The Making of a Heroine: A Feminist Approach to the Representation of Heroines in Selected Historical Novels

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> *Women's heroism has been equally brave and equally original as that of men. But because in some of its forms it differs from the traditional pattern of heroism, it has often gone unrecognized . . .*
> (Polster 19).

Our knowledge and understanding of history is gleaned from certain stories told from particular perspectives. Through the way traditional historical narratives have organized and represented historical events, young people have had access to certain ways of knowing about the past. The absence of women and their contributions to history from these narratives, and thus from the school curriculum, has been an issue for those concerned with the intellectual life of young people. It has been noted that the "role of American women in history has been consistently overlooked and undervalued, in the literature, teaching and study of American history" (National Women's History Project 26).[1] "Students" are said to "sit in classes that, day in and day out, deliver the message that women's lives count for less than men's" (American Association of University Women 67).

For young people to know how the lives of women have

counted, and continue to count, towards the enrichment of intellectual, aesthetic, and everyday life, other stories of history need to be told from different perspectives. They need to see beyond the limited and biased constructions of history that have placed most value on progress that evolves through the domination of those in political and economic power. Young people are said to look often to the past for inspirational models of heroism, but these models should be inclusive of men and women's contributions to history from all cultures, races, and ethnic backgrounds.

Literary experiences with historical novels offer young people alternative ways of knowing that go beyond linear narratives of history, new ways of creating their own mosaics of meaning. Historical novels can be used as catalysts for critical approaches to history, questioning how and why only certain stories are told, and who has been included and excluded from the written records. In particular, the representations of strong female characters in historical novels have the potential to engage young people in thinking about the centrality of women's experiences and lives in history and to place value on their different contributions and heroism in shaping the past. Historical novels for children, writes Suzanne Rahn, have featured strong girl protagonists, particularly since the 1920's. Rahn suggests that feminism influenced American women writers who "established a claim through fiction to a place in history which textbooks were not to recognize for another forty or fifty years" (11).

Feminist critical theories make women's contributions central to their inquiries and question the way in which male models of experience and male narratives have been used to construct universal ways of knowing for all. In the discipline of history, this has involved re-examining history from a "woman-centred" perspective (Lewis 57). Bringing a feminist critical approach to historical novels for youth can raise questions about how conceptions of gender and femininity in different historical contexts work to constrain girls to certain expectations of behavior and asks how, in view of this, they are represented and valued as heroines in the texts of these novels.[2] The question can be raised whether a feminist consciousness informs these texts.

Neither women's nor men's heroism has to be interpreted and represented through narrow, stereotypical male models of the heroic. Miriam F. Polster argues that the heroic journey can follow different paths and be represented through alternative

heroic qualities other than the "male-skewed images" of aggressiveness and physical strength. Rather than the journey of the hero who is summoned away from family to the unknown, women's heroism, often unrecognized, is "rooted in the particular circumstances and values of women's lives, where connection and relationship may not be quickly stated in adversarial terms" (18).[3]

Polster's feminist revision of heroism is inclusive of different forms of heroism that bind neither men nor women to gender constrained interpretations of what it means to be heroic. Her five characteristics of heroism include: respect for human life and dignity; a "strong sense of personal choice and effectiveness"; an "original" perspective on the world in going beyond what others think is possible—which involves questioning assumptions and the status quo while risking ostracism to self; physical and mental courage; and impact on others, whether in a public or a more private setting (22–31). When the concept of heroism is so defined, an alternative knowing can value the contributions of men and women in helping others as well as valuing their different kinds of work. Collective action and leadership in the context of reform movements can also be perceived as heroic.

This feminist perspective of heroism is particularly useful in providing alternative ways of thinking about the representation of heroines in historical novels. Discussion of the novels selected for this chapter focus on how much the making of a heroine is contingent on male patterns of the heroic and on the different forms and patterns of girls' heroism that are made evident and valued. The novels were chosen because they represent heroines with strong voices in texts that raise questions about gender and other constraints in relation to how girls and their achievements are represented in different historical contexts.

MARGUERITE LEDOUX: A BOUND-OUT GIRL

Set in 1743 on the rugged coastline of Maine, Rachel Field's *Calico Bush* tells the story of Marguerite Ledoux, a twelve-year-old French girl who has lost her family and is now a "Bound-out Girl" to Joel and Sally Sargent—pioneers in the New World. She is bound to the Sargent's until her eighteen birthday and "would be answerable to these people for her every act and word, bound to serve them for six long years in return for shel-

ter, food, and such garments as should be deemed necessary" (9). Marguerite's task is to help care for the Sargent's five young children and undertake general household tasks as the Sargent family voyage to Penobscot and settle on their claimed land.

The motif of the bound girl is a useful concept that can be used to think about the different gender, social, and cultural constraints which are shown generally to bind heroines in different social and historical contexts and to define girls' actual bondage as servants or slaves in specific contexts.[4] Social and economic constraints, and racial prejudice are represented as forming the binding of a young girl in this novel in which Marguerite is also represented as a servant. A bound girl, or indentured servant is shown to have endured a life of hard servitude in colonial times when they were forbidden to leave or marry until their service was over (Rappaport 9). Not only is she bound in servitude, Marguerite is represented as an outsider—a "Frenchee" whose loyalty and up-bringing is liable to be suspect in the context of the war between the English and the French. Her identity as a young French girl is stripped from her as she is made to answer to the name of "Maggie."

Marguerite is represented in this text as a strong heroine who earns her freedom from bondage through her demonstrations of bravery. The making of a heroine in this text is a strong example of how a girl's heroism is often defined and represented as emulating the traditional universal traits of heroism associated with boys. There is an emphasis on Marguerite's physical endurance. Helping Caleb prevent the sheep from being swept off the boat during a storm, heading out in a skiff to head a cow and calf back to shore, and crossing the frozen channel of ice to obtain help from the Sargent's neighbors, Marguerite demonstrates that her courage and strength are equal to those of thirteen-year-old Caleb—son of Joe Sargent. As she rows the skiff, the analogy to a male feat is made clear:

> Then the oars were clumsy affairs, made to fit a man's hands rather than her own thin brown ones. Nevertheless she gripped valiantly, bracing her feet against a wooden cleat till her toes ached with the pressure. Drops of sweat rose on her forehead and trickled down over her face. She felt them on her cheeks and lips as she tugged tirelessly at the oars (45).

Her deeds are described and praised in terms of "grit," "spunk," and bravery by the males in the text: "The Captain had

praised her, and Joel Sargent had admitted that she had grit. Perhaps even Caleb would be less scornful of her now" (20). It is made clear that her bravery transcends that which is considered normal for her sex. A male voice narrates that he "guessed Caleb would stick fast . . . but why *she* ain't gone to the bottom traipsin' out there in all that blow is past me. She's got grit, wherever she was raised—I'll say that for her" (20).

The narrative plot continues to be built around incidents, such as a foraging bear and a potentially dangerous encounter with American Indians, in which Marguerite's heroic attributes are demonstrated.[5] She is represented as capable of acting alone; a trait which reproduces the valued tenets of independence and individualism of the American pioneer. "She saved us, all by herself," Dolly Sargent comments in praise (191). In her original approach of erecting a maypole to distract the American Indians from attacking, Marguerite uses skills of communication and persuasion. These are skills, as Polster points out, that are often used by women in lieu of force and which have not always been perceived as heroic, since they are used to influence rather than overpower (39). In the context of Marguerite's action, they are represented and acknowledged as heroic.

Demonstrated through her character are the stamina and fortitude that are necessary for survival in the rugged setting of the wild and untamed frontier. She will "weather" the settlers' life, she is told. She is a heroine capable of sharing the traditional heroic terrain of men, but this ability goes beyond the settlers' objective of taming the land. One of the strongest and most beautiful components of this text is the illustration of Marguerite's close affinity with the land as what she sees and feels about her environment is described in detail. Looking at the scenery around her, "it was as if she knew herself for a part of all this miracle of land and sea and sky" (54). At the closure of the novel, "her bare feet" knew "the hollow and rooty places so that she had no need to look down as she went" (200). These expressions of being in relationship with the land, learning to love and know it, is a way of knowing about the land that women have demonstrated in opposition to the more heroic attribute of subjugating virgin territory (Polster 104–06). Marguerite is represented as being metaphorically linked in legend to the "island-scattered coast of Maine" as "a flowering sprig in the wilderness" (xi).

It is her possession of the heroic traits which emulate those

associated with men, however, that is given as the reason for Marguerite's freedom from servitude. Joel Sargent wishes to do the "right thing" by Marguerite. She had "been a good girl," he tells her, "an' a brave one. I ain't said much, but I know grit when I see it, an' you've got more'n your share." She has "earned" her "freedom" and the right to join her "own folks" (197). She has proved her equality and capabilities. Her identity and freedom restored, Marguerite chooses of her own free will to remain with the Sargent family. Marguerite Ledoux's heroism can thus be interpreted as an examplar of the male traditional model. However, Marguerite's demonstrated relationship with the land, her caring and devotion to the Sargent's young children, and her ability to deal with a dangerous situation by her quick-thinking and inventiveness are attributes that broaden the archetypal model of bravery.

Gender is not foregrounded consciously in this text as a constraint that binds Marguerite Ledoux. For Marguerite to become a heroine is to transcend rather than transgress gender boundaries; since her emulations of men's courage is praised. As the courage and fortitude of the frontier woman has so often been celebrated in romantic form, so is Marguerite Ledoux remembered as legendary heroine and pioneer woman in the ballad, "Maypole Point." Reproduced in the text through Marguerite's character are the attributes deemed necessary for the survival of the pioneer woman. It is useful from this perspective to discuss the representation of Dolly Sargent, who is shown to lose her small daughter through lacking the toughness to "burn" the child's fingers "on purpose" to show her the danger of fire (88). In contrast, represented through the elderly, resilient Aunt Hepsa, are the attributes needed for a quintessential model of the pioneer woman who must civilize the land.

Although women in colonial America were still subordinated to patriarchal family structures, they are documented as receiving respect and independence for their sharing of essential work in an "agricultural economy." Although "work proceeded along gender lines," these "distinctions were easily blurred" (Lerner xxvi–xxvii). Frontier women shared with men the hardship of everyday life in stringent conditions. Perceived from this perspective, one way to approach a discussion of this novel might be in the context of the Equal Rights Amendment (introduced in Congress in 1923) whose supporters "believed that women were similar to men in capabilities and merely needed to be afforded

equal opportunities and accorded natural rights" to achieve equality (Donovan 60).

DACIE TYBBOT: A REVOLUTIONARY HEROINE

The settings of many historical novels follow the linear, chronological great events sequence of history which is familiar from traditional history textbooks. The Revolutionary War has been the background for several historical novels written for youth. Mary Stetson Clarke's *Petticoat Rebel* can be discussed in the context of another rebellion—a girl's rebellion against the gender restrictions under which women were bound in a specific historical context. Dacie may not be bound as a servant girl, but the title of the novel alone draws attention to sixteen-year-old Dacie Tybbot's resistance to her subordination as a female. In American colonial society, females were "generally assigned to subordinate positions" with "universal insistence upon sex-appropriate language, clothes, work, and recreation" (Kiefer 2–3).

"To want to become a heroine, to have a sense of the possibility of being one," writes Rachel M. Brownstein, "is to develop the beginnings of what feminists call a 'raised' consciousness: it liberates a woman from feeling (and therefore perhaps from being) a victim or a dependent or a drudge, someone of no account" (xix). Set in Gloucester, Massachusetts, 1774, in the context of the Revolutionary War, Clarke's novel foregrounds issues of gender constrictions which are centered on the right for equal education for girls. Dacie is represented as a young woman conscious of and frustrated by the restrictions imposed on her because of her sex.

Dacie is aware that she is excluded from the "exciting business of life"—that the only way to be part of the real action is to be disguised as a boy in a men's and boys' world. Her statement that she wished she had "been born a boy!" so that "there'd be something" she "could do" in the war reinforces the division made between her world and that of her father and older boys (157). Either the desire to dress, or actually dressing in male attire, is a motif that is frequently reproduced in historical novels (and other genres) as a way of girls accessing those places of power and action from which they are barred.[6] It is thus reproduced as a wish to transgress gender boundaries in a patriarchal society.

Throughout the novel, the rigid divisions between the private

sphere of women and the public sphere of men in colonial New England are made clear. Dacie is expected to take her place bound within the traditional role of women and girls who would be spinning and weaving coats for the soldiers (157). The role of women who were dependent and confined to the "domestic scene" in supportive or ancillary roles to men at war were often awarded "low status," argues Polsen. When heroism is defined as that achieved on the battlefield, women have limited possibilities to be heroic (12). When the fringes of war do touch the boundaries of Dacie's life, she is represented in ancillary and supportive roles through the re-loading of a musket for her grandfather and by helping the doctor with the wounded. Dacie's heroism is not, as in *Calico Bush*, reproduced through the emulation of men's heroism; this she is denied. The making of a heroine in Clarke's novel can be interpreted through alternative values and definitions of heroism.

Clarke has chosen to represent a protagonist with a raised consciousness about what is at stake in relation to girls' education and their future status in society. With a "sound" educational "background," Dacie thinks, girls would be "able to understand government and politics, and could discuss them ably with men. Perchance men would even listen to such educated women and let them have a part in the business of the world" (213). The emphasis on Dacie's interest and love for education provides the context for her courage in advocating education for girls. Her vocation for teaching is represented through the lessons she gives to freed slaves. Dacie's voice is presented as gathering strength as she continues to speak up for the education of girls at a time when education for girls was little valued over and above the elementary skills of reading and writing, and for girls of Dacie's class, extra education in the form of elocution and needlework.

She faces ridicule and disapproval as she first quietly voices her opinion "that parish schools ought by rights to be open to girls" (118). Later, she is represented as strong enough to defy prominent citizens when they offer her the official post of school teacher in lieu of the school master who has enlisted. "Unless girls can come to school on an equal footing with boys, "she informs them, "I don't care to teach" (242). Despite the disparity in power relationships between herself and the male citizens of Gloucester, she recognizes a responsibility to the girls she teaches. However, her position is clearly represented as subordi-

nate in the context of patriarchal colonial society; she cannot make decisions, only suggest. Her advocacy for teaching is at the grassroots level. It is in the classroom that she "faced a challenge" when the girls she teaches must "demonstrate how well they have been taught" to prove "that they should be granted equal educational opportunities with their brothers" (242–43).

Dacie is eventually granted the position of teaching boys and girls so that the official school master may go to war. Her contribution is valued, her young man, Rafe, tells her for the grander purpose of freeing the school master so that he "can follow his larger sense of duty to our whole country" (254). However, Dacie's new position is represented in the text as important in its own right. "It's almost as if I were fighting, then,!" she tells Rafe. "Exactly," he tells her. "You're doing something no woman before you has ever done—at least, no woman in this town. You're freeing a man to go to war." As she "matched her pace to Rafe's," she feels:

> herself a part of the vast army of patriots working for America's freedom. Now she was one with Zeke and her father and Rafe and all the others who were fighting for liberty. There were more ways than one of helping to win a war, and in the schoolroom she could be working for the cause of liberty as surely as if she were on the battlefield (255).

It is through the representation of a raised consciousness—one that "liberates" Dacie from feeling that she is "someone of no account"—that a heroine is made in this text. Dacie is represented as neither transcending nor transgressing gender or societal boundaries but achieves her goal through pushing at the boundaries from within. Dacie does not go "beyond the confines of 'proper behavior'" that Polster argues is characteristic of a heroine in her actions (32), but her ideas about education are represented as revolutionary in the context of the setting. In terms of Polster's feminist revision of heroism, the novel is a recognition of women's work that has often gone unrecognized, particularly in the historical narrative. This novel can also be discussed in relation to knowing how women have contributed to the intellectual life of young people in the field of education.

It is not known if Clarke consciously uses the colonial era—a time when women's status was changing and under debate—in which to explore issues that were being raised in relation to women's status and education during the 1960's when the novel

was published, but it is an interesting supposition. In a "Foreword" to the novel, Clarke makes the link between slavery and illiteracy, pointing out that "changes in public opinion" were brought about to both issues in Gloucester, Massachusetts because of the Revolutionary War (9). Certainly equality through equal education has long been a tenet of the feminist movement. The analogy of uneducated women to slaves had been made by Mary Wollstonecraft in the eighteenth century (Donovan 9). In the following novel, published thirty years earlier, the issue raised in the text is the socialization of boys and girls into appropriate and different gender roles and is framed around a very different kind of heroine. Although this "different" heroine is younger than other protagonists included here, she is well-known and serves as an exemplar of a particular form of heroism in historical fiction.

CADDIE WOODLAWN: HEROINE AS TOMBOY

The crossing of gender boundaries is a motif that is frequently used in specific historical contexts as a way of drawing attention to the kind of constraints that bind girls and young women in particular periods, and which also demonstrates the way gender is socially constructed. A clear example of how a heroic action by a young girl is able to be carried out, in part, because she has been encouraged to step out of the bounds of appropriate gendered behavior is reproduced in Carol Ryrie Brinks's *Caddie Woodlawn*. Based on the stories of Brink's grandmother growing up in Wisconsin in the nineteenth century, Caddie is eleven years old in 1864 at the beginning of the story and "as wild a little tomboy as ever ran in the woods of western Wisconsin" (1).

Throughout the text is a strong questioning of appropriate gender behavior as Caddie is first allowed to "run wild" with the boys. "Don't keep her in the house learning to be a lady," her father had asked his wife, having lost one daughter to frailty. I would rather see her learn to plow than make samplers, if she can get her health by doing so" (13). Caddie is reigned in by her mother when Caddie's behavior has gone too far away from what is appropriate and she behaves like a "hoyden" towards a young lady guest (129–30). It is time for Caddie to grow up into a woman, her father tells her (240).

Caddie's action as a heroine is to ride through melting snow and to cross an iced-over river to warn her American Indian

friends of the settlers' threatened attack. Her action is based on her own decision that the action planned by her father's neighbors, in his absence, is wrong. Caddie's heroic action, brave, resourceful, individualistic—based on familiar heroic attributes—is performed, therefore, while she is still represented as having the same freedom as her brothers. Writing in the 1930's, Brink foregrounds the issue of gender dichotomy and how young girls and boys were inculcated with a particular value system in the context of a specific period. Caddie's father tells her: "A woman's task is to teach [men and boys] gentleness and courtesy and love and kindness" (240). Caddie's future work is not undervalued in the text. "It's a big task," Caddie's father tells her:

> Harder than cutting trees or building mills or damming rivers. It takes nerves and courage and patience, but good women have those things. They have them just as much as the men who build bridges and carve roads through the wilderness. A woman's work is something fine and noble to grow up to, and it just as important as a man's (240).

A woman's responsibilities are thus described in heroic terms by her father to reconcile and persuade the adventuresome Caddie to her future womanhood. Brink's novel has been singled out for its feminist approach and for its representation of an adventurous heroine. Hancock uses the representation of Caddie to illustrate the freedom that is given to young girls before they reach the gender constraints they encounter at puberty. She is described by Hancock as a "noble heroine" whose action depends on physical strength and an "outreaching spirit" (11). Zilboorg argues that Caddie is an "important example of a genre of works by American women for a young female audience that present admirable girl heroes as feminist role models" (116).

In relation to Polster's shared characteristics of heroism, Caddie is represented as demonstrating physical and mental courage as she questions the actions of the settlers, risks disapproval for her action, and shows respect for human life by valuing the lives of her American Indian friends which is motivated by Caddie's sense of connection and responsibility to them. The fact that the American Indians were indeed represented as "other" to the settlers lends even more credence to her heroic act. Her heroism can thus be discussed in wider terms than

emulating a male pattern of heroism.

However, Caddie's actual heroic *deed*, with which young readers are most likely to identify, is possible only because she has been able to live without the constraints of behaving as a young woman as an "experiment." As in several other historical novels, girls have adventures because they cross gender boundaries; Caddie had ventured from the private sphere of home to the public sphere in visiting the Indian reservation and had built up her physical stamina through her play with her brothers. How much, then, is her specific act of heroism attributable to freedom from the constraints of womanhood and to exposure to male territory in this particular historical context? Brink's text is useful for discussion since it remains popular with young people and certainly is open to critical interpretation and debate on issues of gender socialization in relation to how Caddie is represented as a heroine. It can lead to ways of thinking about how cultural differences are constructed between gender resulting in the dichotomy of the private, feminine and public, masculine spheres, respectively.[7]

GRACE DARLING: THE MAKING OF A HEROINE

> . . . Darling is one of the two individuals who have so honourably distinguished themselves, the other being Grace Darling, his daughter, a young woman of twenty-two years of age! The latter prompted by an impulse of heroism which in a female transcends all praise, seeing that it would have done honour to the stoutest-hearted of the male sex, urged her father to go off in the boat at all risks, offering her self to take one oar if he would take the other! (*Grace* 89).

Walsh's novel does not just tell a story of an actual young woman's courageous rescue of nine survivors from the wrecked passenger ship, *Forfarshire* off the coast of North Sunderland, England on September 7, 1838. Far more than this, it reconstructs from a feminist perspective, how Grace was expected to fit into a certain idea of a heroine. She was to possess the kinds of attributes acceptable in a young woman for public adulation in the Victorian era. The focus in the novel is on the process of the molding of a heroine in a particular social and historical context in that it shows how Grace's bravery was perceived and interpreted in different ways, according to the perceiver's gen-

der, class, and religion in Victorian patriarchal society.

Grace is represented as risking her life to save the survivors of the wreck. Despite the warning given by her father that although they may get to the wreck, they may not get back unless one of the rescued would be "strong enough to help" them, she chooses to take action out of respect for human life. The alternative, she asks her father, is to "otherwise . . . stand and watch" the stranded passengers "die?" She "would try it alone, if [she] had to," she tells him (12). The newspaper clipping quoted above describes Grace's bravery as transcending that of men. Her father speaks of the "mettle" needed to save lives at sea and states: "A man couldn't have a pluckier daughter, even if she was a son" (123). The clergy, among others, however, were anxious to prove that Grace did not act from avarice for the premiums paid to those who rescued survivors from the high seas, but acted rather, from the "compassionate emotions [that] womanhood" had "so much to teach, mankind so much to learn" as an Archdeacon puts it to Grace (217).

It is through Grace's subjective voice as she narrates her thoughts and feelings, that Walsh chooses to reconstruct a heroine who was publicly heralded in the nineteenth century, much as a celebrity is constructed through the media today, as she was thronged by crowds, asked for personal mementoes, and had her portrait painted. Rather than gaining in confidence and self-esteem from her brave action, however, Grace is historically documented by Walsh as being castigated by the local community for encroaching on the Sunderland's lifeboat crew's domain. She is represented as finally living in a state of torment —beset by doubts that her act was indeed selfless; perhaps she had, after all, saved lives for the wrong reasons. "In that case," Grace narrates, "if I had indeed done my deed for money, then all the presents, all the praise and love I had been given had been given in error, taken on false pretences. I would cough, and toss and turn, and wrestle with thoughts like these" (219).

Dying at the age of twenty-four from consumption, Grace is represented by Walsh as enduring personal suffering rather than gaining pride and confidence from her very real heroic act —despite her national popularity. Strong and full of confidence at the beginning of the novel, Grace is represented as gradually losing voice and self as she is burdened with the identity of being "a beautiful example of lowly virtue!" (245). In the context of her own time, Grace was brought up against a patriarchal cul-

ture which denied her a sense of joy in her heroic deed without feelings of guilt. She is only accepted as a role model and heroine by her own sex when they are reassured that Grace's looks and dress conform to their ideal of femininity. The Lukas sisters had expected "some kind of Amazon . . ." (86). Grace can, however, comments one sister, "prove one may be pretty as well as brave!" (88). She had given them:

> A testimonial that the noblest feelings may inhere in a womanly bosom! That our sex is not for ever cut off from the possibility of heroic acts; that to be female is not always to be weak and helpless! You have reconciled us to our gender, Miss Darling, and we must thank you for it, however deeply you blush! (87–88).

It is only at the closure of the novel, when one of the rescued passengers tells her that it did not matter *why* she did it, asking that if she had done it "for rage and spite and greed," was he "the less living for that?" that Grace is able to believe in herself again. "What coin was ever minted, Miss Darling, that made a brave man of a coward, or could buy what you did for me?" (251). Despite her impending death, Grace is represented as feeling restored to a sense of self with his words—no longer burdened by those who attempted to bind her heroic act within the definitions of a "pure and perfect compassion for suffering humanity" (217). "Heroes," writes Polster, "are not measured by publicity. Whether a heroic act receives worldwide attention or occurs in an obscure setting with only a single witness, a heroic act is still heroic" (23). Interesting to consider are questions of how publicity affected a young heroine in Victorian society as she is lauded for risking her life (like a man), yet whose act had also to be perceived as fitting Victorian definitions of femininity.

Feminist scholarship has focused both on the discipline of history and the field of literary criticism in writing women into history. Scholars have rescued and reinstituted in the records of history and literature those women, their deeds, and their works who have been absented by a male hierarchy which has controlled the way knowledge is constructed and studied. Women, it is noted, with those "others" who are not of the dominant ruling groups, have been margalinized; they remain on the outer boundaries of what it is important to know and record. The inclusion of women's contributions and experiences to the historical record involves viewing "the past from an entirely new perspective" (Lerner xxii).[8]

Walsh's text, published in 1991, would seem to informed by a feminist consciousness of this absence of women in the patriarchal record through the choice of language and foregrounding of the written record. Emphasized is Grace's discovery that her name is absent from her father's journal in his written record of their joint rescue. Her name and heroic deed are hidden under the patriarchal name, "The Darlings." She narrates that this caused her "grief;" she felt that she was a "person missing, a person lost from view" (213). She further discovers that her brothers' names are entered for their part in a rescue at sea and that not even her birth is recorded in her farther's journal. She is, she notes, "off the margins of his page" and that her "thoughts if I cannot remember them are lost . . ." (213).

This feminist approach of writing women into history would seem to inform the following four novels discussed in this chapter. Avi's novel reproduces this feminist perspective through the representation of a strong, romantic heroine whose recorded heroic deeds are threatened to be erased from her journal by a patriarchal father. Unlike the actual historical figure of Grace, Charlotte Doyle is represented as a fictional heroine who is able to break away from the constraints of Victorian definitions of femininity.

CHARLOTTE DOYLE: AN UNNATURAL GIRL

When the transgression of boundaries is made most visible, heroines are represented as "unnatural." In *The True Confession of Charlotte Doyle*, Avi's representation of Charlotte Doyle is a clear example of a how a young girl becomes a heroine through transgressing boundaries of gender, class, race, and the Victorian ethic of femininity, and who is thus branded as "unnatural." The unnaturalness of Charlotte is represented through the opening sentence of the text: "Not every thirteen-year-old girl is accused of murder, brought to trial, and found guilty" (1). Set in 1832, as she is ready to begin the voyage to America, where she is to rejoin her parents, Charlotte describes her dress, education, and background as befitting a young woman whose "destiny" was "to be a *lady*" (1). She crosses gender boundaries as soon as she is instructed to embark upon the voyage without female companionship—an impropriety of which she is well aware: "But . . . but that would be all *men*," Charlotte protests. "And . . . I am a girl. It would be *wrong*!" (14). She was, she realizes,

"where no proper young lady should be," and it is her *father's* voice that she hears saying those words (25).

The social and class barriers of Victorian society are made clear throughout the text as Charlotte is represented, at first, as naturally aligning herself with the Captain—reinforcing the boundaries of social class and race—as she finds prospects of being friends with the "forward" black cook, Zachariah "unpleasant." She will be a civilizing and moral influence on the disorderly crew, the Captain tells her. As the voyage proceeds, the order and hierarchical structures of Victorian society are shown to collapse, and Charlotte is represented as fighting against the disorder and wildness that threatens her identity as a young Victorian lady as she begins to cross over the boundaries to join the mutinous crew.

After donning the clothing made for her by Zacharia, which is not "proper" for a lady and finding it "surprisingly comfortable," she spends "two hours composing an essay" in her "blank book on the subject of proper behavior for young women" (66–67). As the voyage proceeds, however, it is, rather, the unnaturalness of Victorian definitions of femininity that are uncovered. The natural order of things masked by constraints of Victorian femininity is symbolized through Charlotte brushing her hair "wanting it smoothly drawn—anything to keep it from its natural and . . . obnoxious wildness" (63).

The text is structured throughout by the oppositions of natural/unnatural and order/disorder. Charlotte's transgression of boundaries is represented by Jaggery as creating chaos out of his orderly world. She has upset the "rightful balance between commander and commanded," Jaggery tells her (188). "It doesn't matter that" *she* is "different," he continues. "The difficulty is that your difference encourages *them* to question their places. And mine. The order of things" (188). Reproduced in the text are the shifting re-alignments of the seemingly fixed differences between hierarchies of gender, race, and social class caused by Charlotte's "difference." Perceived by Jaggery as unimportant as a girl in her own right, she is threatening because she symbolizes a marker of instability through her transgressive behavior. The realization by Jaggery that the surface order of things is an illusion is symbolized by his attempts to restore order to the disorder of his cabin—damaged in a storm. By candlelight, the cracks and splinters are visible; but by blowing out the candle, he demonstrates to Charlotte that "it's

hard to notice the difference. Everything appears in order" (190). When Charlotte finally becomes a member of the crew through the male initiation right of climbing "to the top of the royal yard," she is represented through the language of the Captain as "unnatural." Refusing her own definition as being "unusual," Jaggery identifies her as "an unnatural girl, dressing in unnatural ways, doing unnatural things . . ." (169). "Who shall be blamed for this disastrous voyage?" Jaggery asked. "It cannot be me, can it? No, it must be someone from the outside. The unnatural one" (189). Represented is the girl without bounds who can naturally be sacrificed and hung by Jaggery for the murder of the ship's first mate.

The perception of Charlotte's behavior as unnatural can be understood in the context of the Victorian definition of femininity which was believed to be "natural." Women and especially daughters were conceptualized as innately "innocent, pure, gentle and self-sacrificing" (Gorham 4–5). Charlotte is represented as a heroine through transgressing boundaries. Crossing over to a male-ordered setting, she emulates the traditional heroic pattern of courage through her physical courage as a member of the ships's crew. Charlotte, however, is also represented as intellectually and emotionally engaged in an alternative way of knowing. In the context of Polster's model, she demonstrates mental courage and responsibility in re-aligning her values with a different moral order. She acts upon her own sense of fairness and responsibility in response to the whipping of Zachariah in contrast to the Captain's "justice" dictated by "admiralty codes" (93). Her heroism might, then, also be usefully discussed in terms of women's "heroism in the service of connection and responsibility to others" as distinct from "heroism in the service of abstract principle" (Polster 33).

No longer restrained by rigid divisions of gender, class, and race, or by Captain Jaggery's and her father's definitions of order and morality, Charlotte returns to sea with Zacharia, where "winds have a mind of their own" (210). In relation to Polster's model, she is represented as an "original" heroine with "a strong sense of personal choice" as she displays physical and mental courage in "going beyond what other people think is possible" (Polster 22).[9]

The absencing of women from the patriarchal record is foregrounded in Avi's text. The journal, in which Charlotte records her heroic deeds on her fateful voyage on a ship with a muti-

nous crew from England to America is burned by her father. It consists of "the most outlandish, not to say *unnatural* tales," her father tells her. She is "forbidden—*forbidden* to talk about" the voyage to her siblings (207). Charlotte is confined to her room with a "vast quantity" of her father's books "deemed suitable for [her] reclamation." She does not read them. "Instead," she narrates, "I used the books, the blank pages, the margins, even the mostly empty titlepages, to set down secretly what had happened during the voyage. It was my way of fixing all the details in my mind forever" (208). Unlike Grace, Charlotte is represented as writing her own memories into the patriarchal record so they might not be forgotten. It is this revision and alteration of the patriarchal annals of history that is represented in Kathryn Lasky's novel through her heroine, Meribah.

MERIBAH SIMON: A HEROINE BEYOND THE DIVIDE

Beyond the Divide is the story of an Amish girl, Meribah Simon, who in 1849, accompanies her father on the pioneer trail. In writing about her work, Lasky makes the distinction between historical fiction and the fiction of history and thus between the different ways of knowing about history. In the fiction of history, facts are covered up, erased, abused and distorted.[10] Her novel, *Beyond the Divide*, she writes, is historical fiction of the pioneers emigration to the West rather than fiction of history which she had grown up watching on television and film, which had erased the history of violence against women in the West (Lasky "The Fiction" 159). In this novel, Lasky writes into history this violence against women on the Overland trial through the raping of the young woman, Sarah Billings, who is subsequently criticized and ostracized by the company. Through the representation of how the rape of a girl is covered and concealed—the "nameless" fear "within" the community—Lasky doubles the violence done to a young woman with the violence done to the historical record through its omission. Through Meribah, the record is set straight as she climbs alone to Independence Rock and inserts there, the lost womens' initials with the other names of their company.

It is men who have officially recorded the historical narratives.[11] In Lasky's novel it is a young woman who is represented as actively shaping history and the land as Meribah creatively maps the pioneer trek across the West. Her mapping is

described as “totally original and not reliant on the usual cartographic symbols” (205). She tells the official Government cartographer, Goodnough (based on J. Goldsborough Bruff) that she makes “new symbols to show the shape and feel of things out” there. “Dost thou know that sometimes, no matter how real I know this land is and however long it has been here, “she asks him, that “I sometimes I feel as if I am reinventing it as I move through it?” (209–10). She is a recorder of history—a scribe—a function historically allotted to men; but more than this, she shapes and molds the land to her own view of it. Goodenough compares his skills at cartographer to Meribah’s and finds for all his knowledge of “trigonometry, calculus” and his scientific tools of measurement, it is Meribah who has the deeper knowledge. “As a cartographer he knew the land, but she knew nature. He drew boundaries. She didn’t. He measured. She invented” (251).

In terms of the representation of Meribah as a heroine, she is an active shaper of her own history. With her strong voice she represents attributes from Polster’s five shared characteristics of heroism. She is represented as showing dignity and respect for life in caring for her father when he is fatally injured and in her love and friendship for the raped Selina; she is one of the most original heroines represented in these novels as she maps her own perspective physically and metaphorically as she travels the Overland trail; she possesses mental and physical courage in her ingenuity in mending her father’s broken wagon and in surviving the hardship of winter on her own in the wilderness; and she represents the strength of a woman who can make her own way in community and in solitude in what was predominantly represented as a male setting. Meribah’s model for selfhood is thus composed of many attributes from patterns of both traditional and female heroism.

Going beyond the historical narrative, *Beyond the Divide* represents another way of knowing about history for young people. There is an emphasis in the text itself on the different ways of knowing as Meribah considers the difference between the Amish ways of understanding justice, family, work, and religion and the different “ways” of her father—the reason why her father must leave the Amish community. Meribah’s own selfhood is represented as being constructed through the difference between what she had known before and what she subsequently learns.

The "divide"—that "ridge that separates the waters flowing to the Atlantic from the waters flowing to the Pacific"—is represented as a symbolic divide of knowing for Meribah as she notes the triviality and hypocrisy of the travellers who speak of the "crowning glory of our achievement" on reaching the ridge. "If she felt anything at all; it was a dividing within—self out of self" (146). Meribah's map of the divide represents the uncertainty and future of ways of knowing (although not directionless) rather than fixed and unalterable systems of knowledge:

> Meribah marked the divide on her map in a way that she herself only half understood. She did not print the words. She did not stipple the ridge or crosshatch a mountain range. She made a few, very faint lines for the dividing rivers. But what she did mark on her map were the two oceans. In the wide margins of her paper she printed PACIFIC on the left and ATLANTIC on the right. In printing the names on her map, she reversed her usual mapmaking procedure, for she had never seen either ocean. But this did not bother her. She had marked what she had never seen, but could only believe to be" (147–48).

LYDDIE WORTHEN: MILL GIRL

Feminist scholarship has involved "asking new questions of new topics" (Lewis 57). This includes researching women's place in the home and the work place as well as their work as leaders in reform and emancipation movements. Factories and mills, for example, are some of the new contexts in which women's heroism is recognized. Katherine Paterson has also written women into history in her story of *Lyddie*, which is based on research of the New England mill girls in Lowell, Massachusetts.[12] In contrast to Meribah's story set in the pioneering West, Lyddie's story, beginning in 1843, is narrated in the context of working girls in the industrial East, recreating the history of farm girl to factory girl.

The attributes of heroism, represented through Lyddie, are those of grit, hard work, and a fierce determination to be independent—the Protestant work ethic—in a text that eschews the romantic treatment of a heroine. From the time, she and her brother struggle to keep the small farm going after her mother's breakdown and departure, Lyddie determines to be "beholden" to nobody. After being hired out on her mother's instructions as a servant in a tavern, Lyddie decides on a journey of "freedom"

to Lowell, where she will work as a "factory girl." She will be "free," she narrates. "I can do anything I want. I can go to Lowell and make real money to pay off the debt [on the farm] so I can go home (45).

The concept of the bound girl is reproduced in a different social and historical context in this novel. The differences and contradictions between freedom and slavery in relationship to working girls is made throughout the text. At the tavern, Lyddie defines herself as "no more than a slave. She worked from before dawn until well after dark, and what did she have to show for it?" (43). Working and earning more money in the mill, Lyddie refuses to be identified as a "wage slave" by those girls working for better working conditions. "I ain't a slave!" she tells them "fiercely" (92). Lyddie opposes signing the "petition" because she has "got to have the money" (91). She does not wish to help the new Irish girls manage the looms. "She could not fall behind in her production, else her pay would drop and before she knew it one of these cussed papists would have her job" (100).

Through the representation of Lyddie, the alternative values of working in relationship and caring for others are also represented when her life is turned upside down by the arrival of Rachel, her young sister, for whom she is now responsible. The care of Rachel is shown to demand a different set of values than those of the Protestant ethic of individuality and success (Polster 20). Lyddie's journey, as heroine, is represented as taking a different path as she develops compassion and a larger sense of responsibility towards others culminating in her rescue of Brigid , an Irish girl, from the sexual molestation of an overseer. Lyddie risks and loses her job through her action. The reason given for her dismissal—"moral turpitude" not only belies the moral integrity that is represented by Lyddie as a heroine but makes visible the sexual harassment that lies under the respectable veneer of the mill's regulations supervising the moral behavior of the factory girls.

Free from the constraint of being a "wage slave," Lyddie chooses to attend a college for women in Ohio rather than stay to marry Luke Stevens (181). Represented once again in these novels, through the choice of a heroine, is the equation between education and equal opportunity. A different form and pattern of heroism is reproduced in the novel through the valuing of collective action and "raised consciousness" of women as they

engage in labor reform and compassion for each other. "A distinctive quality of women's heroism," Polster points out, "is the form of aggregate action" (36). There is, in this novel, a different conception of the "freeing" of a bound girl. The making of a heroine in this text is through the demonstration of tenacity, physical, and moral courage in obtaining independence while retaining a sense of responsibility towards others.

RIFKA NEBROT: A VOICE FROM OUTSIDE

The writing in of women into history and literature includes those women from other races, cultures, and ethnic groups. *Letters From Rifka*, by Karen Hesse, is the story of twelve-year-old Rifka's flight, with her Jewish family, from Russian persecution in Berdichev in 1919 and their journey to America. Rifka is separated from her family when she contracts ringworm and must stay alone in Antwerp until her ringworm is cured. On her eventual arrival in the States, she is confronted with discriminatory immigration laws because of her lack of hair. Without hair, she is told, she may not "find a husband to take care of" her and thus be "a social responsibility" (95). Detained on Ellis Island, helping the nurses and doctors care for the other detainees, Rifka demonstrates her linguistic skills and also the "skill and talent," and compassion that would enable her to study medicine. Through her strong voice, Rifka argues her own case to be allowed into the States irrespective of her bald head thus freeing herself from the constraints of gender biased immigration laws.

Rifka' journey, like that of the hero's, is represented as one of courage in the face of fear. On account of her physical looks and linguistic ability, she poses as a "Russian peasant" girl distracting the Russian guards with bayonets searching the train where her parents and brother are hidden (8). "Inside," she narrates, "I twisted like a wrung rag" as she is pawed over by one of the guards (7). Rifka also represents, however, the attributes of care and relationship in the compassion she shows towards a small Russian boy on Ellis Island, who refuses to speak or eat, despite the fact that he represents the Russian soldiers who would have killed her and her family. "Compassion is a part of medicine you can't teach," a doctor tells an immigration official. "Compassion is a quality I have often seen in Rifka" (138). Rifka is represented as gaining entry to the States from the "outside"

through her courage and compassion, her respect for human dignity, and her originality—an inclusive pattern of heroism which is reproduced in these novels.

Hesse bases her novel on "the memories" of Lucy Avrutin, her great-aunt (x). The form of the text emphasizes the personal histories of women that are being written into historical narratives from their formerly unpublished letters, diaries, and journals.[13] Rifka writes letters to her cousin back in Berdichev throughout the vicissitudes of her long journey on the margins and blank pages of the new volume of Pushkin's poetry that her cousin had given her before leaving. Rifka, like Meribah, is represented as a creative and inventive heroine as she creates her own poetry (also written on the blank pages of the Pushkin volume) that contributes towards her acceptance as an immigrant into the United States. Reproduced in the text is an intertwining of a Jewish girl's written record of her courageous journey and her poetry with one of Russia's foremost writers. Pushkin's verses, in turn, are reproduced in the margins of the text of Rifka's story. Again a feminist consciousness would seem to inform the text as a young female "outsider"—persecuted as part of the Jewish community in the Ukraine—writes in her history and verses on the margins of a dominant culture, and whose story in this text is now told in its own right.[14]

ANNIE METCALF: FACING A DIFFERENT KIND OF FEAR

Women's heroism, Polster reminds us, has often gone unnoticed because it has been undertaken in the everyday "ordinariness" of women's lives away from the traditional arenas of heroism, such as the battlefield. Heroism can take place in "commonplace settings and in response to everyday challenges" by family members, neighbors and those with whom we work (21). This form of heroism often is undertaken in the caring of others; it can involve the overcoming of fear and prejudice in helping others. This quiet form of heroism is represented through the character of thirteen-year-old Annie Metcalf in Margaret I. Rostkowski's historical novel, *After the Dancing Days*, set in the context of home and hospital in a small town near Kansa City in 1919.

As Annie and her mother meet her father, a doctor, just returned from the Great War at the train station, Annie experi-

ences the fear and repulsion at the sight of the badly wounded soldiers who disembark from the train with him. Her initial reaction is typical of the feeling of the community of the town. "Now the war is over. We can forget all those horrible things now," Annie's friend comments. Besides, it's true, those men *are* scary to look at . . ." (55). Annie's personal courage is demonstrated as she overcomes her fear and prejudice as she learns "to look" into the "faces" of the young men whom the community wished to ignore and forget. When she meets the young man, Andrew, who has returned from the Great War with severe burns caused by mustard gas, she literally has to face Andrew's burns and the pain that he feels. "I wanted to turn and run away," she narrates, "not in space, but in time, to the moment before I had seen him" (47). Annie, however, faces her own fear and is able to see Andrew as a person.

In her determination to continue visiting Andrew, Annie risks the disapproval of her mother. She questions her mother's attitudes and behavior towards the wounded soldiers, who cannot "face" them and wishes to protect her daughter from the "ugliness" of war that is personnified in their burned and wounded presence. Despite her love and respect for her mother, Annie goes against her wishes. She has the courage to tell her mother that she was "wrong." Andrew, she tells her mother, "needed" her:

> And because they aren't terrible or awful the way you and everyone else seems to think. They fought, just like Uncle Paul! They were brave like he was. They can't help what happened to them! Andrew can't help it that he was hurt. Why can't you see that? His own father won't come to see him! But I will. He's my friend and I'm going back out there again (152–53).

Represented is a heroine whose voice is strong as she uses her own judgment and initiative to free herself from the unjustified fears and prejudices of her mother and others. She stands up for what she believes in and influences her mother's opinion and behavior. Through the representation and viewpoint of Annie, the perception of fear and bravery takes on different forms and meanings than that of the traditional model of heroism. Her heroism may be made in very different circumstances and take a very different heroic pattern from that of Grace Darling's, but the principle motivation on which she acts is the same—"a profound respect for human life." The "risk" she takes is one made

in the context of risking disapprobation with her mother, rather than the risk of her losing her life, but her actions and choices are represented as strong and effective in helping others.

Annie's personal courage is reproduced in relation to larger questions about what are considered as acts of courage and who are remembered as heroic. Throughout the text, the heroism of those who died sacrificing their lives in battle is raised in relationship to those soldiers, who returned but were not remembered as heroes. Raised is the issue of respecting and valuing those soldiers who lived but still bore the scars of war. The text opens up new ways of thinking about the concept of the heroic as Annie pursues the reason for her uncle Paul's death and discovers that he died of measles rather than fighting at the front as his family had been led to believe. "And then Uncle Paul didn't die the way we thought, not helping someone. Not brave and splendid. He got sick and died because nobody could take care of him" (167). Andrew had been burned, he tells Annie, because he had lost his gas mask (167).

Literally and metaphorically, the novel opens up questions about facing death and pain through Annie's persistance in discussing and dealing with these issues. "And it doesn't seem right to me that you and everybody else just want to forget" the men who died and who live, Annie tells her mother (168). Annie's bravery is represented as that of the everyday—experiencing and facing up to the human experiences of fear and loss while retaining the courage to go on loving and caring.

SUMMARY

These historical novels can construct different ways of knowing about history to enrich the intellectual lives of young people. They can show that history indeed can be constructed through stories from different viewpoints; and that knowledge is not fixed and unalterable. Through these *different* stories, women's experiences and lives are represented as central to the past so that young people do not discount the contribution of young women in a society that has often valorized and defined the past through narratives based on men's contributions. From bound girls to mill girls, from pioneer women to teachers, to those who have gone beyond the divide, these heroines are reminders of women's history. Many of their names are forefronted on the

title-pages: Caddie Woodlawn, Lyddie, Rifka, Charlotte Doyle, Grace Darling. Often represented as behind the lines of the historical narrative, they are represented in the front lines in these novels. Their voices are represented as strong in self-affirmation.

A feminist approach to history and literature provides a way of asking different questions about how women are perceived and recorded in the fictions of history and historical novels. The novels reproduce an awareness of how gender has constrained and constructed heroines, and therefore, heroes, in different social and historical contexts. This awareness can open ways of thinking about current constructions of gender and how they may relate to young people's perceptions of the achievements they might make. Carolyn Heilbrun points to the contradiction in her own thinking about heroism that often seems to be reproduced in these novels:

> On the one hand I deplore the fact that women of achievement, outside the brief periods of high feminism, have become honorary men, have consented to be token women rather then women bonded with other women and supporting them. On the other hand, I find that those women who *did* have the courage, self-confidence, and the autonomy to make their way into the male-dominated world did so by identifying with male ideals and role models (31).

Heilbrun's position is that women need not eschew attributes associated with a male model of achievement if they "recognize the importance of taking these examples as women, supporting other women, identifying with them, and imagining the achievement of women generally" (32). Polster's definition of heroism, inclusive of both male and female models provides yet another model of ways of knowing that can be brought to bear on discussion and reading about the heroic, and provides different models of self-hood for young people.

Through the representation of heroines in historical novels, young people have access to various and differing constructions of heroism with which they can identify. They open up ways of thinking about the heroic. The journey of the hero has provided one rich model. Polster's model can be used to enrich young people's ways of thinking about ways the heroic may be interpreted in history, literature, and in mosaics of their own everyday lives.

END NOTES

1. For multicultural resource materials on women's history for the school curriculum, see National Women's History Project.
2. For ways in which feminist criticism can be brought to bear on research on literature for youth, see Vandergrift.
3. Polster bases the relational aspects of her conception of women's heroism on the work of Carol Gilligan in *A Different Voice*. See Gilligan.
4. For an example of a historical novel set in New Jersey and Philadelphia, 1837, in which the heroine is represented as a bound girl—a "taken girl"—in the sense that she is a servant, see Vining. For examples of historical novels in which heroines are bonded through slavery see Hurmence and Lyons.
5. It should be noted that, written in the 1931, the text is not sensitive to the stereotypical representations of American Indians.
6. Women have historically disguised themselves as soldiers. For an example of a fictional account of Deborah Sampson who actually served in the Revolutionary War as a soldier see Clapp. For an example of a novel set in the same historical context as Clarke's novel, see Cavanna.
7. For discussion and historical documents relating to "childhood experiences of nineteenth-century women, focusing particularly on sex role indoctrination" in which boys were encouraged to explore the world while, "for girls the home was to be the world," see Lerner 3–41.
8. For a feminist history using documentary sources to record the experiences of women in american history from a "female point of view," see Lerner.
9. Women are historically documented as serving at sea as captains or crew members in the nineteenth century, see De Pauw. For an example of a children's picturebook documenting the true story of a wife's captaincy of a ship during her husband's illness, see Lasker.
10. For a historical novel which also writes into story a different perspective on the lives of pioneer women, see Conrad.
11. For alternative sources on the West which document women's history on the frontier, see Benz-Clucas.
12. For women's narratives of their personal experiences as mill girls, see Eisler.
13. For examples of letters and diaries used as documentary sources of women's history, see Lerner and Rappaport.
14. For the story of the young Jewish heroine, Sashie, and her family's flight from Russia in 1900, told by Sashie to her great granddaughter, see Lasky, *The Night Journey*.

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