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Interactive Texts and Active Readers: Robert Cormier's 'Adolescent Poetics' in the Light of Wolfgang Iser's Theory of Aesthetic Response

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> I admit freely I'm an arrested adolescent ... I think a lot of us carry around the baggage of adolescence in our lives, so I don't have to sit there and take a big leap into how a 14 year old boy or girl feels, because I know how they felt, they felt exactly how I felt. Those feelings are universal and timeless. ... When I start to write, frankly what I do is write for an intelligent reader. ... I'm not one of these people who write for themselves, I write to be read, and I'm very conscious of my reader. I write to upset the reader, and to provoke the reader, and I feel I can go to my full capacity for that intelligent reader, who often turns out to be 14 years old.[1]

Two pivotal observations derive from Robert Cormier's statements above: the first is his retained sense of adolescence and aptitude for understanding young adults; the second is his conscious intention to be 'provocative' in writing for teenagers, necessitating 'intelligent' readers' active participation in the reading process he inaugurates with his fictions. Although both observations highlight Cormier's 'adolescent poetics', the latter one represents it most.

Robert Cormier's poetics: novels of departure

Cormier first addressed an adolescent readership in 1974 with his young adult novel *The Chocolate War*, and found the contact this entailed with teenagers fascinating. It was mainly his correspondence

with young adults that gave impulse and continuity to his writing for adolescents, and the 14 novels that followed, including *I Am the Cheese* (1977), *After the First Death* (1979), *The Bumblebee Flies Anyway* (1983), *Beyond The Chocolate War* (1985), *Fade* (1988), *We All Fall Down* (1991), *Tunes for Bears to Dance to* (1992), *Tenderness* (1997), and the posthumously published *The Rag and Bone Shop* (2001), were all written for this readership.

In these 'adolescent novels of ideas',[2] almost all of which reflect his 'adolescent poetics', the axes of his bold thematics – including uneasy puberty, corrupted power, betrayal, guilt, self-alienation and psychological alienation, paranoia, fear, intimidation, and psychoses – are clearly discernible. However, the signature features of his writing for adolescents also include a partial distancing of his heroes from other people or their personal quests, an insistent fictional focus on the influence of external circumstances and forces that constrain and control these heroes,[3] adolescent heroes' (innate) tendency towards independence and rebellion against the adults who wield power, and a recognition of the dark side of life that infuses his novels with a sense of 'gloom'.[4] It is these components, in conjunction with his sensitivity, realism, complex narratives, and emphasis on cinematic dialogue practices,[5] that constitute Cormier's 'adolescent poetics'. Two main coefficients are discernible in his 'poetics': first, the intersection of his heroes' quests and power structures; second, the intense involvement of his readers in actualising his writing. If the former endows an interactive intention on his novels, the latter requires his readers to become active. Both these coefficients could perhaps best be understood in the light of an equally interactive view of the relationship between a literary text and its reader of the sort proposed by the German proponent of the 'Aesthetic Response' (*Theorie Ästhetischer Wirkung*), Wolfgang Iser.

Wolfgang Iser's aesthetics: points of theory

Iser's examination of the reading process and the aesthetic response the literary text provokes leads him to combine the text as an objective entity with the subjective disposition of the reader. As he declares, such a realisation requires the reader actively to make meaning, while he stresses that 'the literary work is an effect to be experienced' not 'an object to be defined'.[6] Denominating this relationship between text and reader as 'interaction',[7] Iser identifies it with the praxis relating the two. He describes this interaction by defining his approach to notions such as the 'implied reader', (literary) 'repertoire', and (literary) 'strategies'.

The 'implied reader' is mainly a 'role offered by the text', which is to say is 'rather the conditioning force behind a particular kind of tension produced by the real reader when he accepts the role'.[8] This reader is also a 'model which makes it possible for the structured effects of literary texts to be described', or a 'standpoint' from which the real reader 'can assemble the meaning toward which the perspectives of the text have guided him'.[9] Taken together, the various aspects of the notion thus fully indicate the relationship the author establishes with his readers.

The 'repertoire', which is taken to be the 'content' of the literary work, consists of social assumptions and cultural norms along with literary references or allusions incorporated into the text,[10] namely, as Iser describes it, 'the whole culture from which the text has emerged'.[11] All these elements promote interplay between the text and the reader by providing the latter with the 'guidelines that are essential in view of the overall function of the text'.[12] The reader has then to reorganise all these textual indications in order to develop his or her account of the text, since the text tends to defamiliarise his or her assumptions while it causes indeterminacies between text and reader as well as between text and reality. The reader is thus forced into an 'intertextual' or into an 'extra-textual' dimension, as 'the literary text has no concrete situation to refer to'.[13]

The reader's activity is made possible by virtue of the 'strategies', which serve as the 'form' of a literary work. Iser lends these strategies a significant dual function: 'to organise both the material of the text and the conditions under which that material is to be communicated'.[14] 'Strategies', which are not regarded as simple techniques or devices located in the text,[15] tend to utilise the 'repertoire' as a referential context.[16] As examples of these 'strategies', Iser cites the 'background–foreground' relationship ('primary code–secondary code')[17] and the 'theme-horizon' structure. Comparing the 'primary' code with the 'schematised aspects' of the text, and the 'secondary' with the aesthetic object itself, he describes a procedure through which the reader is directed by the 'primary' code to decipher the 'secondary' one, as 'the chosen element evokes its original setting'.[18] The reader has also to combine the elements that he or she selected, directed by the principle of 'theme and horizon'. Due to the continuous and interactive relationship between text and reader, the reader is able to assimilate all the multiple textual perspectives gradually. For the reader, every moment constitutes a 'theme', while many 'themes' constitute the 'horizon' of his or her comprehensive procedure.[19]

During the reading process, the reader has to modify expectations and to transform memories by means of a 'wandering viewpoint', in order to inform the reading procedure.[20] Travelling continually between his or her temporary expectations and their refutation, the reader tries to achieve 'consistency-building', by organising the information offered by the text and transforming the textual signs into 'mental images'. Perceiving what is present in the text, the reader has to 'ideate' what is absent or implied according to the 'schematised aspects' indicated by the text. However, having set up the reading process, the text punctuates it by interpolating 'blanks' or 'points of suspended connectability',[21] meaning empty spaces between the segments (e.g., characters, plot) of the text. The reader is then required to fill in the 'blanks' that appear along the syntagmatic axis of reading, in the light of the knowledge accumulated during the preceding stages of his or her reading. In this way, the reader is allowed to create multiple combinations or new associations based on the textual elements and to adopt a standpoint from where his or her older views/perspectives appear outdated or are negated, meaning that a 'dynamic blank' appears on the paradigmatic axis of reading. Together with the 'blanks', these 'negations' imbue the text with a 'negativity' and formulate 'a kind of unformulated double' text,[22] which demands a retroactive reading stance from the reader. In this case, the reader may be regarded as active, since he or she is producing the meaning, and as passive, since his or her involvement is determined by the textual structures. Eventually, Iser claims, 'blanks and 'negations' play an essential part in the success of the reciprocal communication between text and reader, so long as they instruct the reader to complete the meaning of the text.[23]

Iser's main concern is to construct an interactive theoretical model that could provide a reliable framework for studying a reader's potential response. In the light of this model we can describe and elucidate Cormier's 'adolescent poetics' — necessarily briefly and with reference to only a few of his novels for young adults given the space limitations of the essay.

Readers in the making: the development of active participants

The notion of the 'implied reader' may help us understand the relationship Cormier establishes with his real readers, as well as the meanings and expectations he negotiates with them.[24] Cormier does, in fact, employ a fictitious reader who 'designates a network of

response-inviting structures, which impel the [real] reader to grasp the text'.[25] Grasping his adolescent readers' need to understand their emotions and the motives of the people who frame their lives, he depicts his heroes struggling to structure their identities and to define themselves, usually dramatically. A selection of representative characters from his novels who act this way include: Jerry Renault in *The Chocolate War* and *Beyond the Chocolate War*, who dares to 'disturb the universe'[26] in which he feels trapped by challenging a school tradition, and who, ultimately, tries to escape the power of a devious authority influence and survive; Adam Farmer in *I Am the Cheese*, who is struggling to discover his identity, distrusts his 'protectors', and challenges their intentions, as he becomes aware of the threats to his fragile fate; Kate Forrester, who tries to escape from terrorists, and Miro Shantas who tries to escape from himself by implementing the plans of the terrorist group to which he belongs in *After the First Death*; Barney Snow in *The Bumblebee Flies Anyway*, who tries to piece together his past, but discovers things that may jeopardise his future; Buddy Walker in *We All Fall Down*, who struggles to find comfort and support from the people around him; Henry Cassavant in *Tunes for Bears to Dance to*, who learns about trusting people and struggles to survive in a cruelly diverse world; Paul Moreaux in *Fade*, who learns that his ability to become invisible brings knowledge of others and himself; Lori Cranston and Eric Poole in *Tenderness*, whose paths cross as they both search for 'tenderness'. According to Sylvia Patterson Iskander, all these characters 'are plausible in the context of our social experience and expectations' and behave as real teenagers while they engage thoughts and 'systems of values that readers can accept as plausible'.[27] In fact, though quite different in comparison to other typical heroes of young adult literature who represent more positive role models and who conform more closely to grown-up values, Cormier's rebellious protagonists can effectively motivate real readers to adopt the 'implied' role offered to them.

Cormier also seems to recognise his readers' need to realise the literary experience offered through his heroes as analogous to their own lives. Therefore, as Brian McHale puts it, he creates 'the reader who must be or become to optimize the reading of the text'.[28] This 'implied reader' is thus a textual structure, which constitutes the possible image or presence of a real recipient, as well as a standpoint that activates the role of the real reader when he or she accepts that role in order to complete the realisation of the literary text. Thus, the teenage readers of *The Chocolate War*, *I Am the Cheese*, *The Bumblebee Flies Anyway*, *We all Fall Down* or *Tunes for Bears to Dance to*, progress hand

in hand with the teenage protagonists in the struggle to structure their respective identities through a procedure of identification. However, it is possible that, during this identification process, readers could be affected by a sense of betrayal and disorientation as they identify themselves with protagonists who have been 'crushed' or 'beaten' by power structures. Like Jerry, Adam, Barney, Buddy or Henry, who cannot plead indifference or ignorance for the conditions that regulate their lives, so, too, Cormier's readers 'cannot count on fictional escapes from the hard choices of life'.[29] They have to recognise the various levels of reality presented in these novels,[30] in which case the identification process may become an encounter between subjectivity and consciousness, a 'maturation process',[31] which fits rather well with an unconventional adolescent reader. In fact, the readers' relationship with the fictionally-represented social or real worlds may reinforce their sense of relationship with the contemporary ones.[32] Cormier is thus requiring his real readers to participate actively in his texts via the implicit readers and to experience their meanings in order to communicate with him.[33] This is why he creates his 'implied' readers in the same way he constructs his second self – the 'implied author'.[34] Although he places both his protagonists and his implied readers in a hard, bleak world, he offers them hope; above all, however, he gives them the chance to recognise their deficiencies as well as suggesting ways of balancing them out. This means that he does not give his heroes[35] what he gives his readers: a second chance to 'move beyond the close of the novels to a new sense of personal responsibility'.[36] In other words, he offers them an interpretative standpoint to which they are led by the textual indications his characters formulate and implied readers activate.[37] Just as Jerry, Adam, Barney, Buddy or Henry comprehend the systems via which they find themselves through a process of inner searching, his real readers grasp the textual parameters and live them as if they were real. In Cormier's case, we can therefore assert that the term 'implied reader' refers specifically to a transferral process in which the text is perceived by the consciousness of the real reader and transubstantiated into experience by the latter's continual participation in it.[38]

Readership in progress: journeying with adolescents

As 'a meeting point between text and reader',[39] the 'repertoire' in Cormier's young adult novels mainly consists of the elements Iser's term entails: elements of reality and elements of the literary tradition. Though it is not reproduced but represented, this reality serves as a reasonable fictional context in which 'contingencies and complexities' are reduced to – and are retained as – 'a meaningful structure'.[40] In this case, the 'repertoire' may 'project the real',[41] while it also 'represents a reaction to the thought systems'[42] or functions as a 'literary reaction to historical problems'.[43] In many of Cormier's novels, where there are indications of 'extra-textual' connections, the 'repertoire' focuses on re-defining reality via the protagonists' relationship with it. *The Chocolate War*, for example, places Jerry in a tough school context, which teenagers will be familiar with from their day-to-day experiences. His reaction to a school tradition and challenging of dominant thought and power systems, seeks to change this reality and then overcome his individuality, while his actions have political implications.[44] Similar implications are projected in *I Am the Cheese*, *After the First Death*, *The Bumblebee Flies Anyway*, *We All Fall Down*, and *Tunes for Bears to Dance to*. In *I Am the Cheese*, Cormier represents the political and historical dimensions of a government practice ('The Witness Relocation Program') more emphatically as it was seen around the 'Watergate' era, while in *After the First Death*, he 'examine[s] patriotism as a force of potential evil'.[45] He comments on intimidation practices in both *The Bumblebee Flies Anyway* and *I Am the Cheese*, while he remarks on patriotism and terrorism in *We All Fall Down* and criticises racism in *Tunes for Bears to Dance to*.

Most of Cormier's adolescent novels are populated by realistic characters who convey their own 'repertoire' and experience many aspects of a real world: fear, love, death, power, violence, terrorism, betrayal, sacrifice, innocence, illness, suicide. By making his readers share his heroes' desperate lives, for example Adam's 'horrifying discovery' in *I Am the Cheese*, Cormier 'encourages our acceptance of the ambiguous boredom and glory of normal life'.[46]

However, there are instances of these plausible characters trying to overcome reality through procedures by which they challenge their fictional entity. A good example is Ben Marchand, the general's son in *After the First Death*. Ben is used to writing down his experiences in order to feel better, and his writing serves as 'a story within a story'. Nevertheless, because these stories are interpolated into the main narrative, they not only challenge Ben's fictionality, or the fictionality of the novel as a whole, they also interrupt the coherence of the reading process. In addition to such characters, the literary modes Cormier employs, in many cases, can be seen as a kind of 're-codification', a challenge to, or even a subversion of, reality both 'real' and fictional. The prime subversion of real objects (the wheelchair, the fake car) in *The Bumblebee Flies Anyway*, for example, questions

reality as well as fiction, and not only affords readers' insights into ordinary life, but also the opportunity to deal with alternative or distorted aspects of reality. Eventually, such narrative arrangements tend to defamiliarise readers' familiar experiences with literary modes or life. Functioning as 'blanks', in Iser's sense of punctuating textual coherence, they attract the readers' attention and provoke their active embroilment in the reading process.

The whole setting in *Fade* extends the story's realistic potential to question the boundaries between fiction and reality. Here, Cormier uncovers the construction of fictional reality and 'alerts his readers to the unreliability of a notion of reality', directing them to discern the process by which the meaning is constructed.[47] The assumptions made by the readers in the novel (such as Susan, Meredith or Jules) about the intentions underlying Paul's manuscript deconstruct and challenge its fictionality, since they function as fictions about fiction. By exposing the author's and reader's roles, Cormier is thus lending a meta-fictional flavour to the reading procedure, challenging the activity of the real readers, but also the conceptualisation or construction of the 'implied author' and 'implied reader'.[48] Again, the narrative modes employed in this novel bring about 'empty spaces' between the segments of fiction, because each chapter stands as a separate narrative dedicated to one of the novel's character-readers. 'Constituting a field of vision for wandering viewpoint', these 'blanks' force the readers to ideate what is absent, and to join any extant segments together to enable a complete comprehension of the textual or fictional sequence.[49]

In all the examples above, Cormier projects the possibilities of his worlds in a postmodernist way, exposing his fictions as a 'liberated' space for writing and reading activities. Moreover, by using complex and multifocused narratives in his novels, or by defamiliarising usual literary conventions like happy endings, victorious protagonists, and so forth, he transcends usual reading procedures and expectations. As a result, the reading process becomes retroactive to reveal the ways in which the fiction is structured and perceived.[50] His real readers, trying to recognise his 'repertoire' and reshape their own, find themselves close to and detached from the text at one and the same time; they become conscious of the deceptive mechanisms at work in Cormier's fictions and remove themselves from the conventional limits of storylines.

In most of the novels mentioned above, literary allusions also seem to govern Cormier's imaginative worlds. For example: Jerry's key-phrase in *The Chocolate War*, 'Do I dare disturb the universe',[51] is

associated with the poem 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (1915) by T. S. Eliot[52]; the song[53] Adam sings in *I Am the Cheese* as well as his father's reference to a 'mystery novel'[54] stand as literary allusions, while the book is connected, albeit indirectly, with *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) by J. D. Salinger;[55] and his last novel, *The Rag and Bone Shop*, draws its title from the last line of a poem by W. B. Yeats.[56] In all these cases, where a text directly or indirectly reveals its interdependence on other texts,[57] readers form the substance of their response by seeking guidance in the verbal clues the text offers them. Although an intertextual interpolation should not always be regarded as a 'blank' on the syntagmatic axis of reading, which is to say a 'severance of connection with context', it does entail the readers' active involvement. In that case, they must seek significance in the text in order to achieve a 'consistency-building' of the meanings the text transfer. Eventually, all these allusions serve as helpful intertextual references and provide readers with 'an organization of signifiers which ... designate instructions for the production of the signified'.[58] The allusions may allow readers to view the operation of the textual dynamics in their totality.

In Cormier's young adult novels, the 'strategies' employed activate readers' participation intensively, offering them the possibility to organise their comprehension of these texts. In fact, 'strategies' establish the rules that must be common in the communication between text and reader in order for such interplay to be 'successful'.[59] The reader first perceives the 'schematised aspects' – the 'referential context' of the fiction – through the 'background–foreground' relationship, then organises his or her comprehension on the basis of this.

The death of Jerry's mother and the new place in which he lives with his father in *The Chocolate War*, the absence/search for Adam's parents and his relationship with Doctor/Agent Brint in *I Am the Cheese*, the students taken hostage in *After the First Death*, Barney's illness in *The Bumblebee Flies Anyway*, and Henry's family situation in *Tunes for Bears to Dance to*, can all be regarded as Cormier's novels' 'background'. Taking this as a foundation, as 'schematised aspects', readers 'foreground' the actions of the heroes and the present-day incidents of their narrative/fictional lives. This is how readers decode and understand heroes' behaviour and evaluate their reactions and motives, as well as the consequences of their lives: Jerry's reaction, Adam's behaviour, Kate's actions and Miro's practices, Barney's fantasies, Henry's betrayal/compromise. This allows readers access to the world of the text, and permits them to grasp and combine every textual indication they can. Through selecting among the latter, the

readers allow their viewpoint to fill in any 'blanks' that have appeared, moving back and forth through the text, using the chosen indications to evoke their original context. In this case, they come across four perspectives: the narrator's voice, the characters' views, the plot process, and their own potential response to textual signs.[60] This brings readers' creative abilities to the fore, as they have to decide on which of the four perspectives to focus each time.[61] However, in addition to selecting these perspectives and in order to comprehend the text, the readers also have to combine and assimilate them piecemeal ultimately to form their own perspective. Readers are interested for the moment in the way a hero operates, and this is the 'theme' of the moment, while the hero's general behaviour forms a behaviour 'horizon' for the hero and understanding for the readers based on the perspective of the narrator, the other characters or the plot. The readers cannot immediately understand Adam's or Barney's reaction to their protectors because, despite being central figures, they do not reproduce dominant norms of thought and behaviour.[62] Their respective behaviours create 'blanks', which the readers cannot easily fill in. Gradually, however, during their 'wandering viewpoint', the readers grasp the different perspectives in the narrative and begin to suspect its polyphony. At this point, readers understand that they have to combine these perspectives if they are to understand how they function and utilise their dynamic. There follow some illustrative examples.

The opening phrase of *The Chocolate War* – 'They murdered him'[63] – shocks readers and gets their immediate attention. However, the description of football that follows replaces the fear of a murder with the intensity of a competitive game played by adolescents. Throughout the novel, readers have to fill in 'blanks' that are foregrounded by numerous 'themes' of a similar ilk and different perspectives (of the heroes: Brother Leon, Obie, Archie, et al., or of the plot), in order to construct the 'horizon' and achieve a 'consistency-building' of their comprehension, so as to form their own perspective. The readers thus become aware that their ability to mould their own perspective is postponed along with the construction of meaning, and that this can go on until the end of the novel. In addition, comments such as: 'Cities fell. Earth opened. Planets tilted. Stars plummeted. And the awful silence',[64] following Jerry's continual refusal to sell chocolate in *The Chocolate War*, form a perspective that can abrogate other perspectives and affect the plot. Functioning as 'blanks', these comments direct readers to experience a 'negation' with regard to the perspective they may determine or adopt.

The first chapter of *I Am the Cheese* depicts a boy riding his bicycle through peaceful, plausible scenery. The 'theme' of this chapter is completely different from that of the next one, in which the contents of a cassette recording a meeting are transcribed. This interchanging of 'themes' will continue throughout the book, using deceptive narratives, until readers manage to understand what is really going on. In this novel, the 'blanks' between narratives function literally as 'points of suspended connectability',[65] since they form completely different perspectives on characters and plot. Even Adam's memory gaps function as textual 'blanks' that postpone the making of meaning and force readers to become detached and involved at the same time.[66] As they experience 'negation' after 'negation', readers progressively realise that they will always miss something and the resulting frustration is ultimately meant to activate them. Just as his heroes appear simultaneously energetic in their effort to comprehend the situations that surround them and passive due to the (power) structures that dominate them, so his readers are both potentially active in the making of meaning and passive in the imposition of textual signs that direct their reading activity. Although the two novels begin differently, their narrative perspectives drive readers to take almost similar stances.

Readers may derive a similar feeling as they read *The Bumblebee Flies Anyway* or *After the First Death*. In the first, along with the protagonist, they are trying to uncover a seemingly terrible secret; in the second, they have to continually wander their viewpoint through first-person and third-person narratives, and through present and past tenses.[67] In every case, Cormier's readers are not entirely free to lean only on what is 'implicit' in the texts; they also need to identify 'explicit' elements and amend their initial expectations by completing the 'blanks' and dealing with the text's 'negations' in order to achieve the same complete contact with it[68] as the novelistic heroes have with their lives.

Thus, during the reading process, Cormier's readers accept the role aspects of an 'implied reader' and experience textuality through the provocative 'repertoire' he employs and the complex 'strategies' he uses. He does not present his adolescent readers with 'a schematic view' of the fictional worlds in which he involves them; rather, the literary work is a vivid and challenging experience for them. Moving beyond the requirements of simple realistic fictions for adolescents and inaugurating more demanding reading procedures, Cormier forces his readers to adopt a 'wandering viewpoint', so as to inform the reading process, to achieve a 'consistency-building' of the meaning and, finally, to fill in any 'blanks' that have appeared and overcome any

'negations' that have emerged. As a consequence, in an effort to grasp all the textual indications, his readers move beyond the conventional limits of the storyline into other dimensions as they strive to assimilate literary modes and, ultimately, to actualise meanings. Forever carrying out his own 'numbers',[69] Cormier plagues his protagonists as well as his readers, impelling them to treat their relationship with his fictional worlds as a reciprocal praxis, as an 'interaction'. Indeed, it is such an interactive relationship that it may offer them multiple interpretations and lived experiences, which could lead them to another view of the literary experience as well as of their own lives.

In conclusion

Studying Cormier's novels for young people through Iser's theory and in the light of literary criticism on them, it was not this essay's intention to interpret Cormier's novels, but rather to reveal the conditions that could call forth their various possible impacts on potential readers. In the course of this essay, the view that Cormier's novels belong to that genre of young adult novels which can lend probability to a theory, has been confirmed. This study has thus confirmed two of Iser's hypotheses in the best possible way: first, that the literary text is richer than any of its individual realisations,[70] and second that good literature transcends familiar conventions and dares to establish another reading regime.[71]

That the main factor that has ensured Cormier's standing as a pioneer in the field of literature for adolescents is chiefly the interactive relationship he seems to establish with his readers, has been also suggested. It is now apparent that this relationship, being the process of readers' activation via his interactive texts, ought to be the yardstick by which his novels are evaluated and appraised, capturing as they do the essence of his 'adolescent poetics'.

Notes

1. Taken from the last interview Robert Cormier gave, along with Melvin Burgess, to Jonathan Douglas in 2000: www.achuka.co.uk/special/cormburg.htm (accessed 9 May 2012).
2. Peter Hollindale, 'The Adolescent Novel of Ideas', *Children's Literature in Education*, 26(1) (March 1995): 83–95.
3. This specific feature connects Cormier directly with an American neorealistic, rather naturalistic, movement in the realm of young adult literature that manifested itself in the 1960s. See also Anne Scott

MacLeod, 'Robert Cormier and the Adolescent Novel', *Children's Literature in Education*, 12(2) (June 1981), 74–81, at 74–5; Sylvia Patterson Iskander, 'Readers, Realism, and Robert Cormier', *Children's Literature*, 15 (1987), 7–18, at 7–8.
4. See Iskander: 7. See also Kimberley Reynolds, *Radical Children's Literature: Future Visions and Aesthetic Transformations in Juvenile Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007): 81–2.
5. Aidan Chambers, 'An Interview with Robert Cormier', *Signal*, 30 (1979), 119-32 (at 125-26, 132). See also Jonathan Douglas, 'Robert Cormier Meets Melvin Burgess': www.achuka.co.uk/special/cormburg2.htm [accessed 7 January 2011].
6. Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978): 10.
7. Ibid.: 20.
8. Ibid.: 36.
9. Ibid.: 38.
10. Ibid.: 125.
11. Ibid.: 69.
12. Ibid.: 80–1.
13. Ibid.: 66.
14. Ibid.: 86.
15. Ibid.: 87.
16. Ibid.: 86.
17. Ibid.: 92.
18. Ibid.: 93.
19. Ibid.: 96–9.
20. Ibid.: 108–18.
21. Ibid.: 198.
22. Ibid.: 225–6.
23. Ibid.: 167–8.
24. Aidan Chambers, 'The Reader in the Book' [1977], in Peter Hunt (ed.), *Children's Literature: The Development of Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1990): 91–114, at 93–4) (first published in *Signal*, 23 (1977), 64–87).
25. Iser (1978): 34.
26. Robert Cormier, *The Chocolate War*, 1974 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004): 123.
27. Iskander: 11.
28. Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 4th edn (London: Routledge, 1993): 84.
29. Iskander: 12.
30. Ibid.: 7.
31. Roberta Seelinger Trites, *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature* (Iowa: Iowa University Press, 2000): 9.
32. Iskander: 10.
33. Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974): 30.

34. Ibid.: 30.
35. Jerry may be an exception, since he has his 'second chance' in *Beyond the Chocolate War* (New York: Dell Laurel-Leaf, 1985), the sequel to *The Chocolate War*.
36. Iskander: 17.
37. Iser (1978): 36–8.
38. Ibid.: 67.
39. Ibid.: 69.
40. Ibid.: 70, 125.
41. Ibid.: 69.
42. Ibid.: 72.
43. Ibid.: 82.
44. See: MacLeod 75; Robyn McCallum, *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction: The Dialogic Construction of Subjectivity* (New York/London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999): 44–5.
45. Chambers (1979): 128–9.
46. Perry Nodelman, 'Robert Cormier Does a Number', *Children's Literature in Education*, 14(2) (June 1983): 94–103, at 103.
47. Patricia Head, 'Robert Cormier and the Postmodernist Possibilities of Young Adult Fiction', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 21(1) (Spring 1996): 28–33: at 30).
48. Ibid.: 31.
49. Iser (1978): 197.
50. Head: 30–1.
51. *The Chocolate War*: 123.
52. T. S. Eliot 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', [1915] *Prufrock and Other Observations* (London: The Egoist Ltd, 1917).
53. The song, 'The Farmer in the Dell', retains the overtones and freshness of an oral nursery rhyme, which would normally offer someone familiar and enjoyable territory. See P. F. Anderson, 'The Mother Goose Pages', *The Mother Goose Pages*, 21 (2001): www-personal.umich.edu/~pfa/dreamhouse/nursery/rhymes/dell.html (accessed 9 May 2012).
54. Robert Cormier, *I Am the Cheese* [1977] (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007): 38.
55. In Salinger's book, the hero, Holden Caulfield, says he would like to be able to phone the author of a book he's read whenever he feels like it. By including his telephone number in *I Am the Cheese* to permit more direct contact with his readers, Cormier seems to have responded to Holden's wish. See ACHUKA, 'Robert Cormier London, July 2000': www.achuka.co.uk/special/cormier01.htm (accessed 9 May 2012). On Cormier's relationship with Salinger, see also Reynolds: 70.
56. W. B. Yeats, 'The Circus Animals' Desertion' published in *Last Poems and Two Plays* (Dublin: Cuala Press, 1939).
57. J. A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 3rd edn (London: Penguin Books, 1992): 454.
58. Iser (1978): 65.

59. Ibid.: 86, 87.
60. Ibid.: 96, 100.
61. Ibid.: 103, 111–12.
62. Ibid.: 100.
63. *The Chocolate War*: 3.
64. Ibid.: 112.
65. Iser (1978): 198.
66. Nodelman: 95.
67. Frank Myszor, 'The See-Saw and the Bridge in Robert Cormier's *After the First Death*', *Children's Literature*, 16 (1988): 77–90.
68. Iser (1978): 168–9, 230.
69. Cormier uses the term 'numbers', for the practical jokes his characters play in *I Am the Cheese*: 52–8.
70. Iser (1978): 62–8.
71. Ibid.: 219–25.