

POWER AND RESISTANCE IN *THE THORN BIRDS*

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**ABSTRACT**

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In *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Michel Foucault presents several theories concerning power, subjectivity, and truth. This thesis considers these theories in relation to Colleen McCullough's *The Thorn Birds*, a chick lit novel written in 1977. Examples from McCullough's text show how Foucault's theories apply to modern literature. A discussion of the female reader and her interaction with the chick lit text also shows how Foucault's theories can be applied in modern society.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Discourse is not just the act of speaking. Rather it is the combination of who does the speaking, how the discussion is held, what context it is held in, and who decides what is said. Discourses are more than just conversations; they are the networks in which people identify who they are and what they believe. These discourses cause their speakers to submit to hidden rules and regulations. According to Geoff Danaher, a discourse “generally refers to a type of language associated with an institution and includes the ideas and statements which express an institution's values. Discourse is the ideas and statements that allow us to make sense and see things” (x). Every day people are subjected to discourses that shape their thinking about economics, family, politics, religion, and sex. People participate in a work as a network of discourses which they are taught from childhood.

As speakers, we have the opportunity to gain insight as we question and consider the discourses we live within. By talking about politics, religion, or sex, people share their own ideas and in turn hear the ideas of others. This interaction may lead to a shared experience where knowledge could be transferred among speakers. It is this experience that allows individuals to consider their subjectivity. Subjectivity in this case is how one determines self meaning in relation to what is outside of oneself. By considering this position, one can reflect and gain insight into the world in which she lives. Michel

Foucault focuses on sexual discourses in his text, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. This text is an examination of the archaeology and genealogy behind the thought and study of sex. Foucault is interested in how people become subjects through the discourses of sex and how they work through discourse to understand how their identity is created by institutions and discourses. In this case, subjects are people placed within or ruled by an operation or process. Foucault argues that we are never actually individuals; rather, individuals are products of discourse. It is through discourse that individuals attempt to determine their self identity. By looking at the history of sexuality from the ancient Greeks to the twentieth century, Foucault attempts to show how people's identity is created and how the discourses they participate in are a direct influence on that identity. He argues against a commonly held belief of repression, meaning that sex is taboo and not talked about in public. Instead, he believes that since the seventeenth century discourses about sex have multiplied and have led to numerous regulations concerning people and their activities.

The concept that people are always living under the control of a power structure and discourse centers on the idea that discourses are a multiplicity of connecting thoughts and ideas which are inscribed on each person. People are shaped and defined by concepts and ideas set down by their parents, church, school, and government officials. For example, a middle-class, white, Republican male who attends church is taught that God created man and that God's rules and expectations of morality and ethics must guide each person. He also typically believes that taxes for social services are unnecessary and all able-bodied people should work for a living. On the other hand, a working-class, African American male, who descended from slavery, may believe that he has been persecuted

and that society now owes him. He wants and desires social services to help himself and his family and believes that government doesn't do enough to help the poor. Foucault would argue that the values of these men are not their own, but rather a product of the discourses they live within. Danaher notes in his book, *Understanding Foucault*, that "Discourses can be understood as language in action: they are the windows, which allow us to make sense of, and 'see' things. These discursive windows shape our understanding and our capacity to distinguish the valuable from the valueless, the true from the false, and the right from the wrong" (31). He argues that Foucault believes individuals are not "self-governing subjects," but rather products of a system and therefore, the way individuals understand themselves comes from the discourses which influence how they act, speak, and make sense of things (Danaher 31). Although Foucault believes people are constantly trapped within discourse, he also notes that by questioning, criticizing, and reflecting one can determine the institutions behind discourses that influence one's thoughts and actions. People have the opportunity to experience how force relations, or the institutions in power, such as church, government, family, and school create control. People can then individually seek knowledge and power to determine the truth behind what they believe to be their own conversations, tactics, and actions.

In trying to understand Foucault, one can apply his discussion of societal discourse to an example from a modern-day literary text. Readers can find different characters lives and careers being shaped by different discourses as mentioned above. The reader can attempt to discover whether the character accepts her position within discourses surrounding her life or if she attempts to understand the discourses controlling society and in turn reflect on her role within society. Admittedly Foucault's theories are

meant to speak about whole societies and not individual people; however, to see the theories in action, one must apply them on a smaller scale. In making Foucault's social theories more manageable, this thesis will study a mini world and society by examining the setting, characters, actions, and discourses within the text of Colleen McCullough's *The Thorn Birds*. McCullough, an Australian-born writer, grew up in New South Wales, the setting of *The Thorn Birds*. As her second novel, *The Thorn Birds* became an international bestseller and hit the small screen as a television mini-series in 1983.

Studying the novel will provide the reader an opportunity to see how Foucault's theories on power, knowledge, and determining identity work in modern literature. In looking at these elements, this thesis will consider McCullough's writing and how it reflects the theories Foucault proposes. In addition to looking at McCullough's writing, this thesis will examine the reader's role and the institutions, and discourses she is influenced by.

As Foucault notes, one determines a sense of self in relation to those discourses placed upon the individual. Chick lit works as a discourse of self discovery and romance which the reader participates in by reading the novel. Rather than a discourse of speech, the reader participates in a discourse of reading and writing. The reader must decide what she will read, when and where she will read, what context she holds the text in and finally who and what influences the texts she reads. Therefore, the reader, just like the characters, lives within discourses that affect her decisions. She experiences the text and the operation of power within the discourse of sex Foucault describes and thus, in my opinion, questions the force relations and discourses which constrain her. In considering this connection, this thesis will bring Foucault's theories back from the text to the modern-day society Foucault considers.

The term chick lit was officially coined in the 1990's by Cris Mazza as a genre of literature geared towards women. However, chick lit has existed longer in the form of romance novels. Both kinds of texts have similar structures, characters, and endings. The basic plot includes a young, inexperienced woman who meets a handsome, wealthy man. The two face multiple obstacles, including hostility and separation, but they eventually reconcile their differences and go on to live happily ever after (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 490). The female heroine is typically intelligent and able. She in turn finds a man who notices her qualities and is capable of tending to her the way she wants and needs. These texts exemplify a larger discourse on romance which tells individuals how they should experience the physical, sensual, and emotional love between a man and a woman.

It has been assumed that because of their formulaic nature, chick lit novels are not substantive. Rosalind Gill and Elena Herdieckerhoff note in their article, "Rewriting the Romance: New Femininities in Chick Lit," that the romance novels of the 1960s and 1970s "were seen ... as a seductive trap which justified women's subordination to men and rendered women complicit in that subordination" (490). However, one must look beyond the characters and plot and consider the text's impact on the reader. She chooses to read certain texts and is affected by the text for different reasons. Janice Radway notes in her book, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, "it is necessary to ask what 'precisely is getting said,' both to readers and to others each time a woman turns her attention away from her ordinary routine and immerses herself in a book" (8). According to Radway, reading and choosing to read chick lit is a result of the reader attaching her thoughts and feelings to symbols within the text. The reader immerses herself in the text and has the opportunity to find a new perspective on the

powers which rule her. The concept of attaching thoughts to symbols is similar to Foucault's belief that individuals are forced to attach their thoughts and actions to the discourses they have learned. It can be argued, therefore, that Radway's symbols are the same discourses individuals are taught from family, government, school, and church. Radway writes, "Comprehension is actually a process of making a meaning, a process of sign production where the reader actively attributes significance and signifiers on the basis of previously learned cultural codes" (7). She notes women are able to see themselves within the text and substitute themselves for the heroine. They in turn reap the desirable effects of the text as the leading man comes to show his undying love for the heroine. Gill and Herdieckerhoff note that, according to Nancy Chodorow, that the need for "emotional care is resolved in fantasy through the figure of the nurturing male lover who can meet her needs and satisfy them" (491). They also note that "one of the pleasures of romance reading is wish-fulfillment in which, in 'escaping' into the heroine's life, readers vicariously experience what it is to be really loved and nurtured the way they crave" (492).

Colleen McCullough's *The Thorn Birds* fits within the parameters of the chick lit novel as described above. However, unlike most formula romances of the time, her text is deeply layered with multiple plot and character conflicts following four decades of the lives of the Cleary family members. The heroine, Meggie, moves with her family to the Australian Outback to run the family business, Drogheda, a large plantation. Meggie; her mother, Fee; her father, Paddy; and her brothers – Frank, Bob, Stuart, Hughie, and Hal – all move to the plantation at the behest of her aunt, Mary Carson. Upon their arrival, they meet Father Ralph de Bricassart, a Catholic priest, who serves Drogheda and the

surrounding area. It is at the precise moment Father Ralph picks Meggie up to carry her to the car that the two become linked, only to face a lifetime of hurt and frustration.

Mary Carson eventually dies and leaves the Drogheda estate to the Catholic Church naming Father Ralph executor of the estate and further sealing his connection with the young Meggie. As Meggie grows and matures, so does her love for Father Ralph and in turn his infatuation and eventual love for her. The family endures multiple losses including a devastating fire which kills Paddy, and also Stewart, who is gored by a wild boar upon finding his father's body. The story continues by telling of Meggie's marriage to Luke O'Neill, her affair with Father Ralph, and the birth of her children: Justine, Luke's daughter; and Dane, Father Ralph's son.

McCullough's text delves into the complicated relationships of Fee and Paddy, Meggie and Father Ralph, Justine and Dane, and finally Justine and Rainer Moerling Hartheim. Within the text, each character lives within a web of discourses and institutional forces that determine who the character is, what he or she values and how he she acts and reacts within the text. The reader thus gains insight into Foucault's theories through the character's tactics, actions, and conversations.

This thesis examines the role of discourse within McCullough's text and use Foucault's theories to show how the discourses affect the characters in the novel. In examining *The Thorn Birds*, one can apply some of Foucault's theories to show how characters live and experience the discourses around them. By also looking at the female reader, one can see that she connects to the characters and thus experiences the same discourses seen in McCullough's text. Through reading the chick lit novel, the reader

receives a new perception of the power and discourses she lives within, thus gaining insight into Foucault's theory for herself.

Chapter two explains the repressive hypothesis and Foucault's opposition to the theory's belief that discourse frees individuals. The chapter also looks at Foucault's theory of power, including the juridico-discursive, a sovereign power from above, it presents the limitations of the juridico-discursive nature of power by looking at McCullough's characters and how they act and react to the discourses and powers which surround them.

Chapter three looks at two forms of confession and how confession affects the power structure facing individuals. The chapter begins by looking at confession as an act of penance in which Catholics release the secrets they harbor about themselves under the misguided belief of freeing themselves of the burden. In this instance, confession serves as a form of discourse shaping elements within a religious institution. The discussion continues by looking at how confession changes from a voluntary release of secrets to a required, questioning method, that institutions use to gain information about individuals. In this section, examples from McCullough's text show the methods for the extraction of answers.

Chapter four examines the second form of confession, discussed in the previous chapter, thus bringing the role of confession back to Foucault's argument that individuals are always caught within discourse and power structures around them. This chapter looks at interpretation and how in making confession a tool for science, the confessor no longer receives knowledge and power, but rather the one listening to the confession receives them. As a result, a game of truth is created in which the confessor must have another

person explain his confession and its validity. Also this chapter looks at the knowledge-power system to explain how gaining knowledge and power is a circular process the individual moves within. It traps the individual in the web of discourses and power. By looking at examples from McCullough's text, the reader can see how this circular notion of power works to entrap the individual and how she attempts to question and resist the power structure she lives within.

In chapter five, the reader is analyzed. This chapter looks at the role of the reader and how she interacts with the text in order to determine a sense of herself beyond the discourses within which she lives. By taking examples from McCullough and situating the reader's interaction one can see how Foucault's theories work within the larger realm of society. This chapter is designed to bring Foucault's theories back from the hypothetical world of *The Thorn Birds* and into the world and society Foucault considered in his writing.

Chapter six concludes the discussion of McCullough's text with a summary of the theories Foucault proposes. It also connects back to the elements of how individuals obtain truth in order to understand their subjective position to power structures and discourses that surround them. A final example from *The Thorn Birds* looks at Justine, the youngest Cleary woman, and shows how her resistance to the power situations she lives within causes her to reflect and question her position as a subject to the operation and processes of family discourse, thus choosing to resist her subjugation unlike family members who accepted their familial roles. By looking at the final relationship between Justine and Rainer, a German diplomat, the reader sees how reflection and criticism can

create understanding and provide her with a new perspective on the power structures and discourses influencing her life.

## CHAPTER II

### POWER: ITS CREATION AND WORKINGS WITHIN SOCIETY

Before looking at Foucault's theories on power, one should understand the commonly accepted concept of the repressive hypothesis and Foucault's arguments against it. Foucault believes that a need to speak and a need to hear have led to an increase in the number of discourses on sex rather than the commonly held belief in a repressive hypothesis concerning sexual discourse. The repressive hypothesis states that political and religious entities required that general society must "ensure that one did not speak of sex" (HS 17). Therefore, an individual could only speak of sex at certain times, such as making a confession or confiding in a therapist. This act of speech, according to the repressive hypothesis frees the individual because she now knows who she is and what she is doing. Supporters of the repressive hypothesis argue that power dominates people, but knowledge and truth set people free. This means that ideological powers control what people can and cannot say and that in order to overcome these powers one must learn and speak up against the powers that be. Foucault doesn't believe this. He believes that power is all encompassing and there is no escaping it. Although there is no escape, one can understand discourse and the how power determines self identity through receiving a small understanding of one's role as a person influenced by discursive

processes. Therefore

power comes from below, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations ... One must suppose rather that the manifold relationships of force that take shape and come into play in the machinery of production ... are the basis for wide-ranging effects of cleavage that run through the social body as a whole. These then form a general line of force that traverses the local oppositions and links them together. (HS 94)

This means that speaking to a priest or therapist does not free an individual, but rather places her within more restrictive discourse and power structures.

In order to evaluate the larger realm of Foucault's discursive theories, one may look to an example and apply the concepts to a miniature society, in this case, *The Thorn Birds*. In his analysis of discourse, Foucault realizes a larger, juridico-discursive power often rules society. This power means that discourses such as those emanating from the government, church, and educational system supply individuals with a base of knowledge and values and determine how the individuals live and what they believe. In the case of the juridical theory of power, Foucault notes that power can be possessed in the way one possesses a commodity, and it "can therefore be transferred or alienated, either completely or partly, through a juridical act or an act that founds a right" (SMBD 13). He adds that power, according to the juridico-discursive theory, is something that one can hold and surrender in order to constitute control. At the same time, he notes the limitation of the juridico-discursive power saying it is only useful as a power to an extent. This power from above is minute in relation to the power structures taking place at the local level. Power beyond the juridico-discursive is the result of multiple force relations within

the world individuals live in. Power is “the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (HS 93). Within these situations, the power relations join and break apart, forming chains in which knowledge is gained, confronted, transformed, and strengthened (HS 92). It is this chain of power that moves it beyond the juridico-discursive theory and into the practice of everyday lives. For Foucault, power is something individuals live through and experience through their actions and decisions. By looking at examples from McCullough’s text, one can see how the juridico-discursive works as a power from above. One can then use examples from the text to see the limitations of this power and see how individuals move and operate within power systems at the local level.

McCullough creates a basis for the juridico-discursive power structure when she places her characters as heads of a large economic institution and a Catholic parish. In the case of Father Ralph, he is the acting priest for Gillanbone and serves as the spiritual leader of the other characters. He is therefore bound to the rules of the Church and the vows he took to serve God. Mary is the head of Drogheda, a large plantation. “As Michael Carson’s widow she was indisputably a queen ... Not Mary Carson’s idea of living, to play second fiddle. So she had abjured the flesh, preferring to wield power” (McCullough 72). McCullough attempts to show the limitations of the juridico-discursive power in the final interlude between Mary and Father Ralph. During their exchange, Mary throws herself at Father Ralph before condemning him to his fate as a priest struggling to follow the discourses and rules set down by the Church.

McCullough creates two discourses surrounding the exchange of Mary’s will. First, she refers to a juridico-discursive power by discussing a legal document that lays

down the rules regarding her financial holdings. Second, McCullough creates a discourse of revenge when she has Mary, the scorned lover, create the will which affects the other characters. Mary Carson forces Father Ralph to decide if he will betray the Cleary family and use her fortune to launch his career in the Church. Mary's emotional words serve as an example of the romance discourse she operates within when she says, "You're wrong. I have loved you. God, how much! Do you think my years automatically preclude it? Well, Father de Bricassart, let me tell you something. Inside this stupid body I'm still young—I still feel, I still want. I still dream" (McCullough 182). The repetition of the word "still" here implies that the sexual nature within Mary has increased or at least endured rather than decreased with time. Mary doesn't just "still" exist sexually, rather she feels, wants, and dreams. These activities imply vitality and youth. By throwing herself into Father Ralph's arms and kissing him, Mary diminishes her power as queen of Drogheda, but gains power through her romantic discourse. Thus she approaches Father Ralph as a woman longing for a man. However, because of his role as priest, living within the structures of the Church, Father Ralph can not respond to her desires. This brief lapse of power is rectified as Mary hands Father Ralph the envelope with her new will and final love letter. She is, as Foucault puts it, "transferring her power" to him not only sexually, but legally through her will.

McCullough also addresses the juridico-discursive power when she has Mary state that the will was witnessed by Tom, the fencer, and "no court in the land will deny its validity, I assure you" (190). McCullough shows the rules of power which Foucault addresses by having the characters take part in "an exchange of contracts" (SMBD 13). Foucault argues that under the sovereign power structure, power is gained and lost in the

exchange of these types of documents. This legal contract lays out the way in which Father Ralph will be named as executor of the estate and how he will be charged with providing for the Cleary family financially, thus giving him increased power over the family.

By creating a spiteful love letter, McCullough adds a discourse of revenge to the legal discourse surrounding the will. Thus, in transferring her will to the Church Mary takes her anger out on Father Ralph by saying, “Very simple, my dear Father Ralph. I wanted absolutely no one to know of this will’s existence apart from you, and me. This is the only copy and you hold it. Not a soul knows that you do. A very important part of my plan” (McCullough 191). McCullough implies Mary’s affection and anger through the words Mary uses. The phrases “absolutely no one” and “only copy” imply that her tactics mean to force him into a decision of solitude; at the same time, she lovingly refers to him as her “dear Father Ralph.” He cannot seek assistance, and he will suffer no matter what choice he makes. Mary thus maintains power in this exchange because she refers to and uses a discourse of revenge to set up the situation. Father Ralph must now think as a priest, adhering to the rules the Church has set down for him, which require him to remain celibate, poor, and obedient. He must face the discourses he vowed allegiance to and thus place the Church before his own personal desires.

McCullough continues to address the juridico-discursive power structure when the will is read and the family is forced to make a decision regarding its well-being. Rather than contesting the will and receiving all of Mary’s vast holdings, the Cleary family simply submits to the Church as Paddy says, “No, Harry! I couldn’t do that. The property was hers, wasn’t it? She was quite entitled to do what she liked with it. If she

wanted the Church to have it, she wanted the Church to have it. I don't deny it's a bit of a disappointment, but I'm just an ordinary sort of chap, so perhaps it's for the best" (McCullough 210). McCullough's word choice implies the fate of the family and its complacency within that inevitable destiny. For example, Mary is "entitled" to do what she wishes with her property; whereas, Paddy is an "ordinary sort of chap." In using these terms, McCullough solidifies Mary's place as head of her household and the family as individuals forced to live under her authority. She also implies Paddy's position in his initial reaction. He "couldn't" do anything against his sister's wishes. He does address his disappointment, but the repetition of the word "want" and the conjunction "so" places Paddy and his family under the authority not only of his sister, but also the Church, which now has total control over dispersing Mary's holdings.

This example follows Foucault's argument that, under the juridico-discursive, power is derived by law and code "Law had to be the very form of power, and that power always had to be exercised in the form of law" (HS 88). Those in power, in Foucault's case – the monarchy, the Church, etc., and in McCullough's case the family and the Church – control how individuals work within society by placing limits on what they can and can't do. McCullough underlines this acceptance as she writes the inner thoughts of Father Ralph "There was not even going to be the longed-for chastisement of rage or contempt; Paddy was going to hand it all over to him on a golden plate of goodwill, and thank him for relieving the Clearys of a burden" (McCullough 211). McCullough supports Foucault's analysis concerning the juridico-discursive power here in having the family "hand it all over" and "thank him for relieving" them of their "burdens." By handing the money and control over, the Clearys face the concept that the law controls

what they do. If the law, in this case Mary's will, forces them to live under the control of the Church, then the family is accepting of that position because, according to Foucault individuals make their decisions based on what ruling entities tell them to do.

McCullough implies that the one with power, Father Ralph, feels for the family and has to face the idea that he is now the power entity placing laws upon the Clearys. Father Ralph longs for "chastisement" and "rage," implying that he knows that the power he now wields over the Clearys isn't fair or right. Father Ralph's role as subjugator changes after the interludes with Mary and with the Cleary family. He is unable to put the Clearys first and, therefore, chooses to better himself and the Church in deciding to take the money. However, this changes his role. He is no longer just inscribed in the regulations of the Church, but is also entangled within the inner workings of the family as he becomes the executor of the Cleary's financial situation. He controls their money and their spirituality.

Foucault moves beyond the limited scope of the juridico-discursive notion of power by saying that power comes not only from above but also from below in a web of discourses through which individuals must navigate. He feels it is important to look beyond the omniscient power and analyze how power works at the local level i.e. the systems of family, church, school, and economics. He writes, "We should make an ascending analysis of power and begin with the small mechanisms which have their own history, their own trajectory, their own techniques and tactics and then look at how these mechanisms have been and are invested, colonized, used, inflected, transformed, displaced, extended and so on" (SMBD 30). This ascending analysis allows Foucault to deconstruct the sovereign juridico-discursive and present it as a historically-based

concept, which must be seen in order for the individual to realize how her identity is created and controlled by institutions. In looking at power from the bottom up, Foucault shows how power originates through discourse and issued by larger powers, such as church and state, to set rules and regulations upon individuals. According to Foucault, “it is this image that we must break free of, that is of the theoretical privilege of law... We must construct an analytics of power that no longer takes law as a model and code” (HS 90). He adds that we must rid ourselves of a negative representation of power and conceive of a “sex without the law, and a power with out the king” (HS 90-91). Foucault argues that power has four basic principles which appear at the local level and which individuals must sort through in order to gain a glimpse of their role within the power structures and discourses guiding them. First, power is not seized or shared; rather, it is exercised in the relations of people’s lives. Second, power takes place not outside individuals, as the juridico-discursive notion of power implies, but it is an integral and internal part of the individual. Third, power comes from below, meaning it isn’t binary with one individual controlling the other. Instead power links together a chain, or web, of different discourses and activities. Finally, power is always met with resistance (HS 94-95). This resistance allows people to question their identity rather than accept their identity as determined by what they are told. This questioning gives them the chance to learn and understand how power works in society.

The active nature of power and the individual’s interaction with discourses can be seen in the interaction of Meggie and Father Ralph. Here, Father Ralph serves as the spiritual guide and priest while Meggie is his parishioner. However, Meggie decides to take power over her life when she decides that she will have him sexually. When she

leaves Drogheda and sets the rules aside to focus on herself, she becomes able to understand her subjugation to the family and to the Church.

For example, when Anne sends Meggie to Matlock Island she sends her some place to be alone where she can focus solely on herself. McCullough creates an example of the larger discourse of self discovery by having Meggie move closer to nature and drawing on her natural state of being. Thus, “Away from Fee, her brothers, Luke, the unsparing, unthinking domination of her whole life, Meggie discovered pure leisure; a whole kaleidoscope of thought patterns wove and unwove novel designs in her mind” (McCullough 393). In leaving her home and her family, Meggie allows herself to step away from her position within the family and focus on her wants and desires. In this case, she leaves the family which constrains her and receives the opportunity to consider the power structures and discourses which she lives within. In escaping this place Meggie can “stop wearing clothes” and “begin to feel like an animal born and brought up in a cage, suddenly let loose in a gentle, sunny, spacious and welcoming world” (McCullough 392). In this construction, Meggie is reborn when she enters the island. In McCullough’s words, she is “born” and then “let loose” from her cage. This implies that the time she spends alone on the island is time not ruled by the Church, Drogheda, or her family. However, Meggie is not free of her restraints, which are still in play, but her momentary understanding of the power and discourses which she lives within allows her to reflect upon and accept her personal role in life and society.

At the same time, Father Ralph breaks his vows and rules set by the Church when he beds Meggie. In this case, he doesn’t set out to be with Meggie but to gain insight in visiting with her:

He had meant what he said to Anne Mueller; he just wanted to see her, nothing more. Though he loved her, he hadn't come to be her lover. Only to see her, talk to her, be her friend, sleep on the living room couch while he tried once more to unearth the taproot of the eternal fascination she possessed for him, thinking that if only he could see it fully exposed, he might gain the spiritual means to eradicate it. (McCullough 406)

Here McCullough exemplifies one of Foucault's points about power – that it is not acquired, but rather experienced. McCullough sets up Father Ralph's experience with Meggie by having him attempt to acquire knowledge. She repeats the word "see" three times in this selection emphasizing the point that Ralph hopes not to experience but rather see what places him in a subject position to his feelings for Meggie. McCullough sets Ralph up not to be Meggie's lover, but to "see her, talk to her." He hopes that his watching and talking will allow him to acquire knowledge and "unearth the taproot of the eternal fascination she possessed for him."

It is only after Ralph submits to his passion for Meggie and makes love to her that he can understand and grow in his relations to her and to the Church. By going to Meggie, Ralph participates in a larger discourse of sin and redemption. He breaks his vow of chastity and therefore has to seek forgiveness for his action. Here Ralph not only acts as the voice of the Church, as a priest, but is also forced to live by the Church's rules and regulations concerning priests. Foucault would say the discourse of sin and redemption, for example, creates a chain in which "power is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another" (HS 92-93). Going to Meggie produces several interconnected moments for Father Ralph as he

sleeps with her, realizes his sin, asks for forgiveness, and finally turns closer to the Church. Because he goes to Meggie in a secluded area, where no one can see and judge him, he is able to step away from the vows and rules of the Church. In turn, he goes to her as a man, her equal, rather than a spiritual leader. For Foucault,

sex and sexuality comprise a set of practices, behaviors, rules and knowledges by which we produce ourselves and are produced ... It is the human experience that affects and involves the body, desires, forms of knowledge, fears, and social rules ... sex is more than a way of procreating, or experiencing pleasure. Rather, it is tied up with meaning and power; it is a form of knowledge as well as a physical activity; and it involves one's relation to the self as much as one's relations to others.

(Danaher 136)

Although he had planned only to visit and learn, he does succumb to her and give in to his sexual desires. After a night of passion, Ralph realizes, "You were put in my life to show me how false, how presumptuous is the pride of a priest of my kind ... But until this morning I have never known humility" (McCullough 411-412). It isn't until after being with Meggie that Ralph is able to see the sins he has committed. By breaking his vow and considering the discourses and regulations imposed by the Church, Ralph is able to receive of glimpse of how the discourses work in his life and affect the thoughts and decisions he makes. Ralph accepts his position within these discourses and regulations of the Church and focuses more on his priestly duties as a result of his new understanding. In gaining this new perspective, Foucault would argue, Ralph has become an individual who "does not simply circulate in those networks" but is "in a position to both submit to

and exercise this power ... In other words, power passes through individuals. It is not applied to them" (SMBD 29).

In his analysis of power, Foucault provides several explanations of how power is created and who holds power. He notes that individuals move through multiple discourses which affect how they act and speak. People cannot overcome these discourses and powers; however, as seen in McCullough's text, it appears that they can receive a momentary understanding of how these discourses and powers affect them. Therefore, they are not free; but they do have a new perspective on their roles within society. Foucault argues that this sense of power only partially explains an individual's acceptance or resistance to the identity which institutions and discourses create for her. A complete understanding of how the individual's sense of self is created by power structures and discourses comes when the individual realizes that she is placed in different discourses depending on the thoughts and actions she takes. As seen in the examples, McCullough's text shows the chick lit reader how the characters' identity is created by the discourses they live in and how the reader can gain a glimpse of the powers which influence her. Her use of sexual discourse exemplifies Foucault's arguments and shows how power can come from above, but also how it is created from discourses surrounding the individual.

## CHAPTER III

### CONFESSION: THE CATALYST TO UNDERSTANDING POWER, TRUTH, AND KNOWLEDGE

A second area of Foucault's analysis of power, subjectivity, and truth looks at how truth is created and spread. For Foucault, truth is not something that already exists and needs to be discovered; rather, it is an event which happens and is produced by different techniques. Foucault believes that truth is debatable and therefore should be questioned. Foucault questions the freeing nature of the repressive hypothesis as he looks towards the local level of power and discourse. By analyzing the lower levels of power, Foucault notes that power is all encompassing and truth and knowledge do not necessarily free an individual but place her within another set of power and discourse. Therefore, gaining knowledge does not lead to freedom from a sovereign repression, but rather, a new perspective on the discourses surrounding one's life. This perspective allows the individual to debate the truth she is provided by the institutions she lives within. In turn, the individual begins to understand the powers circulating within those discourses. Foucault connects concepts of power, truth, and knowledge with a central line of discourse—the confession. This chapter will attempt to trace the changes in confession, from a penance confession which “frees” one of a secret, to a confession induced and required by science in order to gain information about individuals. This change in how confession is performed signifies a change in discourse and thus a change in power.

Confession brings about a change in how people talk about their lives and their actions: “It is in the confession that truth and sex are joined, through the obligatory and exhaustive expression of an individual secret. But this time it is truth that serves as a medium for sex and its manifestations” (HS 61). Foucault means that a desire to understand one’s self can be seen in the discourse of sex and how individuals question and critique that discourse in the search for understanding. Foucault explains that the production of truth is determined by looking at two procedures, the *ars erotica* and *scientia sexualis*. The *ars erotica* is a sexual experience where one learns from a master and knowledge comes from the pleasure of the action itself. The *ars erotica* concept is used in countries such as China, Japan and India, for example, and is similar to the teachings of the Karma Sutra and the Tantra. This is structurally similar to the juridico-discursive nature of power, wherein a king or a power offers guidance. In both cases, knowledge comes from a master. Power is limited in this way because the individual takes the information the master or power provides without questioning the master’s motives. According to Foucault, institutions want to gain more information on individuals so they can remain in power and control the individuals they question. Therefore they create a questioning method such as confession to gain this information. A required yearly confession sets the Church up as a master of the parishioners. Rather than pleasure for pleasure’s sake, a view held by those who practice the *ars erotica*, the Church requires parishioners to tell of their sins and receive absolution. This requirement allows the Church to tell her parishioners what they should and shouldn’t be doing and judge the individuals’ actions as right and wrong.

McCullough traces similar lines of the progression of confession in her text, starting with confession's ability to allow the confessor to release secrets she may not otherwise admit. According to the repressive hypothesis, this release of secrets should provide the confessor with knowledge about herself and her actions, thus freeing her from the powers and discourses she lives within. However, Foucault makes light of this argument and jokes about the therapeutic nature of the confession which he says should be "spoken in time, to the proper party and by the person who was both the hearer of it and the one responsible for it, the truth healed" (HS 67). To the contrary, he believes that confession doesn't heal but places the individual within more discourses, which tell her how to think and feel. In the case of Paddy and Frank, Paddy angrily reveals to Frank the secret of Frank's birth father, misguidedly freeing himself from the burden he carries. In this case, he receives the chance to relieve the burden, and Frank receives information he needs to understand his role in the Cleary family. In the argument Paddy yells, "And you're no better than the shitty old dog who fathered you, whoever he was!" (McCullough 127). Here Paddy reveals a secret he has sworn to keep and confesses the truth about Frank's father. In the heat of the moment, Paddy throws discretion out the window, but he follows his insult and confession with regret saying, "Oh dear Jesus...I didn't mean it, I didn't mean it! *I didn't mean it!*" (127-128). Following the confession with regret allows McCullough's readers to understand the impulsive and hurtful nature of the confession and its ability to make the confessing individual aware of his or her actions. In this instance, Paddy acts out his anger in order to hurt his son. McCullough's word choice of "shitty old dog" refers back to the name Frank calls Paddy in referring to his sexual activities with Fee. The role of sex is shown as dirty here, and Paddy sets off

the dirty nature of Frank's birth by referring to his father as "whoever." McCullough does not name the man, thereby making the affair seem sordid and illicit.

McCullough places the two men within multiple discourses. For example, Paddy originally operates within the discourse of a dutiful husband who marries Fee as a result of her undesirable pregnancy. He keeps her secret until the fight with Frank. In revealing Fee's secret, Paddy moves into a discourse of regret. He regrets not only hurting Frank with the revelation of his father, but he regrets more what the revelation will do to Fee. He doesn't want to see her hurt and pleads with Frank to stay so that she will not know he has revealed the truth. Frank's discourse also changes as a result of the verbal exchange. He moves from a Cleary family member to a bastard child, with an unknown father. Both men must now consider their new discursive roles in determining their identities.

Confession works not only as a revelation of secrets but also allows for the spread of knowledge through the *scientia sexualis*, a science of sex used by the West. Foucault again critiques the ability of an individual to free herself from power in this depiction of confession. He notes that under the *scientia sexualis* confession becomes a process "for telling the truth of sex" that "is geared to a form of knowledge-power strictly opposed to the art of initiations and the masterful secret" (HS 58). In this instance, confession no longer has a freeing ability, but now becomes the tool institutions use to classify individuals. It becomes a source of information which can be used by one or many. Through the *scientia sexualis* the pastoral confession becomes a type of discursive machinery for asking questions and classifying the answers: "By no longer making the confession a test, but rather a sign, and by making sexuality something to be interpreted, the nineteenth century gave itself the possibility of causing the procedures of confession

to operate within the regular formation of a scientific discourse” (HS 67). Foucault notes that, since the Middle Ages, Western societies have depended on confession as one of the main rituals for the production of truth (HS 58) and that confession has moved beyond an “obligatory act of speech which, under some imperious compulsion, breaks the bonds of discretion or forgetfulness” (HS 62) to a system of analyzing and codifying: “The confession has spread its effects far and wide. It plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships and love relationships, in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life, and in the most solemn rites” (HS 95). It is this move from the penance confession to the required and extracted confession that Foucault argues creates the discourse on sex and sexuality.

The change from a pastoral to a scientific confession machine takes place when the confessions are prodded out of the confessor. Foucault notes that “the confession is wrung from a person by violence or threat; it is driven from its hiding place in the soul, or extracted from the body... Western man has become a confessing animal” (HS 59). Although the characters in McCullough’s text do not revert to torture, they force confessions even when the confessor does not wish to confess. This can be seen in the case of Fee and Meggie. The prodding in this instance is not a torture, but rather a gentler form or coercion by a mother and her child. While watching the children play, Fee informs Meggie that she knows the truth of Dane’s birth father, that he belongs to Father Ralph and not Luke O’Neill. The banter between mother and daughter symbolizes the interrogative nature of confession which Foucault believes is used to create and proliferate a discourse on sex:

FEE. Lord, he’s the living image of his father

MEGGIE. Do you think so, Mum? I can never see it myself. Dane is nothing like Luke in nature or attitude to life.

FEE. Do you take me for a fool, Meggie? I don't mean Luke O'Neill. I mean Dane is the living image of Ralph de Bricassart.

MEGGIE. Why, Mum! Why Mum, what an extraordinary thing to say! *Father Ralph de Bricassart?*

MEGGIE. Mum, you have absolutely no right to say such a thing. It isn't true!

FEE. Don't lie to *me*, Meggie. Lie to anyone else under the sun, but don't lie to me.

MEGGIE. The distance in his eyes. That's what I notice myself most of all. Is it so obvious? Does everyone know, Mum? (McCullough 484-485)

Meggie attempts to hide her secret although she knows Fee knows the truth. Within the discussion, McCullough has the women question each other four different times and almost every question is answered with a question. This badgering questioning leads the reader to believe Meggie's confession is being forced from her. Meggie, the confessor, does not appear willing to reveal her secret. McCullough has her emphatically answer Fee, twice denying Father Ralph as the father. Having two of Meggie's responses be questions and two be exclamations about Fee's accusation, McCullough places her characters in a situation where confession is used by one individual to gain information about another.

McCullough demonstrates how Fee wrings the confession from Meggie not just in their words but in how she situates the feelings and actions of the two women. Upon hearing Fee's initial comment about Dane, Meggie "felt herself go cold" and then she drew a "carefully casual breath" while "nonchalantly swinging her foot" (McCullough 484). Meggie attempts to appear unaffected while also carefully calculating her next answer. When Fee refuses to accept Meggie's initial response, Meggie feels like "Lead. Her foot was made of lead. It dropped to the Spanish tiles, her leaden body sagged" (McCullough 484). Meggie's physical stance dramatically changes. She is no longer comfortable, but now realizes someone knows her secret, one which weighs her down and causes her body to sag. As Meggie emphatically denies the accusation she realizes she isn't "sure if her mother was bent on torture or commiseration" (McCullough 485). Although Fee does not physically torture Meggie, her words do cause Meggie's body to undergo dramatic changes that force her to release her secret. It is only after Meggie gives in that the enormity of her relief shows "in the way she sat, loosely now, relaxed" (McCullough 485).

Like current power structures, Fee forces Meggie to confess using an interrogation tactic, similar to ones used by police to force suspects to tell what illegal activities they have been involved in. Unlike Paddy, who earlier in the text revealed a secret to release himself of its burden, despite its opposite effect of placing him in a different discourse, Meggie fights the urge and forces Fee to draw out the information. For Foucault, it isn't important to determine a new understanding about sex and truth, but rather to see the "progressive formation of that 'interplay of truth and sex'" and in turn to "tell the truth about sex" (HS 57). In the example of Meggie and Fee, Meggie fears that a

label may change her status and that of her son. It is only when Fee demands the truth that Meggie relents. Meggie and Fee do not find themselves “free” as a result of their confessions rather, they find themselves placed within a new discourse, just as Paddy and Frank found themselves moved in the discursive web. In the case of the Cleary women, they are now placed in the romantic discourse of a woman with a secret past. In sharing their secret, both women shift within the discursive web from mothers, to mothers of bastard children. They must attempt to keep their secrets in order to keep others from classifying them in this new way.

This chapter shows how confession has moved from a secret-telling device to a realm of scientific and medical examination where truth is drawn out from the confessor in order for the individual to better know herself. The confession has lost “its ritualistic and exclusive localization” it spreads (HS 63). Now confession takes place between children and parents, students and educators, patients and doctors, and delinquents and experts, thus creating a confessional science. These changes, Foucault would argue, lead to the individual eventually finding truth and knowledge as well as more subjugation. By looking back at the changes in confession and McCullough’s novel one can see how confession allows individuals to experience a moment of clarity and see how power structures can draw information out of others. Individuals receive a momentary glimpse of their role within discourses and power structures and therefore have a momentary understanding of their role within the discourses. It is important to note that this does not free the individual but helps her to understand the identity created for her by power structures. One will see in the next chapter, that while confession offers an outlet to

discovering the truth, it is not just the confessor who gains knowledge but the one who hears the confession.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONFESSION: EFFECTS ON THE INDIVIDUAL'S UNDERSTANDING OF SUBJECTIVITY

The preceding chapter used examples from *The Thorn Birds* to exemplify how the confession changed historically from the release of a secret and act of penance to a discourse on sexuality, which institutions use to classify individuals based on their secrets. Foucault notes that confession has become how the church, state, and medical professions collect data on people in order to classify them. Dreyfus and Rabinow note in their analysis of Foucault that “through the expansion of the methods of science the individual has become an object of knowledge, both to himself and to others, an object who tells the truth about himself in order to know himself and to be known, an object who learns to effect changes on himself” (Dreyfus, Rabinow 174-175). In order to move beyond the repressive hypothesis, which confession helps create, one must understand how truth is created. The power to know something about an individual does not lie just in the confessor but also in the one hearing the confession. In cultures, there develops a need to know the truth about oneself, which in turn prompts the telling of truth by individuals. Confession about oneself to others creates a network of power relations that claim to extract the truth through their interpretations (Dreyfus, Rabinow 174). The interaction between confessor and listener depicts the interpretive nature of confession and how the listener claims to know the truth about the individual. The claim of truth

allows the listener to judge and classify the individual creating a new discourse for the individual to be defined by. The way an individual attempts to determine self meaning by referring back to a knowledge base is called, knowledge-power. In this structure, the individual refers back to knowledge she has previously obtained from institutions which influence her. As a result, she makes meaning and understanding from what others have told her to think and believe, not her own thoughts. By looking at interpretation and the way an individual comes to understand what is taking place, one can understand how the individual becomes trapped in a circular pattern of knowledge and power, where the individual searches for her own understanding of her decisions only to return to an understanding provided by discourses and powers which surround her.

As previously stated, confession is the mode in which the *scientia sexualis*, the science of sex, examines individuals and categorizes their actions in order to set limits on them. Dreyfus and Rabinow note in their book that nineteenth century medical examinations, like other forms of confession, exposed “figures of authority to the individual’s deepest sexual fantasies and hidden practices. Moreover, the individual was persuaded that through such a confession, it was possible to know himself” (173). This confession serves as a component in the expansion of discipline and control of bodies, populations, and society itself and is still relevant in the twenty-first century. Individuals still see psychiatrists and still need someone to help them know the truth about themselves. As a result of allowing another to determine an individual’s truth, the individual allows herself to be regulated both physically and mentally.

Historically, the confession changes from one of penance towards a required examination by the controlling powers and institutions. The individual must turn to a

doctor, lawyer, or other entity in the controlling institutions and tell that other her whole life's story. However, it is the action of telling and hearing the confession that allows for an exchange of knowledge and power. This interaction is what Foucault considers important in the development of truth: "The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence of a partner" (HS 61). It is this partner that judges, punishes, forgives, and consoles the confessor. As a result, the confession must be heard by another who claims to determine the truth of the confession.

In the case of Father Ralph's confession to Cardinal Vittorio, upon his return from Matlock Island, Vittorio listens to Ralph and then tells him to confess to Father Giorgio, not to Father Guillermo saying:

Father Guillermo is less perceptive, and might deem your true repentance debatable ... They, too, are men, my Ralph, those who hear the confessions of the great. Never forget that as long as you live. Only in the priesthood do they act as vessels containing God. In all else they are men. And the forgiveness they mete out comes from God, but the ears which listen and judge belong to men. (McCullough 439)

McCullough uses language similar to Foucault's in describing the interaction of the confessor and the listener. By using the words, "listen," "judge," and "forgive" she implies that the hearer of a confession interacts in making meaning for the confessor. In the case of Father Ralph, Cardinal Vittorio sends him to a particular interpreter so his humility and sincere repentance can be determined. McCullough notes that the priests are

men too and only “in the priesthood do they act as vessels containing God.” This sentence differentiates the priests from their roles as God’s instruments and their roles as men. Although they act on God’s behalf they still hear and judge like men. It should be noted that Father Ralph does not have a choice in who he to confess to, he is told by a superior who he will provide his private thoughts. It is the same for individuals, they do not choose who to confess to, but are told through discourse that they must confess to their priest or to a therapist if the medical institution deems it important. They also are told to confess to the census bureau about their marital status, family, and their employment record. This information is then interpreted by another person and the information is used to label the individual and set down new rules and regulations for her.

This example of Father Ralph’s confession to Cardinal Vittorio also illustrates Foucault’s argument that “the agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks (for it is he who is constrained), but in the one who listens and says nothing; not in the one who knows the answer, but in the one who questions and is not supposed to know” (HS 62). Cardinal Vittorio listens, but does not speak: rather he watches Ralph during the confession and finally “turns away to do battle with his own thoughts” (McCullough 438). He is unable to judge Father Ralph. Instead he sends him to another priest for absolution. McCullough implies here that Cardinal Vittorio hasn’t just learned something about Ralph but that he has learned something about himself as well, although she does not tell the reader what this something is. Because Cardinal Vittorio’s role is that of a listener, he has power over Father Ralph and chooses to ease the young priest’s confession by sending him to another thus removing himself from judging his younger counterpart.

This example shows how the confessor can no longer determine what he means or feels about his confession, but rather an “other” or outside interpreter must determine what is being said and meant within the confession. It is in confessing to another priest that the sincerity of Father Ralph’s confession can be determined. He is not able to determine the sincerity of the confession for himself. Dreyfus and Rabinow note that, “Since sex was a secret, the subject himself was not simply hiding it because of reserve, moralism, or fear; the subject did not and could not know the secrets of his own sexuality” (179). The interpreter becomes “a master of the truth.” According to Foucault:

With regard to the confession, his power was not only to demand it before it was made, or to decide what was to follow it, but also to constitute a discourse of truth on the basis of its decipherment, and by making sexuality something to be interpreted, the nineteenth century gave itself the possibility of causing the procedures of confession to operate within the regular formation of a scientific discourse. (HS 67)

Unlike the repressive hypothesis, which believes the confessor is freed by the knowledge she gains in confession. Foucault’s analysis states that the confessor is not free as a result of the confession but is given the opportunity to reconsider her confession based on the interpretation.

McCullough’s text exemplifies the interpretive nature of the confession as Cardinal Vittorio explains that different men hear confessions in different ways, thus proving that one judges an individual’s confession to be more sincere or honest than another. After avoiding the meeting with his mentor, Father Ralph returns to the Vatican to face the Cardinal and confess his sins. However, upon arrival his confession is delayed

for afternoon tea. The intentional delay by Cardinal Vittorio is important because it shows the judgment and power he has hearing confessions. The confessor must wait and submit to the priest or therapist because it is he, the listener, who has the power to interpret meaning from the confession and tell the individual what she is to gain from the confession. It is a priest's duty to hear the confessions of his parishioners and his fellow priests and provide absolution. However, in this case the Cardinal makes a judgment and delays the confession, as if knowing what is coming. He doesn't want to hear the confession of a man he respects. Rather than passing judgment on his friend and colleague, Cardinal Vittorio says, "there is nothing you can tell me which could alter the impressions I formed of you during our years together, nothing you could tell me which will make me think less of you, or like you less" (McCullough 435). Cardinal Vittorio adds, "Ralph, we are priests, but we are something else before that; something we were before we became priests, and which we cannot escape in spite of our exclusiveness. We are men, with the weaknesses and failings of men." (McCullough 435). Again Cardinal Vittorio dismisses Father Ralph's indiscretion by blaming it on being a man and the "weakness" of men. This is the second time Cardinal Vittorio refers to the priests as "men." In the first instance, he determined that Father Ralph should confess to Father Giorgio because his status as a "man" would allow him to determine the validity of Ralph's confession. It is this role as men that he uses in the earlier example to determine which priest would interpret the confession in the correct way. In blaming Father Ralph's actions on the weakness of man, Cardinal Vittorio also can refuse judgment of the impending confession and admit that "nothing" will change his opinion of the beloved Father Ralph.

Knowing that Cardinal Vittorio understands his plight, Father Ralph is able to divulge his indiscretion and the emotions attached to his time with Meggie. Ralph admits his love for Meggie and his prideful actions. “No. I’m a man, and as a man I found pleasure in her I didn’t dream existed. I didn’t know a woman felt like that, or could be the source of such profound joy” (McCullough 438). Foucault claims that the confession’s “veracity is not guaranteed by the lofty authority ... but by the bond, the basic intimacy in discourse, between the one who speaks and what he is speaking about” (HS 62). Foucault is arguing here that a connection is not made just between the confessor and the person who hears the confession, but also between the confessor and the material of the confession. McCullough connects Father Ralph to his confession in this intimate setting by having him tell Cardinal Vittorio, “To repent of Meggie would be to murder her. I don’t know if that’s very clear, or even if it gets close to saying what I mean. I can’t for the life of me ever seem to express what I feel for Meggie adequately” (McCullough 438). Meggie is part of Father Ralph and, while he can confess to breaking his vows and being with a woman, he can’t confess to loving her. Because she is part of him, Father Ralph is unable to adequately explain his relationship with her and his feelings for her and therefore cannot confess his connection to her.

In refusing to pass judgment and thus sending Father Ralph to one priest instead of the other, Cardinal Vittorio shows that the truth depends on the interpreter and the interpretation. Foucault would call this a game of truth. A game of truth is “a set of procedures that lead to a certain result, which, on the basis of principals and rules of procedures, may be considered valid or invalid” (qtd. in Danaher 40). Dreyfus and Rabinow note that

The most private self-examination is tied to power systems of external control: sciences and pseudosciences, religious and moral doctrines. The cultural desire to know the truth about oneself prompts the telling of truth; in confession after confession to oneself and to others, this *mise en discours* has placed the individual in a network of relations of power with those who claim to be able to extract the truth of these confessions through their possession of the keys to interpretation. (174)

This network of power relations extracts truth the moment one realizes that power not only comes from above, in the case of the juridico-discursive, but also through the telling and retelling of secrets and therefore the added discourses one moves within as a result of these confessions. In telling the truth to an “other,” the individual considers not only at what he or she believes is the truth, but also what the interpreter claims is the truth.

According to the previous definition of truth, confession is the technique used to create a moment of understanding for the individual who realizes that her beliefs are the result of what power relations want her to see and believe. This interpretation places the confessor in new discourses determined by the listener. Foucault notes that truth has five important points. First, it is centered on the scientific discourses and institutions that create it.

Second, truth is an effect of economic and political incitement. Third, truth serves as an object of diffusion and consumption. Fourth, it is produced and transmitted under the control of certain apparatuses, and finally, truth is the center of debate and confrontation (Foucault: quoted in Danaher 41). Each of these traits can be seen in *The Thorn Birds*.

First, truth for the characters is centered on the family and religious discourses they live within and the structure of the family and the Church which create the discourses.

Second, the truth lives within the economic level of the family which, as previously discussed, is determined by Father Ralph and the Church. The characters examine and debate their place within the family and the Church in order to receive a minute understanding of the power structures they live within. Finally, the characters question their lives and the power structures they live within, referring back to their religious and family values. In confessing their indiscretions and finally considering the interpretation of their confessions, the characters debate how their actions help to create meaning. This debate allows the characters to receive a momentary understanding of their position in society and consider a new perspective on the intertwining discourses which control them.

This game of truth is further complicated in the search for knowledge and the questioning of power structures. One can assume, under the repressive hypothesis, that in gaining knowledge through confession one gains truth. This truth, or understanding, should thereby free the individual from her social subjugation to power structures which define her. However, this is not quite true. Because individuals live in a web of discourses their truth is determined by the interchange of these discourses. McCullough places her characters within several webs of discourses, such as religion, family, romance, revenge, regret and the search for self identity. Paddy, a staunch Catholic, marries Fee and raises his family according to Catholic rules and regulations with one rule being that a family cannot use birth control. In addressing this matter, Paddy explains to his eldest son, "I am her husband. It is by God's grace we are blessed with our children" (McCullough 127). Paddy accepts God's will as justification for the family of eight which he attempts to raise even in the poorest of times. Although he may have little

food to feed the family and hardly any money to care for their needs, he continues to have children because the Catholic faith has taught him that birth control is not right and he should turn to God for guidance on how many children he should have. Paddy and his family work through religious discourse that supplies them with information, values, and restrictions. In attempting to determine how these values and restrictions define them, Paddy and the family become caught up in an entrapping game of truth where they realize their identity changes depending on which set of rules and discourses they find themselves turning to for information. Foucault refers to this trap in which an individual determines self meaning from what another told her to think and believe, as knowledge-power. In the construct of knowledge-power, an individual makes meaning by referring back to previously learned knowledge. However, that knowledge is something given to the individual by an institution and thus reflects what the institution wants the individual to know and believe. Therefore, the individual does not have her own thoughts, but rather her thoughts are constructed by the power structures which guide her. In order for the individual to make sense her identity she must refer back to various bodies of knowledge. In doing so, she doesn't receive information that frees her from the discourses she operates within, but receives a glimpse of the power structures and an understanding of how they control her life.

As the characters attempt to gain knowledge and misguidedly strive to free themselves from the discourses they move through, they eventually return physically, mentally, and emotionally to the institutions they know and value, such as family and church. Following the fight with Paddy, Frank runs away to fight in Jimmy Sharman's traveling fighting troupe. As the interpreter of Paddy's confession, Frank understands

why he feels distant from the family: "I must have always known it ... The feeling you hadn't always been there, that you came after me" (McCullough 129). Frank listens to what Paddy has to say and then judges Paddy by saying that he, Frank, knew he came into Fee's life before Paddy. Frank appears to judge Paddy's place in Fee's life and believes Paddy wasn't good enough to have her on his own. Rather, Frank believes that Paddy needed the situation of a bastard child in order to be with Fee. Frank takes that information one step further and attempts to distance himself permanently: "Tell her I went to join Jimmy Sharman because I want to be someone. It's the truth" (McCullough 128). However, after spending time in jail for murder he returns to the only place he has ever known, Drogheda and his family. After his return, Frank continues his distance from the family and his role as a bastard child by alienating himself within the confines of Drogheda. When asked if he would like to live in the main house, he replies, "I'll take a guesthouse, thanks...It will be nice to be able to get away from people" (McCullough 518). His return signifies his understanding that he is not an official member of the Cleary family but is accepted by them despite his lack of blood relation, while his living in the guesthouse allows him space to reflect on himself and the discourses he lives within.

The same reflection on self identity can be seen in Meggie. She receives a glimpse of the discourses she is defined by when she leaves Drogheda with her husband, Luke, and again when Anne sends her to Matlock Island. In the solitude of the island, Meggie turns to thoughts of her family to question her values and the identity power structures have created for her in her thoughts about the family. While swimming alone she thinks to herself:

Years ago Father Ralph had asked her what she thought about, and she had answered: Daddy and Mum, Bob, Jack, Hughie, Stu, the little boys, Frank, Drogheda...now add to those Justine, Luke, Luddie and Anne, homesickness, the rainfall...But it had all come and gone in such tangled, unrelated clumps and chains; no opportunity, no training to enable her to sit down quietly and think out who exactly was Meggie Cleary, Meggie O'Neill. (McCullough 393)

Her isolation allows Meggie to finally think of herself. She is allowed the opportunity for “self-examination of consciousness and the confession of one’s thoughts and acts” (Dreyfus, Rabinow 175). By examining her own thoughts and her role as a child, mother, sister, wife, etc., Meggie realizes she has never put herself before anyone else. In focusing on herself first and taking the chance to be with the man she loves, Meggie breaks the values instituted in her by her family and the Church. The affair allows Meggie to temporarily step away from the game of truth and see the life she desires, one with Father Ralph. However, after he leaves she instinctively returns to Drogheda. Over time she realizes, “I fell into the same trap my mother did ... Drogheda is my life ... the house, the books ... Here I’m needed, there’s still some purpose in living. Here are people who rely on me” (McCullough 664). As Meggie comes face-to-face with her daughter’s future she is reminded of her own place. She needs a life with a “purpose” where there “are people who rely on” her (664).

Father Ralph also breaks the cycle of the game of truth when he breaks his vow of chastity with God. In sleeping with Meggie, Ralph realizes all the sins he has committed and becomes a more focused priest with a new sense of humility. During his confession

to Cardinal Vittorio, Father Ralph says, “I repent the breaking of vows as solemn and binding as my life. I can never again approach my priestly duties in the same light” (McCullough 438). Because of his indiscretion, Father Ralph must change the way he is as a priest and isolate himself from Meggie, which means returning to his residence in the Vatican. McCullough describes Father Ralph’s renewed dedication in a section that explains how he became a Cardinal. She describes Father Ralph’s time in the Church by saying, “his rise within the central hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church has been spectacular” (McCullough 495). McCullough also implies Father Ralph’s dedication to the Church by having him appear in limited sections after the affair with Meggie. He appears once in Drogheda, again when Dane is sent to study under him, and finally when Dane dies and Meggie confesses that Dane is Father Ralph’s son.

McCullough exemplifies Foucault’s theories on confession and the game of truth in her text by intertwining her characters with the institutions of family and church. She allows the characters to receive a glimpse of how the institutions use discourse to influence them. Thus the characters reflect on the impact discourses have over their ability to make decisions, and reflect on those discourses in order to come to an understanding of the influence discourse and power have over their lives. McCullough places the characters within a confessional discourse that she attempts to break. But, as Foucault explains, the characters must return to the knowledge they already have and, therefore, remain trapped within the identity that power structures and discourses have created for them. This concept can also be seen in the reader and how she reacts to the text. As one will see in the next chapter, the reader is placed in a discourse of reading, and the meaning she gains is determined by the publishing company which supplies the

books. Thus she is also trapped within discourse and power structures. However, like the characters, she may receive a glimpse of these power structures and discourses at work in her life and gains an understanding of how her identity is formed by their influence.

## CHAPTER V

### THE FEMALE READER: HER INTERACTION WITH THE TEXT AND HER UNDERSTANDING AND EXPERIENCE OF POWER AND SUBJECTIVITY

Foucault devises several theories on how power is created, dispersed, and affects individuals. Individuals must work through a web of discourses, each affecting the ones around them. One sees this by focusing on confession and the games of truth. In both instances, the individual relies on institutions to tell her what to think, how to act, and what to believe. She becomes dependent on someone else to determine her self identity. As a result, the individual is always influenced by what others tell her and is defined and influenced by those interpretations and teachings. Therefore, in order for the individual to understand this interaction of truth and knowledge, he or she must question the teachings of those in power. This doesn't free the individual, but instead allows her to understand power structures controlling her life.

In looking at Foucault's theories on the relationship of power situations, confessions, and games of truth as they pertain to the discourses surrounding characters in *The Thorn Birds*, one can see how the theories work within modern literature. In studying the reader's interaction with the text, one can see not only how literature exemplifies Foucault's theories but also how these theories work in society at large. As seen before, McCullough's characters can only gain a glimpse of how they are impacted by discourse and therefore receive a minute understanding and experience of the power

struggles Foucault discusses. The reader undergoes the same process. As one will see in this chapter, the reader ultimately gains a sense of empowerment and understanding because she identifies with the characters, gains knowledge from their actions, and at times feels superior because of her placement as the outside observer. By looking at the reader's role within discourse, as well as how she gains truth, knowledge, and power, and how she experiences the text, one can see Foucault's theories at work in society.

In order to understand the reader's search for self identity, one must first realize that she like the characters is defined by multiple discourses. By looking at the books an individual reads, such as chick lit and the subgenre of romance novels, one can see that women may consider reading books about women something that helps them to understand themselves and their role in society. Chick lit is considered by theorists and readers to be novels written by women for women. It depicts a female character's attempt to deal with everyday struggles such as home, friendship, family, or love (Mlynowski, Jacobs: qtd. in Maher 195). This genre has the ability to represent a range of women's issues often in a fun, upbeat manner, although *The Thorn Birds* is more dramatic. The texts are generally two-hundred pages and often formulaic in their nature with boy meeting girl, boy and girl facing conflict over their growing infatuation, and finally boy and girl falling in love implying a happy ending for the characters.

Although this plot structure has been seen as trivial by some critics, for the general chick lit reader it brings a consistent appeal to a regular audience (Radway 29). In her book, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women*, Tania Modleski argues that there must be a simple and repeatable structure in order to avoid confusion for the reader. This structure helps the reader to identify with the characters

because there is very little distance between her and the characters and allows the reader to connect with the text and in turn the heroine's fantasy becomes the reader's fantasy (55). Although *The Thorn Birds* does not fit every part of the formulaic nature of chick lit it does conform to many, and the female reader still experiences the text and gains a sense of empowerment because she identifies with the characters, gains knowledge from their actions, and at times feels superior to the characters.

One way the female reader identifies with the text is in the escape from her daily life and struggles. In the text, she is able to find herself and connect with a heroine who faces the same issues she does. Readers surveyed in Radway's 1982 anthropological study of female readers in Midwest America found that the escape into a romance novel was "good therapy" (Radway 52). Radway notes that the reader needs time to herself away from her daily life to reflect back on what is going on. Radway writes, "What reading takes them away from is the psychologically demanding and emotionally draining task of attending to the physical and affective needs of their families, a task that is solely or peculiarly theirs" (Radway 92). This escape is seen in McCullough's text as Meggie runs off to Matlock Island. She leaves her daughter, her husband and her friends in order to gain a sense of self. In setting up the escape, McCullough has Anne say, "I don't think going home to Drogheda is the right sort of holiday. What Luddie and I feel you need most is a thinking time. No Justine, no us, no Luke, no Drogheda. Have you ever been on your own, Meggie? It's time you were" (McCullough 383). In this instance, McCullough follows the general characteristic of chick lit and romance novels sending her heroine away to an exotic island to be by herself for "thinking time." This time allows Meggie to realize that she places herself last in a line of people and, therefore, doesn't

focus on herself enough to realize what she wants and needs. McCullough also creates the formulaic boy-girl conflict when Father Ralph arrives. Now Meggie must face her feelings for Ralph and in turn succumb to those feelings, make love to him, and share her private hide-a-way with him before eventually returning to her real world with Anne, Luddie, and Justine.

Once the reader finishes the book she too rejoins her family and focuses back on her work with renewed spirit and understanding of herself. Madonne Miner addresses the effects of escape when she quotes Norman Holland in her essay, "Guaranteed to Please: Twentieth-Century American Women's Bestsellers." Holland notes that

While consciously engaging a text for "social, biographical, political philosophical, oral, or religious meaning," or for "escape, titillation, amusement," readers unconsciously engage this text for the sake of the pleasure of transforming "primitive wishes and fears into significance and coherence." In other words, the fictional text provides a locus, a space, in which a reader might reexperience and rework unresolved fantasies and fears that date back to earliest infancy. Readers would be attracted to texts that allow the most effective engagement and transformation of the most primitive aspects of themselves. (188)

Chick lit and romance novels allow the female reader to fulfill a primitive fantasy in which she is attracted to an unattainable male. As she watches this man and witnesses his interaction with another woman, she subconsciously longs to be the male's focus of desire and in turn places herself within the text and experiences the couple's romantic interludes. In doing this she experiences all the emotions and passion which the affair

creates. This fantasy may or may not be based on past experiences, but becomes a temporary escape from the reader's normal everyday life. Although this process takes place in the subconscious, an opposing factor to Foucault's argument that exterior discourse shape individuals, it supports the ideal that the individual interacts with power and is able to subconsciously receive a glimpse or understanding of the power structures operating through discourse.

While identifying with the characters and the story, the female reader is able to attain a personal comprehension that she then attributes to the experience of reading. According to Radway, comprehension is a process of making meaning, a process of sign production where the reader actively attributes significance to signifiers on the basis of previously learned cultural codes (7). These cultural codes include discourses and power relations the female reader lives within. Assume the hypothetical example of the reader who is a 35-years-old, divorced, and a mother of two. She is going to comprehend the text differently than a 25-year-old, successful business woman who is childless. Both women depend on their personal background and the discourses they live within to determine truth and meaning within the text she is reading induce. Crawford and Chaffin state that "Understanding is a product of both the text and the prior knowledge and viewpoint that the reader brings to it" (3). An individual's background knowledge creates schemas or frameworks used to help comprehend information. In reading, the reader takes in a sentence and attaches the information to schemas such as falling in love, having sex, breaking up, or lying to a partner. These schemas provide three things for the reader: a copy for the reader to refer to, a framework for the reader to determine the nature of understanding, and an ability to allow the reader to go beyond the information actually

given in the situation (Crawford, Chaffin 5). This movement beyond what the text says also allows for inferences to be made about motives, consequences, enabling conditions, etc. (9). For example, when in McCullough's text, Father Ralph appears on the private island Meggie is staying at she waits to wave him on as old Rob's car drives up to the house. But then "she stood dumbly and waited while he walked down the road toward her, Ralph de Bricassart. He had decided he wanted her after all. There could be no other reason for his joining her in a place like this" (McCullough 405). The reader is caught by the fact that Meggie stands "dumbly" as if seeing a ghost. The reader may acknowledge that Meggie has seen something which makes her stop. This acknowledgement can then be attached to the reader's own experiences, wherein she may have been surprised by someone coming back into her life. The reader also works within a framework and discourse of lost love when she reads that "there could be no other reason for his joining her." In this recognition the reader is able to look back on a crush or a situation where she felt wanted and needed. By referring back to the comparable framework, the reader may connect to Meggie's emotions and may therefore predict what will happen next. The reader is able to go beyond the text of Ralph's arrival and predict future actions when she, the reader, acknowledges the words "he had decided he wanted her after all." This phrase signals the reader that something will happen between them because Meggie is now back with the one she loves and she feels he wants and needs her too. The schema of a romance or chick lit reader allows her to attach a private island and two people coming together. She can then deduce that the two will become romantically involved, and, knowing that the love is forbidden, she can predict that some great conflict will result

from the experience. Making this prediction not only allows the reader to identify with the character, but also allows her to gain knowledge and feel superior to the character.

Looking beyond just comprehension one can see that differences in background and viewpoint also create differences in knowledge gained by the reader. Background differences among the readers, such as upbringing, education, and life experiences, directly affect how different they interpret a text. Foucault would argue that this background is the local level of discourse and is where the game of truth takes place. In determining what the text says, women refer to the schemas and background knowledge provided throughout their lives. This return to what she knows draws the reader back to her previous knowledge the same way Frank, Meggie, and Father Ralph return to their knowledge centers of family and the Church.

Although the reader gains truth and understanding by returning to previous knowledge in the action of reading chick lit, she also has the opportunity to break these bonds due to the superiority she gains over the text. Modleski notes “The reader, then, achieves a very close emotional identification with the heroine partly because she is intellectually distanced from her and does not have to suffer the heroine’s confusion” (41). Because of her distant position, the reader takes on the role of priest and or therapist and acts as a witness and interpreter of the characters’ thoughts and actions.

McCullough creates a chance for character and the reader to witness actions and thoughts throughout the text. This witnessing power provides the reader with power over the text. One example is the relationship between Father Ralph and Meggie. In their first encounter, the reader is presented with an image of a priest enchanted with the young girl. He passes quickly through the line of brothers to find her:

Behind them, all by herself, Meggie stood gaping up at him with her mouth open, as if she were looking for God. Without seeming to notice how his fine serge robe wallowed in the dust, he stepped past the boys and squatted down to hold Meggie between his hands, and they were firm, gentle, kind. ‘Well! And who are you?’ he asked her, smiling.

(McCullough 89)

By placing Meggie between Father Ralph’s hands McCullough implies that he is taking Meggie in to himself. Meggie becomes a part of Ralph he can’t deny after making love to her. In their first meeting, Father Ralph dismisses the other family members but moves down to Meggie’s level and brings her in with firm and gentle hands. McCullough’s added note that he smiles in asking who the young girl is causes the reader to interpret the situation as one which pleases him. He doesn’t just glance over her and move on; rather, he smiles at her and comes down to her level to introduce himself. The reader infers that Father Ralph takes a liking to the girl, which he won’t be able to deny later.

The reader’s role as an interpreter becomes significant again in the interaction between Meggie and Father Ralph when he returns to Drogheda to find that Paddy and Stu have been killed. Father Ralph says, “Yes, I’ve come. I wanted to be sure you were safe, I had the feeling I was needed, I had to see for myself. Oh, Meggie, your father and Stu! How did it happen” (McCullough 265). In his words, Father Ralph appears to be concerned with the family and the tragedy they have undergone as a result of the fire. However, the female reader passes judgment and interprets Father Ralph’s actions because she is privy to them. He doesn’t go to help the family initially, but upon arrival “barks” out the demand to know where Meggie is (264) and then he sheds his clothes on

the way to being with her. He also doesn't talk to her face-to-face but wraps the young woman in his arms and whispers to her with his "cheek on her hair" (McCullough 265). The reader pieces together these clues and realizes that Ralph doesn't just want to help the family but that his connection to Meggie means he wants to be with her. The romantic inclinations of removing his clothes and whispering in her hair indicate an intimate closeness between the two. The reader realizes by these clues that the two will romantically connect in this instance; therefore, it is no surprise when "he put his hand beneath her chin, tilted her head until she looked up at him and without thinking kissed her" (McCullough 265).

Because the reader is able to see things and interpret actions, she has the opportunity to know what will happen before the characters do. This fact is important when considering the role of confession as a tool to gaining knowledge and truth. In this case, the reader is also aware of secrets held by other characters, such as the fathers of Dane and Frank. Just as the characters are involved in interpretations of the confessions, the reader has the chance interpret the confessions for herself. She has the power to "force" the character to confess, because she is able to continue reading the text. In choosing how much to read in a single sitting, the reader can either allow the characters to delay their confessions or force them to confess within one sitting. The reader also has the ability to read and re-read sections of the novel, such as the love scenes or the confession scenes. If the reader doesn't want to see the heroine in a negative light, she may skip a section, such as the confession of who her child's father is. This reading, re-reading and skipping within the text provides the reader with a chance to interpret the text as she sees fit.

As seen previously, Foucault's theories may be seen in modern day chick lit and romance novels. The concepts of truth, power, subjectivity, and knowledge are prominent in these texts, which focus on female characters falling in love and facing challenges on their way to meeting with their heroes. Foucault, however, does not direct his theories to a small section of society; instead he directs his theories towards society as a whole. In moving beyond a literary text as exemplifying Foucault's theories, one must consider the role of the reader. As seen in this chapter, the reader, ultimately gains a sense of empowerment because she identifies with the characters, gains knowledge from their actions, and at times feels superior because of her placement as the outside observer. By looking at what kind of a discourses a reader might be influenced by as well as how she gains truth, knowledge, and power, and how she experiences the text, one can see Foucault's theories at work in society.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION: THE EFFECT OF QUESTIONING, REFLECTING, AND RESISTING ON POWER AND SUBJECTIVITY

This thesis has traced Foucault's theory of power by attempting to show how power creates an individual's understanding of herself and her actions. Foucault does this by creating a three-part discussion concerning the creation of power, its dissemination, and its deceptive nature. Individuals are always under the authority of some form of power because they are affected by the web of discourses wherein they participate. It is this influence of the institution in determining the self that Foucault believes dramatically affects an individual's understanding of herself. Danaher supports the notion of a multiplicity of power saying, "if we abandon the idea that the sovereign subject is the origin of meaning, we are better able to grasp how our identities are played out within the complex ensembles and discursive flows that produce a multiplicity of subjective positions" (43). In order for individuals to understand their role within discourse and power, they must realize that the sovereign power does exist, but they must then set that understanding aside and realize the power which tells them how to think and feel does not come just from large institutions such as church and state but also from multiple discourses which individuals participate in regularly. The individual has the opportunity to either accept the institutions' ideas on how the individual should think and act or the possibility of questioning and resisting that institution's concepts in order to gain

knowledge and understanding about herself. Foucault's argument then moves beyond a discussion of power and into a discussion of the catalyst for understanding truth—the confession. Foucault notes that individuals reveal the truth about themselves to others in confession and that, through this revelation, they are judged and told what the truth is about themselves. In the modern era, confession becomes a science in which people's actions and thoughts are classified, codified, and analyzed, with the result that, those in power place restrictions on the individual.

However, Foucault importantly notes that the action of saying and hearing confession also places the individual within the matrix of power and discourse. Not only does the individual seek knowledge herself by confessing, but through this action she moves into additional discourses. The circular nature of power, truth, and knowledge is seen in Foucault's argument concerning the game of truth. According to the game of truth, people search for truth in their confessions and daily interactions, but this search for truth brings them back to the identity someone else has provided them because the only reference they have is the knowledge they have been provided by others. The return to past knowledge is not as important as the steps taken to get there: "Thought for Foucault is that which allows us to step back from our conduct and reflect on what we do ... Thought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object and reflects on it as a problem" (Danaher 44). The action of stepping away from one's surroundings and considering one's place within discourse is what creates a search for power, knowledge, and truth.

Because the characters in McCullough's text reflect on the discourses which define them, they are able to momentarily acknowledge that influence and in turn accept

or resist it. For instance, Meggie leaves for Matlock Island and realizes her love for Father Ralph. However, because she is caught within the discourses of mother, daughter, lover, etc., she can only consider these discourses and their effect on her definition of herself. Thus she leaves for Drogheda understanding how she is defined by her positions as mother, daughter, lover, etc. She leaves the island and heads back to Drogheda. Frank also leaves Drogheda after finding out that Paddy is not his father. He spends time away fighting for a traveling fighter's troupe and eventually spends time in jail for murder. However, once released he comes back to Drogheda and lives with the family. The reader conducts a similar stepping back and acknowledgement phase. In stopping her daily activities to read a chick lit novel, the reader sets aside her family, work, and relationships, which identify her within discourses of mother, employee, caregiver, etc. She then takes time to identify with the characters in the text, as seen in chapter five, and experiences some sense of superiority over the characters. This reading and connection to the text allows the reader to connect her life with those of the characters and, therefore, reflect on her own life and the discourses that define her.

McCullough shows not only the importance of stepping away and reflecting but also the importance of resistance as one way that people begin to understand how their identity is created by discourse and power structures. Foucault describes resistances as being "spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent," but that by definition, "they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations" (HS 96). This resistance can be seen in the character of Justine, who, from birth, McCullough sets up as a character that appears to refuse to be influenced by those around her. For example McCullough notes, "Whenever Justine cried Meggie was right there to pick her up, croon

to her, rock her, and never was a baby drier or more comfortable. The strange thing was that Justine didn't seem to want to be picked up or crooned over; she quieted much faster if she was left alone" (380). By setting Justine in this context, McCullough has the reader infer that from the beginning Justine does not operate the same way the other Clearys and Father Ralph do. She does not depend on anyone to create her identity, although she mistakingly does not realize her identity has been created for her since her birth.

Although she works through multiple discourses which define her, Justine's resistance to those discourses allow her a momentary understand about how the discourses operate in her life and how they create her identity. Justine resists the power of Drogheda by removing herself from her family. Because of her removal from the place where others have found and accepted their identities, Justine is forced to create her own. She becomes an actress, a profession where she creates many identities. Justine moves to London to act, while Dane heads to Rome to become a priest under the tutelage of Father Ralph. Following Dane's death, Justine retreats even farther from Drogheda, this time not to another country but within herself. McCullough creates this tension as Justine struggles to find her place, saying, "Twice she tried to go home to Drogheda on a visit, the second time even going so far as to pay for her plane ticket. Each time an enormously important last-minute reason why she couldn't go cropped up, but she knew the real reason to be a combination of guilt and cowardice" (McCullough 660). This resistance can be seen in Foucault's analysis of discourse and power as well. He notes that resistance is a part of the internal power which takes place on "points, knots, or focuses of resistance" (HS 96). Unlike the characters in McCullough's text, the reader knows that Justine blames herself for Dane's death. She defines herself romantically as a woman looking for love because

she went to Rainer rather than going with Dane to Greece, where he drowned. His death serves as a point of power and resistance for Justine. As a result, she considers her role as that of a woman needing a man and decides to change the discourse that of a successful actress playing the roles of famous women. She turns farther from her family as a result and deepens her resistance to the family structure that other characters have accepted. Justine is unable to accept her role in life and therefore continues to resist in an attempt to find understanding.

However, when she believes she can no longer handle fighting the identity she has been provided through discourse, Justine decides to move back to Drogheda permanently. Under the direction of Rainer, Meggie is forced to tell Justine not to come home. In his visit to Meggie, Rainer notes her position by saying, "Justine has donned some kind of hair shirt, but for all the wrong reasons. If anyone can make her see it, you can. Yet I warn you that if you choose to do so she will never come home, whereas if she goes on the way she is, she may well end up returning here permanently" (McCullough 665). McCullough emphasizes the need for understanding and stepping away here. She forces Meggie to act because, if anyone can make Justine see her inner struggle, Meggie can. Meggie has had the opportunity to leave Drogheda and experience life outside its confines, even for a short while; therefore, she is able to understand what Justine is dealing with. In taking away the choice of returning to Drogheda or continuing on with Rainer, McCullough considers another point by Foucault, that "more often one is dealing with mobile and transitory points of resistance, producing cleavages in a society that shift about, fracturing unities and effecting the regroupings, furrowing across individuals themselves, cutting them up and remolding them" (HS 96).

Power is not only something from above, but rather and more importantly it is something individuals must work through in order to receive a slight understanding about their identity. Like the characters in the book, individuals in modern society must consider that their identity is defined by the discourses they move through. Individuals must consider who is doing the speaking, what is being said, and in what context the discussion is taking place. By considering and reflecting on these elements the individual interacts on a local level and determines how she is placed under the authority of the power structures and discourses around her. Foucault writes, “Just as the network of power relations ends by forming a dense web that passes through apparatuses and institutions ... so too the swarm of points of resistance traverses social stratifications and individual unities” (HS 96). Not only does one interact with these discourses, but as one has seen in the case of Justine, the individual can also resist these interactions. In discussing the discourses of sex Foucault notes, “Let us consider the stratagems by which we were induced to apply all our skills to discover its secrets, by which we were attached to the obligation to draw out its truth, and made guilty for having failed to recognize it for so long ... The irony of this deployment is in having us believe that our ‘liberation’ is in the balance” (HS 159). It is the conclusion of this thesis, that power and discourse create a web in which one must locate one’s self and in which one must also question one’s self. It is as a result of discourse that individuals are forced to consider who they are in relation to that which surrounds them. As one can see from McCullough’s characters and from Foucault’s parting remarks, gaining knowledge does not lead to freedom from repression, but rather a deeper understanding of one’s subject position within power structures and discourses. Considering and reflecting on how these power structures and

discourses causes one to determine how self meaning is created and allows the individual the opportunity to understand her role and consider the possibility of accepting or resisting the institution's definition of herself.

### **List of Abbreviations**

In putting together this thesis, I attempted to make the text easy to read by abbreviating multiple sources from Foucault. The following is a list of those abbreviations.

- HS            *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Vol. 1.* New York: Vintage Books, 1978. Print.
- SMBD        *“Society Must Be Defended” Lectures at the College De France, 1975-76.* Eds. Maruo Bertaini and Alessandro Fontana, Trans. David Macey; New York: Picador, 2003. Print.

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## VITA

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