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Parody and the pen: Pippi Longstocking, Harriet M. Welsch, and Flavia de Luce as disrupters of space, language, and the male gaze

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Parody and the Pen: Pippi Longstocking, Harriet M. Welsch, and Flavia de Luce as
Disrupters of Space, Language, and the Male Gaze

by

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Thesis

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Abstract

In opposition to a literary tradition of damsel-in-distress female characters, Astrid Lindgren's *Pippi Longstocking*, Louise Fitzhugh's *Harriet the Spy*, and Alan Bradley's *The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie* provide examples of empowered, intelligent, and capable young girls living in a mid-20th century environment and successfully subverting patriarchal norms.

Drawing on Laura Mulvey's theory on women as spectacle, Hélène Cixous's concept of l'écriture féminine, and New Historicist influences, I explore the common threads within these post-World War II era texts. Pippi's strength and humor, Harriet's spying and writing, and Flavia's scientific expertise and detectival work illustrate their ability to bend gender conventions and defy authorities and institutions that seek to tame them. With their infiltration of spaces, fragmentation of the male gaze, and seizure of language, these heroines set a precedent for readers to follow, and these texts offer possibilities for social disruption in the name of female child empowerment.

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Introduction

Amidst the recent history of World War II in Sweden, the United States, and Great Britain, three young heroines find opportunities in chaos while inserting themselves into spaces that were largely segregated according to gender and age and focusing their gaze on others in an effort to empower themselves during a historical moment in which many women and girls felt restricted and marginalized. Astrid Lindgren, Louise Fitzhugh, and Alan Bradley, though writing in entirely different times and cultural settings, constructed three versions of the empowered female child, each of whom asserts her own agency through means commonly considered masculine. Lindgren's *Pippi Longstocking* (1945 in Sweden, 1950 in the U.S.) presents the world with Pippi, the feisty, irreverent, and superhumanly strong nine-year-old with a knack for defying adult and institutional intervention. Fitzhugh's *Harriet the Spy* (1964) continues the theme of child irreverence with the bluntly truthful Harriet, an aspiring professional writer and self-proclaimed spy who subjects those around her to her critical gaze. And finally, Bradley's more contemporary work, *The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie* (2009), is set in 1950s England and features eleven-year-old Flavia de Luce, who is described as "Pippi Longstocking with a PhD in chemistry" (Bethune) and shares Harriet's knack for investigation. These three heroines share three characteristics: their ability and tendency to insert themselves into spaces traditionally restricted from women and children; their bending of the male gaze and eventually, in Harriet and Flavia's cases, assertion of a critical feminine gaze that focuses on their surroundings and those who seek to oppress them; and their participation in a form of authorship, constructing realities for themselves and/or those around them.

The most significant world event in the backdrop of all three novels, World War II created a violent disruption in Europe and the United States, and the recovery period that followed focused on rebuilding a stable society. Perhaps because the Victorian era was also a recovery period from social unrest, economic struggle, and political uncertainty, much of Europe and the U.S. promoted Victorian gender and family ideals as a means to recuperate a lost sense of stasis in the aftermath of WWII. Hundreds of thousands of women joined the workforce as a result of the wartime production demands and found a new sense of agency in these professional developments. Once the war ended and the soldiers returned, both the British and U.S. governments scrambled to place their veterans in jobs. As the newest members of the workforce, women were told to trade in their working lives for domestic ones, and the post-war social environment placed renewed emphasis on the value of female domesticity. Not all women complied with this transition, and many spoke out against this quickly spreading plague of inequality, marking the post-war period as a moment of resistance, as well as conformity, to oppressive, socially proscribed gender roles.

In her text, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*, Stephanie Coontz explains the social efforts to push women out of the workforce and into the home after WWII. She describes the massive influx of women workers during the war, but explains that after the war, management made significant efforts to “purge” women workers from their industrial jobs (31). Even though many women continued working despite downgraded positions and reduced paychecks, “[v]ehement attacks were launched” against women who refused to define themselves in terms of home and family (31). Reinvigorating the spirit and ideal of the Victorian “domestic angel,” the United States, Great Britain, and many European countries such as Sweden put pressure on women to inhabit nearly sacred

domestic spaces, distinctly separated from public spaces designated to men, and to accept their roles as nurturers. As Coontz clarifies, “The Victorian ‘cult of True Womanhood’ did not open the door to self-gratification by touting the family as the source of personal happiness; instead, it sternly associated the family with the development of both ‘individual and collective character’” (43). Women came under intense scrutiny to uphold a standard of character to influence both their children and husbands while possessing no power outside of their homes. Rather than serving as a private sanctuary, the home was a place where women become fully encompassed in the patriarchal gaze. In addition to placing women on a moral pedestal, Great Britain and the U.S. in particular promoted a nostalgic sentiment about childhood after losing almost an entire generation of young men to the war and looked again to Victorian ideas to revive that period’s concept of the innocent child.

Influenced by John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s notions about children, the Victorians promoted the idea of childhood as an independent life stage from adulthood, resulting in many beneficial social and labor reforms, but also seeing children and childhood as somewhat utopic states of being in need of protection. These ideas, too, placed children along with women within unattainable frameworks. These social constructions created rigid gender and age-specific roles that painted any bender or defier of said categories as a social outsider. The three texts explored in this thesis pull apart strict notions of childhood and femininity with protagonists who bend gender conventions and often use their positions as children to subvert social institutions.

In the years following WWII, the Scandinavian countries experienced periods of social and economic change. Historically hierarchical nations, the Nordic countries fostered a blossoming of social and economic democracy, leading to improvements in incomes, diets,

dress, housing, and social services for citizens of the lower economic classes (Nordstrom 282). Women were making some professional advancement but remained in largely subordinate roles such as secretaries and clerks. The concept of the “ideal housewife” also took firm hold over most of the Western cultures during the mid-20th century, and the Scandinavian countries were no exception. As Byron Nordstrom explains, “Women were expected to cook healthy meals and raise perfect children” (285). Though a time of much technological and social progress, the attention to and improvements in gender rights left much to be desired. In the first chapter of this thesis, I analyze the many ways in which Pippi Longstocking functions as a force of chaos for beneficial change. She provides a positive example of an independent female child who uses her physical strength, disruption of spaces, and aptitude for tall tales to assert her agency and independence, and her inexhaustible playfulness illustrates her nonviolent resistance to oppressive authority figures. With her outrageous performances, Pippi shakes up notions of females as spectacles always under the male gaze and holds a critical mirror up to the society that attempts to tame the strongest girl in the world.

In the spirit of Pippi, Harriet M. Welsch possesses a flair for resisting social institutions and norms. Under the guidance of her governess, Ole Golly, Harriet gradually learns to navigate her social circumstances while remaining true to herself. A self-proclaimed author and spy, Harriet apologizes to pull herself out of a tricky situation with her classmates, but ultimately continues in her spying and writing habits. Like Pippi, Harriet remains uncompromising in her identity, even giving herself the middle initial “M” to take part in naming herself. Linking her identity closely to the occupations she enjoys, Harriet practices her spy skills by inserting herself into the public and private spaces of others and

constructing narratives of their lives through daily written observations. Her position as female child allows her to travel undetected within these spaces, and she exhibits her critical gaze in the way she speaks about viewing the world. When questioned about her note taking, Harriet informs her friend that she writes observations about everyone around her because she has “*seen* them” and wants “to *remember* them” (Fitzhugh 11). In Chapter Two, I maintain that Harriet uses her identity of female child to her advantage, inserting herself into spaces that adults, especially men, are denied, and she employs a critical feminine gaze illustrated in her honest journaling, looking at not only the people around her, but also establishing her authority and developing her authorship.

Bradley contributes his own resistant young heroine in the form of Flavia de Luce, an eleven-year-old girl who subverts the notion of the nurturing, life-giving female and instead possesses an astonishing expertise in life-taking poisons and death. Though published in 2009, *The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie* is set in 1950s England, which places Flavia in a post-WWII society with lingering effects of the war both at home in the estate house and throughout the country. As a young girl, Flavia is often barred from the masculine adult spaces of science and crime investigation, but she refuses to concede to arbitrary boundaries. With an expertly stocked chemistry lab at her disposal, Flavia critically observes her environment and those within it with attention to the most miniscule of details. Similar to Pippi and Harriet, Flavia utilizes her status as female child to her advantage and gains access to information and spaces that the adult male authority figures overlook or are denied, and this advantage often gives her the upper hand in her crime investigations. In Chapter Three, I argue that Flavia exploits assumptions about the docility of female children and focuses her gaze on those who oppress her. Through her crime investigation, which involves piecing

together a narrative, Flavia engages in a form of authorship similar to Pippi's tall tales and Harriet's spy notes. Following in the footsteps of the boundary-breaking heroines before her, Flavia pushes her way into gender- and age-segregated spaces and subverts the patriarchal forces that endeavor to contain her.

By asserting themselves into both private and public spaces, Pippi, Harriet, and Flavia actively subvert patriarchal norms in multiple ways. According to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's influential *The Madwoman in the Attic*, "In patriarchal Western culture...the text's author is a father...an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis" (6). All three heroines take control of the phallic pen. Pippi is a master of tall tales, crafting stories to entertain herself and others, whereas Harriet composes narratives about everyone she observes. And Flavia constructs a narrative to account for a death after she discovers a man's body on her family's estate. Because she continues building the man's story after his death, Flavia's narrative, like the patriarchal author, possesses generative powers; she animates the dead by solving his murder. With this focus on acts of feminine writing that occur when the three girls construct narratives by using and manipulating language, this thesis draws heavily on Hélène Cixous's work, "The Laugh of the Medusa," with its ideas on l'écriture féminine. Though Cixous's essay has been criticized for appearing, at times, essentialist, her writing "suggests (rather than states) that the ambiguities of language are both a trap and a potential space of liberation since ambiguity can produce fissures and disjunctions in a totalising version of the world" (Robbins 169). The heroines of these texts take advantage of these potential spaces in language to produce disjunctions in the patriarchal world's view of them as powerless objects. Possessing an ability to shake up the

phallogentric Symbolic order with their witty contributions, Pippi, Harriet, and Flavia develop a sense of authority from various forms of authorship.

In addition to their participation in authorship, Pippi, Harriet, and Flavia exhibit an awareness of their social environments, proving themselves to be critical observers. In *The World Wars Through the Female Gaze*, Jean Gallagher references “Jonathan Crary’s distinction between ‘spectator’ (with its connotations of a ‘passive onlooker at a spectacle’) and ‘observer,’ which he defines as ‘one who sees within a prescribed set of possibilities, one who is embedded in a system of conventions and limitations’” (5-6), and she provides a discussion on how the American female, operating as a critical observer, might have resisted those conventions and restrictions (5). Though not direct observers of war and from different countries, these three heroines exhibit aptness for critical observation and resistance. Pippi constantly questions authority, Harriet critically observes everyone, adults and children alike, and Flavia places her environment and all those in it under her microscope, scrutinizing everyone and everything in her quest for knowledge and agency. All three masters of a traditionally masculine skill, Pippi’s physical strength goes unmatched, Harriet experiences success as a budding writer, and Flavia possesses an understanding and ability in chemistry and crime solving that astounds a team of male police officers. Though created and living in different times and cultural environments, these three characters exist in a post-WWII social climate with prevailing ideologies that seek to limit their agency. Pippi, Harriet, and Flavia use similar strategies to subvert these ideologies, and in doing so, they provide models for young female readers to assert themselves similarly and participate actively in their environments rather than settle for passivity.

Feminist theory has provided much work on the visibility of women within a patriarchal society; however, what I focus on in this thesis is a girl's (rather than a woman's) invisibility. Laura Mulvey theorizes that much of women's oppression stems from their position as spectacles and as objects, and she explores the ways in which as objects, women fall under the (male) "gaze" (19). She discusses the patriarchal binary that splits men and women into active lookers and passive objects (19). I use the term "feminine gaze" throughout this thesis to mean a critical look sent from an observer whom society marks as feminine. As subjects embedded within a social system that sees them as disempowered because of their sex and age, young females occupy positions as doubly othered, and I employ the term girls to distinguish them from women or adult females. In her pivotal work on a genealogy of girlhood titled *Girls*, Catherine Driscoll explains her use of the term "'feminine adolescence' as different from 'female adolescence' (which is predominantly a discourse about puberty) with a degree of independence from any specific age category" (6), and I distinguish between feminine and female in much the same way, using feminine to mark their socially expected gender norms and female to gesture towards their othered positions that result from their female sex in a male-dominated, mid-century society that conflated biology with gender¹. The disruption of wartime provided an opportunity for bending gender constructions, and Pippi, Harriet, and Flavia's positions as female children create a blockage in the male gaze in that those in power assume female child subjectivity as natural and unopposed. These heroines take advantage of those assumptions, which create opportunities for these girls to return the gaze and infiltrate restricted spaces. Given the

¹ At various times throughout this thesis, I switch between referring to Pippi, Harriet, and Flavia as "girls" and "female children" to reemphasize at certain moments the notion of their positions as doubly othered because of both their sex and age.

predominating conceptions of the mid-20th century gender roles, I seek to present valid examples of female protagonists that resist common “domestic angel” and child-as-innocent stereotypes. These fictional girls provide models of empowered children during a time when patriarchal norms acquired increased strength and popularity in Sweden, the United States, and Great Britain.

The primary aim of this project is to demonstrate how Lindgren, Fitzhugh, and Bradley present their protagonists as models of young female agency. Through this study of young girls achieving mastery and authority over their environments, I provide a discussion on how the characters seek stability out of chaos and how that chaos provides an opportunity for growth and beneficial change. With the historical context of WWII in the recent past and the resultant significant changes in gender roles, family dynamics, and ideas of childhood, Pippi, Harriet, and Flavia stand out as empowered female children in an age of oppression. Though these texts are products of various times and cultural contexts, I trace the ways in which they operate similarly and work to accomplish the same goals. Despite a long-standing literary tradition of damsel-in-distress female characters, these three texts provide models of strong young girls who unapologetically obtain agency in their environments. I seek to counter centuries of prolific literary examples that proscribe oppressive gender norms to young female readers and demonstrate that even during a time of culturally constructed subservient feminine identity, there were strong female protagonists that resisted oppressive institutions and ideologies. Lindgren, Fitzhugh, and Bradley’s texts provide examples of empowered, intelligent, and capable young girls living in a mid-20th century environment and successfully subverting patriarchal norms.

Chapter 1: Patriarchy and Plutification: *Pippi Longstocking* and the Subversion of Spectacle and Language

A leader in the tradition of feisty little girls, Pippi Longstocking performed and laughed her way into the hearts of children following her publication in Sweden in 1945 and later in the United States in 1950. In his article, “*Pippi Longstocking* and the Subversive Affirmation of Comedy,” David L. Russell claims that Pippi Longstocking is one of the great characters of 20th century children’s literature largely because “Pippi herself embodies the quintessential childhood fantasy: A fiercely independent child, endowed with great physical strength and inexhaustible financial resources, lives on her own without the constraints of adult supervision, says and does exactly as she pleases, and subverts at every opportunity the accepted conventions of society” (167). In addition to Pippi’s fantastic qualities, her strength and independence are remarkable given the historical period in which she was created—World War II. As a result of the war, Europe endured years of violent chaos and made social changes to error on the side of conformity as part of a quest to regain stability. In direct opposition to that stable but conformist social movement, Pippi operates as a force of chaos, but instead of using violence to resist social norms, she relies on play. In a time when much of Europe and the United States reinforced oppressive ideologies about powerless children and inherently domestic femininity, Astrid Lindgren offered up a red-headed rebel, a remarkably strong little girl who challenges those notions with her social and economic independence, her physical strength, and most of all, her laughter. As illustrated by these various challenges to social norms, Pippi masters spaces with her strength and performances, fragments the male gaze by hijacking the concept of women as spectacles, and disrupts the phallogentric Symbolic order with her language play.

To fully explore Pippi's role as a subversive character, it is essential to examine the historical and cultural climate in which Lindgren wrote this text. *Pippi Longstocking* originated from an oral tale Lindgren created for the amusement of her ill daughter, Karin, in 1941. During that time, the world was at war, with Germany steadily engulfing Europe and showing no signs of weakening. While Sweden was neither invaded nor occupied during WWII, the Nazi military had essentially surrounded the country by 1940. Though the Swedish government attempted to maintain an image of neutrality, Sweden continued to trade with the Germans because of the threat of military reprisal if they refused (Nordstrom 316). Many people criticized the Nordic countries for not defending themselves and continuing to trade with the Axis powers, yet others responded with an examination of Scandinavia's ill-equipped military forces and economic vulnerability. Each Nordic country experienced shortages and significant changes in fundamental aspects of everyday life (320).

Following the war, respect for democratic institutions and a sense of responsibility for alleviating common social issues strengthened among the Nordic people. Though they still revered their monarchies, royal political power declined with the rise of social democratic parties, which took control of Sweden in 1945 (322-23). Some viewed this development in Nordic political policy as a positive example of participatory democracy, while others pointed out flaws in the system, the most glaring of which was having the decision-making power in the hands of party leaders rather than the members (325). The post-WWII era brought about questions regarding the future, with the reality of nuclear warfare raising concerns of international peace and cooperation. Though mainly focused on domestic social issues, Lindgren provided creative works that sparked social change and international appeal. Challenging the current state of sociopolitical affairs, Lindgren gave the world Pippi

Longstocking—a young, vibrant girl with enough strength to challenge the Mighty Adolf, enough intelligence to provide for and entertain herself, and enough heart to make her small piece of the world enduringly better. As a product of the WWII era, Pippi functions as a symbol of reform, breaking from social constructs of femininity and childhood. This chapter examines Pippi’s role as a positive model for children, especially young girls, to challenge patriarchal notions of childhood and girlhood, setting the stage for future characters such as Harriet M. Welsch in Louise Fitzhugh’s *Harriet the Spy* (1964) and Flavia de Luce in Alan Bradley’s *The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie* (2009) as explored in the next two chapters.

As previously discussed, the 1940s and 50s exhibited a moment of reversion to circumscribed gender roles; women and children occupied the domestic spaces and were expected to be docile and submissive, whereas men controlled public spaces and were encouraged to be active and dominant. Pippi disrupts this binary primarily with the use of her incredible physical strength and makes her presence immediately felt within domestic and public spaces. In fact, the first thing the reader learns about Pippi is that her physical strength is what makes her so remarkable, and she demonstrates her physical prowess by easily lifting her horse over her head. Using her strength to impact her environment, Pippi acts as a hero to a little boy being bullied. When playing “Thing-Finder,” Pippi, Tommy, and Annika witness a gang of boys beating up a smaller, weaker boy, and Pippi intervenes. After quickly overpowering the attackers, Pippi tells them, “You are cowards. Five of you attacking one boy! That’s cowardly. Then you begin to push a helpless little girl around. Oh, how mean!” (Lindgren 33). Interjecting herself into a public space—indeed, the distinctly masculine space of a boys’ street fight—Pippi acts as rescuer and protector. By calling herself “a helpless little girl,” she calls attention to the fact that she breaks from her assumed social

position. Not only does Pippi use her strength to defend and protect others, she also uses it to protect herself by resisting institutions that attempt to confine her: the foster care system, for example. When the townspeople decide Pippi belongs in a children's home, they send two police officers to collect her from Villa Villekulla, but they fail in their mission. As the narrator explains on the first page of the text, "She was so very strong that in the whole wide world there was not a single police officer as strong as she" (13-14). Pippi's strength outmatches the police, who are representatives of law enforcement, indicating that she is stronger than and, therefore, able to resist the governmental institutions.

Eventually testing her strength against the circus strongman, the Mighty Adolf, Pippi proves a worthy adversary to even the world's most malignant individuals. After three rounds of wrestling, Pippi holds Mighty Adolf down. "Now little fellow," she says, "I don't think we'll bother about this any more. We'll never have any more fun than we've had already" (Lindgren 63). The strongman's moniker is a clear reference to Adolf Hitler, a man with an inflated self-importance and commanding stage presence who placed most of Europe in a stranglehold. Pippi easily resists Adolf's grasp and literally flips him on his back, telling him that they won't "bother about this any more," this "fun" is finished, and Pippi ends it. In her article "Bakhtin and Carnival: Culture as Counter-Culture," Renate Lachmann uses Ivan the Terrible as an example of "a counter-state that suspended the prevailing laws through its own set of counter-laws" and explains that this is "an inversion of the carnival usurpation of official culture...The usurped carnival is directed against the folk, for the counter-law with its masquerade and mime is used to perpetuate a rule of violence: the carnival becomes a theater of cruelty" (122). This explanation could equally describe Hitler's dictatorship over Germany and much of Europe during which he replaced German law and international

agreements with his own laws, usurping the official order with his own sinister political agenda. Using the setting of the circus, Lindgren ridicules Hitler with the image of a strongman being physically usurped by a nine-year-old girl.

Pippi's ability to overthrow the strongest opponents challenges the idea of children and females as weak. In her article "A Misunderstood Tragedy: Astrid Lindgren's *Pippi Longstocking* Books," Maria Nikolajeva states, "It is essential to note that Pippi never abuses her strength. In fact, she only uses it against those who are themselves nasty toward the weak: the big boy Bengt, the police officers, Mighty Adolf in the circus, the burglars Thunder-Karlsson and Bloom, or the bandits Jim and Buck" (57). Demonstrating strength of body as well as of character, Pippi relies on her muscle most commonly in resistance of male characters who seek to abuse their physical and social advantages, but her altercations always end in play and with an act of kindness. She turns an attempted arrest into a game of tag with the policemen, and once they accept defeat, she sends them out with "two cookie hearts" telling them, "It doesn't matter that they are a little burned, does it?" (Lindgren 42). Like the cookies, the policemen, too, leave their encounter with Pippi a little burned, not having realized their own shortcomings but learning that Pippi is best left to her own devices.

Always in the spirit of play, Pippi disrupts most spaces she enters because, as Russell articulates, "Pippi is an absurd child in a conventional world" (169); she exists in an environment that seeks to confine people to categories or conventions of masculine/public/active versus feminine/private/passive, and Pippi simply refuses to fit in. Hélène Cixous describes a similar playful resistance in her work, "The Laugh of the Medusa," and discusses women's need to shake up masculine spaces and discourse. She writes, "They [women] go by, fly the coop, take pleasure in jumbling the order of space, in disorienting it,

in changing around the furniture, dislocating things and values, breaking them all up, emptying structures, and turning propriety upside down” (Cixous 887). In contrast to Pippi and the women Cixous describes, Lindgren offers an example of social outsiders who also attempt to turn propriety upside down, but do so violently rather than playfully. The burglars Thunder-Karlsson and Bloom reject social norms and steal, embracing their positions as outsiders to harm or take advantage of others, but Pippi uses her position as outsider to empower herself, stand up to authority, and protect others. She manages the would-be-thieves as she manages all other adults who seek to overpower her—with silliness. After making them dance the schottische with her for hours, Pippi sends them away with a touch of kindness. The narrator explains, “As they were going out of the door Pippi came running after them and gave them each a gold piece. ‘These you have honestly earned,’ she said” (115). Lindgren shows the reader the difference between subversion for good and rejection of laws for wrongdoing.

Lindgren further emphasizes Pippi’s position as outsider with her independence and difference to “typical” Swedish children, as established immediately with the description of Pippi living alone with no parents. The narrator explains, “She had no mother and no father, and that was of course very nice because there was no one to tell her to go to bed...” (Lindgren 11). Having no concerns about caring for herself, Pippi possesses all the necessary preconditions for independence: intelligence, strength, and money. Eva-Maria Metcalf provides further comment, stating, “Pippi certainly has both the brawn and the brains to come out on top in every situation and to remain her own ‘master.’ And...she is ‘as rich as a troll’” (131). Establishing Pippi as her own master is particularly interesting considering the power dynamics in family life during that era. Pippi’s independence from parental authority is

further emphasized when her neighbors, Tommy and Annika, are introduced as “good, well brought up, and obedient children” (Lindgren 14). As the epitome of the ideal housewife, Mrs. Settergren, Tommy and Annika’s mother, tells Pippi, “Children should be seen and not heard,” effectively summing up the attitude about children’s roles in both the public and private spheres (209). While the housewives ruled the home, children occupied places of complete subjugation. As per usual, Pippi offers an excellent response, exclaiming “[I]t’s nice if people are happy just to look at me! I must see how it feels to be used just for decoration” (209). Parodying the child’s role as mere decoration in an ideal family unit, Pippi sits like a statue, putting on a performance of her expected social position.

Not only can Pippi impact her environment with her playful performances, but she also achieves control over spaces with her remarkable abilities. When riding through town, Pippi comes across an emergency—a burning building with two little boys trapped inside. The adults standing around the building, including the firemen, have given up trying to save the children, calling it impossible. Gladly accepting the challenge, Pippi effortlessly formulates a plan and rescues both boys while turning a traumatic situation into a circus performance. Relishing in the excitement, she “raised her arms to the night sky, and while a shower of sparks fell over her she cried loudly, ‘Such a jolly, jolly fire!’” (Lindgren 142). Pippi can do what the firemen cannot and saves the little boys. Proving herself more capable than adults in this situation, Pippi functions as a child protector to other children. She figures out a strategy for rescuing them, demonstrating her intelligence in addition to her strength. Ever the performer, Pippi enters every adventure with a flair for entertaining and meets even the scariest of situations with a playful outlook. Similar to the ways in which she both

controls and disrupts spaces, Pippi's performances serve to mock the ideologies promoting concepts of children as both weak and decorative that the adults attempt to instill in her.

Pippi's knack for disorder is exhibited from the beginning of the text with the juxtaposition of Pippi's home, Villa Villekula, to Tommy and Annika's house. Next to the Settergrens' tidy home, Pippi's unruly garden containing a "tumbledown garden gate" and "old moss-covered trees" surrounds her little house that usually has a horse on the porch (19). When Tommy and Annika enter the house, they observe its disorderly state thinking it looked as though "Pippi had forgotten to do her Friday cleaning that week" (19). Both embodying and inhabiting chaos, Pippi lives in a disordered home, emphasizing her resistance to traditional domesticity associated with girls and women during the 1940s and 50s. She cooks and occasionally cleans her house, suggesting that while Pippi is untidy, she is perfectly capable of maintaining her living environment as she sees fit. She exaggerates the domestic duties and transforms chores into games. For example, when she bakes cookies, she makes five hundred at once, using the floor to roll out the massive amounts of dough and cut it into hundreds of little hearts (25). When Pippi decides to clean, she turns mopping into soapy floor skating (76). Nikolajeva explains that Lindgren reverses the traditional pattern of children's texts—which usually start with a safe and secure home, then an exciting but dangerous adventure, and finally a return back to the comfort of home—and she states, "Pippi comes from chaos to disturb order (cf. Edström 1990), from adventure to home that is boring and therefore must be turned into adventure" (61). Though Pippi, Tommy, and Annika leave their homes to find various adventures around the village, adventures also seem to come knocking on Pippi's door.

The episodes with burglars and police officers mentioned earlier exhibit instances of male adults threatening Pippi's independence. Nikolajeva notes that Pippi only relies on her strength against "unfair (and exclusively male) adversaries" (59), and her regular tussles with male figures function as playful criticisms of patriarchal invasions on young girls' autonomy, a persistent struggle that she shares with Flavia de Luce as explored in Chapter Three. The policemen who try to put her in an institutional home and take away her autonomy illustrate that Pippi's independence is threatened by adults, particularly adult men. Pippi's house is visited by two pairs of men: policemen and burglars. Both pairs attempt to use force to control Pippi and take from her the things that make her threatening to socially proscribed concepts of powerless girls: her wealth and independence. With the institutional backing of the law enforcement system, the police officers attempt to justify why Pippi must trade in her freedom for adult supervision. Trying to convince her of the importance of being looked after and attending school, one of the officers asks her to imagine how she will feel once she grows up not knowing what the capital of Portugal is. Pippi responds brilliantly with, "No doubt I should lie awake nights and wonder and wonder, 'What in the world is the capital of Portugal?' But one can't be having fun all the time" (24). Pointedly mocking the policeman's shallow reasoning for obligatory institutionalized education, Pippi then explains, "For that matter, I've been to Lisbon with my papa" (24). Not only does Pippi know the answer to the trivial question, but the knowledge she holds is acquired through experience rather than formal schooling. Pippi does not want to be told things (and even more, take what she hears from adults as given fact), but wants to learn them for herself. Similar to her tangle with the Mighty Adolf, Pippi turns the policemen's aggressive action into play, eventually growing tired of their "games" and simply hoisting them up and depositing them outside of her front

gate. In addition to her social impertinence, Pippi defies the institutions that attempt to tame her—the foster care system, the police, and the school. As Metcalf explains, “Despite her sable swinging and pistol shooting, Pippi practices non-violence. Usually her reprisals take the form of a circus performance” (132). When the police attempt to pull her off to an orphanage, Pippi easily resists their attempted physical force. Usually depicted as heroes or reliable allies, the policemen in this story are grouped with the burglars. Since they cannot reasonably justify their attempt to forcibly remove Pippi from her home, are the police officers any better than the thieves? In addition to posing this challenge to male authority figures, Lindgren contradicts the concept of the helpless, powerless child in need of an institutionalized upbringing by presenting Pippi as intelligent and entirely capable of caring for herself.

Pippi may easily mock restrictions on her social agency because of her independence, and unfailingly ensures that she is both seen and heard. Lindgren provides her protagonist with the necessary means of independence, and Pippi flourishes on her own. Tommy and Annika, Pippi’s two best friends, serve as spectators to Pippi’s antics. Because they conform to their expected gender and social roles, they “can only look aghast and marvel at a freedom they will never possess” (Metcalf 131-32). Living within the tidy realms of social institutions, Tommy and Annika participate in Pippi’s games but never in her subversion of the predominant hegemonic systems. According to Ramona Frasher, Tommy and Annika “represent to a high degree the traditional models of masculinity and femininity with which little boys and girls have been...expected to identify” (861). Instead of also poking fun at the authorities, they passively receive the benefits of Pippi’s performances and goodwill. They afford the child readers a realistic depiction of relatable children, and with this setup,

Lindgren seems to be giving the readers a comfortable space to place themselves within the story while simultaneously challenging the values that underpin the readers' upbringing.

Again referring to Metcalf, one may read Pippi as a

parody of the nineteenth century girl's book. Pippi feigns ignorance and uses her role as outsider...to make fun of society ladies, teachers, and other representatives of law and social order. She imitates them not in order to become accepted into this institution, but to ridicule social games by playing these games to the extreme. (133)

This nine-year-old strongwoman dons a metaphorical fool's mask to draw circles around her society's shortcomings. Pippi performs in an effort to "shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up the 'truth' with laughter" (Cixous 888).

The chaos and social reconstructions of WWII have created gaps in gender constructions, and Pippi's position as a young girl creates a blockage in the male gaze, one that she constantly builds on with her extravagant performances. As Mulvey explains, "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female...In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness" (19). Pippi's physical appearance—bright red hair, pigtails that stick straight out, potato nose, freckles, mismatched stockings, and oversized shoes—alludes to a clown's appearance but it also exaggerates and subverts the idea of Pippi (as a young girl) as a spectacle. She's an outrageous spectacle, one turned into a comedic display, not sexualized but parodied. With her tendency to bend conventions until they break, Pippi subverts the concept of female as spectacle by becoming a hyperbolic

spectacle herself, particularly during an outing to the circus. Pointing out explicitly that circuses are places where one must pay to observe spectacles, Pippi exclaims, “Preserve us!...It costs money to look? And here I go around goggling all day long. Goodness knows how much money I’ve goggled up already” (Lindgren 90), making a light jab at the commodification of spectacles. Knowing that women are most often associated with the spectacle, it is both an amusing and highly critical examination of the act of looking. When Pippi reaches the ticket window, she asks the elderly female worker, “How much does it cost to look at you?” (91). The answer, of course, is nothing because within a patriarchal social system, women are always on display. As is her habit with social conventions, Pippi takes this concept of spectacle and shakes it up. Jumping into the ring herself to wrestle a strongman, walk the tightrope, and ride the disgruntled (male) ringmaster around like a horse, Pippi makes a circus out of a circus (94).

Similarly, Pippi parodies the concept of female within a domestic space and dresses up for a coffee party at the Settergrens’ home. Certain that she will be the “most stylish person of all at this party,” Pippi paints her mouth and nails fiery red with a crayon, blackens her eyebrows, and fastens big green rosettes on her too-big shoes (73). Taking on class structures and socially propagated models of feminine behavior, Lindgren has Pippi play pretend as a “fine lady” and mock constructions of femininity with her performance and language. Pippi manages to spill sugar all over the floor and devour the majority of the offered treats before engaging in the ladies’ conversation consisting mainly of complaining about their housemaids. Creating an entirely mythical grandmother and maid named Malin who serves her, Pippi tells the ladies, “You can imagine that Grandmother mourned when she lost Malin. Just think, one Tuesday morning when Malin had had time to break only about a

dozen teacups she ran away and went to sea. And Grandmother had to break the china herself that day” (80). With her strange display of dress and behavior and a tall tale to match, Pippi parodies the affluent women who engage in this conversation critiquing the working class and transforms it into absurdity. The Western gender politics of the mid-20th century emphasized the ideal housewife as a bourgeois woman whose husband provided enough financially to afford domestic servants. With the alleviation of housework, many housewives found themselves suffering from acute boredom and spent much of their time organizing and attending social events. Lindgren examines this phenomenon, parodistically offering Pippi, a child who will supposedly be expected to conform to this ideal as she matures, as a carnivalesque performance of this social image. Explaining her concept of *l’écriture féminine*, Cixous writes of women’s struggle from within the male-dominated social discourses, stating

If woman has always functioned “within” the discourse of man, a signifier that has always referred back to the opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy and diminishes or stifles its very different sounds, it is time for her to dislocate this “within,” to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of. (887)

Pippi gets inside of her expected gender role like an actor stepping into a costume and delivers speeches, which are her forms of feminine writing or speaking, that sting both the phallogentric and adult norms of discourse.

Though other children’s book authors have taken a playful approach to language, Lindgren’s approach is unique in that her protagonist presents challenges to the Symbolic order itself. Nikolajeva suggests, “Unlike Lewis Carroll, whose nonsensical play with words

is often based on phonetics, like puns, Lindgren plays with semantics, with the different meaning of words, as well as with the illogical ways languages uses some of them, that is pragmatic rules” (65). Pippi takes a bite into language, laughing with words rolling around in her mouth, and she appears to experience the most joy when disrupting language during conversations with adults. She gives cheeky responses to stupid questions, and when the policemen ask her, “Is this the girl who moved into Villa Villekula?” Pippi jokes, “Quite the contrary... This is a tiny little auntie who lives on the third floor at the other end of the town” (39). They fail in their weak rhetorical appeal to convince her to enter foster care; Pippi has no intention of leaving her home and communicates that to the policemen in no uncertain terms. She uses her language, as well as her physical strength, to say no and to defy and mock authority (40). Nikolajeva explains that *Pippi Longstocking* is a text in which “the value of the Symbolic order is openly interrogated” (67). She also uses language to lampoon the names of things such as multiplication which she renames “pluttifikation” (Lindgren 41). The silliness of the nonsense word is enough to make English-speaking readers laugh, but, as Metcalf notes, the comedy of the actual word gets lost in translation, with the original Swedish word Pippi uses translating closer to “fartification” (132). Pippi continues with her language and logic play when she decides to attend school so that she can have a vacation, but her day at school quickly becomes an utter and hilarious disruption of the formal learning experience. She questions the logic of math equations, which are things school children are supposed to take as indisputable facts, and responds to quantitative questions with qualitative ones. When the teacher asks Tommy, “If Lisa has seven apples and Axel has nine apples, how many apples do they have together?” Pippi diverts the math lesson with a follow-up question of her own: “Yes, you tell, Tommy... and tell me too, if Lisa gets a stomach-ache

and Axel gets more stomach-ache, whose fault is it and where did they get hold of all the apples in the first place?” (54). She does not want arbitrary facts, but instead wants stories and information about people. When presented with a word problem that does nothing more than prompt a child for a rehearsed answer, Pippi creates a story. In fact, when she is not using language to ridicule adult discourse, Pippi is creating stories for her own amusement as well as to entertain her friends.

Pippi parodies the school experience, and the miscommunications or failures of language are what she pounces on for comedic effect. A master of storytelling, Pippi gets caught lying but moves right into the next tall tale. When she first meets Tommy and Annika, she informs them that everyone in Egypt walks backwards, an obvious lie that Annika identifies. When Annika informs Pippi that it’s “wicked” to lie, Pippi sadly agrees, and explains, “But I forget it now and then” (18). Pippi keeps talking right into her next tall tale, and with her “whole freckled face lighting up,” she tells her new friends, “let me tell you that in the Congo there is not a single person who tells the truth” (18). Clearly finding joy in storytelling, Pippi participates in a form of authorship with her tall tales and refuses to follow traditional conventions of phallogocentric narratives. Her stories swirl around and get tangled in themselves, and Pippi often contradicts herself. When meeting another little girl who is looking for her father, Pippi carries on in her usual fashion of silliness, feeding stories to a new listener. When the little girl expresses doubt at Pippi’s tale, Pippi dares the girl to accuse her of lying, but turns around again and tells the confused girl not to let people fool her so easily (67). Though her tone is not mocking when conversing with other children, Pippi is a constant contradiction, a subversive social butterfly that can never be pinned down. She doesn’t abide by “appropriate” methods of discourse and lets her imagination romp freely.

Given Pippi's obvious contention with authority and traditional social structure, one may not be surprised that Lindgren's novel received a large heaping of backlash in 1946. Metcalf explains that many critics found it "demoralizing and contrived" and others claim that *Pippi Longstocking* is escapist and affirms middle class values (133). Yet, critics on the other side of the argument find in *Pippi* a shining example of anti-authoritarian and subversive children's literature (133). With the widely mixed reviews, it is rather astonishing that Pippi quickly became a literary icon. One explanation as to why very likely lies within her near universal appeal to children and adults, and part of that appeal manifests in her humor and the positive, empowered image she projects as a young girl. While she readily saves other children (often little boys) from danger using her strength, one could say that Pippi also saves the children she meets by disrupting the spaces they share and creating openings for them to follow her in her quest for chaos in the name of child empowerment. Perhaps initially disconcerting to some adults, Pippi's refusal of social institutions and expected behaviors provide a starting point for the empowerment of both children and adults. Owen Earnshaw discusses ideas of youth empowerment in his article titled, "Learning to Be a Child: A Conceptual Analysis of Youth Empowerment," stating, "Were points of refusal on the part of the child taken as signals as to how a practice could be improved then a more democratic situation of cooperation might emerge" (16). Instead of adhering to the imbalanced binary traditionally taken between adults and children, Earnshaw suggests that adults consider an alternative route—one that employs conversation rather than domination. He continues, "The way that the elder comes to a situation where refusal rather than being an obstacle can help the elder to learn is through a conversation as equals" (16). Because none of the adults addresses Pippi like an equal, her communication with them always amounts to

her holding the mirror to the adult world's shortcomings. In addition to acting as a silly but strong role model for children, Pippi also challenges adults to reconsider their conceptions of and interactions with children while simultaneously presenting an opposition to patriarchal ideas of girlhood.

Confronting the patriarchy in the form of Bengt and his friends who are ganging up on a smaller boy, Pippi experiences and overcomes a boy's explicit attempt to objectify her. When she interferes with Bengt's bullying, his first move is to try to objectify her by sarcastically calling her a "babe" (Lindgren 32). He immediately judges and shames her based on her appearance, overtly exhibiting the male gaze at its sharpest. Brushing off his pointed sexism, Pippi quickly dismisses him by declaring, "I don't think you have a very nice way with the ladies'...And she lifted him in her strong arms—high in the air—and carried him to a birch tree and hung him over a branch" (33). With one sentence, she mocks his hyper-masculine behavior and then defeats him with her physical strength. Taking on typical conventions of feminine appearance, Pippi blows metaphoric raspberries at the social mirror.

Though she confronts the patriarchy with her traditionally masculine qualities during her tussle with Bengt, Pippi breaks patriarchal norms with her more feminine and childlike qualities as well. Yet, some critics find Pippi's behavior, unrealistic physical strength, and rejection of normative femininity to be sexist rather than feminist. In her book *Children's Literature and the Politics of Equality*, Pat Pinsent discusses the difficulty of portraying women in children's literature as strong without losing their femininity, a problem that becomes more complex when considering how definitions of femininity vary across time and cultures (25). She uses Kik Reeder's criticism of *Pippi Longstocking* as an example of how

some readers may find issues with Pippi's characterization. Pinsent writes, "Kik Reeder (in Stinton, 1979) presents a critique of Astrid Lindgren's *Pippi Longstocking* books...she discusses how Pippi herself is sexist in her treatment of her friends. She suggests that, 'It is soon apparent that Pippi isn't a girl at all, even a tomboy, but a boy in disguise' (p. 115)" (25). This criticism seems ironic in that it perpetuates the same essentialism it finds fault with in Lindgren's text. Because Pippi possesses immense strength and refuses to act like a "proper" little girl, Reeder assumes Pippi cannot be a girl at all. While the transgender implications of her critique could prove interesting, this criticism assumes that if Pippi resists performing a Western concept of "girl" then she must be a boy. I argue, however, that Pippi does not deny being a girl—rather, she reminds the reader many times that she identifies herself as a girl, and the strongest girl in the world at that (Lindgren 99)—but she rejects patriarchal notions of girlhood that proscribe a fixed set of parameters within which she is allowed to perform. In possessing both traditionally masculine and feminine traits, Pippi breaks boundaries of gender expression, functioning as a character that shows child readers the nuanced possibilities for their own gender performances.

Though Tommy and Annika remain much the same throughout the text, Pippi gently encourages them to take part in her adventures and sets the example of a liberated child. She acts as a role model to the reader in that she embodies "the ultimate child and the ultimate grown-up in one person. She is a wise fool who subverts for the sake of subversion and makes life into an endless game" (Metcalf 134). Creating blockages in the male gaze with her chaotic behavior and contradictory language, Pippi creates opportunities for other children, like Tommy and Annika, to challenge oppressive social ideologies. One instance of this occurs when Pippi and her friends venture into the countryside for a picnic, and a bull attacks

Tommy. A common symbol for masculinity, one could read the bull's attack as a metaphor for Tommy's impending masculine maturation, something that would fully indoctrinate him into the phallogocentric notion of manhood. When the bull charges, "Tommy let out a terrified shriek that could be heard all through the woods," and tries to run away (Lindgren 84). Pippi, once again, comes to the rescue. Breaking off both of the bull's horns, Pippi metaphorically castrates the animal after which it loses its violent urge and falls peacefully asleep. In breaking off the bull's horns and preventing it from goring Tommy (and violently transferring the phallus), Pippi saves Tommy from becoming a bull, or in other words, an aggressive, impulse-driven male as the patriarchy pegs all men. A ball of contradictions herself, Pippi throws off any attempts to confine her feminine identity and protects Tommy from being forced into a restricted form of masculinity. Pippi's play and chaos create opportunities not only for herself, but for other children to defy conventional gender roles. When asked about her too-big shoes, Pippi says she wears them so she has room to wiggle her toes (35), expressing her desire for freedom of movement and illustrating even the smallest ways in which she refuses to be confined by standards of feminine fashion or social expectations. Her example helps those around her to resist that confinement as well.

Though Pippi's resistance to social norms seems apparent in the above examples, much of Pippi's defiance was not carried over from the Swedish version into the American and British translations. Many scholars have noted the various issues in translating texts, particularly with consideration of meaning that gets lost in the translation. Nikolajeva provides a discussion on the loss of Lindgren's most poignant criticisms when *Pippi Longstocking* was translated into English. She explains, "Not only have the translators (or the editors?) played down Pippi's defiant tone in her endless parleys with the adults, but both the

British and the American translator have liberally omitted most of Pippi's witticism, and her skillful play with language that is absolutely essential to understand both Pippi as a character and the books as an interrogation of authority" (50). Reading the text in English within an American context, I, like many others, still have found this text highly subversive despite the liberal editing. Others, such as Sibel Erol, view Pippi's fantastic qualities not as subversive, but on the contrary as reinforcing "the conformity signified by the Settergren children" (113). Erol continues her critique of Lindgren's text with a complaint of Pippi's overt fictionality within a realistic setting, claiming, "The Pippi who laughs at everything is a fabricated fantasy figure who serves as an agent of vicarious wish-fulfillment not only for other children, but also for the other Pippi, the 'real' Pippi we could have known if her story had been written realistically" (115). In this criticism, however, Erol misses the point of Pippi entirely; she was never meant to be a "realistic" depiction of a child because what is a "real" child? Ever the advocate for child empowerment, Lindgren refuses to perpetuate adult concepts of a real or normal child, and instead offers children, particularly female children, possibilities in the form of the endlessly opportunistic Pippi. If the English version portrays a toned-down Pippi, I can only imagine the delightful chaos that ensues in the original Swedish text.

With the personal mantra, "Don't you worry about me. I'll always come out on top" (Lindgren 12), Pippi Longstocking embodies the notion of empowered child and strong girl. Her playfulness allows her to disrupt spaces, inserting herself into both the private and public spheres and shaking up socially accepted ideologies of childhood and girlhood. With her physical strength, self-confidence, and assertion, Pippi proves a worthy adversary to the primarily male adult authority figures who seek to tame her through forceful insertions into institutions such as the foster care system and formal schooling. Pippi manages to subvert all

of these attempts with a laugh and twist of words, exhibiting her mastery over language in addition to her resistance to phallogocentric logic. Her carnivalesque performances of femininity play with the idea of women as spectacles, forming blockages that create opportunities for future characters like Harriet M. Welsch and Flavia de Luce to follow in her footsteps, fragmenting the male gaze and eventually exhibiting a critical feminine gaze of their own. A product of the WWII era, Pippi comes from chaos and uses it as a force for change. The end of Lindgren's first book closes with Pippi's declaration of a future career as a pirate, an outlaw. This little girl promises to maintain her knack for disruption and will no doubt continue challenging the patriarchal status quo one carnival performance at a time.

Chapter 2: Harriet Spies the Patriarchy: The Critical Observer as Author[ity] in

Harriet the Spy

This chapter examines Louise Fitzhugh's *Harriet the Spy* (1964) and the many ways in which Harriet follows in Pippi's oversized footsteps, disrupting patriarchal forces with her resistance to socially constructed notions of girlhood. As I address in the introduction to this thesis, the socially proscribed "domestic angel" feminine gender role had taken a firm hold over most of Europe and the United States by the mid-20th century, though many resisted. There are few words that describe Fitzhugh's book-slamming, window-peeping, insult-writing protagonist, Harriet, less accurately than "angelic." An eleven-year-old budding writer, Harriet M. Welsch lives in the Upper East Side of New York City and takes a particular interest in observing the people around her. She writes her blunt thoughts in her journal and ventures into spaces around her neighborhood to spy on a select group of individuals, extending her critical gaze to both adults and children. In many ways, Harriet operates as Jean Gallagher's notion of the post-WWII American female as a critical observer, a notion explained in the introduction as an active looker in contrast to a passive spectator (5). Though Harriet is nearly twenty years removed from WWII, she exhibits an aptness for critical observation and resistance.

With Harriet's voyeuristic tendencies, impolite writing, and ill-mannered body, Fitzhugh created a valid example of a female protagonist that resists common "domestic angel" and child-as-innocent stereotypes. This fictional girl provides a model of an empowered female child during a time when patriarchal norms acquired increased strength and popularity in the United States. In this chapter, I maintain that Harriet uses her identity of female child within a patriarchal culture to her advantage, inserting herself into spaces that

adults are denied, and subverting the male gaze with her spying. Building off of Pippi's ability to fragment the male gaze, Harriet proves capable of exerting a feminine gaze, a critical look sent from an observer whom society marks as feminine. Harriet also takes authority through her authorship, which is a traditionally masculine skill, and controls the phallic pen with her writing. Within the complex environment of the sixth-grade classroom, Harriet must learn to survive while remaining true to herself, ultimately subverting authority and social expectations for young girls.²

To place Harriet within a historical and literary framework, I would like to explore briefly the contextual influences surrounding Harriet's creation and initial reception. Born in 1928, Louise Fitzhugh lived through WWII and had entered adolescence during the development of the "domestic angel" and child-as-innocent post-war social constructs, and Harriet's parents would have been of the same generation. Fitzhugh likely would have been exposed to popular literature of the time, and the spy novel arose as a distinct genre during the 20th century largely as a result of WWI and then gained increased attention during and after WWII ("Spy Novels"). Published and set in the early 1960s, *Harriet the Spy* tells the story of a young girl trying to survive her social setting and develop a sense of self through spying and writing. Writers such as Ian Fleming (James Bond series) and Edward S. Aarons (*Assignment* novels) gained popularity during the 1950s and early 1960s with their stories about spies and covert operations. As marginal figures possessing a finely tuned expertise in the art of invisibility, spies can act as agents of order or chaos. They have the ability to protect secrets and maintain an organization's or country's power, but could subvert and topple these same institutions just as easily. The institution Harriet resists is not a Nazi

² As I mention in the introduction, I use the term girl to differentiate Harriet from women or adult females, who often work to maintain the patriarchal system they inhabit.

government but an oppressive ideology that by promoting restrictive social constructs about female domesticity and inherent childhood innocence, attempted to restore a sense of stability to the United States following the years of worldwide conflict. Fitzhugh created Harriet during an era of espionage fiction and made her protagonist arguably more subversive than the fictional adult male secret agents of the time because she chose to write about a supposed-to-be-innocent female child who disrupts social institutions.

In the spirit of Pippi, Harriet possesses a flair for resisting social institutions and norms. Her resistance is shown writ small in her classroom setting when she leads the rebellion against the prissy, popular Marion Hawthorne and Rachel Hennessey, who demand blind obedience from their fellow classmates. Harriet takes on a larger confrontation with society through her use of space and language. Through her spying, Harriet obtains sensitive information about many of her neighbors and classmates that she records very honestly in her private notebook. Her spying functions as more than mere voyeurism, as she explains when talking with Ole Golly. Harriet claims, “I want to know everything, everything...I will be a spy and know everything,” to which Ole Golly responds, “It won’t do you a bit of good to know everything if you don’t do anything with it” (24). As she expresses in this conversation, Harriet enjoys spying because it allows her to acquire information, and she recognizes that knowledge is power. But Ole Golly urges her to push her agency further by reminding her to do something with that knowledge, and therefore, transition from a passive vessel of information to an active agent within her environment. Harriet gradually understands Ole Golly’s advice near the end of the novel when she realizes that sometimes one must lie, or provide false knowledge, in order to be an effective agent. When Harriet’s notebook is discovered and read by her entire class, including her best friends, Sport and Janie, the sixth-

graders ostracize Harriet and create their own “Spy Catcher Club” in retaliation (224). In order to survive her social situation, Harriet apologizes for her writing and lies by calling it fiction to repair her relationships. However, in addition to the “fiction” she publishes in the school newspaper, she continues writing privately. On the last page of the novel Harriet has reconciled with Janie and Sport, and she “opened her notebook very carefully, watching their eyes as she did...They didn’t look angry. They were just waiting for her to finish” (300). Refusing to change herself for anyone, Harriet apologizes for her too honest notes without really meaning it and continues in her spying and writing habits. She realizes that words, whether fact or fiction, influence others, and she uses this knowledge and influence to continue her behavior and simultaneously maintain her friendships.

Harriet remains uncompromising in her identity, even giving herself the middle initial “M” to take part in naming herself and links her identity closely to the occupations she enjoys. She practices her spy skills by inserting herself into the public and private spaces of others and constructing narratives of their lives through daily written observations. Harriet’s position as female child allows her to travel undetected within these spaces, and she exhibits her critical gaze in the way she speaks about viewing the world, something she shares with Flavia de Luce as discussed in the next chapter. For example, when Sport questions her about her note taking, Harriet informs him that she writes observations about everyone around her because she has “*seen* them” and writing down her observations helps her to remember them (Fitzhugh 11). In his article “Children’s Literature and the Child Flâneur,” Eric Tribunella explains, “One of the key figures in literature of the city is the flâneur, the idle wanderer or man about town, defined primarily by two activities: strolling and looking” (64). Harriet performs both of these activities, strolling and looking, as she completes her daily spy route

around her neighborhood, but her writing is an essential third activity because it demonstrates that Harriet is not only looking, but also gathering and analyzing information. Under the guidance of Ole Golly, Harriet records her thoughts about the people she sees. When others dismiss her spying and writing as playing, Harriet immediately corrects them, insisting that she is not “playing,” she is “working” (Fitzhugh 234), which indicates that Harriet sees her efforts as a spy and writer as professional endeavors, not idle pastimes. Again Tribunella offers insight by stating, “The flâneur is one who is carefully attentive to the world around him as he walks, a *critical observer* of the city and its people, and one who learns from them” (Tribunella 64, emphasis is mine). Harriet’s writing indicates that she learns something from each subject of her voyeurism. She explains, “Ole Golly says there is as many ways to live as there are people on the earth and I shouldn’t go round with blinders but should see every way I can. Then I’ll know what way I want to live and not just live like my family” (32). Harriet’s position as child flâneur grants her access into people’s private lives where she exhibits an ability to analyze critically different ways of living.

As a spy, Harriet operates on the periphery, looking at others from her hiding spot, an invisibility that grants her agency. Much work has been done among feminist theorists on the visibility of women within a patriarchal society. What I am focusing on in this section, however, is a girl’s (as opposed to a woman’s) invisibility. Again referencing Laura Mulvey’s theories on women as spectacle (19), Harriet disrupts the active/male and passive/female binary because she proves herself to be not just a looker (the traditionally masculine role in this binary), but a critical looker and an active observer. As a girl, Harriet has not yet transitioned into womanhood and the subsequent “to-be-looked-at-ness” (Mulvey

19).³ Because she is not yet visible as an object for the male gaze, she may move throughout her environment invisibly, turning her (often male) neighbors into the spectacles and objects of scrutiny. Her ability to travel unrestricted throughout her neighborhood positions her as an empowered child because there is no one to keep her from entering the various spaces on her spy route. Instead of remaining within the domestic sphere of her house and school, Harriet enters the public and private spheres around the Upper East Side, disrupting the conception of young girls as passive objects.

Her physical movements when not spying also illustrate especially well her challenge to the passive/female and active/male binary. Harriet uses space in extreme ways, and when she decides to be Harriet the child, rather than the spy, she is loud and rough, always yelling, slamming, running, and colliding with the cook. For instance, in the first few pages of the novel, Harriet gets ready for her first day of sixth grade. After breakfast, she “ran very fast all the way up to her room. ‘I’m starting the sixth grade,’ she yelled, just to keep herself company. She got her notebook, slammed her door, and thundered down the steps” (Fitzhugh 27). She makes her presence immediately known and felt in the space in ways that contradict mid-20th century constructs of quiet, demure little girls. In “The Laugh of the Medusa,” Cixous bemoans patriarchal views of girls as passive objects and the idea that those who defy this concept require taming. She writes, “The little girls and their ‘ill-mannered’ bodies immured, well-preserved, intact unto themselves, in the mirror. Frigidified. But are here ever seething underneath!” (877). As made apparent from the first chapter of Fitzhugh’s text, Harriet’s ill-mannered body is not immured; she’s quick, noisy, and collides with people constantly. She resists orderliness and being confined to a patriarchal ideal of girlhood. Even

³ Additional clarification on Laura Mulvey’s theory can be found on page xii in the introduction.

when women attempt to contain Harriet's body, she resists. Janie's mother, Mrs. Gibbs, explains to Harriet that she should go to dancing school and that her mother is worried about the way Harriet moves. Harriet objects, "Fast...that's the way I move, fast. What's wrong with that?" (Fitzhugh 80-1). A contrast between Harriet and Flavia, as addressed in the next chapter, can be viewed in the ways they make choices about or resist performing socially proscribed characteristics for young girls. Whereas Flavia expresses awareness about her expected gender role and chooses to play the sweet girl role when it benefits her, Harriet refuses to conform to expectations for her gender and age, unless she does so strategically as part of her spying. She moves in ways that best serve her goals, in ways not dictated by what society expects of her. In other words, Harriet the child moves loudly, whereas Harriet the spy exercises stealthy quiet.

Upon becoming Harriet the spy, her gaze is focused on others, and instead of making her presence felt in the space, she transitions to invisibility. After coming home from school and completing her after school cake-and-milk routine, "Harriet put her books down on the desk and hurriedly began to change into her spy clothes" (39), and it is her change of clothes that signals her change of space and transition as an actor in spaces. Harriet's "spy clothes" consist of an old sweatshirt, jeans, and sneakers, all in dark blue, and serve as her working uniform (39). The dark colors of her spy clothes help to give her outfit a stealthy quality, and she fixes her belt with hooks to carry all of her spy equipment. She feels most comfortable in this outfit, which is an ensemble of discarded items that Harriet rescued. Her mother "had actually gone so far as to throw these out, but Harriet rescued them from the garbage when the cook wasn't looking," refusing to part with items with which she feels a strong connection (41). This struggle between Harriet and her mother represents an attempt at

taming Harriet, and Harriet's mother loses. Similar to a superhero's costume, Harriet's spy clothes suggest a change in her persona and provide her with a sense of anonymity. In addition to her spy clothes, Harriet wears "a pair of black-rimmed spectacles with no glass in them" (41). Her glasses in particular emphasize her spy persona in that they emphasize her eyes and thus, her gaze. The spectacles have no glass, meaning no lens or obstruction for Harriet to peer through, and this suggests that Harriet has an unrestricted view as a spy. She doesn't look into a mirror but through glassless spectacles. When watching two of her regular subjects, the Robinsons, Harriet writes, "Boy, Ole Golly told me once that some people think they're perfect but she oughta see these two. If they had a baby it would laugh in its head all the time at them so it's a good thing they don't. Also it might not be perfect. Then they might kill it" (68). This moment exhibits Harriet's criticism of how others see themselves and reveals how differently a critical observer sees them. Even if her view appears mean at times, perhaps Harriet does not allow even politeness to restrict her gaze, and this unobstructed view allows her to see others more clearly than they see themselves.

Making a similar transition from a child among friends to a solitary agent, Harriet enjoys company most of the time, but asserts her independence as a spy. She explains to Sport, "No silly. Spies don't go with friends. Anyway, we'd get caught if there were two of us. Why don't you get your own route?" (10-11). Harriet asserts her independence and tells Sport that spying is a solitary activity. She neither requires nor wants a male companion's help, and even suggests that they will get caught if he comes, indicating that he lacks her competency in stealth while also suggesting that boys are not as invisible as girls in public or private spaces. Because they are given a higher position in mid-20th century Western social hierarchy, boys are more visible than girls. Harriet's choice may seem antisocial, but it

indicates that spying is an activity she engages in just for her. Had she invited Sport, Harriet would have undermined her own agency as a spy because she would have been looking alongside a male gaze instead of independently of it. Harriet's assertion also emphasizes her approach to spying as work and not play. As Tribunella articulates, Harriet "turns her critical gaze on the world in order to make sense of it, her family, and herself, and she observes the world around her by walking the streets of the city and later presenting her discoveries to others publicly" (74). To push Tribunella's ideas about the child flâneur further, Harriet's gaze seems more significant given her position as a female child who demonstrates a critical, feminine gaze. Harriet's role as a female child flâneur carries particular significance because by acting in this fashion, she directly opposes female "to-be-looked-at-ness" and instead, does the looking herself. Rather than accepting a position as spectacle, Harriet takes the active observer role and turns those around her into objects of her critical gaze.

Knowing that she, too, falls under Harriet's gaze, Ole Golly not only allows Harriet the space to pursue her interests, but she actively encourages them. She tells Harriet, "I'm going to take you somewhere. It's time you began to *see* the world. You're eleven years old and it's time you *saw* something" (9, emphasis is mine). Ole Golly is encouraging Harriet's gaze by telling her to look at the world. Harriet takes this advice to heart, pulling out her notebook at every opportunity to write her observations. Though her notebook belongs only to her and is meant to be private, Harriet's words hold power; she possesses the freedom to be as critical and honest as she wants and directs her gaze at anyone who comes within eyesight. She uses the power of her notebook to critique as well as to contain adults. On the first day of class, Harriet takes notes on her teacher, and when she is finished, "[s]he slammed her notebook shut as though she had put Miss Elson in a box and slammed the lid"

(33). From Harriet's point of view, Miss Elson seems entirely forgettable and easily contained within the confines of her notebook. J. D. Stahl discusses the concept of child perception in his work titled, "Satire and the Evolution of Perspective in Children's Literature: Mark Twain, E. B. White, and Louise Fitzhugh," with particular attention to the way "[a]dults are seen foreshortened, authentically distorted by the child's legitimate but limited point of view" (121). Similarly, Harriet's gaze represents a child's point of view as well as a female's. By writing and slamming her notebook around the idea of Miss Elson, Harriet subverts authority in a small way. She can think and write whatever she wants about the adults who possess control over the environments she is in, which gives a bit of control back to her.

Perhaps the recipient of Harriet's most critical and direct gaze, Mr. Waldenstein finds himself tongue-tied as a result of Harriet's stern stare. Watching Mr. Waldenstein court Ole Golly from the cover of bushes and trees in the park, Harriet scrutinizes him from a distance and refers to him in her notebook as "this silly little fat man" (Fitzhugh 99). When Ole Golly invites Mr. Waldenstein to dinner, Harriet does not appreciate the disruption to their dinner routine and his invasion of Harriet and Ole Golly's private space. Mr. Waldenstein tries to befriend Harriet and impress Ole Golly by making ingratiating comments upon his arrival, but "Harriet was sending so many nasty looks in his direction that he stammered a bit and stopped" (109). In this instance, Harriet quite literally disrupts a man's language with her gaze. Because he holds certain assumptions about little girls, Mr. Waldenstein relies on flattery to win over Harriet, but she quickly disavows him of those notions. During dinner, "Harriet discovered suddenly that Mr. Waldenstein had been staring at her steadily for some time. She decided to stare him down" (112). She sees the male gaze and chooses to return it,

again breaking down the active/male and passive/female binary with her choice to actively return his gaze. She indicates to Mr. Waldenstein that she will not comply to be a mere spectacle, but will return his look with a sharply critical one of her own.

In addition to gazing critically at the world, Harriet records her observations, and the act of writing, taking control of the phallic pen, and acquiring authority in her authorship is as important to Harriet's identity as spying. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* provides significant insight into the long-standing tradition of writing as a male practice. They explain,

Male sexuality...is not just analogically but actually the essence of literary power...But of course the patriarchal notion that the writer "fathers" his text just as God fathered the world is and has been all-pervasive in Western literary civilization, so much so that, as Edward Said has shown, the metaphor is built into the very word, author, with which writer, deity, and *pater familias* are identified. (4)

In the opening scene, the reader meets Harriet while she teaches her best friend Sport about being a writer and immediately links authorship with authority. Harriet describes the characters of the town she has created before beginning a storyline in which she deftly weaves the characters' lives together. When Sport questions Harriet's creative choices, she immediately establishes herself as the authority on the topic by stating, "Well, I'm going to be a writer. And when I say that's a mountain, it's a mountain" (4). To Harriet, her role as writer means that she possesses an authority that others, like Sport, lack despite his being a male. At one point in the town's story, a baby is born. Harriet narrates, "Dr. Jones says, 'You have a fine baby girl, Mrs. Harrison, a fine baby girl, ho, ho, ho'" (Fitzhugh 6). Sport wants

Harriet to make the baby a boy, but she refuses, “No, it’s a girl. She already has a boy” (6). When Sport asks what the baby looks like, Harriet responds, “She’s ugly” (7). This creative choice on Harriet’s part emphasizes her desire to bring more women into the world and suggests that Harriet rejects certain social norms. By insisting on the birth of a baby girl and then refusing to make her a beautiful little flower as baby girls are so often described, Harriet subverts a common literary compulsion to make female characters attractive so that readers will like them. Even if she fails to realize it, Harriet takes a feminist approach in her storytelling by suggesting that women and girls do not need to abide by cultural standards of beauty to be valuable characters in a story. Harriet’s style of storytelling also feels more realistic in that it avoids idealizing the characters. Harriet’s decision to make the only writer in her fictional town male suggests her awareness that writing is perceived as a male profession, but one that she pursues regardless of that perception. She informs Sport in no uncertain terms that she will be a writer when she grows up (Fitzhugh 4), but she keeps her writing private because, for now at least, Harriet’s writing is for her pleasure alone. Intending to eventually turn her private pleasure into a public profession, Harriet knows she has this phallogocentric tradition working against her literary ambitions, yet she derives a sense of authority from her chosen pastime.

In another form of storytelling, Harriet learns that lying can be an effective way to protect oneself. Ole Golly’s departure coupled with her classmates’ ostracism after reading her notebook makes Harriet feel isolated. In order to mend the situation and help Harriet survive her social setting, in this case, a sixth-grade classroom, Ole Golly advises her to lie. Robin Bernstein addresses the controversial advice in her article “‘Too Realistic’ and ‘Too Distorted’: The Attack on Louise Fitzhugh’s *Harriet the Spy* and the Gaze of the Queer

Child,” commenting that some critics have condemned the governess’s suggestion as immoral while others such as Bernstein see it as practical advice for social survival (3). In her essay, “The Feminist Writer as Heroine in *Harriet the Spy*,” Lissa Paul argues

But lying, of course, is part of the arsenal of weapons that the successful trickster heroine uses to survive. Penelope, for example, lies to save herself from lecherous suitors; and Charlotte in *Charlotte's Web* lies, or exaggerates, to save Wilbur. The trickster heroine must appear conforming and obedient, while at the same time remaining true to herself, her life, and her art. (70)

The difference between the heroines Paul references and Harriet is that Harriet is a child, and therefore, lying disrupts the notion of childhood innocence that so many critics and other adults value. Ole Golly, however, clearly sees that idea as nonsense. Harriet lies to survive both socially and emotionally and to continue writing. In a highly subversive act, she tricks the authorities (her parents, teacher, and principal) into thinking she’s playing by their rules, but in fact, does not change at all. When Harriet publishes her editorial column, her editorial pieces look much the same as her journal entries. For example, the first edition with Harriet’s entries includes items such as, “Jack Peters (Laura Peter’s [sic] father) was stoned out of his mind at the Peters’ party last Saturday night, Milly Andrews (Carrie Andrews’ mother) just smiled at him like an idiot” (Fitzhugh 290). Though she frames this writing as fiction, Harriet continues spying and writing as she did before.

Because she has access to people’s private lives and can write about them in her private journal as well as in the class newspaper, Harriet possesses the generative power of storytelling. Conscious of the authority writers possess, Harriet also assumes that authority when constructing her own narratives. Her observations do not simply reproduce, but create

stories about the people around her and when shared publicly, Harriet's writing impacts others' perceptions when she shares those stories. For example, when she writes for the school newspaper, she includes inserts like, "Janie Gibbs has won her battle. This should be a lesson to all of you in courage and determination. If you don't know what I'm talking about, then ask her" (Fitzhugh 290). Harriet uses her spying to gather and eventually distribute information about others, but only gives hints about major events; some writing she keeps just for herself. Instead of laying all her information bare in the public paper, Harriet offers tidbits and prompts her readers to follow up for more details. In this way, Harriet elicits action from her readership and becomes "a child who appropriates adult forms of literacy and transforms them to suit her own purposes" (Stahl 120). She uses her writing to poke fun at adults, employing an adult form of literacy—journalism—to document instances of adult foolishness. Harriet's newspaper entries also exhibit her returned gaze because the same adults that attempt to criticize or control her writing and movement, while indicating that they see a badly behaved child when they look at Harriet, now receive a glimpse of the faults that Harriet sees when she looks back at them. Instead of pouring the entire contents of her notebook into the paper, Harriet gives samplings, which are enough to appease the adults who monitor her behavior. Subverting ideas of child as powerless while simultaneously appearing to acquiesce to them, Harriet appropriates adult means of expression and uses them well. She has the power to impact her environment through her writing.

Though Harriet eventually receives adult approval for her writing, it is only after she agrees to call her writing fiction and to write within the parameters of a socially approved platform—her school's newspaper. While this change may seem initially like her surrender to the institution, Harriet continues her writing and spying and publishes entries that make

implications about others without fully revealing all of Harriet's information, as demonstrated with the above entry about Janie. The power in Harriet's words is threatening to adults (and other children) and to the social construct of the female child, but Harriet only pretends to yield so she can continue to write. Cixous urges women, "Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it. I know why you haven't written... Because writing is at once too high, too great for you, it's reserved for the great—that is, for 'great men'; and it's 'silly.' Besides, you've written a little, but in secret" (876). Harriet's parents view her writing habits as silly at first, and eventually strange. When experiencing a rare bonding moment with her parents, Harriet pauses to record her thoughts in her notebook. Upon looking up again, she sees her parents "staring at her in the strangest way," and Harriet observes, "You'd think I was doing something very funny. Ole Golly never acted like that" (Fitzhugh 170-1). This moment signifies that Harriet's position as a young female writer marks her as a social other because it reveals that even Harriet's parents find her affinity for writing to be a strange, even disconcerting quirk. Once the contents of Harriet's notebook are revealed, she receives strong chastisement for her pointed observations from her classmates, her school, and her parents. Her parents insist on restricting her writing, taking her notebook from her before school and placing it under the cook's watch, "who looked as though she might eat it" (236). The limitations placed on Harriet's writing mirror Cixous's description of, "Smug-faced readers, managing editors, and big bosses [who] don't like the true texts of women—female-sexed texts. That kind scares them" (877). Harriet's texts scare her parents enough to make them attempt to control her writing. Though much of what Harriet writes is mean, her private notebooks are meant only for her and consist of her honest thoughts.

Cixous suggests that females who take control of the pen, the phallus, are made to feel guilty, and Harriet certainly feels this way once she is shamed and shunned for her private writing.

Harriet's writing and her body are for her; she writes in secret for herself, to be true to herself, and develops her sense of identity through her occupations. Though the text focuses largely on Harriet's outward gaze, there are significant moments of inward reflection as a result of her observations, and this self-analysis suggests that Harriet's spying and writing serve as vital means of identity development. Tribunella suggests, "The questions that are prompted by Harriet's observations around the city are crucial to the formation of her identity, a task she ties implicitly to her writing" (76). By looking at others, Harriet reflects on their circumstances and life choices; then she occasionally wonders what this information means about her. When thinking about Sport's parental neglect and untidy home, Harriet writes, "Sport's house smells like old laundry, and it's noisy and kind of poor-looking. My house doesn't have that smell and is quiet like Mrs. Plumber's. Does that mean we are rich? What makes people poor or rich?" (Fitzhugh 52). Instead of relying on others to inform her of her place in the world, Harriet uses her collected knowledge to ask questions and make inferences for herself. As a writer and spy, she establishes her sense of self. Stahl elaborates

Her "professions" of spying and writing are expressions of her adventuresome sense of discovery. They are also her heuristic means of self-discovery: of measuring by adult roles (mostly negative) what she could, but does not want to become, and, in the case of her notebooks, of keeping in touch with her perceptions and emotions. As Lissa Paul has argued, and as is shown by her rebellion against the conformities expected of her, such as dancing lessons

(leading to debutante balls, acting properly with boys, etc.), Harriet is indeed a feminist writer. (121)

Through her storytelling, critical view of the world, and obtained mastery of the feminine gaze, Harriet embodies the role of a young feminist writer.

Guiding Harriet on the path to feminist writing, Ole Golly, also a character on the margins, tries to teach Harriet that the best way to subvert authority is often from within the system. Harriet's interactions with mothers in the text illustrate the pressure on Harriet to learn to behave like a young lady. Mrs. Gibbs informs Harriet that her mother supports her attending dancing school, and that as girls, she and Janie "need a few graces, you know, turning into young women any day now," indicating that Harriet is still viewed as a girl, not yet a young woman and that Harriet is not appropriately performing her gender (Fitzhugh 80). When Harriet strongly objects to enrolling in dancing school, she explains to Ole Golly that she doesn't want to wear "those silly dresses" instead of her spy clothes (Fitzhugh 87). Eventually, Ole Golly convinces Harriet to concede to her parents' wishes, and at first, it appears that Ole Golly sides with Harriet's parents and believes that Harriet needs to conform to social standards for young girls. Mr. and Mrs. Welsch certainly see it that way, thinking Ole Golly reasoned with Harriet on their behalf. However, examining what Ole Golly tells Harriet in order to convince her suggests a more subversive intention. She reasons, "Can you see Mata Hari in a gym suit? First of all, if you wear your spy clothes everyone knows you're a spy, so what have you gained? No, you have to look like everyone else, then you'll get by and no one will suspect you" (87). Ole Golly references Mata Hari, a Dutch exotic dancer and convicted spy, as a role model for Harriet, and convinces her with this historical example of another woman whose ill-mannered body could not be contained. Ole Golly's example is

interesting for a number of reasons, but particularly because, as an exotic dancer, Mata Hari embodied the sexualized spectacle Mulvey explains in depth: “Woman displayed as sexual object is the *leitmotif* of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip-tease...she holds the look, and plays to and signifies male desire” (19). While Hari operates well within this notion of erotic spectacle, as a spy she also used her visibility, and the invisibility this visibility gave her, to gather information and subvert authorities, even entire governments. Her chosen position as erotic spectacle functioned as a façade, a distraction to keep invisible her true nature and intentions, much like Harriet’s public writing serves as a distraction to adults that allows her to continue her private writing. Knowing that one day, Harriet will grow into womanhood with the burden of spectacle that comes with it, Ole Golly encourages her to look to women who found ways to resist and disrupt institutions from within the most seemingly oppressive positions of female subjectivity.

Some scholars may reasonably argue that this novel falls into the tomboy taming tradition as so many children’s and young adult texts have before it, but with the help of her therapist, Dr. Wagner, and Ole Golly—the only two adults who attentively listen to her—Harriet is offered a way to survive her social setting while continuing to write. Harriet’s behavior is received by most people in the text as undesirable and in need of correction, but as Judith McMullen explains, “Writing, an occupation which had to be ‘tamed’ out of earlier characters, such as Jo March (*Little Women*), helps these contemporary females order their worlds” (200). Because Harriet agrees to apologize to her classmates and teacher and to call her writing fiction, many may perceive this as a moment of surrender where Harriet finally accepts social indoctrination much like Jo March in *Little Women*. However, Harriet continues her spying and her very honest writing to the end, now publishing her notes for the

school to see. McMullen continues, “Harriet Welsch's writing is not so much ‘tamed’ as rechanneled. She has fought for and won the right to write what she observes, and she has also regained the respect of her friends” (203). Unlike Jo, Harriet does not have writing tamed out of her, but rather, she finds a way to continue her writing within a different contextual frame. Tribunella contends, “Apologizing for her apparent mean-spiritedness while continuing to report unflattering news about members of the class or community, Harriet is effectively able to hide out in the open” (78), which is not unlike Flavia de Luce in assuming the persona of the innocent girl when necessary. Again gesturing to the inevitable visibility that accompanies physical maturation and that will push Harriet into the male gaze before too long, Tribunella’s comment suggests that even when forced into the public eye, Harriet can choose to withhold some information and some of herself. Harriet wins at the end and does not compromise her identity, but instead disguises herself in order to negotiate her social setting while continuing her subversive behavior.

In her article “The Legacy of Peter Pan and Wendy: Images of Lost Innocence and Social Consequence in *Harriet the Spy*,” Judith John voices objections to Harriet that many critics and readers share: she is too mean, heartless, and lacks empathy as demonstrated by her written insults. John argues, “Harriet’s problem is not lack of information; it is too much innocence, too much thoughtlessness...She has a wonderful imagination, just as Peter does, but like Peter, Harriet lacks empathy and understanding” (170,171). While John makes a valid point in seeing many of Harriet’s actions as thoughtless, I disagree with both above statements because Harriet’s writing and observations indicate that she gives a great deal of thought to those around her. I would also hesitate to say that Harriet is “too” innocent; she’s a sheltered sixth-grader who tries to learn about her environment and asks adults tough

questions. Additionally, Harriet's sadness when observing Harrison Withers after he loses his cats suggests that Harriet is quite empathetic. When she sees Harrison sitting in an empty apartment, she thinks, "They got him...They finally got him" (Fitzhugh 164). Then Harriet writes, "I will never forget that face as long as I live. Does everybody look that way when they have lost something?" (164). Harriet recognizes Harrison's look of loss, and it affects her because she has experienced much the same thing with the loss of Ole Golly. Though Harriet often writes about others' differences to her, she also writes about the ways in which she might be similar to others, and she becomes invested in the lives of the people she watches. As she told Ole Golly, Harriet wants to learn everything about everything and this includes herself and her relationships to others.

One person in particular that Harriet seems to identify with, Harrison Withers, shows his own form of rebellion after the Health Department takes all of his cats away. Harriet sees this other outsider refusing to allow institutions to tame him, and this pleases her. She observes his moping—which mirrors Harriet's own after having her notebook taken from her—until one day, Harriet sees that Harrison got a new kitten. She writes, "Hee hee. They ain't going to change Harrison Withers," and walks away feeling "unaccountably happy" (Fitzhugh 273). The kitten symbolizes Harrison's act of rebellion and inspires Harriet to continue with her own. With her notebook safely back in her hands, Harriet writes, "Ole Golly was right, sometimes you have to lie...Now that things are back to normal, I can get some real work done" (300), and her statement suggests that with this new arsenal of social defiance added to her repertoire of knowledge, Harriet intends to continue her spying and writing with renewed fervor. They are not going to change Harriet M. Welsch either. As Paul puts it, "Harriet wins, both as a writer and as a participant in society. She turns the disaster of

the discovery of her notebook into a triumph” (69). Harriet’s ability to continue writing and keep her friends suggests that she has learned to successfully navigate her social setting, and like Harrison, she will continue breaking the rules one bit at a time.

Instead of viewing her position as female child as an obstacle to be overcome, Harriet uses her position in the margins to empower herself while further supplementing her power with her control of the pen. As figures that inhabit social margins, female children have the potential to conceive of a feminine practice of writing, and Harriet arguably demonstrates an early form of this ability. Cixous claims, “It is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain...It will be conceived of only by subjects who are breakers of automatisms, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate” (883). Harriet is a young girl on the periphery whose position as both female and child creates assumptions that her subjectivity is inherent and unopposed, and therefore, she appears nonthreatening. Harriet takes advantage of these automatisms to break them. As a female and child and writer, Harriet exists as a paradox in a patriarchal world. She controls the phallic pen while also occupying her social position as doubly othered because of her age and sex. Faced with her first major social obstacle, Harriet manages to remain true to herself and her art while avoiding suspicion, as Ole Golly instructs her. Harriet’s attitude at the end of the text and her claim that now is the time to get some “real work done” imply that she will continue to resist subjugation. When Ole Golly leaves, she tells Harriet, “Tears never bring anything back. Life is a struggle and a good spy gets in there and fights. Remember that. No nonsense” (Fitzhugh 132). Telling Harriet to be strong and embrace independence is Ole Golly’s form of love, but it also serves as a message to Harriet to persist in her fight.

Because she knows Harriet will continue to resist social norms, Ole Golly prepares her for the struggle ahead and instructs her to not allow nonsense, from herself or anyone else.

Fitzhugh's *Harriet the Spy* provides a story of a budding feminist and feminine writer, who offers a positive example of a young girl resisting predominant ideologies about children as innocent and girls as powerless. She refuses to compromise her identity and expresses joy when other rebels gain victories over their oppressors. Harriet immediately establishes her position of authority as a writer and takes her occupations of writer and spy very seriously, altering her behavior and appearance to best suit her goals, but not for anyone but herself. While her writing may seem cruel at times, Harriet writes her thoughts without restriction and does not allow for anything, even manners, to obstruct her gaze. Even when faced with severe ostracism, Harriet refuses to abandon her authorship and finds a way to appease her critics while remaining true to herself. Though she apologizes for her words and agrees to frame her writing as fiction, Harriet remains the same and is slowly learning that sometimes, the best way to subvert the institution is from within it. Knowing that she will eventually transition into womanhood, Harriet looks to examples of other strong women who assert the feminine gaze and utilize their knowledge as power and cause for action. In the end, Harriet picks up her pen again, ready to wield her words in assertion of her empowerment.

Chapter 3: Through the Microscope: Flavia de Luce's Investigations of Space and the Feminine Gaze in *The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie*

During World War II, extensive chemical knowledge eventually led to ultimate power and potential for global chaos. For the protagonist of a young adult mystery series, eleven-year-old Flavia de Luce, chemistry also provides a sense of power and agency, not only as a chaos-inducing tool, but also as a source from which to derive stability. Much like England after WWII, Flavia is semi-orphaned with a lost generation in the form of her deceased mother and a father completely stuck in the past. As representative of the new British generation and the accompanying technological advancements, Flavia fights to break free from outdated and stifling traditions, discovering a sense of agency in her aptitude for chemistry, particularly poisons. With England now in the hands of its younger citizens as its caretakers, Flavia, too, fulfills the role of caretaker to her grieving father, Colonel de Luce, and shell-shocked butler and jack-of-all-trades, Dogger.

In 1950, the socially proscribed “domestic angel” feminine gender role had taken a firm hold over English culture, and Alan Bradley has created a resistant young heroine who subverts the idea of women as nurturing and maternal and instead, is an expert in life-taking poisons and death. Like Pippi and Harriet, Flavia is positioned as doubly othered as female child, and, as a result of her sex and age, she is barred from the masculine adult spaces of science and crime investigation. Thanks to her intellect and self-assertion, Flavia establishes a connection with the public and political sphere of detectival work, and in doing so, crosses into a space typically designated to men. A budding chemist, she examines her environment down to a molecular level and extends the same intense scrutiny to the people and events that surround her. When Flavia stumbles across a dying man on her family's estate, she

immediately immerses herself in the murder investigation. The dead man Flavia discovers is still speaking with his last words and the evidence he leaves behind, and Flavia listens, relying on information left by the deceased to solve a murder mystery that puzzles the police team. Using her status as a female child to her advantage, Flavia subjects others to her gaze, takes ownership over the crime narrative with a journal of potential suspects, and gains access to information and spaces that the police overlook or are denied. She brings life to the dead man by continuing his story, reading and interpreting the messages he left behind in various forms. By asserting herself into the political space of crime investigation, Flavia actively subverts patriarchal norms in multiple ways. This final chapter explores the ways in which Bradley presents Flavia as a heroine largely influenced by British mystery writers of the Victorian era, as she asserts her agency through the use of modern science and boldly ventures into the professional spaces traditionally designated to men—chemistry and crime. I argue that Flavia, fully cognizant of the cultural expectations for young girls, exploits those assumptions, setting her gaze on those who oppress her, and engages in storytelling through her crime investigation. With this animating power, Flavia asserts herself into gender- and age-segregated spaces and subverts the patriarchal forces at play.

Though first published in Canada in 2009, *The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie* takes place in England in 1950, and Bradley's choice to place his narrative in the past allows the reader to examine the text from multiple perspectives. In the first chapter of their book, *The Distant Mirror: Reflections on Young Adult Historical Fiction*, Joanne Brown and Nancy St. Clair explain the powerful effects of placing the protagonist of a contemporary text in a historical setting, stating, "These historical protagonists usually begin in a position of extreme vulnerability created not only by their youth, but also, variously, by race, creed,

class, and gender. In confronting their respective circumstances and challenging the dominant structures of their society, each assumes more control of his or her life, gaining unanticipated strength” (4). By placing his story in a historical context, the author asks the reader to engage with the text through two lenses: as a contemporary reader and within the cultural implications of the text’s setting. Bradley places his precocious heroine in a historical moment that emphasized particularly restrictive ideologies concerning women and children. His choice of historical setting may ask readers to question how differently current Western societies view women and children, perhaps gesturing toward the myth of progress. However, the additional layer of adversity in Flavia’s life given the social and historical setting also makes her resistance and accomplishments especially impressive. If Flavia can assume control and strength within her mid-20th century environment, contemporary readers may feel more likely and able to do so in the present.

As in previous chapters, Jonathan Crary and Jean Gallagher’s ideas on women as spectators and observers prove helpful in thinking about Flavia’s ability to see her world critically. As Gallagher explains, texts produced during WWII offer “an emerging alternative model of fragmented or indirect visual apprehension, constructing their wartime female observers through failures, gaps, or blockages in vision” (6). Though not a direct observer of war, Flavia exhibits aptness for critical observation and resistance rather than mere spectatorship, placing her environment and all those in it under her microscope and scrutinizing everyone and everything in her quest for knowledge and agency. In her work on a genealogy of girlhood titled *Girls*, Catherine Driscoll explains her use of the term “‘feminine adolescence’ as different from ‘female adolescence’ (which is predominantly a discourse about puberty) with a degree of independence from any specific age category” (6),

and I distinguish between feminine and female in much the same way. Flavia could be considered an adolescent, though one who has not yet entered puberty, and I use the word feminine to indicate her gendered position in society rather than her inevitably maturing body. Flavia, not yet a “woman” by the socially constructed definition of a post-pubescent female, occupies a gap in the male gaze because she has not yet been fully indoctrinated into the patriarchal world. Additionally, because adults, specifically men, view her subjectivity as a given, and therefore, do not gaze at her critically, they fail to see her clearly. I use the term “feminine gaze” throughout this chapter to mean a critical look sent from an observer whom society marks as feminine, and I explore the ways in which Flavia takes advantage of the assumed subjectivity of her position as female child, which creates opportunities for her to return the gaze and infiltrate spaces.

Using chemistry as a metaphor for the indiscernible connections with the rest of the world, Bradley offers his heroine as an agent exploring those relationships. Flavia navigates her environment by testing these connections and cultivates her agency through the use of her problem solving skills. Describing her love of chemistry, Flavia claims, “What intrigued me more than anything was finding out the way in which everything, all of creation—all of it!—was held together by invisible chemical bonds, and I found a strange, inexplicable comfort in knowing that somewhere, even though we couldn’t see it in our own world, there was real stability” (Bradley 10). These two elements—connection with the rest of the world and finding stability—prove highly insightful when examining her relationships with her family members and household staff, her town, and the world in general. In post-WWII Europe, connections with the rest of the world were tenuous at best. To quote Paul Tibbet, a WWII pilot who dropped an atomic bomb, “War, the scourge of the human race since time began,

now held terrors beyond belief,” (Sheinkin 197) and in an era where the threat of atomic warfare pervaded daily life, stability likely seemed in short supply. Relying on her intelligence and will power, Flavia ventures into the world of crime solving, hoping to make sense of an instance of violence that has disrupted her personal sphere and bring stability back to her family’s home, Buckshaw.

When speaking with her father’s old headmaster, Flavia discusses the implied meanings of her and her sister’s names, and these meanings carry significant implications about her role as a powerful force. Telling her that learning of her sisters, the Shakespearean Ophelia and Greek Daphne, he admits, “[I]t was most gratifying to learn that your father retained enough of his Latin to name you Flavia. She of the golden hair” (277). What the headmaster fails to consider, however, are the historical implications of Flavia’s name. The *OED* defines “Flavian” as, “Of or pertaining to the Roman gens Flavia,” and knowing that Flavia has brown, not blonde, hair, this definition proves far more insightful. Instead of a tragic female figure, Flavia is named for the Roman emperors who gave Rome a fresh start after a civil war, the extravagance of Nero, and the Jewish and Germano-Gallic revolts, and as such, these emperors are generally thought of as a group responsible for restoring peace and stability (Boatwright 356-57). This alternate meaning supports the idea of Flavia as a powerful figure and an individual who values stability, particularly as a citizen of a state that recently experienced extensive violence and chaos. With her intelligence and mastery over chemistry or the connections comprising the entire world, Flavia symbolizes a restoration and a step forward.

Though it serves as a connection point between Flavia and others, her affinity for chemistry also sets her apart from everyone else. Different forms of these molecular bonds

represent her interpersonal relationships: she shares volatile bonds with her older sisters, Ophelia and Daphne, distant bonds with her father, Colonel de Luce, and reciprocal bonds with her family's butler, Dogger. When recalling her laboratory's former disuse, Flavia explains, "Uncle Tar's laboratory had been locked up and preserved in airless silence, down through the dusty years until what Father called my 'strange talents' had begun to manifest themselves, and I had been able to claim it for my own" (Bradley 8). Her father's sentiments about Flavia's knack for science perfectly sum up the overarching attitude toward women showing skill in traditionally male spheres, though he allows her to pursue the interest. By creating a heroine with pervasive knowledge in traditionally masculine fields, Bradley presents a challenge to the problem of culturally proscribed spaces that Nancy Armstrong describes in her essay, "Some Call it Fiction: On the Politics of Domesticity." She contends, "modern institutional cultures depend upon the separation of 'the political' from 'the personal' and...they produce and maintain this separation on the basis of gender—the formation of masculine and feminine domains of culture" (573). With Flavia's given interests, Bradley offers a heroine that works to dissolve those barriers, even if it makes her an outsider in her family and her society. With a well-equipped chemistry lab at her disposal, Flavia hungrily devours the secrets of the molecular and chemical world, asserting her power over its invisible connections and taking strides into the personal and political sphere of crime.

As Laura Mulvey explains in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, narratives follow a pattern that includes drama and pleasure, which "consist in the eruption of events that disorders the laws of everyday normality" (177). Flavia's story is enmeshed in two layers of narrative, one historical with the drama and disruption of WWII, and one fictional with the murder Flavia stumbles upon that both disrupts her normal life and gives her pleasure in solving. Both

situations have created instances of chaos that allow for moments of social transformation before and/or during the return to stability. These moments of disruption, chaos, and trauma allow for this young girl to turn her feminine gaze on others, particularly but not exclusively adult men, and develop an increasing sense of agency within her environment. Described as “Pippi Longstocking with a PhD in chemistry” (Bethune), Flavia subverts conceptions of girlish domesticity and docility with her advanced chemical expertise, using her in-home chemistry lab to break gender and age boundaries. Though she feels a sense of stability from the knowledge that all things are connected with invisible bonds, she claims, “My particular passion was poison,” which includes life-taking, potentially chaos-inducing substances (Bradley 10). Chemistry, which can both save worlds and destroy worlds, represents both chaos and order, and Flavia, as a master chemist, may choose which effect she wishes to produce. This knowledge gives her power and insight; she sees connections that others miss and looks for minute details that contain worlds of information.

Certainly a tool for understanding the modern world and all of its advancements, chemistry also serves as a connection to Flavia’s past, particularly with the women who made significant advances in asserting their agency in a patriarchal world. Absorbing the language and history of the science, Flavia “cheered aloud when [she] read that a woman, Madame Curie, had discovered radium” (Bradley 9). Quickly, Flavia teaches herself the science with the help of a chemistry book previously belonging to her mother, presenting a line of inheritance from one female trailblazer to another. Harriet de Luce, Flavia’s mother, owned the estate house and possessed all the family’s wealth before marrying her third cousin, Haviland de Luce. Bradley sets the foundation for strong women in the family by positioning Harriet as the economically powerful end of the marriage in addition to the

presumed intellectual and certain adventurer. Frequently off on international excursions, Harriet presents the reader with an exemplary woman largely representative of the advancements in gender politics during the 1920s and 30s. However, in 1940, when Flavia was one-year-old, Harriet disappeared, and the downfall of this spirited woman might be read as an allusion to the beginning of the decline in women's rights; she was on track to summit a literal and figurative mountain, only to fall down again. (Another possibility for Harriet's absence is to complicate the missing mother trope common in classic literature. The missing role model creates vulnerability for Flavia, but it also creates an opportunity for her to express independence and to solve the family mystery of her mother's disappearance⁴.) At eleven years old, Flavia exhibits her awareness of gender inequality and actively seeks to champion her sex, following in the footsteps of the strong-willed women before her.

Stemming from a Victorian literary tradition as well as a period of female repression and the "cult of the child" ideals, Bradley structures his heroine as doubly rebellious in that she is a female child in an adult man's world. In his work on the Victorian female detectives, Joseph Kestner comments, "Intelligence, self-assertion, daring and defiance marked a range of female protagonists in English fiction before the creation of Sherlock Holmes," pointing out that the female sleuth as a common literary figure predates the most well-known protagonist of the genre (3). Flavia appears to derive from these earlier female characters, ones who challenged the restrictive boundaries set by Victorian ideas of male and female spaces. As detectives, they must permeate both private and public/political spheres and

⁴ Flavia's mother's name, independence, and adventurous spirit seem to echo another famous literary Harriet—Dorothy L. Sayers's Harriet Vane. Both women were well-educated and active participants in male-dominated British environments. It seems likely that Bradley chose Flavia's mother's name in a deliberate gesture toward Harriet Vane, who could be seen as something of a literary mother to Flavia, another female sleuth.

display their critical thinking skills. Again pointing out the power of these female rebels, Kestner explains, “The fact that Holmes is not ‘superhuman’ but is rather defeated by Irene Adler gave the opening to create the female detectives who became his ‘sisters’ in the detectival tradition” (3), and it appears that Flavia behaves quite like Irene Adler, outwitting the head police inspector through means not entirely legal. Already a cultural outsider, Flavia fully embraces her status, abiding by her own code of ethics to deliver justice and solve mysteries as she sees fit, scoffing at the idea of herself as a sweet, innocent girl.

As possibly the strongest supporter of Flavia’s chemical interests, Dogger’s relationship with Flavia is one of reciprocal dependency. He, too, protects her when necessary but offers companionship and conversation, treating her as an equal in high contrast to the other adult characters. Arguably, it is Dogger’s sense of vulnerability that best allows for his ability to treat Flavia as an equal. Out of vulnerability comes the potential for the most meaningful relationships, ones in which both parties can be open and honest, and Dogger has found this bond with Flavia. In her entry on “Childhood” in *Keywords for Children’s Literature*, Karen Sánchez-Eppler discusses the history, sociopolitical debates, and academic discourse on childhood as a worldwide concept. She explains that the idea of “childhood dependency has frequently been used to naturalize a lack of autonomy, not only for the young, but for all sorts of subservient people,” including women as one subset of the oppressed factions (36). Flavia shatters this idea of childhood dependency from the beginning, but does so most noticeably in her ability to solve the murder mystery independently by relying on her own intellect. Saving both Dogger from his memories of the war and her father from an unwarranted murder charge, Flavia exhibits forms of autonomy that many of the adult figures lack. In addition to turning the parent-child dynamic on its

head, Flavia's mutually respectful friendship with Dogger also depicts her as a person on whom adults depend. As effectively illustrated by her interactions with her father and Dogger, Flavia is wise beyond her years, proving herself as a worthy ally, but one whom other adults constantly underestimate.

Perhaps the most enjoyable and cherished of Flavia's relationships, her connection with Dogger is one maintained with mutual respect and understanding and serves as a more constant example of Flavia's role as caretaker to the adults around her. She describes Dogger as "Father's man: his factotum," who had "survived two years in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp, followed by thirteen more months of torture, starvation, malnutrition, and forced labor on the Death Railway between Thailand and Burma where, it was thought, he had been forced to eat rats" (Bradley 19). Dogger visibly displays the horrific trauma that countless other individuals endured during WWII and, like England, remains persistently haunted by the memories of wartime atrocities. Bradley first introduces Dogger during one of his lapses into terror, shouting to unseen attackers in the estate gardens. Calling to him that she has them covered from her window and then that they have gone, Flavia chases away his invisible tormentors (20). She offers him a large glass of milk for comfort, even pulling a leaf from the cucumber vine to wipe his upper lip, and this moment pulls the reader's attention to Flavia's clear role as Dogger's caretaker and comrade. By accepting this role, Flavia also flips the child/parent or child/caretaker binary on its head. In many ways, the child in this story operates as a parent to the adults.

Flavia's agency as a child navigating the adult world undermines the Victorian sentiment of childhood innocence and dependency, which returned in the post-WWII era. In her book, *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children's Literature*, Marah

Gubar comments, “To be disturbed by precocity, as Dickens and many other socially conscious Victorians were, indicates one’s commitment to the idea that there ought to be a strict dividing line separating child from adult” (3). Constantly jumping over that line, Flavia delves into the adult worlds of chemistry and crime, finding that her competency in these spheres causes adults to rely on her, even if reluctantly. Dogger depends on Flavia as his co-conspirator as they are the only two other witnesses to Colonel de Luce’s midnight verbal altercation with the now-dead Horace Bonepenny. He trusts her as his ally in protecting the colonel, speaking to her as person-to-person rather than adult-to-child. Similarly, for a fleeting moment in a jail cell, Flavia’s father confides in her. Flavia narrates, “Here we were, Father and I, shut up in a plain little room, and for the first time in my life having something that might pass for a conversation. We were talking to one another almost like adults; almost like one human being to another; almost like father and daughter,” and because Flavia takes the initiative and requests to see her father, she is rewarded with the information she seeks (Bradley 191). Though initially wrong in her assumptions about her father’s involvement with Bonepenny’s demise, Flavia earns the opportunity to gather essential evidence and to strengthen a feeble bond with her father, the person she seems to crave approval from most, by actively inserting herself into the investigation.

In an additional instance illustrating her resistance to the innocent child sentiment, Flavia masters the art of cunning and lying. She caters her approach to each person from whom she seeks information, perfecting this craft in her communication with the adults, particularly Inspector Hewitt, to whom she tells the biggest, most child-as-innocent-crushing lie. “You must release Father at once, Inspector, because, you see, he didn’t do it,” Flavia spontaneously confesses in the inspector’s office (169). Taken aback, Inspector Hewitt

questions, “He didn’t?” to which Flavia responds, “No...I did. I killed Horace Bonepenny” (169). Though the inspector clearly doubts this confession, the strength of the intent behind Flavia’s admittance disarms him, and he grants Flavia’s request to speak with her jailed father. Moreover, Inspector Hewitt doubts Flavia’s guilt not because she is a child, but rather because of the lack of evidence, explaining to her, “Arguing against it...are your physical size, your lack of any real motive, and the fact that you haven’t exactly made yourself scarce” (355). While unbelievable, her fib still wins her access to her father and his information. This display of insight on Flavia’s part illustrates Bradley’s move in the direction of some Victorian writers who dispelled ideas of child primitivism. As Gubar elucidates, “Far from being wedded to the notion that a firm barrier separated child from adult, they enjoyed engaging in intimate intercourse with clever, artful children whose precocious abilities enable them to blur the line between innocence and experience” (151). With her knack for managing adults, Flavia adds her own smudge to that line, a smudge probably consisting of noxious chemicals.

Even when kidnapped, threatened, gagged, and bound by the murderer, Flavia never loses her nerve, but on the contrary, she rallies. Far from the traditional damsel-in-distress, Flavia remains calm in a terrifying circumstance when Frank Pemberton (a.k.a. Bob Stanley) captures and ties her up in a covered pit, even making light of the situation by recalling the Clameur de Haro: “*Haroo! Haroo, mon Prince! On me fait tort!*” (Bradley 315). She relies instead on thinking about what her hero, Marie-Anne Paulze Lavoisier, would do. Telling herself not to count on others to save her, Flavia thinks, “[T]here is a notable shortage of princes in England nowadays,” referencing both the decline in the formerly prominent noble class and in the number of young men generally as consequences of WWII (316). Depending

on her own ingenuity, she takes stock of her surroundings. In this instance of severe adversity, the reader watches Flavia become the heroine. By placing Flavia in a seemingly impossible situation to watch her think through the mystery and gather her inspiration from other strong women, Bradley provides the heroine that Dickens never had, giving power to the female character without weakening it later by scorning her differences (Golden 17). Her quick mind and unwavering determination prove that Flavia can handle any challenge personal, political, or otherwise.

Like the atoms and molecules she studies, Flavia is also physically small but immensely powerful. As a female, she is supposed to remain within domestic spaces, to be contained, yet she uses materials that are contained in some way (chemicals, solutions, etc.) to break those restrictions, and she infiltrates spaces and breaks boundaries from within the patriarchal system. Eager to get a closer look at the corpse in her family's garden, Flavia becomes fascinated with the crime scene investigation equipment, but Inspector Hewitt quickly dismisses her with a request for tea. Flavia remarks, "So that was it. As at a birth, so at a death. Without so much as a kiss-me-quick-and-mind-the-marmalade, the only female in sight is enlisted to trot off and see that the water is boiled," frustrated that the all-male police force thinks nothing of shooing a girl back into the house (34). Though Flavia concedes to the inspector's request, she does not remain in the house for long, and soon enters spaces all about town to collect information. In her powerful piece, "The Laugh of the Medusa," Hélène Cixous declares, "What happiness for us who are omitted, brushed aside at the scene of inheritances; we inspire ourselves and we expire without running out of breath, we are everywhere!" (878). Constantly omitted from the official investigation, Flavia gains her power from her marginality, acquiring information in ways that only she can because of her

position as a young girl. She is not restricted to a professional investigator's code of conduct and may move fluidly throughout her environment. Like the atoms and molecules she scrutinizes, Flavia, too, is everywhere.

Because she is a young girl and adults, especially men, consider her nonthreatening, Flavia often moves unseen, an invisible agent in the margins much like Harriet M. Welsh. This invisibility grants her power in allowing her access to spaces that highly visible individuals, policemen for example, cannot infiltrate with such ease. Immediately establishing a line of evidence, Flavia heads to the only inn in town to discover the dead man's name and succeeds in doing so because she creates a sense of camaraderie with the inn's young housekeeper, Mary. Flavia uses her identity as a young girl to appeal to the slightly older Mary, making her laugh and gaining her trust, as Flavia affirms in stating, "The gap had been bridged... Mary threw her arms round me and gave me a crushing hug" (Bradley 90). In establishing this connection Flavia gains a valuable information source—the inn's register of guests. Her appeal to friendship with the older girl exhibits that Flavia knows how to use her position as a female child even with older girls and young women. Invisible and highly effective, Flavia operates much like her chemical passion: poisons. These lethal chemical mixtures are often invisible as well and require expert scrutiny to be detected using senses other than vision. Well aware of various methods for poison detection, Flavia identifies the poison on the now-named Horace Bonepenny's breath by smelling it. Flavia, not only capable of invisibility, masters identifying the invisible as well, and these strengths suggest that her critical gaze extends beyond the visual and becomes a critical awareness.

As descendent of a literary tradition of female sleuths, Flavia operates similarly to Nancy Drew in particular, but wields autonomy that not even Nancy had. Jennifer Woolston

uses the example of this internationally famous girl detective to illustrate a girl successfully operating in the adult male world, stating, “Instead of being confined by the rules (or laws) of the father, Nancy is allowed to engage in adventures of her own choosing, thereby proving to be active within the adult world of decision-making” (175). Like Nancy, Flavia chooses her adventures and actively participates in adult environments, but unlike Nancy, she never asks for permission. At the beginning of the investigation, Flavia takes her first trip to gather evidence, thinking, “I could do what I needed to do and be back before anyone even realized I was gone” (Bradley 54). She knows where to look for clues in town and, more importantly, knows that if she were to ask for permission or tell anyone of her intentions, her father would most likely forbid it. Though both girls exhibit extensive agency throughout their environments, Flavia seems to possess the stronger independence. Additionally, Nancy falls firmly into the teenager category and could viably be referred to as a young woman, whereas Flavia remains a pre-menarche girl. Though Nancy’s ability to drive provides her with a reliable mode of transportation and mobile freedom, Flavia manages just fine with her bicycle, Gladys, and seems to derive her efficacy from her marginality given that a bicycle appears far less conspicuous than a car. Her invisibility empowers her, and instead of drawing attention to herself and asking to be allowed to investigate, Flavia permits herself.

Both the narrator and the protagonist in this novel, Flavia holds control over her own story and places her adventure under a microscope for both herself and for the reader. Bradley’s choice to make Flavia the narrator compounds Flavia’s agency because, as Kestner explains

[T]he narrator demonstrates not only the female protagonist’s expertise as detective but also her seizure of the language to record her own experiences.

Unquestionably, the empowerment by the female gaze is doubled in these texts, as the protagonist has the gaze in a professional sense but also reinforces the gaze by gazing at herself to chronicle her adventures. (22)

Flavia turns her gaze to the professional investigators, perhaps the biggest object of her scrutiny, and shows them to be not unkind but certainly not as skilled as she as they always follow one step behind. Inspector Hewitt finally recognizes Flavia's gaze and alters his own at the end of the case (and novel). This realization occurs in Flavia's "sanctum sanctorum," her chemistry lab (Bradley 11). Admitting him into her sacred space, Flavia watches him, describing for the reader, "Inspector Hewitt was standing in the center of my laboratory, turning slowly round, his gaze sweeping across the scientific equipment and the chemical cabinets like the beam from a lighthouse" (351). This moment effectively conveys Flavia's doubled gaze; she describes watching the inspector's view of her change. Representing the vastness of Flavia's abilities, the massive and expertly stocked chemistry lab clearly awes Inspector Hewitt, and he realizes that Flavia, too, is a critical observer of the world. So, he begins treating her as such, relying on her information and research to fit together the pieces that his investigative team overlooked.

In this act of allowing the inspector into her private space, Flavia subverts the patriarchal binary that Mulvey describes as active/male and passive/female because although Flavia is no longer invisible to the inspector in this moment (19), in seeing her clearly for the first time, he realizes that she sees him and the world around them in return. His previous assumptions about the girl he instructed to go make tea created a fragmented view of this intellectual individual. Where he only saw a feminine child a few days before, he now sees, much to his surprise, an active intellect. Inspector Hewitt decreases the condescension in his

gaze and looks at her with new respect once he understands that Flavia returns the gaze in an assertion of her intellectual authority. Thanks to her knowledge and self-assertion, Flavia establishes a connection with the political sphere in gaining the respect of the police inspector. The description of Inspector Hewitt's newly aware gaze as a beam from a lighthouse—which usually circles around without focusing on anything—provides an apt illustration of the temporality of his comprehension, and this flickering moment of recognition, however, soon passes. When Flavia attempts to negotiate with the inspector over information, he tells her, “There are times, Miss de Luce...when you deserve a brass medal. And there are other times you deserve to be sent to your room with bread and water” (Bradley 360), and with that, his assumptions have fallen back into place. Because the prevailing ideology lives firmly within him, Inspector Hewitt manages only an ephemeral glance at Flavia's true nature.

Knowing that she cannot rely on the authority figures around her to encourage her scientific pursuits, Flavia inspires herself to acquire an advanced repertoire of chemical knowledge and in doing so, generates new life within herself, then continues this generative process by constructing a narrative that accounts for Bonepenny's demise. She expresses her delight at discovering that all things are composed of tiny, invisible, chemical bonds and admits that when she realized the connection chemistry had to everything, her “life came to life” (Bradley 10). According to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's influential *The Madwoman in the Attic*, “In patriarchal Western culture...the text's author is a father...an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis” (6). Taking control of the phallic pen, Flavia pieces together the story that explains Bonepenny's death on her family's property. Because she continues building the man's story after his death,

Flavia's narrative, like the patriarchal author, possesses generative powers; she animates the dead by solving his murder. Though she hits a few snags along the way, Flavia eventually weaves the chain of events together, stating, "This was not a Grimm's fairy tale; it was the story of Flavia de Luce" (Bradley 332). She takes ownership over the narrative and differentiates her story from the Grimm brothers' writing, which often features vulnerable and wronged young ladies who need valiant men to save them. In Flavia's story, she saves others including her father and Dogger, though Dogger returns the favor at the end of the novel. Because it is Flavia's story, she speaks life into herself, animating herself while also animating a man whose life recently expired, and takes an active role as a heroine rather than a damsel in need of rescuing.

By wielding the pen and owning the story, Flavia becomes the authority. She writes and in writing she animates, giving life to herself and the dead man, but she also possesses power in what she refrains from writing, as some information she chooses to keep as leverage. For example, when Inspector Hewitt asks Flavia why she believes the poison remained in Bonepenny's sinuses, she thinks, "I did have a reason, but it was not one I was willing to share with just anyone, particularly the police" (358). She has considerable power and continues asserting her agency because she holds such valuable information. Here, Flavia also subverts the idea of females as life giving in that she refrains from speaking or creating new information for Inspector Hewitt. Instead, she withholds. Though Flavia holds the power to animate and bring life, she can also choose not to use it, and, arguably, it is this choice and Flavia's awareness of it that make her such a formidable force. Flavia's multi-faceted skillset and intelligence indicate significant character complexity. The inspector omitted her from the beginning, withholding information and access, and Flavia happily rebelled by inserting

herself into investigative spaces, ultimately receiving the opportunity to return his silence as well as his gaze.

According to Cixous, Flavia's speech acts and written discoveries function as her seizure "of the occasion to *speak*, hence her shattering entry into history, which has always been based *on her suppression*. To write and thus to forge for herself the antilogos weapon. To become *at will* the taker and initiator, for her own right, in every symbolic system, in every political process" (880). Many of Flavia's speech acts function as means through which to insert herself into women's history and give a nod of respect to it. When Flavia investigates the tower at her father's boyhood school, one of the groundskeepers hears her swearing and immediately assumes that a boy has snuck into the tower. Flavia realizes that no one suspects a young girl of creeping around an old school at night, and she avoids being caught long enough to obtain the information she needs. Once the inspector removes Flavia's cap, the groundskeeper exclaims, "Why, it's only a girl!" (Bradley 239), voicing the historical and collective view of girls as "only" while commenting on her lock-picking skills and presence in "off-limits" spaces as something to be scolded. Inspector Hewitt asks Flavia where she learned to pick locks, and she irreverently responds, "Long ago and far away" (239). This retort is not merely cheeky, but incredibly insightful, and mirrors Cixous's statement, "Now women return from afar, from always," when they write (877). Long ago and across the world, women and girls learned to move beyond the barriers, physical and metaphoric, established to suppress them. In taking the occasion to speak and force herself into historical spaces, Flavia works to bring her fellow feminine subjects from "without" and from "below" men (Cixous 877). Possessing a highly logical, scientific mind, Flavia often employs antilogos responses like this one when responding to male authority figures that

seek to tame her, not responding illogically but against the one-definition, phallogentric logic that the men calling her “only” a girl exhibit. With this short speech act, she bends the masculine/logic and feminine/illogic binary during her active participation in a political crime investigation.

Flavia’s gravitation towards crime solving, particularly in figuring out the cause of a man’s death, plays with a connection that the phallogentric Symbolic order strings between death and women/girls. As Cixous explains, “Men say that there are two unrepresentable things: death and the feminine sex” (885), suggesting that the feminine sex is linked with death in that they both escape definition and total comprehension. While this idea severely others the feminine sex, it also grants power. Being part of that which is unrepresentable to men grants Flavia an additional layer of elusiveness; she, too, is a mystery. When she meets her father’s old headmaster, he warns her of his lacking conversational skills with little girls, positing, “A boy is content to be made into a civil man by caning, or any one of a number of other stratagems, but a girl, being disqualified by Nature, as it were, from such physical brutality, must remain forever something of a *terra incognita*. Don’t you think?” (Bradley 275). In response, Flavia adjusts her expression into what she “hoped was a Mona Lisa smile” (275), responding in kind to his assumptions about her mysterious nature. Remaining fully cognizant of his perception of her, Flavia obtains the information she needs from the headmaster and continues on with her investigation. Knowing that Flavia exhibits superior mystery-solving skills to the male adult investigators reinforces her connection with death; perhaps she is better suited to mystery solving because she also exists as a mystery in a male world.

A proven chemistry expert and crime-solver, Flavia defies the norms of a 1950s, young British female with her scientific savvy and outspoken charisma, and she quickly takes the upper hand when adults underestimate her. Employing science and her shrewd deductive reasoning skills, Flavia manages to outsmart a team of male detectives and earns respect from the male professionals of the fields in which she flourishes. Bradley provides a young heroine inspired by the Victorian female detectives and much in the spirit of Pippi Longstocking and Harriet M. Welsch, offers her as a successful example of positive female identity and agency, rejecting the Golden Age ideology concerning children. The connections she holds with the past provide her with the inspiration and strength to move forward, offering a positive example of progress for her gender, her country, and her fellow chemists. Empowered and irreverent heroines such as Flavia counter centuries of prolific literary examples that proscribe oppressive gender norms to young feminine readers and demonstrate that even during a time of culturally constructed subservient feminine identity, there were strong female protagonists that resisted oppressive institutions and ideologies. Out of the chaos caused by WWII came opportunity for social change, and Flavia actively participates in the balance between chaos and order, deciding which effect serves her best. With her scientific savvy, knack for infiltrating restricted spaces, and unwavering scrutiny, Flavia embodies an intelligent, capable, young girl living in a mid-20th century environment, and successfully subverts patriarchal norms, hopefully inspiring contemporary readers to follow suit.

Conclusion

Though composed in different locations and time periods, Lindgren's *Pippi Longstocking*, Fitzhugh's *Harriet the Spy*, and Bradley's *The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie* were strongly influenced by the social changes that the chaos of WWII instigated. Sweden, the United States, and Great Britain experienced varying degrees and types of chaos and trauma during the war years, but all looked toward Victorian social ideologies after the war to reconstruct what many felt was an era of social stability. From the end of WWII through the beginning of the 1960s in all three countries, women were encouraged to remain in domestic spheres and forfeit social and economic agency to men who retained access to and sovereignty over public spaces. Patriarchal views of women and children confined them to restricted notions of gender and age roles where conformity was favored over individuality and self-advocacy. Many individuals resisted this subjugation, however, and this period also became an opportunity to challenge socially proscribed notions of femininity and childhood.

Pippi, Harriet, and Flavia subvert ideas of "domestic angels" and innocent, powerless children in three different societies through similar methods. As young girls, they occupy positions as doubly othered but often use their underestimated positions to their advantage and employ their remarkable intellect and abilities to resist subjugation. Each girl possesses mastery over at least one traditionally masculine skill and perpetuates nuanced concepts of gender identities and expressions. Because they are girls and not physically mature women, Pippi, Harriet, and Flavia have yet to be fully indoctrinated into the patriarchal world under the male gaze, and these positions grant them a level of invisibility. Refusing to abide by ageist and gendered restrictions on their access to spaces, the girls move throughout private and public spheres, often entering environments that are typically restricted from both

women and children. Pippi's strength and humor, Harriet's spying and writing, and Flavia's scientific expertise and detectival work illustrate their ability to bend (and often mock) gender conventions and defy authorities and institutions that seek to tame them. With their infiltration of spaces, fragmentation of the male gaze, and seizure of language, these heroines set a precedent for readers to follow, and these texts offer possibilities for social disruption in the name of female child empowerment.

Subversion for the sake of beneficial change is the name of the game for Pippi, Harriet, and Flavia. Pippi leads the way with her carnival performances and exaggeration of women as spectacles, which cause a blockage in the male gaze. As later characters, Harriet and Flavia take this blockage further and exhibit critical feminine gazes of their own. These moments of critical awareness are important because they present possibilities for girls to resist and critique patriarchal forces at play, providing opportunities for readers to observe the many social shortcomings mocked within the texts while considering how similar faults are operating in their own lives. In many ways, the three girls are unusual children placed within conventional worlds, but perhaps readers see them as so unusual because there continues to be a lack of powerful, boundary-bending girls in children's literature. While these heroines are not alone in their subversive endeavors, I hope that as children's literature and scholarship continue to expand, new generations of rule-breaking girls join Pippi, Harriet, and Flavia's company. After all, efforts for social progress would be far less enticing without a dash of irreverence.

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