, we edit it out of our language and our books, we change the channel. But in the back of our minds there’s this gnawing knowing. Because somehow, through our very silence, we participate in and condone the atrocities that happen to others: what Irish writer Marion Young might call a “sanction of silence.”⁶

Larry: “A gnawing knowing…” I…hmm. Isn’t it paradoxical—even harmful—that survivors of sexual abuse are silenced by what constitutes research in universities?

Jack: You could say that. Some would argue it perpetuates the silence, even retraumatizes.

Larry: Are you saying there’s no research on mother-son incest told in the first person?

Jack: None that I know of.

Larry: Do you wonder—at least I do—why all of a sudden everyone’s talking about sexual abuse memories? What do you make of it?

Jack: I attribute it to steady progress around memory and the unveiling of traumatic histories.

Larry: Abusers play key roles in keeping it quiet, don’t they?

Jack: Absolutely.
Larry: Memory and remembering...is it important to remember abuse? I mean—a lot of people ask, why not just forget about it? Why dwell on it?

Jack: I could say that memory constitutes my being.

Larry: So silences...

Jack: Render me incomplete.

Larry: Yet somehow we all participate in it, is that right?

Jack: We have to. We don't live in isolation. “Personal memory is always connected to social narrative as is social memory to the personal.”

Larry: And therefore personal narratives, like myths, are learned?

Jack: Uh huh.

Larry: Was this your experience?

Jack: Yeah. Through abuser-defined and socially determined ways of remembering, certain ways of knowing and recalling are privileged over others. It's a pathological mindset that bars remembering.

Larry: Would you say memory is more than recall? More than a fixed point in the past?

Jack: Yeah. Antze and Lambek say that we need to imagine memory as practice. There are discourses of memory. Memory is the product of discourse, and there are “ways the expression of memory is itself discursive.”

Larry: Fascinating. Um—how does the story of Oedipus fit into this? I'm sure you're familiar with it.
Jack: Yes. Like Oedipus, who discovered the woman he married was actually his mother, we blind ourselves to forbidden knowledge. Same with Hamlet, which I'm sure is an oedipal story—he'd rather kill himself than face the parricidal taboo.\textsuperscript{11}

Larry: Interesting. Are you saying education and knowledge are chiefly all about memory? That our identities are based on memory?

Jack: Yes. We don't realize it, but silences of taboo memories like incest are deeply embedded in the cultural curriculum. Through our complicity we teach these damaging silences. "The extent of the unwritten past of our human ancestors in comparison with what we call \textit{history} is difficult to comprehend."\textsuperscript{12}

Larry: So you're saying, "our experience of the present very largely depend upon our memories of the past."\textsuperscript{13}

Jack: Yeah. And when what is memorable is distorted, suppressed, mythologized or silenced by everyone involved, that's when sexually abused individuals suffer.

Larry: Suffer in silence.

Jack: I said it before, and I'll say it again: significant social changes are eminently educational in character.\textsuperscript{14}

Larry: So teach about it?

Jack: Yes.

Larry: Talk about it?

Jack: Yes.
Larry: OK. So, back to your book—you’ve talked a bit about the value of narrative discourse and fiction, yet in many ways it isn’t fiction. Penny and Edsel—excuse me, Edi, Paul’s wife—and the others in your first book—I mean—that group you met with that opened up all of this—they’re real.

Jack: Yes, indeed.

Larry: Sad, wasn’t it?

Jack: Penny’s suicide?

Larry: Yes.

Jack: Heart-breaking.

Larry: Did you see the press conference her parents gave?

Jack: It was disgusting. They denied everything. Not surprising knowing what she said about them and how society buries incest memories.¹⁵

Larry: Do you think the public bought it—their public denial of everything?

Jack: I’ve come to learn that people will believe what they want to believe. I think the tide is turning, but it’s a slow go. You can give someone knowledge but they may not learn from it. There’s a chasm between knowledge and acknowledgment.

Larry: Do you feel guilty about it? Do you wonder if you hadn’t opened up those wounds that she wouldn’t have ended up drowning herself?

Jack: I thought of that at first, yes. But, you know, she said to me more than once, what a blessing it was to finally be able to talk about the sexual abuse. It was the endless silence that killed her, Larry. Too much silence for too long. You can only take so much. It’s like I’ve said about gay males who were
abused: “These males, along with heterosexual males who were sexually abused, contribute to 90% of youth male suicide.” It’s a very serious social and mental health problem. Silence is deadly.

Larry: How’s Tom taking it?

Jack: Not well. He, uh, he started drinking pretty heavily. He’s very angry. And confused. He, um, he’s just gone into a detox facility in Oliver, where he was working up until last year.

Larry: He was doing drugs too.

Jack: Yeah. Prescription drugs and gin. It’s hard. He’s dealing with a lot.

Larry: Both his parents were alcoholics?

Jack: No, his father was. His grandfather too. Who knows how far back it goes?

Larry: It’s hard to break the pattern. Do you believe that traumatic histories run in families, much like alcoholism or heart disease?

Jack: Absolutely.

Larry: You wrote a song about Penny.

Jack: Mmm, yes. I sang it at her funeral. It was—and continues to be—a very painful time.

Larry: It’s on your new CD, called “Stream of Unconsciousness.” Let’s play it on the air in its entirety.

Jack: OK.

Larry: So, this is Jack Sinclair, singing “River Bed” from his first album, “Stream of Unconsciousness.”
[CD Song #6: River Bed¹]

When you walked into the water
did you hope that it would heal ya?
Did your eyes close to the father,
did you look like fair Ophelia?
Would a glimpse of your reflection
have offered some protection
from the pain?

You let the river rage and enter
every single orifice.
Did it feel like sweet surrender
or another bloody sacrifice?
Floating in your summer gown
the colours bleeding down
a crimson rain.

For you thirsted after living
so you let the river fill you,
but the world is not forgiving
and the silence surely killed you:
sail away, sail away, to the sea.

Or did you have a vision
you could walk upon the water?
But you sailed into the ocean
where you lived like Neptune's daughter,
where the current's never flowing
in the deep and dark unknowing
once again.

¹ Original lyrics and music by the author.
Were you thinking of Virginia
with her pocket full of stones?
Was there no more spirit in ya,
just the flesh upon your bones?
Did you lose faith in tomorrow,
did you wash away the sorrow
in your veins?

For you thirsted after living
so you let the river fill you,
but the world is not forgiving
and the silence surely killed you:
sail away, sail away, to the sea.

Larry: A very moving and personal tribute. That was uh, Jack Sinclair, on his new album: "Stream of Unconsciousness." OK. So, let's go over the statistics again here. We've heard a lot about girls being sexually abused. Lately we're hearing even more about boys who have been sexually abused. I'm talking about the scandals with the Catholic Church and all. Then there was the Mary Kay Letourneau story that kept making headlines. Some of the argument there was that she is bipolar and therefore not culpable. But I really can't say in all my years of broadcasting that I've heard about women or mothers who sexually abuse their children.

Jack: There's much work to be done because it certainly is out there.

Larry: You said that Alfred Kinsey dismissed mother-son incest as fantasy back in 1948. In 1972 Mathis thought that female perpetrators were so rare as to be insignificant and harmless. Does this sound to you like Freud's change of theory at the turn of the century, when he basically recanted his claim that all these women were being sexually abused and in order to save his reputation he said it was hysteria? Fantasy?
Jack: Yes, it's much the same phenomenon. Some people are receptive to the fact when I teach about it. Others ignore what I said and drop the subject right away. It's much easier for people to believe a man would do this kind of thing but not a woman, and especially not a mother.\textsuperscript{22}

Larry: Is it as harmful? Your critics say that mother-son incest is psychological, not really sexual. What's involved with it, anyway? It seems beyond the imagination.

Jack: That's because we are penis focused and in this patriarchy we can't imagine a mother perpetrating a sexual crime. It's very damaging. We know that the psychological effects to the boy can be devastating.\textsuperscript{23} We know that female perpetrators abuse both girls and boys.\textsuperscript{24} Um, one study found 67\% of female perpetrators abused girls and the remainder abused boys.\textsuperscript{25} One-third of boys who are sexually abused are abused by a woman.\textsuperscript{26}

Larry: One-third. That's a significant number. So it's not gender specific. It's the same as with men, then? They abuse both girls and boys.

Jack: Right. As far defining it, I can draw on some of the research that's been done. It's extensive, but I'll give you some of the key points:

Intercourse is the obvious kind of worst-case scenario people might imagine, and it does happen, though the data around it currently point to mental illness on the part of the adult son, the mother, or both. Other things can include a combination of the following:

1. Forcing him to have sex with others
2. Using him to masturbate herself. This can be done by rubbing him against her genitals and breasts or by making him insert his fingers into her vagina
3. She might also force him to perform cunnilingus on her
4. Openly masturbating in front of her son
5. Taking baths with him, even if he's post-puberty
6. Having him suck and fondle her breasts well beyond when he should have been weaned
7. Performing fellatio on her son
8. Regularly sleeping in bed with him time and time again, combined with overcrowding and hugging.\textsuperscript{27}
There are many other things, Larry, both subtle and gross.

Larry: Wow. I would never have imagined that it could be so physical. It's usually thought of as an over-attachment thing.

Jack: When the mother is the abuser, it often is.

Larry: The consequences must be devastating.

Jack: You can imagine.

Larry: Remember the outrage the nation felt when Susan Smith turned out to be the one who had drowned her own two boys in South Carolina?²⁸

Jack: Yeah.

Larry: Do you find that there are two sides to it? The public was outraged that a mother could do that but isn't there also more sympathy? We heard talk of post-natal psychosis, post-partum depression. The defense brought up Susan's own history of trauma and the sexual molestation by her stepfather that purportedly later resulted in an affair.²⁹ How legitimate do you find those reasons and why don't they say similar things about men? Not that they give birth, but, you know, insanity pleas and such.

Jack: That's a very good point. It's not to say that mental illness is not a factor when women or men commit terrible crimes. I think we need a balance here. We need, in some cases, to look for mental health reasons as to why a woman or a man would sexually abuse. We tend to look at these kinds of cases as though men are pigs and women must be completely psychotic. Are there are cues from their childhood experiences that may lead them to become sexual abuse perpetrators? Is it transgenerational? I like to call it transgenerational learning; I think we pass down knowledge in all forms—historical, traumatic, emotional, sexual and textual—even silences—from one generation to the next. We do this at home. We do this at school. It's considered much more taboo to say bad things about your mother as opposed to your father. We are dealing with socially embedded rules. And the rules around incest are socially inbedded.
Larry: Say more about that. Explain to me what pedagogy has to do with all this.

Jack: Van Manen uses the term pedagogy to restore a forgotten or absent relation between adults and children. Extending upon his credo that pedagogical intent is an orientation to the good, to what is good for the child, I believe a pedagogy that encompasses the sexual abuse histories of children and adults in educational settings is desperately needed. This requires anti-oppressive pedagogy. Educational institutions are transmitters of memories. What an individual tends to think is memorable about the past is to a great extent what the social environment designates it to be. By recalling not the historical or collective past but the personal past, students claim personal agency around memory.

Larry: So, an educational approach that counters oppression. Along the lines of Paulo Freire’s classic book.

Jack: Yeah. We know from Freire’s work that writing about and naming oppression is a major first step, but it must be followed up with advocacy, social action, and long term commitment.

Larry: And you see the silence of topics like homosexuality or sexual abuse as rooted in oppression? Kevin Kumashiro, what is oppression?

Kevin: Oppression refers to a social dynamic in which certain ways of being in this world—including certain ways of identifying or being identified—are normalized or privileged while other ways are disadvantaged or marginalized. Educational settings perpetuate and institutionalize these so-called norms. Anti-oppressive education aims to challenge multiple forms of oppression.

Larry: I remember Martin Luther King writing in a letter from Birmingham Jail: “We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.” Does that still hold water, Kevin? I mean, forty some odd years later are you still saying that students are oppressed in school? Doesn’t democracy give a voice to all people?

Kevin: Education is rarely democratic at all, Larry. It still tends to be about the majority rule. Education often means repetition. Teachers repeat the same lessons from year to year and often impart one way
of knowing about historical events to the exclusion of other voices. That’s what oppression is: “the citing of harmful discourses and the repetition of harmful histories.” It’s like the Christopher Columbus story. It’s only recently that we’ve come to challenge the notion that he didn’t ‘discover’ the new world. There were people here already. We’re coming to realize that these early explorers imposed their religious beliefs and values on the locals. They unknowingly introduced small pox, which killed numerous people. Ignorance is destructive.

Larry: Kevin, what are the characteristics of anti-oppressive education?

Kevin: There are five key components or qualities:
1. The curriculum needs to include units about marginalized groups or topics, the “Other.”
2. Otherness needs to be integrated throughout the curriculum.
3. Understanding oppression requires more than an examination of one’s own attitude, treatment, and knowledge about Others.
4. It requires transformation and critical analysis of power structures and ideologies.
5. Critical teaching involves making visible the privilege of certain identities and the invisibility of this privilege.

Larry: Why are we so blind to oppression if this is a free country? Is it the same in Canada, Jack?

Jack: Well, I could say that our sociopolitical system gives us democratic freedom, whatever that means and however that’s interpreted, though I could also say it gives us the freedom to suppress subjects we don’t want to discuss.

Larry: Are you getting press coverage in Canada? It seems to me most of your presentations and publications have been in the States.

Jack: You’re right. We’re not talking about it nearly enough in Canada. It’s ironic I had to come, and gladly, to be on the Larry King Show to reach a Canadian audience. We don’t have an evening talk show figure like you. We don’t really have a CNN. We don’t even have daytime talk shows of any merit that really look at topics like incest. We rely on Oprah and Dr. Phil.
Larry: Jack, where does oppression come from? And how do we deal with it without becoming discouraged and despondent?

Jack: Oppression begins with an act of violence, initiated by those in power. Incest is that insidious, violent act. Tales like the ancient Greek myths and Biblical stories attempt to validate and perpetuate these acts of violence by posing as foundational stories that sanction abuse by those claiming privilege and power. Personal narratives that employ mythopoetics subvert violence/violation and are mandatory in order to critique the power structures and ideologies that enforce them. We can transcend this: incest can be prevented. And where it has occurred, we can prevent further injury. We can support the individual.

Larry: Would you say gay people are oppressed?

Jack: Absolutely.

Larry: Even after all the progress? I mean, don’t parts of Canada have gay marriage?

Jack: One doesn’t necessarily inform the other. The end of slavery did not end racism. It’s a beginning. In fact, a major study of American colleges and universities—the largest of its kind—found that half of the LGBT students hide their sexual orientation to avoid harassment.

Larry: Wow. They interviewed students?

Jack: And faculty, administrators and staff.

Larry: Is there a difference between perceived harassment and actual homophobia?

Jack: In this survey over one third of the gay students polled had experienced harassment in the past year. And these were schools with non-discrimination policies.

Larry: Policies don’t necessarily translate into action?
Jack: No. It's the same when I present at a conference, Larry. People attend according to the topic and I end up preaching to the converted. When I present on "homosexual taboos" it's a wonder if there's one heterosexual in the group. When I present on abuse, the room is filled only with abuse survivors or therapists. Very few people go to presentations outside of their work or life experience. I imagine most people just don't want to hear that. But people will watch this show, for the most part, because you're a celebrity.

Larry: Thank you. So schools that have gay-straight alliances really only reach people already concerned about the issue?

Jack: Very broadly speaking, yes, though these are certainly valuable groups. It's just that most people don't want to move outside of their comfort zones.

Larry: OK. Bishop Hedstrom, what do you think of all this? Do you think education needs to be more inclusive of topics like homosexuality and incest?

Bishop: You know, Larry, introducing topics like that is undoing the moral fabric of society. We are getting so distracted with trying to include every voice in the classroom and at every meeting around the country, that nothing is getting accomplished. And the really serious thing about it is that we're dwelling on the negative. I wouldn't want my kids coming home crying because the teacher made them talk about sexual abuse. Who needs to hear about that? Teachers are going to terrorize them, and God knows we've got enough terror in the world as it is.

Larry: What's your solution?

Bishop: We need to get back to the three Rs. Back to basics. Back to fundamentals. I tell you, Larry, we wouldn't be in the sorry state we are today if we adopted the fundamentals.

Larry: Jack, what do you say to that? Do we need to get back to the three Rs?

Jack: Larry, the three Rs don't even start with "R"! The three Rs are in reality a call to silence the emphasis on other topics like sexuality in schools, topics which have long been squelched because they
are the issues of Other people, of Those people. Instead, the three Rs today should be Repression, Repetition, and Retraumatization. Issues like anti-homophobia education, the protection of sexual minority students in schools, and, I would add, the prevalence of sexual abuse and incest, are social issues, issues that are found in every walk of life, in every religion, fundamentalist or otherwise. A repressive educational system seeks to deny the essence of those who make up the student body. What we repress hinders teaching and learning. Without critical awareness of the issues, repetition of social issues will continue: hate crimes, bigotry, racism, sexism, heteronormativity, suicide, and mental health problems, to name a few. When I went to school in the 1960s homosexuality and sexual abuse were never talked about. Nor was alcoholism or domestic violence. Not teaching about these topics further silences students, retraumatizing them again and again as they encounter denial of who they are and what they experienced. This is the difference between knowledge and acknowledgment.

Larry: You're tying this to education in saying that sexual abuse hinders learning. Is that because of all the damaging consequences from it?

Jack: Yes. The anxiety, depression, hypervigilance, dissociation, trouble concentrating—all can impair a child’s ability to attend, to process new information, to interact with others, to focus. We fail these children by ignoring the underlying issue.

Larry: Judith Herman, you've written about trauma. Is that what this is all about? Repression, repetition and...what did you say the other one was?

Jack: Retraumatization.


Larry: Give me an example.

Judith: OK. Um... a psychiatrist—Lenore Terr—studied 20 children with documented histories of early trauma. Only one could verbally describe what had happened before the age of two and a half. Nevertheless, 18 of these children exhibited evidence of the traumatic memories in their behaviour and
in their play. The traumatic experiences they had had were firmly encoded in memory, and they reenacted those events in their play with incredible accuracy. Adults are no different. They will continue to recreate traumatic episodes, whether literally or figuratively or metaphorically. So for parents and teachers—even victims—pretending it doesn’t happen or doesn’t matter isn’t working. It leads to life-long struggles.

Larry: Because of reenactment?

Judith: Partly, yes. Out of an attempt to change the outcome. The psyche strives for wholeness. Events are traumatic when they have no psychological and emotional resolution. This is the premise of EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprogramming), a revolutionary treatment for traumas like sexual abuse.

Larry: Is that what you had done?

Jack: Yes. It's very powerful and effective.

Larry: Tell me about the repetition compulsion.

Jack: Victims often don't even realize they're doing this. I used to fidget with my fingertips when I was anxious. After a couple of years in therapy I suddenly realized what I was doing as I moved from finger to finger. I had an image of each finger having a penis at the end and I would go from finger to finger trying to cut them off with the other hand. I always knew what the image was; I just never associated it with something further. It was my way of trying to end the abuse. In this case, it stemmed from being forced to finger my mother's vagina. Awareness and understanding are absolutely necessary for the survivor of trauma to develop new constructs. Writing and creative expression are excellent vehicles. It's got to be expressed somehow and in conscious, healthy ways rather than unconscious, self-destructive or self-abusive ways.

Larry: As I prepared for this show, I had the chance to read things I never would have chosen to read, yet it was very enlightening. Judith, you know about the writing of Michael Levy on the compulsion to repeat?
Judith: Of course.

Larry: Does his stuff echo your sentiments?

Judith: Yes. And an excellent example is in the fairy tale itself. Eddy goes on his second voyage and encounters the old professor from the School of Music and he ends up repeating sexual abuse from his childhood. The compulsion to repeat led him to being revictimized. So if schools only offer repetition of subject matter and content, how is a child supposed to learn different ways of being? If a child is being sexually abused at home, say, then she or he is living in an environment where the abuse is a huge secret. If schools echo that same silence, if they refuse to talk openly about sexual abuse, then they retraumatize the child all over again. Each time a student encounters a situation where it feels unsafe to talk about difficulties in his life, repression or oppression—however you want to call it—it reaffirms a life-long pattern of damage to the individual. I think it's a moral responsibility that educators have. The character's name isn't Eddy for nothing. We're talking about edification. Ethics. Some people have argued that it's unethical to ask students to write about their personal stories and histories of trauma. I say it's unethical not to invite writing of this nature.

Larry: Kevin Kumashiro, do you agree? Are you saying that talking openly about things that are historically taboo is the solution? Would that do it?

Kevin: We know that it's not enough to say, "Sexual abuse is wrong" because it goes on all the time. We know that it takes more than saying, "It's okay to be gay" for the message to land. I say that instead of repetition we need supplementation. It's not that we have to throw out the baby with the bath water. We don't discount all of the historical events that have happened, both personal and collective. By laboring to re-work history, to performatively re-work history, we begin to undo harmful associations to past events. We have to "repeat with a difference."

Bishop: Why should schools be forced to talk about homosexuality? Especially like the recent episodes in Surrey, British Columbia. The community has parents with moral values—Sikhs and Christians—who want to raise their children according to their values, and the homosexuals are forcing their agenda onto them. We don't need—
Jack: No, that's not it. First of all, there are gay parents in Surrey. Secondly, children of people who are Sikh fundamentalists and Christians and whatever other faith might find out that they're gay. Think how damaging it is not to be exposed to the fact that there are other ways of being in this world. And don't tell me for a minute that religious households are free from child abuse. And, just as importantly, whose agenda has been forced on whom? Homosexuals have spent thousands of years oppressed by the heterosexual majority. This is a repetition of the same theme!

Larry: One in ten.

Jack: By the estimates, yes, one in ten. Children need to know that there are other ways of being and living in the world. That there are other religions, other races, other sexual orientations, and that this is okay. It's about taking care of the children, Bishop Hedstrom. That's where this concern stems from. Sikhs and Christians have gay children too.

Larry: OK. But what about your manifesto, which, by the way, I thought was fascinating reading. Take a person who is gay and give him a history of sexual abuse with his mother. Did the abuse make him gay? Is that a fair question? You know that kind of statement is going to invoke a lot of controversy.

Jack: Certainly. And of course, it may be impossible to say for sure that any one thing, including a life event like incest, "makes" a person gay. There is not enough data right now to say this theory is rooted in reality. It will be necessary to look at the sexual orientations of men who have endured mother-son incest, the age of incest onset, etc. Yet consider the statistics on the prevalence of early sexual encounters in gay men and lesbians and it begs examination: does early childhood sexual abuse with an adult male or female influence sexuality in later life? Gay men and lesbian women report a significantly higher rate of childhood molestation than heterosexuals do. In an interview of 942 subjects, 46% of gay men reported same-sex molestation compared to 7% of heterosexual men. Similarly, 22% of lesbians reported homosexual molestation in contrast to 1% of heterosexual women. Cameron and Cameron surveyed over 5000 adults and found a history of incest in 22.3% of gay men compared to 1.2% of straight men; 3.4% of gay women and 0.3% of straight women. Results support the hypothesis that homosexuality may be learned and that incest cannot be excluded as a significant basis for homosexuality.
Similarly, Simari and Baskin (1982) examined the extent of incestuous experiences in 54 gay men. 46% of them reported experiencing same-sex incest between ages 9 and 16. Interestingly, 96% of these men viewed themselves as gay prior to the incest. It depends upon the age that incest began. Also, the majority of studies done to date are for same-sex experiences. What results would we garnish from looking at boys abused by women?

Larry: The statistics are shocking, are they not? Could it be that if we did more to prevent childhood sexual abuse that there would be fewer homosexuals?

Jack: Who knows? It's fraught with controversy, but it begs further investigation.

Larry: But you've got to wonder, don't you? Did that early interference contribute somehow to being gay?

Jack: Yes. I do wonder.

Larry: Sue Grand, you've written a bit about this. You've studied mother-son incest. What's your take on it?

Sue: Well, let me see if I can encapsulate it. I believe traumatically induced disorders of knowing are informed by gender (male/female or masculine/feminine) polarities. By that I mean incest results in dissociated masculinities and femininities. It's known that gender (sexuality) confusion is common to incest survivors. As Judith said, they often seek to repeat the pattern of surrendering/being dominated in literal or disguised ways. When a man experiences incest he becomes the devalued other who is penetrated; he enters feminine consciousness and knows himself as woman through remembering the archetypal female body. My theory is based on the premise that sexual abuse is both mainly and historically perpetrated by males, and is therefore patriarchal.

Larry: So you're saying the son is treated more like a daughter.
Sue: Yes. In mother-son incest the son functions as both a husband and a daughter. He is a ‘daughter’ in that he is discouraged from autonomy, separation and individuation. His mother unconsciously discourages maleness because she wants a female, symbiotic, caretaker child.52

Larry: OK, I’m with you. Is this similar to Kali Munro’s work?

Sue: Not quite. Munro argues, from her clinical experience, that the son is often put in the role of the husband. She doesn’t account for gender polarities and reenactment.

Larry: Jack? Do you buy this? Do you think you were put in the role of the husband?

Jack: No. Munro falls short in considering the histories of the abusing mothers. In identifying that the son “is likely to feel aligned with his mother and protective of her, wanting to please and take care of her [and] may even be put in the position of trying to protect her from her abusive husband…” she is naming behaviours that can be typical of parenting the mother rather than acting as a spouse.53 We need to factor in clinical research that is demonstrating the prevalence of repetition and transgenerational sexual abuse.

Larry: So what about Sue Grand’s theory? Are you a victim of patriarchy? Are you uh, reenacting the role of the daughter?

Jack: Yes and no. Based on my research and experience, I believe it can be the mother who is in the role of the daughter. She is unable to transcend her childhood role because of her own history of what is likely more prevalent than research is assessing and accounting for: sexual abuse. She’s actually attempting to recreate through reenactment of the incest she experienced. So, yes, to some degree I think I am a victim of patriarchy. The abusing mother is unsuccessfully trying to recreate the incestuous father (or abusing male) figure in her own son. She desperately wants her son to be a person that paradoxically lovingly caretakes and parents her but who also menacingly engages in sexual activity with her. The hypersexuality and psychotic characteristics of Borderline Personality Disorder perpetuate the abuse tyranny.
Sue Grand argues that the individual opted for the feminine/daughter reenactment. I would propose that out of repulsion he chose the only sexual orientation that would be sexually unavailable to his mother. Being gay attempts to discontinue the female/male abuse pattern. As she behaves as her abusing father, she reenacts a situation that places the son in what is usually an abuse women suffer. The boy who is sexually abused by a needy, dependent mother is trapped in the role as the nurturing/abusive father. She clings to her son even in his adulthood, desperate that he won’t get involved in a relationship with a woman. The young boy internalizes this confusion and unconsciously opts for homosexuality in those very early formative years. The mother would rather her son has no attachments whatsoever, but by pairing up with another male he solves the problem of competition with his mother or the fear of replacing his mother, and also avoids the suffocation of sexual activity with a female. At the end of the day, however, we’re often left not knowing the mother’s own sexual abuse history, which may remain forever hidden and speculated upon.

Larry: I’m no psychiatrist, but I think I actually followed that. And it makes sense. It makes sense. Jack, is there any data on repetition when it comes to sexual abuse? I’ve heard it said that people who are abused will do the same to others. You mentioned transgenerational—does this tie in?—we pass down knowledge, good or bad—from one generation to the next?

Jack: Exactly. We know that approximately one-third of people who were sexually victimized as children will repeat the offence as adults.54

Bishop: Larry, these folks all have a personal axe to grind. The result can only be crisis. This isn’t a curriculum that cares for children.

Kevin: It’s not about getting students or others to "where I am."55

Jack: It’s more about getting teachers and others to be where the students are.

Judith: And where they have been.

Jack: How much of their lives are we going to ignore while we teach them a myriad of other things they can’t begin to relate to. You’ve got to show them that their own lives matter in this world and in
this way they can begin to relate to the world around them with critical awareness. Where's the hope if the only experience they've had in life are alcoholic parents or racism or poverty?

Bishop: Larry, how can anyone justify talking about sins in the classroom? Homosexuality! Incest! My God, what's next? The Pope just reconfirmed that homosexuality is a sin. President Bush called them sinners. These are voices of authority, of high moral character.

Jack: Life is difficult. Events that happen to us are difficult. Allan Block writes about difficult memories and he worries what his children learn in school, because his children will learn only that which derives from their teacher's memories. He said, "If curriculum is the story we tell our children, then the story we tell derives from what we adults have remembered and what we have forgotten."  

Kevin: It's even beyond what we remember and forget. It's what we choose to remember and choose to forget. It's what we don't know. It's knowledge and acknowledgment.

Larry: I think it's Barbra Streisand.

Kevin: Huh?

Larry: "What's too painful to remember we sometimes choose to forget..." Remember that?

Jack: "The way we were."

Larry: Gotta love her! What a classy lady! Anyway, Charles, what thinkest thou?

Charles: Well, I'm a bit of a fence sitter on this one. I think public education does marginalize many people—the poor, minority groups, families, for example. We need an education with a core curriculum based on local values.

Bishop: Here, here!
Jack: What if racism is locally valued? What if blacks or Hispanics never get to run for local office? What if, like in Toronto I believe it was, the Catholic school board told one of its students he wasn’t allowed to bring his boyfriend to the grad ceremony?

Charles: I’m talking about a moral responsibility. Knowledge must be situated within a traditional belief system that is meaningful to the children. Public schools—democratic ones—must instruct children in commonly valued ways of knowing, understanding, and believing in their world. 59

Judith: That’s the very problem! Commonly valued ways of knowing come from where? The parents? The students? The administrators? The politicians? Government? If we value silence around incest, children will assume those values.

Larry: Jack, any comments about democratic education?

Jack: Our traditional practices alter our memory. This is how society affects, even determines, what we remember and how. Anti-oppressive pedagogy is not traditionally aligned with democratic education, as in Dewey’s notion of it. The problem with Dewey, according to Thayer-Bacon, is that he measured democratic education according to “the extent in which the interests of a group are shared by all its members, and the fullness and freedom with which it interacts with other groups.” 60 If we teach according to the interests of all the members then marginalized topics will certainly never be included. Michael Ignatieff called this the tyranny of the majority. 61 Ironically, in a given classroom there may be 40% of the students who have been sexually abused. We must cease from skirting around topics of difficulty, especially so in the earlier grades. It seems that talking openly about sexual abuse does not become a topic for discussion until, at the very minimum, undergraduate school. Certainly there are teachers out there who are working towards change and who may openly talk about such issues in high school. There’s a desperate yearning to separate the emotional realm from the academic realm in an almost Cartesian way. This is especially true as students age when university classrooms become the domains of academia, of objectivity, of evidence based practice, and in-depth studies of the Other.

Kevin: Britzman said something like we unconsciously desire to learn things that only affirm what we already know. Anything else disturbs our sense of identity. We either struggle to incorporate that new information or we dismiss it. 62
Jack: This is why there's such intolerance to people coming forward to reveal they were sexually abused as children. Especially when it takes place within the family.

Judith: Educators should expect students to enter crisis. And by that term I don't mean that they should be going around like walking wounded and in constant despair. I'm talking about crisis along the same lines as Jack mentioned: the challenge of incorporating knowledge which does not want to know itself. Jack and I have talked about this around his life. He pretended for years that things were okay despite all the mental health challenges he was having. It wasn't until he was able to name it—incest—as the truth of what had happened to him as a child, and we're talking years, Larry, that he entered this kind of crisis. In order to have any kind of quality of life, he had to enter this crisis of knowing and being. It's the Holy Grail of pedagogy. Most people deal with their sexual abuse in isolation or at best in individual counseling. Think of what it could mean to be validated and supported by the teacher, by classmates, by your peers and friends.

Larry: Is this what education has come down to, Jack? That we have to teach through a crisis? I'm reminded of my own childhood. My father died when I was nine. My mother had to go on Welfare. Times were tough and we had to tough it alone. I think that's why I like tackling the tough issues and talking with people. People are fascinating. People's stories are fascinating.

Jack: Many of us grew up in crisis situations at home. We often live with crisis all around us: the invasion of Iraq, the terrorist attacks on 9/11, AIDS. If we teach students how to live through a crisis, how to examine and understand and critique what's going on, they're going to emerge much stronger for it. Judith Herman likewise believes that teaching and psychoanalysis require one to live through a crisis. Both are called upon to be performative in that they both strive to enable change. Performative teaching and psychoanalysis center on the capacity of individuals to transform themselves in response to new information. It requires people to hear and incorporate the dissonant, and not solely the consonant music of life within their frame of knowing and identity. It is the teacher's task to recontextualize the crisis and to put it back into perspective, thus reintegrating the crisis into a transformed frame of meaning, a narrative of hope. If education is to be anti-oppressive, we must perform. We must behave our way to change.
Larry: Jack, what kinds of knowledge are we imparting to others?

Jack: Knowledge through a myopic lens. Do we teach factual, historical, national, and local knowledge? Isn’t an event like incest in a person’s life also factual and historical, with implications for the local and national levels of society? Do we teach data or do we teach other forms of intelligence: emotional, social, spiritual, and behavioural? Do we teach silence? As Michelle Payne wrote, our resistances to certain subjects "may suggest some of the gaps and silences in postmodern pedagogies—particularly in terms of the role of emotion and power relations—to which we need to attend."

Larry: Are we teachers or are we editors?

Judith: We are editors when we exclude—consciously or unconsciously—topics that disturb and disrupt.

Larry: So is this the new trend then? Getting it all out helps? Jack? Can you write a book and put it to rest?

Jack: You don’t write to put it to rest, Larry. I write to teach. I went from survivor to historiographer. Arthur Frank stresses that the ethical importance of the “wounded” storyteller sharing his or her story with others makes a great deal of sense. Otherwise we face the prospect of our own illness events in the future without the benefit of the shared wisdom of those who have been there.

Larry: Are there other people out there—other educators—writing about trauma?

Jack: Indeed.

Larry: Like who? Give me some examples.

Jack: Marion MacCurdy has an excellent book out called Writing and healing: Toward an informed practice. Michelle Payne is doing incredible work using the personal essay as a vehicle for writing about trauma. Writing, by the way, that goes beyond true confessions, but examines the pathologies of
the world, of society, of culture. Writing that opens up creative expression. This isn't some disguised vehicle for therapy. It's scholarship as well. Carolyn Ellis has written about the use of autoethnography. Mary Doll recently did a book on mythopoetics in curriculum that covers a span of important issues. Arthur Frank has a wonderful text called *The Wounded Storyteller*. There are many more. This is just the beginning.

Larry: So there's a grassroots movement.

Jack: Grassroots, yes. Weeding out suffering.

Larry: I remember a movie called "Little Boy Blue" that had an incest theme to it. Is that where this kind of topic is getting expressed—through the arts?

Jack: There're ample resources, Larry. Some teachers say, "I wouldn't know where to begin" when confronted with the notion of either teaching or learning about 'difficult' subjects. And yet all it takes is opening one's awareness to the surprising amount of incest and sexual abuse themes there are in popular culture, never mind the media these days. Several movies contain this theme. Many songs as well.

Larry: Like what?

Jack: Films like *The Unsaid*, *Olivier, Olivier*, *Celebration* (a Danish film), *Spanking the Monkey*, *Magnolia*, *War Zone*, *Cider House Rules*, *Angels and Insects*, *Lone Star*, *De Johnsons*, *The Cement Garden*, *Heart of the Stag*, and *Little Boy Blue*, as you mentioned. Pop and heavy metal or death metal music that some students are listening to is replete with this theme: Korn's *Porn Creep*, *Mr. Rogers, All in the Family*, Pat Benatar's *Hell is for Children*, *Suffer the Little Children*, Aerosmith's *Janie's Got a Gun*, and the songs of Tori Amos, to name but a few. Literature abounds with incest and abuse themes, ranging from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to Anais Nin's incest diary, as well the lives and works of Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath, and Maya Angelou, and the recent autobiographical work of Walter De Milly's *In My Father's Arms*. 


Larry: So, what about some of those movies. I mean, some people might say, "Hey, it didn’t bother me." Aren’t there some people who wouldn’t call it abuse, but, if you’ll forgive where I’m going here, as a rite of initiation or something. Like Summer of ’42. Why dredge it all up? Is it really necessary to talk about it?

Jack: Well, that’s a good question, Larry. A lot of people think that. There have been studies done on this. Let me speak briefly about one that looked specifically at mother-son incest.

Larry: Okay.

Jack: A clinic interviewed 67 men with a history of sexual abuse. Seventeen of those reported mother-son incest. These 17 had more trauma symptoms than men who were sexually abused by other individuals, so it suggests that mother-son incest is more traumatic, even when controlling for variables. Now, of those 67 men who had been abused, 27 recalled positive or mixed initial reactions or perceptions to the abuse, including about half of the men abused by their mothers.

Larry: Okay. So almost half of all the men said it wasn’t that bad or didn’t really bother them.

Jack: Yes. But, those men who diminished the seriousness of it—for whatever reasons—also reported more adjustment problems than men who saw the abuse as purely negative.68

Larry: Really? So, you’re saying that men who kind of think nothing of it or pass it off as not that impactful actually had more problems.

Jack: Exactly.

Larry: Denial is damaging.

Jack: Yes. And we use the word ‘denial’ a lot, but it doesn’t mean they deliberately downplay their feelings. Denial is also a normal coping strategy.
Kevin: And it’s among the rules of society. Don’t talk about it. Don’t say that about your mother. It’s a rite of passage. If it’s heterosexual adult-child contact then it’s not abuse.

Larry: So is that where you begin? Teaching? Curriculum? Using narrative? Forms of narrative? Writing, music, art, poetry?

Jack: Yes! We have to begin somewhere with a topic such as this. In an era where personal memories and autobiography are still considered on the margins of legitimate educational research, educators are much more at ease imparting knowing of the impersonal rather than the personal.

Larry: So the message is to get active. No more bystanders. I noticed that theme in your fairy tale.

Jack: Precisely. In the fairy tale witnesses and bystanders play recurring roles to emphasize this theme. Esau himself was both a bystander and witness to sexual abuse. While he did report it, the hegemony of the system he was working in maintained a shroud of secrecy. On the boat Eddy has troubles when a storm brews up and he loses his oars. The symbolism is of being out of control and being unable to cope by oneself against a stronger force, as in the experience of being abused by an adult. A secondary theme is the mentioning of the passing scutter who ignores his pleas for help, representative of those individuals throughout a child’s life who had an idea the home environment was not healthy but never intervened. Felman and Laub in Testimony reflect upon the condition of knowing and not knowing and their translation into (in)action, and how this affects the unfolding of history and our approach to it. By “not knowing” they are referring to those who are witnesses and yet cannot tolerate incorporating that knowledge into their schema. The action of inaction results in personal histories that could have been altered. 69

Judith: Testifying involves calling those who are witnesses and bystanders to a crime to come forth with their knowledge. There are many bystanders in life—those who see an event happening but do nothing about it. A true witness, in the legal sense of the term as far as testimonial goes, is someone who will actually come forward to speak to what she or he saw. A bystander can be the non-offending parent who often knows what the offending parent is doing but chooses to ignore it. A witness can be that teacher who sees a child acting out in a sexualized way with other children and then contacts social services out of concern. A bystander can be a piano teacher who learns years later that incest
was taking place in that household yet still befriends the perpetrator because “he was always nice to me.” A bystander is any person who can look at a room of 30 individuals and ignore the fact that an average of one in three girls is sexually abused and about one in six boys is sexually abused. If sexual abuse of children is a form of oppression, as many would agree it is, then teaching and writing about such an oppression is crucial to the notion of deconstructing power, ideology, and ways of knowing.\textsuperscript{70}

Jack: The culmination of testimony comes in the final section of the fairy tale with Jack’s manifesto. Through his ability to testify and present his case for himself he begins to achieve personal agency, empowerment, and the beginning of social change. It would be one thing to tell my story, which is significant. But in itself, it is incomplete. As Arthur Frank says, “it requires commentary in order to be transformed into a social ethic.”\textsuperscript{71} Felman and Laub speak “...of the testimonial power of the...relation between language and events.”\textsuperscript{72}

So in testifying, like a witness would, you attest to a generally unrecognized or suppressed truth.\textsuperscript{73}

Larry: So you’re empowered by that, correct? You become a witness, not solely victim or survivor. It’s a shift in identity, is it not?

Jack: It has that potential, yes.

Larry: So, mythopoetics is clearly different from autobiography, is that what you’re saying?

Jack: Yes. Arthur Frank might call it “automythology”—a reinvention of the self out of the unnatural history of destruction we endured.\textsuperscript{74}

Larry: You said that you’re re-writing or re-righting (r-i-g-h-t) past experiences. Examining history through a different lens.

Jack: Yes. Philosopher W.B. Gallie said it well: narrative can demonstrate how later events were conditioned by earlier ones if we look back on it with “retrospective intelligibility.”\textsuperscript{75}

Larry: Is there a difference between history and mythology?
Jack: Not if you view history through the lens of Lévi-Strauss. He suggested the two could be melded if we study histories as not separate from, but rather, a continuation of mythology.  

Larry: So Jack, why aren't more people writing about their experiences? Is this the oppression we're talking about? People are so silenced that no one dares break the silence? Have times hardly changed since Oscar Wilde spoke about the love that dared not speak its name?

Jack: We changed in huge ways, Larry, and in other ways we're still in the Dark Ages. The favoured way of doing researching is to write about other people. You go out and interview them, collect their data, and then produce a narrative that’s got your own spin on it and that promotes your career. I'm putting it crassly because there is value to traditional modes of research, but I'm also calling for the inclusion of other ways of learning and becoming in this world. Writing from the position of one who has walked a mile in those shoes, of one who has been the victim of violence, is far too emotional for most universities. Research is still traditionally promoted and defined as examining the lives of other people. Researching your own life within the context of the world often remains forbidden.

Larry: Because you're too close to the topic. We've only got a couple of minutes left. Tell me, what is the moral to the story?

Jack: It is unconscionable and unethical that marginalized topics such as homosexuality and sexual abuse continue to live on the periphery of educational discourse. Ethically, we must include subjects that arouse emotion, that trouble, because these subjects are within the lived experiences of many people. In order to edify education, we need to address the moral and ethical value of inclusiveness. Much more research is desperately needed on mother-son incest, its prevalence, causes, and sequelae of problems it causes across the lifespan. No single theory will explain the origins of mother-son incest but having a deeper awareness of the role of transgenerational learning can have is a much under-recognized component. For this reason the personal history of the mother is an equally important element in understanding the symptoms and behaviours of her son, the male client. The complexities stemming from the gendering of traumatic dissociation can aid the therapist and client to come to a fuller understanding of the interactions that are playing themselves out within incestuous families. The question of whether mother-son incest contributes to homosexuality rates is both a controversial and necessary research avenue to be explored. Given the prevalence of sexual abuse histories in
homosexuals, the gay community needs to be educated about the ramifications and manifestations
early childhood sexual abuse can have and how the effects of it have become encoded in gay culture’s
accepted norms, values, and ways of being. Finally, we need to empower survivors of abuse to keep
breaking the silence around this so-called taboo subject and to be their own researchers and
archaeologists in uncovering personally traumatic histories in order to end the cycle of abuse and claim
health.

Larry: Is it ever over?

Jack: You know, I think Foucault says it well for me: “There are times in life when the question of
knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is
absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking or reflecting at all.”78
Program Notes


8 Ross, ibid., p. 152.


10 Antze & Lambek, op.cit., p. xii, p. 4.

11 Hedges, ibid., p. 36.


23 Idem.
29 Idem.
35 Idem.
49 Tomeo et al., op.cit.

Ibid., 55-77.

Ibid., 55-77.


Block, A. A. "If I forget thee...thou shall forget": The difficulty of difficult memories. In M. Morris & J. A. Weaver (Eds.), *Difficult memories: Talk in a (Post) Holocaust Era* (Vol. 165, pp. 25-44). New York: Peter Lang, pp. 37-38.


Ibid., 387-393.


Kumashiro, K. K. (2000a), op.cit.


Frank, op.cit., p. 145.


Frank, op.cit., p. 137.

Frank, op.cit., p. 122.


Ibid., p. 139.
WORKS CITED


*Critic of homosexuality can teach, not counsel* (June, 2003). *GALE Force, (Gay And Lesbian Educators)* 13. Vancouver, BC.


