

THE ROLE OF THE FEMALE IN THE NOVELS  
OF BETTY CAVANNA

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by

Helene Esther Dyck

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of  
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## ABSTRACT

Sexual stereotyping, as does any stereotyping, stifles human growth. In the present study Betty Cavanna's portrayal of females was examined in order to determine whether her books, written primarily for adolescent girls, are sexist.

Five Cavanna novels were chosen at random and read in order to establish the general characteristics of her books. Feminist literature was read for background material as well as for establishing sexist criteria. On the basis of these criteria, Cavanna's books were judged to be sexist.

The search for independence and maturity which Cavanna's heroines undergo involves a compromise in which an adjustment is made to a limited stereotyped female role. The young girl is expected to change from an independent, autonomous individual, to a "feminine", submissive woman who knows and feels this position to be "natural". She does this by gradually discarding any aggressive or "masculine" behavior, by dressing and behaving more "femininely", and by becoming interested in boys as "boyfriends" rather than as friends.

If this process is entered into slowly the results are more likely to appear "natural" and the girl, who may not even be aware of the transition, eventually feels more com-

fortable in situations previously disagreeable to her. She learns to hide her capabilities in order to bolster the male ego and directs her abilities into acceptable "feminine" lines. She thus retains a belief in her competence even though her full potential has been curtailed.

Frequently a transcendent male character guides the girl to this "feminine" maturity. Though the girl is shown gaining self-confidence, confidence is never complete until it includes approval of or acceptance by a male. When she has become reconciled to a subordinate role, the acceptable option available to her is marriage. Though she may choose a career, the career is secondary to the man in her life. Often this is the same young man who guided her "growth" initially and whom she originally regarded as a friend. Though she may continue to show initiative, she is careful not to let it conflict with the interests or the egos of the males she knows.

Thus in the process of growing up in Cavanna's world the catalytic agent is inevitably male, the world to which the girl must adapt is male, and the goal which she eventually chooses for herself is male. Not only are females in Cavanna's books primarily assigned traditional roles and personalities, but female characters who do not fit into the traditional role are either made to conform or are seen as unfortunate human beings.

It is through Betty Cavanna's insistence on marriage as the girl's destiny, despite the heroine's decision to prepare for and enter a career, that her inevitable compromise to female independence takes place. Although women today are not all married and do not all wish to be, Cavanna does not reflect this possibility. Traditional goals and means of finding one's identity, that is, through the definition of a man, are reflected time and again in Cavanna's novels.

Her heroines, who seem so independent at times, do not seem to feel the contradiction between the creative, self-actualizing being within them and the subservient role they are compelled to play. Instead, with a smiling submission, they inevitably make a smooth and successful - regardless of how unrealistic - compromise with a male dominated world. No positive image is given of woman's true physical, emotional and intellectual potential. Invariably, traditionally imposed limitations intervene.

While Cavanna's books do not overtly praise the traditional background role of women, they are none the less dangerous because of their subtle nature.

Although they are recommended to help girls mature to a new identity, no real growth takes place. Instead illusory "growth" towards submission is encouraged. Herein lies the insidious nature of this fiction.

Furthermore since education may be seen as including

situations in which students are challenged, stimulated and provoked towards new responses rather than to ready-made solutions to problems, the place of formula fiction in education may be questioned. Books such as Cavanna's, which deal with stock responses, stereotyped characters, and pat solutions do not appear to have a place in the process of education. There seems little doubt that formula fiction stifles the achievement of the full human potential.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

As consciousness of woman's place in society changes, the recommendations of books for girls must change, as must the books themselves. Betty Cavanna has written prolifically for the last thirty years. Since these same years have seen a growing awareness of the changing role of woman in society, viewing this role in the works of one influential author might well prove of benefit to teachers, librarians and parents.

There are several reasons why Betty Cavanna was chosen for this study. Any number of authors could have been examined in a study of the role of the female as it is presented to adolescent girls, but the coincidence of Cavanna's productive writing career with the growing concern regarding woman's status suggests the possibility that her books might reflect this change. She is a woman who writes for girls about girls who are searching for self-confidence and independence.

Furthermore, the very number of her books indicates their popularity and "success". Although she writes nonfiction for children as well, she has completed over thirty adolescent novels under the name of Betty Cavanna, ten under the name of Betsy Allen, and six under the name of Elizabeth

Headley. In addition, she is currently involved in writing a series of mystery stories. (Commire, 1971, pp. 54-55) Her books are found in public libraries and, in even greater number, in school libraries.

Interviews with a number of junior high school librarians indicated that Betty Cavanna's books are widely read.<sup>1</sup> Though circulation appeared to vary somewhat from one area to the next, no librarian reported circulation less than average, while several indicated a high rate of circulation.

Furthermore, Norvell's study (1973) lists four Cavanna titles in both his grade seven to nine and the grade ten to twelve charts. His findings indicate that of the number of girls reporting on Cavanna titles, the following percentage found the book interesting:

TABLE I  
NUMBER OF GIRLS REPORTING ON A SELECTION AND  
AN INTEREST SCORE IN PERCENTAGE POINTS

SELECTION	Girls in grades 7-9		Girls in grades 10-12	
	No.	%	No.	%
Angel on Skis (1957)	497	79.3	309	64.9
The Boy Next Door (1956)	576	79.9	206	74.8
A Girl Can Dream (1947)	516	80.5	381	65.0
Going on Sixteen (1945)	791	82.0	563	64.3

(Norvell, 1973, pp. 183, 192, 223, 319, 329, 354, 355)

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<sup>1</sup>The librarians interviewed were from the following junior high schools in Winnipeg School Division: River Heights, General Wolfe, Hugh John Macdonald, J. B. Mitchell, Cecil Rhodes, and Andrew Mynarski.

Books in Print (1974) lists thirty-three Cavanna and Headley titles as currently available. This too indicates continued interest in her books.

Not only are Cavanna's books widely read, they appear also to be widely recommended. Various Cavanna titles are listed in H. W. Wilson's 1947, 1952, and 1957 editions of Standard Catalog for High School Libraries, as well as their 1970 Junior High School Libraries Catalog. The novels are also listed in the 1966 National Council of Teachers of English's Your Reading: A Book List for Junior High Schools, the 1968 publication, Books, Young People and Reading Guidance (Pilgrim and McAllister), the 1969 Canadian Library Association publication, Basic Book List for Canadian Schools, and the 1971 publication, Books for You: A Reading List for Senior High School Students (J. A. Wilson). These, as well as other book selection aids, suggest that Cavanna's books are thought to have qualities worthy of recommendation.

#### THE AUTHOR

The author under discussion was born Elizabeth Allen Cavanna, the daughter of Walter and Emily (Allen) Cavanna in Camden, New Jersey, in 1909. She was married to Edward Headley from 1938 until his death in 1952. In 1957 she married George Russell Harrison, who is presently dean emeritus of Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She has one son from her first marriage. Her career began as a reporter on the Bayonne Times in New Jersey. For ten years she worked

first as advertising manager and then as art director for the Westminster Press. She began her career as a full-time writer in 1941. (Commire, 1971, p. 54)

Her second husband's occupation in the academic world, her own interests in writing, travel, art and antiques, her homes in Concord and Cape Cod, Massachusetts are all heavily drawn upon for background and content in her novels. When she is unfamiliar with the background she wishes to use, "she visits the locale and makes every effort to learn about the people, their houses, customs and way of life." (Magaliff, 1964, p. 25)

About her writing for young girls, Betty Cavanna says:

While I have a rather poor memory I discovered, early on, that I had an almost total emotional recall for this particular period of my own life, which made it possible for me to identify with a teenage heroine. Fashions in clothes and speech change, but the hopes, dreams, and fears of the young remain fairly constant, and over the years I have explored all sorts of youthful problems - among them loneliness, shyness, jealousy, social maladjustment, and the destructiveness of alcoholism, divorce, race prejudice, and mother-daughter rivalry within family situations.

(Commire, 1971, p. 25. Emphasis not in original.)

Here lie both the strength and weakness of Cavanna's junior novels. While it is true that she has, albeit rather didactically, explored problems such as jealousy with a certain amount of insight, the assumption that the "hopes, dreams and fears" of young people do not change is questionable. In the following chapter evidence is provided which suggests that the goals of young people today are not the same as they were

several years ago.

Cavanna herself admits astonishment that her early works such as Going on Sixteen (1945) are read as frequently as more current ones, but feels that "apparently many adolescents still identify with Julie, the major character, and are still touched by the sincerity with which I tried to tell this rather simple story." (Commire, 1971, p. 55) She states her belief that as life has grown more complex for the young, so have her novels, other than her recent group of mysteries which are not meant to instruct but merely to entertain. What this paper attempts to show, on the contrary, is that Cavanna's novels present a social structure in which young girls have had the same unchanging goals for decades.

#### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The examination of Cavanna's portrayal of females will be to establish whether her books, written primarily for eleven to fifteen year old girls, are sexist. That is, are females in Cavanna's books assigned only traditional roles and personalities? When a female character does not fit the often stifling role traditional society has destined for her, is she seen as an unfortunate human being? A nonsexist view would offer the girl reader a positive image of woman's physical, emotional and intellectual potential. It would encourage her to reach her own full human potential, free of traditionally imposed limitations.



## DEFINITION OF TERMS

Several terms require explanation in regard to this study. The double standard of behavior which persists throughout North American society assumes that there are "masculine" traits and "feminine" traits, i.e., that there are traits which are characteristic of or appropriate or peculiar to two respective sexes. As Wilma Scott Heide (1974) has stated,

The results of rather recent research with mental health practitioners revealed and documented that clinicians view as healthy, "normal", and indeed ideal in women those traits which would be considered immature for men and adults (of unspecified sex). Thus, healthy women are judged to be more submissive, more easily influenced, less independent, less adventurous, less competitive, less objective, more easily hurt, etc. than healthy men. Furthermore, stereotypically labeled "masculine" traits of an opposite nature are generally perceived as more socially desirable than stereotypically "feminine" traits. (p. 178)

This paper recognizes that there are human traits only, with both sexes possessing the capacity for either or both. Heide goes on to say that,

As long as the present prevalent view is deemed desirable and "natural" (and not just normal), societies will be pathological and unhealthy. This is especially true of societies that are androcentric, i.e., dominated by that half of the population - males - who are taught to deny, disguise, rationalize, or instrumentalize their "feminine" inclinations. (p. 178)

Therefore when masculine or feminine appear in this study in quotation marks, that is, "feminine", the stereotyped meaning is intended. When natural appears in quotation marks, an

affected or learned behavior is intended rather than a truly natural one, i.e., an inclination or thought or action based on natural desires and instincts alone.

In defining sexism, Wilma Scott Heide has stated,

A feminist can be female or male. An antifeminist is also called a sexist. A sexist believes in and lives the philosophy of sexism, i.e., that the sexes be stereotyped and socialized into so-called "masculine" and "feminine" behaviors and roles and that this is "natural". Sexism is still normal: normal simply means usual and is not to be equated with "natural". Sexism and sexists further believe and live the doctrine that one sex should dominate the other; the reality of this is that men usually dominate women legally, politically, religiously, educationally, economically, psychologically and socially. A sexist can be a male or a female. Sexism, as does racism, denies individuality, civil liberties and civil rights.

(Heide, 1974, p. 177. Emphasis in original.)

The term feminist as used in this study refers to that group of people who believe in the political, economic and social equality of the sexes, i.e., in the full human potential of both men and women. They are actively opposed to the perpetuation of stereotyped behavior patterns of either sex.

The term formula fiction is used in this study to describe those junior novels which adhere to a definite formula in which the characteristic elements are type of situation, pattern of action, characteristic roles and relationships, and setting. (Martinec, 1971, p. 341) The pattern of action in Cavanna's novels, as described in chapter three, is relatively consistent. Character growth, as described in chapter four, may occur but with an inevitable outcome.

## METHOD OF PROCEDURE

To begin this study five of Betty Cavanna's novels were chosen at random and read to determine general characteristics of her books. The novels chosen were Going on Sixteen (1945), Two's Company (1951), Diane's New Love (1955), Country Cousin (1967), and Spice Island Mystery (1969), which, covering the time span from 1945-1969, suggested that there had been little change in the author's content and style over the years.

Feminist literature was also read for background information as well as for establishing sexist criteria. Previous critical assessment of Cavanna was located and examined. Of the fifty titles listed in the primary sources section of the bibliography, thirty-two were obtained and read. The ten Betsy Allen titles were omitted since they are geared to a younger audience than the adolescents with whom this paper was primarily concerned. Of Cavanna's mystery series four were omitted since her purpose in writing them, as has already been stated, was to entertain rather than instruct. Three Elizabeth Headley titles were omitted since Cavanna books with the same publication years had already been read. The only other title not read was Joyride, which was published in 1974 and which was, as yet, unobtainable. Asterisks following the titles in the bibliography of primary sources indicate those which were read for this study.

Answers to the following questions were looked for in

each of the novels read to determine whether they contained sexist attitudes:

1. What does "growing up" mean to Cavanna?
2. What does a "feminine" identity involve?
3. How are "tomboys" treated?
4. What emphasis is there on being a "lady"?
5. What is meant by "being natural"?
6. What is the mother's role in the girl's growth?
7. What is the father's role in the girl's growth?
8. What is the role of the boyfriend?
9. What options are available to the "feminine" girl?
10. What stereotypes recur?
11. How does the female relate to the male?
12. What careers are open to her?
13. How are spinsters viewed?
14. What careers are held by married women?
15. What role does college play?
16. What affects the girl's choices in life?
17. What role does marriage play?

On the basis of these sexist criteria the books were evaluated.

#### STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

Chapter one serves as an introduction. It explains the choice of author and offers a biographical sketch; it states the purpose of the study and explains its structure.

Chapter two deals with the relevance of the topic and touches on the traditional treatment of the formative years with its debilitating results. It includes a brief history of the feminist movement and emphasizes the need for re-examination and change.

Chapter three is a critical assessment of Cavanna's novels. A general survey is made of existing criticism in regard to the novels' value as formula fiction, as reflecting a maturing process, and as "bookbait".

Chapter four examines Cavanna's novels in regard to sexism, that is, her depiction of woman's role. It estimates the "maturation" of her novels through the years, and examines her definition of "growing up" as well as the limitations involved in being a "feminine" girl. A summary concludes this chapter.

Chapter five is the final chapter. It includes implications of the study of Cavanna's novels for education generally, and for teachers and librarians specifically. It also includes suggestions to offset sexism and suggestions for further research.

## Chapter 2

### RELEVANCE OF THE TOPIC

#### INTRODUCTION

Women have been subjected to both crude and subtle forms of discrimination for centuries. Till now generations of girls have been socialized to accept inequality without protest. In order to understand why an examination of adolescent novels on the basis of sexism is relevant today, it is necessary to look briefly at the rise of the women's liberation movement. As Virginia Woolf has observed, "When a subject is highly controversial, and any question about sex is that, one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold." (Heilbrun, 1973, p. ix)

The definitions of sexual roles which are held today are, to a large extent, received, unexamined ideas from the past. According to the conventional view "masculine" equals forceful, competitive, controlling, vigorous, unsentimental, and occasionally violent; whereas "feminine" equals tender, genteel, intuitive rather than rational, passive, unaggressive, and prone to submission. Traditionally the "masculine" person is the maker while the "feminine" person is the

nourisher. (Heilbrun, 1973, p. xiv) Although there has been much discussion by role theorists as to the processes by which masculine and feminine roles are internalized, whether by imitation, by identification, or both, there is agreement that these characteristics are not inborn but learned.

(Entwistle and Greenberger, 1972) For example, in the learning of a feminine role, psychologists would stress as one factor the "proximity of suitable female figures...in the child's life space and psychological dynamics involved in the child's imitation of, and identification with, such figures." (Entwistle and Greenberger, 1972, p. 648) Therefore, it can be assumed that characteristics traditionally labelled "masculine" or "feminine" could apply to either sex if socialization processes permitted it.

#### TRADITIONAL TREATMENT OF FORMATIVE YEARS

The passivity characteristic of the "feminine" woman is not due to biology but rather to a destiny imposed by home, school and society. While a young boy develops an assertiveness in his relationship to others, the young girl is taught to renounce her autonomy, to make herself an object rather than a subject. The less she exercises her freedom to understand and to grasp what she finds about her, the less she will affirm herself as subject. If little girls were encouraged, they "could display the same lively exuberance, the same curiosity, the same initiative, the same hardihood as a boy." (de Beauvoir, 1952, p. 262) Today, thanks to the

new feminism, more and more girls are encouraged to educate themselves and to participate and excel in sports. However, if a girl is unsuccessful in these efforts, she is excused because after all "she is just a girl". Her efforts are also often hampered by the fact that, despite her accomplishments, she must also be a woman; she must not lose her "femininity". (de Beauvoir, 1952, p. 263)

Roszak (1969) points out that the idea that women are innately "feminine" and therefore uniquely responsible for the softer human virtues is a "lethal deception". (p. 101) It could be argued that there are only human virtues, and not masculine or feminine ones. Women who have been taught from infancy not to compete with men have generations of training to undo. It is a difficult process to stop since once the discriminatory pattern has been set up, the socialization process perpetuates it.

Where the idea "That woman must wait till man comes seeking, that she cannot awaken till the man finds her pleasing and bestows on her a respectably dependent identity" (Heilbrun, 1973, p. viii) is present in a literary work, this polarization is perpetuated. Any movement towards a world in which individual roles and the forms of personal behavior can be freely chosen, rather than rigidly assigned, can be seen as a good thing. This indicates exposure to a variety of roles at every age. As Bonnie Bullough says

To really gain ultimate equality it will be necessary to remodel many of our institutions, to change the socialization process so that a girl who wants to be an admin-



istrator or a physician or a basketball star is regarded as normal and encouraged in her ambitions as much as if she wants to be a wife and mother. Girls will also have to be taught to be somewhat more competitive instead of disguising their competitive instincts.

(Bullough, 1974, p. 353. Emphasis not in original.)

It is not the purpose of this paper to re-interpret history or religious traditions in order to understand how current attitudes towards women have arisen, but rather to point out the need for books, specifically girls' books, to be re-examined and possibly replaced. Much research has already been done on sex stereotyping in the early years, and it is generally acknowledged that by the age of four children are taking in the idea that a woman's place is in the home. (Wortis, 1971, p. 742) Although less research has been done on the adolescent period in a person's life, it is an impressionable stage as well. As Burton (1959) points out

the in-between period that is adolescence is a particular time of stress.... The happy vagueness of the "when I grow up" in the childhood period has given way to the sharp realization that the growing up is nearly complete and that...there must be a coming to terms with personal shortcomings and a facing of the question, "How do I measure up to a role in the adult world?" ...The adolescent culture has its own unique and rigid code, in which a type of conformity is at a premium, and the teen-ager ...can only pretend to be adult within the boundaries of the peer culture and the rules enforced by adults. Around the stresses of the adolescent period a large body of fiction has developed. Titles from this body of writing are among the most popular in the voluntary reading of adolescents, making this category of fiction worthy of serious analysis by teachers and librarians. (p. 50)

Furthermore, a recent study shows that among adolescents it is middle class whites who hold the most stereotyped view of women's work role. (Entwistle and Greenberger, 1972, p. 648) This finding suggests that literature directed at this par-

ticular group should also be examined for sexism since it would re-enforce views already held.

The stereotyped role that girls are taught from infancy can hinder the development of fulfilling lives. Feminist Ellen Willis is quoted as describing the result, in adolescence, of the stereotyped role:

When she reaches adolescence, [the young girl] finds that if she wants friendship and approval from other kids, she must direct most of her energy toward pleasing boys. That means being preoccupied with clothes and makeup - and how to have a "good personality".... And it means coming to understand that her status in the world and her worth as a person depend not on what she accomplishes but on whom she marries.

(McConnell, 1972, p. F36)

While McConnell admits that these comments may sound extreme to many they form, as shall be demonstrated in chapter four, the basis from which Cavanna writes.

Furthermore, since the ratio of boy-centered stories to girl-centered stories is five to two (Hoffer, 1973, p. 35), it is all the more important that girls' books be examined for content. It is doubtful whether the goal of sexual equality will be reached by this generation. However, the decision to ensure future equality must be made by women now. While it is equally true that changes cannot be effected by one woman or by a small group, every individual's contribution ultimately may have an effect. Many women continue to endorse the bankrupt arguments for male supremacy, choosing to play for small and secret gains even though it means using the manipulative power of the powerless. But maintaining the status quo does nothing to help either men or women attain

full humanity. As has been stated earlier, the central purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which Betty Cavanna is a writer of formula fiction which merely promulgates the preconceptions of traditional mythology in regard to women.

#### BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT

What was going on in the women's liberation movement prior to and during the time that Betty Cavanna wrote her junior novels? What were the important factors resulting in women's unrest?

Before industrialization, the woman's role within the home was essential. Though we may pity the "woman of the land" of a century ago, she nonetheless felt a sense of value in what she did. There was a productive relationship between her labour and the end results. This woman was very often charged with the early and sometimes the later education of her children. Though the man might go out into the world, woman ran the home, and her job had value. The woman, therefore, had an important position and was unwilling to demand radical changes in her status either because she saw little chance for change or was more or less contented with things as they were.

As North Americans became increasingly urbanized, however, and the public school system became more widespread, the home was no longer the all-consuming job it had been. Technological developments within the last century have made

housekeeping a part-time job. The number of hours required for women to do housework, shopping, and home-related activities became a fraction of the time required by their grandmothers. This meant that women had more freedom to enter the labour force.

In addition to technological and economic factors, changes in the role and attitude of women resulted from the development of reliable methods of contraception. (Bullough, 1974, p. 342) The availability of birth control methods could not but have revolutionary consequences. Prior to World War II in order for a woman to have a career she had to sacrifice marriage and a family, and as a spinster her status was generally regarded as less than that of wife and mother. (Bullough, 1974, p. 329) With improved birth control no clearcut decision between marriage and maternity versus career or education need be made.

Educational changes have also been a factor. Bullough reports that "throughout the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century most of the women's colleges continued to emphasize that women were different from men, and to deny that any of their graduates might really want a career." (Bullough, 1974, p. 329) Those who did enter professions were handicapped by prevailing prejudices. As a result most women wanting or needing to earn a living chose ways in which they would not compete with men, such as nursing, social work, elementary teaching and library work. Most women worked only until marriage, resulting in a rapid turn-

over, which, in turn, kept wages down. Regardless of what career a woman chose, the implication was that she had to sacrifice almost everything in order to succeed. It was far more acceptable to earn recognition through sharing the achievement of a husband.

Although North American women had won the franchise by the 1920's, the real social and cultural barriers to full equality for women remained untouched. For over thirty years the movement remained relatively dormant. Though the brutal conditions of the 1930's and the massive wartime drain of men in the 1940's forced increasing numbers of women into the labour market, the old ideal remained: a woman's place was in the home and behind her man. With the return of the men after the war, most women returned to their homes.

In the conservatism of the 1950's a Victorian ideal of the woman's life was restressed: "a full womb and bare-foot, selfless devotion to husband and children." (Roszak, 1969, p. 189) However, emanating from this period were several factors which made the re-emergence of the women's movement inevitable. First, working women numbered twice the pre-war figure. Yet most of these women were in low-paid, semi-skilled categories as opposed to the professional and technical positions held during the war years.

Secondly, women were finding suburban life somewhat wanting. After children were grown "a life (roughly thirty more productive years) of housework and bridge parties stretch[ed] out before them like a wasteland." (Roszak,

1969, p. 189) And for younger women "the empty drudgery they saw in the suburban life was a sobering contradiction to adolescent dreams of romantic love and the fulfilling role of woman as wife and mother." (Roszak, 1969, p. 189) This, of course was the concept described by Betty Friedan as "the feminine mystique". (Friedan, 1963)

At the same time a growing civil rights movement in North America challenged traditional political ideologies, cultural myths, sexual mores and sex roles. The result has been an ever-increasing awareness on the part of men and women that changes in attitudes toward women's role are necessary.

The greatest obstacle facing those who would organize women in order to obtain equality is women's belief in their own inferiority. (Roszak, 1969, p. 191) An afternoon or evening of television viewing might well confirm this view. As has been pointed out, "The institution of marriage is the chief vehicle for the perpetuation of the oppression of women; it is through the role of wife that the subjugation of women is maintained...." (Roszak, 1969, p. 30) But women today are not all married, nor do they all wish to be. Goals are changing. As in the past and in the still unequal present, a woman "is first defined by the man to whom she is attached, but more particularly by the man she marries, and secondly by the children she bears and rears - hence the anxiety over sexual attractiveness and the frantic scramble for boy friends and husbands." (Roszak, 1969, p. 193)

Even when women obtain an education it does them little good. The education is seldom used to further a career. It is more often used to make a girl more "marriageable".

Feeling the contradiction between the essentially creative and self-actualizing human being within her, and the cruel and degrading less than human role she is compelled to play, a woman begins to perceive the falseness of what her society has forced her to be. And once she perceives this, she knows that she must fight.

(Roszak, 1969, p. 200)

The fact that even in the early English novels, heroines, an example of whom is Defoe's Roxana, looked realistically at marriage as "nothing but giving up liberty, estate, authority and everything to the man, and the woman was intended as a mere woman ever after - that is, to say, a slave..." (Heilbrun, 1973, p. 55) makes the perpetuation of the stereotyped myths by modern writers, despite current changes in thought, unacceptable and disappointing.

#### NEED FOR RE-EXAMINING FEMALE ROLE

Thus there is a need for a re-examination of adolescent "girls' books". According to the Child Study Association, the books a child reads "should not shield him from knowledge of destructive forces in the world, but rather help him to cope with them." (Issues in Children's, 1973, p. 107) Books should present "basically honest concepts of life, positive ethical values, and honest interpersonal relationships." (Issues in Children's, 1973, p. 108) This calls for increasing sensitivity to many issues, including sexism. It has

been said that sex prejudice is considered the only socially acceptable prejudice. (Issues in Children's, 1973, p. 108) But it can be agreed that the destructiveness of sexism is as bad as that of any prejudice and should therefore be exposed and resisted.

The countering of this destructive doctrine involves encouraging girl readers to develop physical confidence and strength without fearing any corresponding loss of femininity. The idea of "tomboys" should be re-assessed. A girl who climbs trees is simply a girl who likes climbing trees.

Girls should be encouraged through their reading to find satisfaction and fulfillment in work outside the home without being regarded as someone unable to love a man or trap one with a large enough income.

Margaret Mead's comment that "man is unsexed by failure, woman by success" (Issues in Children's, 1973, p. 108) is unfortunately true. It describes a situation which needs to be changed not just for the sake of women but also for men. Our rigid role definitions place inhuman demands on growing boys which carry over to manhood: they must be fearless, competent, strong, unemotional. Similarly, women who study seriously, work with pride, enjoy their competence in "male" jobs, get promoted, and fight sexism are regarded as unfeminine. Too little effort has been made to show that either a male or a female showing both "masculine" and "feminine" traits can have a valid and firm sense of self.

In much of girls' literature, even when a girl



exhibits courage, competence or similar values, the focus too often shifts to the implicit or stated question of whom she shall marry. A character can not be seen as a woman in her own right if she is defined by her father, her children or her husband. Why must the question in boys' books be "what shall we be?" when in girls' books it is "who shall he be?" (Issues in Children's, 1973, p. 112)

Why must a woman be seen as odd if she wants neither husband nor children, choosing instead an alternate life style? Housewives can be creative, strong and vital, but not every woman need see this as her role. As McConnell (1972) points out,

The 1970 census revealed that the American woman is more likely to attend college, work, live alone, marry late, be divorced or separated, and outlive her husband than she was in 1960.... [M]arriage and motherhood are only one part of a woman's life...yet, most women are prepared from birth only for the marriage portion of their lives. (p. F36)

Why can a young woman not be given all possible options and the freedom to choose and function at whatever she can best apply her abilities? If a woman is divorced or widowed why must solution to her problems so frequently be seen as re-marriage?

In order for both men and women to develop to their full potential, the issues mentioned above require some attention. Literature has long been recognized as assisting people in reaching this potential. As Engdahl (1975) points out, "No author can give [teenagers] answers. But I feel that books directed toward the young can encourage them to go

on looking for answers - which, surely, is one of the major goals of education. And if they can, teenage novels do fill a need." (p. 52) Due to the questioning, doubting, fearing and aspiring period adolescents undergo, their literature has an especially important place. Furthermore, one of the many problems facing an adolescent woman who desires a more independent self-actualized life than the traditional wife/mother role is the lack of positive women models. (Nelson, 1975, p. 53) In order to be helpful, literature directed at young people should depict all possible roles and goals. Since one source of female models is the literature which adolescents read, and since librarians have testified to Cavanna's continuing popularity, there appears to be sufficient reason to see if adolescent literature as presented by Cavanna reinforces the wife/mother role or provides alternative models.

## Chapter 3

### SURVEY OF CRITICISM

#### INTRODUCTION

Critical assessment of Betty Cavanna's junior novels has been fairly positive. As Magaliff points out,

Miss Cavanna's books have received favorable comments from the critics. Her talent as a storyteller is praised, as is her handling of human relationships. No adverse criticisms of her choice of topics has been made. Positive comments are given for her treatment of adolescent emotions and anxieties, characterization, incidents and plots.

(Magaliff, 1964, p. 27)

This chapter intends to relate some of this criticism, including some which is not so positive. It will deal primarily with Cavanna's books in regard to their value as formula fiction, their value in the maturing process, and their value as "bookbait", since all of these can be related to the role of the female with which this paper is concerned.

#### VALUE AS FORMULA FICTION

Betty Cavanna writes about young girls, usually of middle class families living in New England, who are learning to cope with their adolescence. The author has researched the background material, and the reader can sense its authenticity. The stories follow a basic formula in which

the heroine tries to find her way to maturity and independence. Outwardly this would seem a noble aim, one with which people concerned with liberating women could not argue. But it is the means by which this so-called maturity and independence are achieved which undermines the goal. It is true that the situations depicted would appeal to girls insofar as girls are willing to continue seeing themselves subordinate to males.

In an Aristotelian approach to evaluating formula fiction, Martinec states that "The analysis of an individual work of formula fiction is of value only insofar as it throws light on the nature of the formula, since individual works are ephemeral but the formula endures." (1971, p. 340) Thus, examination of the formula used by Cavanna will enhance an understanding of its "value".

In each of Cavanna's novels, as in almost all fiction, the heroine is faced with a problem. There is some evidence that the problems faced reflect changing times. In Going on Sixteen (1945), Julie's problem is how to overcome shyness and awkwardness and develop self-confidence; in A Girl Can Dream (1948), Rette must learn to cope with a moody, jealous disposition, and with boys; but in A Breath of Fresh Air (1966), Brooke is faced with adjusting her own emotional entanglements to the shock of her parents' divorce. (Martinec, 1971, p. 341) The suggestion made by Martinec is that today's teenagers must work out their private conflicts within the framework of larger social concerns.

Regardless of the problem, the pattern of action remains constant. Martinec outlines the conventional pattern, which applies to Cavanna as well as to other writers of formula fiction, as follows:

- 1.) After the introduction of the protagonist, the problem is dramatized by a brief episode, and then explicitly stated by an intrusion of the omniscient author.
- 2.) Although the protagonist has managed to function adequately up to a point, now some event destroys the precarious equilibrium and precipitates a crisis.
- 3.) The protagonist reacts with increasing frustration, refusing to heed the advice of wiser characters, and instead of approaching the solution to the problem, seemingly getting further and further away from it.
- 4.) Just as a point of absolute hopelessness seems to have been reached, an accident, coincidence, or the sudden intervention of a "transcendent" character brings the illumination and insight to the beleaguered protagonist.<sup>1</sup>
- 5.) The problem is solved by the protagonist and appropriate action is taken.

(Martinec, 1971, pp. 341-342)

Martinec concludes that on the basis of the continuing popularity of books such as Cavanna's, teen-age readers appear to accept the view of their world as presented within the formula of the junior novel. This view implies that

- 1.) Immaturity (the basic problem of teenagers) is somehow to be equated with isolation from the group.
- 2.) All problems can be solved and will be solved successfully.
- 3.) Adults cannot help you much. They mean well but are ineffectual. True communication, true community is possible only with one's peers.

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<sup>1</sup>In Cavanna's novels, this "transcendent" character is almost inevitably male.

4.) Solutions to problems are found gratuitously, either brought about by others or discovered by chance.

5.) Maturity entails conformity. Acceptance equals happiness, and this is the true goal of life. The trick is to conform while maintaining one's own individual identity.

(Martinec, 1971, p. 344)

The existence of the formula does not in itself imply that the book is worthless. The important question, as Staneck asks, is "Does the formula lend itself to the reflection of a changing adolescent culture?" (Staneck, 1972, p. 35)

Robert J. Havighurst's developmental tasks proposed for this age group include "learning new relationships to peers, achieving independence from parents and acquiring self-confidence and a system of values of one's own." (Martinec, 1971, p. 344) On the basis of this Martinec concludes that

[It] is around these very problems that the formula of the junior novel [such as Betty Cavanna's] is structured, and [the young readers'] acceptance of the formula no doubt explains the genre's peculiar popularity with and value for young teenagers. (p. 344)

Chapter four of this study intends to show that "the trick...to conform while maintaining one's own individual identity" is in Cavanna's case no more than "woman's willing recognition of [man] as her destiny." (Heilbrun, 1973, p. 49) It may be argued that such a view of one's destiny can do little to contribute to any true self-confidence or self-realization or system of values of one's own since, as shall be demonstrated, the heroines in Cavanna's novels soon not only assume the goals and beliefs of their "boyfriends", but see their identity in terms of these boys as well.

## VALUE IN MATURING PROCESS

Contemporary society no longer tends to view adolescence as a state of innocence. Rather it is seen as the time in a person's life when loss of innocence and a search for personal duty are the most intensely felt. Literature plays a role, however vicariously, in both the loss and the search. In view of this, is it enough for literature to confine itself to problems such as "how do I get a date?" or "what shall I wear to the prom?" Concerns of teen-agers have changed and perhaps the content of the formula, if not the formula itself, should as well.

Richard Peck (1973) sees the best youth novels as those portraying adolescence as a maturing process and Cavanna's books certainly do that. Although the focus is on being young, there is a sense of becoming as well as being. While Going on Sixteen (1945) was a good book for its time and whereas it may still have entertainment or escape value, it could be argued that it, and the books Cavanna has written since but which are based on the same formula, are basically compromises to any real growth a girl can anticipate. These books re-enforce sex roles imposed by society, thereby limiting a girl's aspirations - since marriage will inevitably interfere - and lowering indirectly the self-esteem of those girls who read it.

Pilgrim and McAllister, in Books, Young People and Reading Guidance (1968), also state the belief that books can

serve as tools for further growth toward maturity. Cavanna is listed as an acceptable author writing about young love, which is "the most popular of all reading for the younger adolescent girl." (p. 64) They go on to say that some adults may despise the shallowness of these books but "books about young love will continue to be read and probably fill a ...need. The worst that can be said about them is that they are shallow and unrealistic." (p. 64) It might be added that "the worst" includes perpetuating dangerous myths which could impede full development. Cavanna's books are listed under the headings "The Need for Wholesome Family Relationships", "The Need to Learn Adult Roles", "The Need for Peer Status". Pilgrim and McAllister also state that unnecessarily sustaining a stereotype is the mark of a bad novel.

Stephen Dunning (Meade and Small, 1973) acknowledges the didacticism characteristic of the junior novel but does not seem to argue its "message". For example, in A Date for Diane (1945) the message seems to be "enter the social world and you can become mature." In A Girl Can Dream (1947) it is "assess your own capabilities and set reasonable goals for success within those capabilities." (Meade and Small, 1973, p. 161) The shallowness of the former is obvious but the latter is only seen as debilitating when it is known that Loretta's "reasonable goals" are not what she is capable of, but rather what she will be "allowed" to do in a man's world.

In an article on the adolescent novel Dwight L. Burton (1951) comments that books by Betty Cavanna have been



among the most popular with young adolescent readers. He singles out Going on Sixteen (1945) as notable, while most of Cavanna's other novels "are neither better nor worse than dozens of innocuous girls' stories which have flowed from the press in recent years." (p. 364)

Burton commends the picture of adolescent life described in Going on Sixteen.

It rests upon its genuineness and sincerity rather than melodrama. Julie, the heroine, is a somewhat shy, non-descript girl who lives on a farm with her father and commutes to the town high school by bus. The story carries her through three years of high school to a point where she has apparently "found herself". The theme... is handled well.... Julie does not blossom at all; there is no metamorphosis, but there is realistic evolution of character brought about by Julie's own efforts and recognition of her faults and by the sympathetic guidance of a teacher. (p. 365)

Burton sees Cavanna's strength as lying in the perception with which she presents adolescents together, and her weakness in her treatment of family relations and in characterization. Magaliff (1964) concurs with this criticism. Too often the characters are stereotypes. Cavanna is inclined to categorize her characters before proceeding to the business of the story. (Burton, 1951, p. 365)

Despite this comment, Burton, in a later article (1959), says, "Though her books are uneven and, on the whole, undistinguished, Betty Cavanna maintains a consistently realistic perspective on the adolescent period." (p. 69)

He also comments on the popularity of Cavanna's plotless, episodic, but humorous "Diane" books. "Though shallow in characterization, these books present effectively the

jealousies and rivalries of middle-adolescent girls" and contain some memorable episodes. (1959, p. 69) About these same books Rosenberg's Young People's Literature in Series: Fiction (1972) states:

This series has mercifully been allowed to go out of print. It bears no relation to today's teenager, and has been included because, to date, it is Ms. Cavanna's only series. (p. 37)

Magaliff states that although Cavanna's books are not masterpieces, they have much to offer to adolescents in the form of "positive values". Betty Cavanna's

...characters are not wild, flighty creatures far removed from reality. They are interested in school, clothes, and boys, which are the things that do concern the average teen-age girl. Her dialogue is natural. The conversations are not forced or strained.

(Magaliff, 1964, p. 31)

On the other hand, Magaliff criticizes the unreality of the prevailing "prettiness" of the Cavanna heroines. They usually have "hidden beauty" which surfaces at about the same time that the heroines gain their self-confidence. The implication that good looks are a requirement for a sense of self-esteem to exist is obvious. For the most part the characters, young and old, are presented as attractive people. There is a fat girl in Angel on Skis (1957), but she slims down, her complexion begins to clear and the next thing the reader knows she is being courted by the Swiss ski instructor. In Toujours Diane (1957) a hunchback is briefly introduced supposedly for the sole purpose of teaching Diane humility. The life of the hunchback, however, is not explored.

Richard S. Alm (Meade and Small, 1973) also sees value in the Cavanna books in the maturing process of adolescents. He sees Betty Cavanna as a writer of some importance in that she writes about credible adolescents, working out, in credible situations, their problems. As a result, he maintains the books cannot be regarded as trivial from a literary point of view.

On the other hand, Feminists on Children's Media<sup>2</sup> in Issues in Children's Book Selection (1973) criticizes the use of Cavanna's books for the purpose of maturing. A Betty Cavanna book appeared in a widely used bibliography compiled by Clara Kirchner in 1966 entitled Behavior Patterns in Children's Books in a section entitled "From Tomboy to Young Woman" as follows:

A Girl Can Dream by Betty Cavanna (Westminster, 1948):  
Loretta Larkin, tops in athletics but poor in social  
graces and jealous of a classmate who shines socially,  
finds out that being "just a girl" can be fun.  
(Issues in Children's, 1973, p. 111)

Feminists on Children's Media criticizes this annotation, stating that young readers of books which compromise individuality and which fall into the categories of "Womanliness", "Growing Up", and "Popularity",

are forced to believe that the spunk, individuality and physical capability so refreshingly portrayed in tomboy heroines must be surrendered when girls grow up - in order to fit the passive, supposedly more mature image of a young woman. Where is that earlier energy to be

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<sup>2</sup>Corporate author

spent? Is depression in the adult woman perhaps linked to the painful suppression of so many sparks of life?  
 (Issues in Children's, 1973, p. 111)

The "maturing" process here is unrealistic also because real life seldom allows for the easy transition from "tomboy" to "lady" which books such as Cavanna's imply.

Thus, while some critics see value in Cavanna's books in the maturing or learning process they portray, others see this portrayal as described by Cavanna as misleading and potentially dangerous.

#### VALUE AS "BOOKBAIT"

Have Betty Cavanna's books any value as "bookbait"? It has been suggested that the use of books such as Cavanna's by librarians and teachers is not a "give 'em what they want", but a "give 'em what they possibly can aspire to" approach. (Meade and Small, 1973, p. 13) In view of the compromise this requires on the part of the adolescent girl, this is not heartening news. Though the more experienced reader can easily see through the obvious devices such as cliché situations, formula plots, and stereotyped characters, it is precisely this experience with life and literature that enables us to judge these works inappropriate for us. But for the student with a literary disadvantage, these books may provide entrance into a world previously inaccessible.

In 1954 Margaret A. Edwards wrote that "many young people who would never [have] come voluntarily to the library to read a great book did come because the word [had]

gone around that we [had] a copy of Double Date or Going on Sixteen." (p. 88)

Stephen Dunning (Meade and Small, 1973, p. 154) sees the junior novel as a bridge to better literature, and contends that this must be kept in mind when deciding to buy or not to buy; to use or not to use. What may be clearly judged as a mediocre book may be the perfect book to stimulate reading interest. On the basis of this he lists three Cavanna books out of thirty selected junior novels, basing his selection to a large extent on popularity.

Because these books deal with the lives of adolescents, with a certain amount of insight into the problems of young girls, they have not only proved to be popular but are also considered valuable as "bookbait". But their value as "stepping stones" to great literature has also been attacked. Magaliff sees that though Cavanna books are not great literature, they can be used to encourage the habit of reading for those who need to be stimulated (1964, p. 31). But she concludes that some of Cavanna's readers will never move beyond this stage. The fact that Cavanna books are still popular with housewives seems to verify this comment.<sup>3</sup> They may, in fact, simply continue to stimulate the unrealistic fantasies of the "adolescent" adult or serve as a bridge to slick adult magazine fiction. (Magaliff, 1964, p. 33)

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<sup>3</sup>According to a Fort Garry librarian, Cavanna books circulate equally amongst housewives and teen-age girls.

Furthermore, Dorothy Pettitt found in her study of adolescent novels that whereas some can qualify as literature, Going on Sixteen (1945), the only Cavanna title listed in her study, qualified as "marginal" (Meade and Small, 1973, pp. 165, 168). Marginal books, which she described as having too few of the qualities of literature, have, she concluded, no place on the curriculum, not even as suggested individual reading.

The adolescent novel has been defined by G. Robert Carlsen as

a book written by a serious writer for the teen-age reader. The writer tries to evoke through his use of words the feelings and emotions, triumphs and failures, the tensions and releases, that people in the age group of twelve to twenty normally experience.... Actually, many of the better books do not offer any real or convincing solution to the difficulties confronting the characters. Like good adult literature the adolescent novel holds up for the reader's inspection the whole spectrum of human life.... And as in real life there is no neat patterned solution to life's problems.... [Today's young reader wants] an honest view of the adolescent world from the adolescent's point of view; a book that holds a mirror up to society so that the reader can see his own world reflected in it.

(Carlsen, 1967, pp. 45-49. Emphasis not in original)

The implication would seem to be that writers of teen-age books must keep pace as well, reflecting the changes in attitude towards social conventions, if not, indeed, predicting them. Yet Carlsen includes, in his section "Girls' Stories", Betty Cavanna's Going on Sixteen (1945). This recommendation, made as recently as 1967, suggests that Carlsen still sees value in this book. It is true that a young girl lacking self-confidence might still identify with Julie. However,

the question of "value", viewed in regard to sexism, may present a different conclusion. Does Julie really gain self-confidence or has she just adjusted to her destined role? In view of present attitudes, is this an "honest view"?

Since the question of value both in content and as "bookbait" material remains unanswered, it is likely that librarians will more or less reluctantly continue to stock their shelves with novels by Cavanna and similar writers, and teachers will continue to permit their inclusion on reading lists. (Martinec, 1971, p. 340) The fact remains, however, that since Cavanna is still being stocked, recommended, and read it is all the more important to determine whether she is keeping pace with the issues of the day. Specifically, does she reflect the growing change in, and concern with, the female role?

## Chapter 4

### EXAMINATION OF CAVANNA'S NOVELS IN REGARD TO SEXISM

#### INTRODUCTION

The question then is whether Betty Cavanna's books are sexist. Are the girls and women in her novels assigned exclusively female roles, even though the material may be true to life? It has been recognized that "books reflect not only their authors' philosophy but also the philosophy of the society producing them. And the use of clichés, common expressions, and characters who exhibit attitudes commonly held in society - attitudes that are not always admirable - does indeed make a story propaganda." (Gersoni-Stavn, 1974, p. 182) The experienced reader may see the "natural reflection of life" as propaganda, but the inexperienced reader does not.

#### Three Categories of Sexism

Feminists on Children's Media<sup>1</sup> (Issues in Children's, 1973) suggest three categories by which books may be viewed. Sexist books undermine women and can be described as follows:

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<sup>1</sup>Corporate author



Books that outline a traditional background role for women, praising their domestic accomplishments, their timidity of soul, their gentle appearance and manners, and - at the same time - fail to portray initiative, enterprise, physical prowess, and genuine intellect deliver a powerful message to children of both sexes.  
(Issues in Children's, 1973, p. 110)

Important here is whether the sexist statement comes from a sympathetic character or whether the reader feels there is something wrong.

An opposite possibility is the book that gives a positive image of female roles, one in which allowance is made for development in the female character beyond the stereotype. In this book boys can be friends, without being boyfriends; girls can be found in flexible, diverse roles.  
(Issues in Children's, 1973, p. 113) Marriage is not seen as the ultimate goal for every female.

A third possibility is the "cop-out", the book that promises much but does not deliver (Issues in Children's, 1973, p. 110). This type of book involves a compromise. It may be a line, a paragraph or a last chapter, but somewhere an adjustment is made to the stereotyped role of women. Often the compromise results in a stunted character, since logical development is interrupted. The compromise may come about as a result of social pressure or for the sake of conformity, and may reflect both the social uncertainties and inner conflicts of writers, publishers and reviewers in a society which continues to be sexist. (Issues in Children's, 1973, p. 110)

Betty Cavanna's novels appear to fit primarily into

the "cop-out" category and are, it can be argued, of potential danger because of their subtle nature. Ostensibly recommended to help a girl mature, they may, in fact, do just the opposite in the sense of any true maturing.

Following the introduction, this chapter compares an early Cavanna novel with two more recent ones to demonstrate that there has been relatively little change in the formula the author uses. The remainder of the chapter is divided into two sections. The first is entitled "What 'Growing Up' Entails" and the second is "Options for the 'Feminine' Girl". Both have several sub-headings which focus on specific areas in which sexism may be revealed. There is a certain amount of overlap from one section to the next since the basic assumptions on which all Cavanna's novels are based appear to be the same. In the main, these assumptions can be summarized in the following way.

A girl as she matures through her adolescent years finds herself in conflict with those around her. A new independence and identity are required of her; the story of each heroine is primarily concerned with her acceptance of this new identity. It involves negating her natural tendency towards aggressiveness and accepting a "natural" passivity. The nature of this passivity is generally pointed out to the girl indirectly by the example of her mother and the dominance of her father, and directly by the advice of the transcendent male in her life. This passivity is best acquired slowly for the girl to become "truly feminine".

Though the girl is shown as gaining in self-confidence, confidence in herself is never complete until it includes approval of or acceptance by a male. When she has become reconciled to this subordinate role, the acceptable option available to her is marriage. Though she may choose a career, the career is secondary to the man in her life. Though she may continue to show initiative, she is careful not to let it conflict with the interests or the egos of the males she knows.

The paradoxical aspect of this "growth" lies in the nature of the independence the heroine apparently acquires. While ostensibly maturing to a new identity, she is, in reality, becoming subordinate and passive.

#### NO CHANGE IN FORMULA

Initially this study hoped to demonstrate that there had been a progression in the female role in the writings of Cavanna from the 1940's to the present. In view of the independent Julie of Going on Sixteen (1945) this seemed highly probable. But an examination of this novel, the 1956 book, The Boy Next Door, and the more recent Country Cousin (1967) indicates little progress.

Burton (1951) lauded Going on Sixteen since in it Betty Cavanna "avoids the easy assumption present in many books with a similar theme, including others of her own. Boys, though they may have a place in Julie's life, are not the magic medium through which she suddenly blossoms."

(p. 365) Yet boys do appear to play an important role. When Julie's love for the dog Sonny inspires her to try to sell her artistic talent in order to buy the dog, she meets with failure in terms of money, but success in terms of encouragement. The knowledge that she is talented convinces her to enter a school poster contest which she subsequently wins. As she gains confidence through the use of her abilities, she loses her self-consciousness and begins to fit into school life. With this acceptance Julie exhibits acceptance of herself. She is able to poke fun at herself through cartoons for the school paper. Her relationship with her father improves as does her relationship with her friends.

But just after Julie has done and grown so much, this growth is undermined. On a double date she is ill at ease when left alone with the two boys, but she need not have worried because "They were talking across her, above her head, rapidly, importantly.... The thing that worried her now was more natural to her - would she conceivably be equal to [her date] ?" (p. 164) John, her date, is a budding architect and is impressed by Julie's efforts to redecorate the living room. He admires her workmanlike hands. This is like manna from heaven to Julie, and she experiences a firmness in purpose in her future which John also evinces. The important thing here is that it is a male's approval that is ultimately required.

In regard to choosing a career Cavanna paints an admirable picture of Julie. Julie, who now "belongs", tells

her friends that she is going to enroll in the Academy of Fine Arts which her mother had attended. The "femme fatale", Anne, says, "But I don't know what I want to do after I get out of high." (p. 189) Julie feels sorry for her big-eyed helplessness until she realizes Anne thought the attitude "cute". Julie is filled with contempt; "Not to have a plan, not to have a passionate urge to do some one thing, not to have the deep-rooted desire to work and achieve" (p. 189) appalled her.

Shortly afterwards, Julie, who is the only person left with faith in Sonny's ability to win the dog show, is responsible for his winning. She succeeds where men have failed. But this image of a confident, successful Julie does not remain. The author says that Julie's confidence was complete only when Dick asks her to a dance. Her father responds to this "success" by becoming protective and calling her "baby". Her victory at the dog show is not seen as the climax, since on her return home the focus shifts again to the date with Dick. Dick chides her for her enthusiasm over Sonny's victory, asking her in a "suddenly masculine" (p. 208) tone if she would rather stay with the dog than go to the dance with him. When she admits she would like to do both Dick responds with "Women!" and grabs her hand "authoritatively". (p. 208) They go to the dance. The reader is left to believe that it is only right that Julie has conformed to the more socially approved behavior.

The significant points to note are, on the one hand,

the positive light in which Julie is shown and, on the other hand, the importance of male approval and role in decision-making despite the capabilities of the heroine. In regard to the degree of her independence Julie is admirable and, considering that the book was written before much attention had been paid to the voice of equality of the sexes, acceptable.

Appearing in 1956, The Boy Next Door offers little variation from the predictable plot. Jane and Ken are next door neighbours. When Ken wants to become Jane's "boyfriend" instead of her "friend", she is confused. Her younger sister, a "femme fatale", takes over for a while while Jane is "finding herself". This includes enlisting a friend to "help make her over". As a result Jane "blossoms". In her "made over" state Jane elicits the paradoxical advice from a male that she "keep on being just as sweet and natural" (p. 92) as she is. But Jane at times resents the change required of her. Occasionally "she wished she could just forget the existence of the entire male sex." (p. 123) She realizes that her sister's way is not her way, and instead finds relief in her writing for the school newspaper. Her new friend, Peter, enters as the "transcendent" catalyst in her development. He encourages her individuality and as a result she is soon editor-in-chief. Like Julie, Jane finds that "the importance of finding a vital, consuming interest couldn't be overestimated." (p. 152)

At this point Cavanna may well be applauded. Like Julie, confidence in her job gives Jane confidence with

people. She is even willing to expose Peter, who is British and therefore "different", to her friends. But again the final emphasis is not on the self-confidence gained by the job, but rather on the fact that self-confidence makes her relationship with the boy easier.

Jane takes up Ken's hot-rod crusade and, in carrying out the males' concern, she is "happy in the same undefinable way she had known last summer." (p. 229) When her efforts on the part of the boys' hot-rod club are a success, Ken says by rights she should be made president. Jane, however, sweetly demurs. She knows her place. The end reveals Jane happy with Ken as her "boyfriend"!

As in Going on Sixteen male intervention results in the heroine's gaining confidence, and happiness depends on being associated with an acceptable male.

The more recent book, Country Cousin (1967), might be expected to reflect the even greater independence being gained by women at the end of the 1960's, yet that is not the case. The heroine, Mindy, is unsure of herself and her ambitions. She envies girls like Caroline who seem to have "a recipe for instant success". (p. 199) For a time she considers new methods of "allure". When she is asked by Dana, who becomes her boyfriend, whether she is interested in being "a computer programmer, get[ting] married, or both?" (p. 22) she is baffled. Yet Dana, like so many Cavanna heroes, knows exactly what he wants to be.

Eventually, with the help of several men in her life,

Mindy decides on fashion design as a career. She finds that "It's the most wonderful feeling...to know precisely what I want to do!" (p. 221) Dana has been most responsible for this awakening. He has likened her to a "sleeping beauty" (p. 186) and the assumption is that he is the prince, the "transcendent" male, who will awaken her, not only to her talents, but also to her feelings. Dana echoes other heroes in saying that knowing what she wants to do is a sign that she is grown up, but warns her not to grow apart from him. To which Mindy replies, "Can't you see I'm growing towards you all the time?" (Cavanna, aa, p. 221) The story ends romantically. Although the future appears to include career and marriage, the priority is indicated by the following: "Mindy, however, still had stars in her eyes when applause for the pearl-encrusted wedding gown that climaxed the showing died away." (p. 218)

Ironically, the description of the fashion world which Mindy has chosen to enter may unwittingly sum up the female image in Cavanna's books: the models were made up so much that they "looked like puppets...yet they still emanated an undefinable chic." (p. 217) Furthermore, the reader is told, "These designs were those of an unafraid artist, who was determining the shape of things to come." (p. 217)

Since it is obvious that little change has been made or, for that matter, can be made in the basic formula, and that viewed in the light of social developments in the last thirty years, there may even be said to be a regression, the



remainder of this chapter will deal with the novels without regard to chronology.

#### WHAT "GROWING UP" ENTAILS

##### Achieving Independence and a Feminine Identity

Most of the books reflect primarily Cavanna's view of what it means for a girl to mature. She poises her girls on the brink between childhood and adolescence and the novels concern themselves with the girls' searching for a new identity. As Simone de Beauvoir points out, although throughout childhood little girls suffer some curtailment, they are none the less autonomous individuals in their relations with family and friends, in school and in games. With puberty, however, passivity becomes reality. The young girl

is already free of her childish past, and the present seems but a time of transition, it contains no valid aims, only occupations. Her youth is consumed in waiting, more or less disguised. She is awaiting Man.

(de Beauvoir, 1952, p. 307)

One would think that the girl's spontaneous urge would be to regard herself as essential, to see herself in her former childish independence. How can she make up her mind to become inessential and submissive? It would not be surprising to find the young girl confused and frightened. Miraculously, Cavanna's girls submit to passivity without a great deal of difficulty.

In Time for Tenderness (1962) the growing up theme is explicitly stated by the father's reference to his two child-

ren as transplanted seedlings who will grow in "the new earth and pots of Brazil." This growth involves a desire for individuality. Meg, in Spring Comes Riding (1950), is tired of being "one of the Sanderson girls" (p. 9); she wants to be seen as an individual. In Almost Like Sisters (1963), Victoria wants to get away from her mother's shining presence. Maggie, in Stars in Her Eyes (1958), "was already aware that every person was an individual, that every person had to behave according to his own special rule, that she was forever doomed to be herself." (p. 29) She fights the label of being a famous television personality's daughter; she wants to be in her own right. In The Scarlet Sail (1959), Andrea's struggle is specifically against her new stepfather but generally against anyone who treats her as "childish or feeble-minded." (p. 23)

Looking at the adult women in their lives the girls see only self-confidence. The older women in A Girl Can Dream (1948) make Loretta Larkin uncomfortable. They were "so utterly complacent and assured." (p. 11) Her own mother "was so feminine, so popular, so completely jelled as a person." (p. 16) Similarly Kate Vale in Paintbox Summer (1948) is shadowed by both her mother and her older sister Valerie who is, to every girl of Kate's acquaintance, "the cynosure of social success." (p. 11)

The girls ask themselves "Who am I?". Fancy's answer, in Fancy Free (1961), is, in Alice's words, "I hardly know. At least I know who I was when I got up this morning,

but I think I must have changed several times since."

(p. 70) At this stage the book begins focussing on what the girl would like to do and immediately one of two ever-present boys in these novels begins to feel more "comfortable" to the girl.

Inevitably the question involves males. In Paintbox Summer (1948), Kate Vale, in considering the difference between herself and the mature, self-confident women around her, ponders,

Seventeen wasn't exactly young. Lots of girls get engaged and some of them even got married at seventeen. What catalytic agent changed them suddenly from children to women? How did they acquire maturity and poise?  
(p. 32. Emphasis not in original.)

The catalytic agent, it shall be seen, is a male.

As children most of the girls did not feel this lack of confidence. In Lasso Your Heart (1953), the reader is told, "It wasn't natural for Prue to feel inadequate" for at home she was equal to almost any situation. (p. 54) Not so in the social whirl in which the heroine finds herself thrust. When a girl has her language corrected by her mother because "'yep' and 'OK' are unladylike" she is likely to explode as Rette Larkin, in A Girl Can Dream (1947), does with "And suppose I don't especially want to be a lady?" (p. 15) This sort of comment, however, is invariably futile. Regardless of the times in their growing up period when the girls wish they were young again "blissfully innocent of the complications that arose with the entry of 'men in your

life'" (Cavanna, g, p. 143)<sup>2</sup> the inevitable entry occurs. Some girls long for "the night...when she would discover a boy" (Cavanna, w, p. 40) as though they know that, with society structured as it is, "a boy" is a major part of the answer to their search.

The topic of "boys" for that matter always enters the novels within the first few pages. Whether the story takes place in North America, Australia, Brazil or Japan, the girl's attitude towards boys either "makes her or breaks her" as far as belonging to a group is concerned. Through the years Cavanna has not changed the topic but just the "when" or "how" it is approached. In Going on Sixteen (1945), Cavanna tells us that girls discuss clothes, not boys, in the lunchroom, though the cloakroom is a different matter. In Passport to Romance (1955), Jody must promise to write her friend if she "meet[s] any interesting boys." (p. 13) In Time for Tenderness (1962), Peggy tells the girls at the lunch table in her new school in Brazil that "No matter where you are, boys have a way of coming first." (p. 25) Through this acknowledgment she is accepted by the girls. Once the hurdle of acceptance is past, Peggy can relax. But Cavanna has made the criteria for acceptance by a group look decep-

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<sup>2</sup>When the inclusion of the title to which reference is being made does not appear in the paragraph, the letter following Cavanna's name or pseudonym refers to the particular title as listed on pp. 112-114 of the bibliography.

tively easy.

The importance of "belonging" is stressed in other Cavanna novels as well. Typically, Jane, in The Boy Next Door (1956), says "It was nice to be in a group where she knew everybody and everybody knew her." (p. 40)

Thus a certain amount of conformity to existing patterns of behavior is required of the young heroine. It is assumed that when she learns the secret of the "feminine" women in her life she too will experience their confidence and assurance.

#### From "Tomboy" to "Lady"

It appears to be essential for the young girl, in accepting her place in what she will soon discover to be a man's world, to relinquish her "tomboy" ways and accept the ways of the "lady".

Often the appearance of the heroine indicates her state of maturity. Like most Cavanna heroines, Prue in Lasso Your Heart (1952) has a "boyish figure". (p. 12) She is described as "tall and clean-limbed". Her physical development parallels her growing up. Though self-doubt is soon to hound her, her boyish figure in the beginning reflects her "childish" independence and assertiveness. Immediately after the physical description of Prudence Foster the author has her look out at the hills around her new home. "On and away they swelled, in soft, motherly curves, kindly and comfortable and familiar now, though a year ago..." (p. 12) all this

had been strange to her. There seems no doubt as to the inevitable outcome.

In contrast to the heroine is the usually present, precocious "femme fatale", whom the heroine views with mixed emotions. Julie envies Anne, who is attractive and has "boy-attracting power", but resents being pushed into feeling that boys and clothes were all important. (Cavanna, c, p. 23) The "femme fatale" is always "kittenish" in appearance. She has "a gentleness about her, a sweet, almost kittenish quality that the boys liked." (Cavanna, e, p. 22) She is "very aware of herself, so confidently feminine, so certain of her charm." (Cavanna, g, p. 31) She has long ago discarded boyish nicknames, an act which seems necessary in order to become "confidently feminine". As the heroine watches someone like Lida Belle Carter play up to some young man with "feminine grace" she is often tempted to imitate the "femme fatale" with more or less disastrous results.

Also involved in negating her "tomboy" inclinations is a re-directing of the "natural co-ordination" characteristic of many of Cavanna's heroines. Julie remembers when eligibility in "the gang" used to mean being a good sport and being good at sports. (Cavanna, c, p. 22) Now it has to do with boy-attracting powers. Significantly as Julie "matures" her diving "no longer had the clean, polished form of the boy's." (p. 170) Prue finds adapting to dancing no difficulty; "Her natural co-ordination made her competent, here, as on a horse or on a hockey field." (Cavanna, j, p. 56)

Thus, with more or less ease, the transition is made from diving to dancing.

This, of course, implies that all "tomboy" ways are discarded in the process of maturing. The sympathetic heroine, Meg, in Spring Comes Riding (1950), says of her younger sister, "It was time Sarah stopped being such a tomboy." (p. 53) When the heroine in a book has a boyish nickname she seems to prefer a more feminine one as does Jody of Passport to Romance (1955). Her uncle calls her Josie which makes her feel feminine, and her room-mate, a "femme fatale", criticizes the use of Jody for Josephine. In The Scarlet Sail (1959) the heroine Andrea, nicknamed Andy, compliments another girl's tennis ability: "You play an awfully good game for a girl." (p. 53) Girls are not expected to be good at "boys' things".

In Angel on Skis (1957) fourteen year old Angie feels more comfortable outside. "I'd rather chop wood or clean out the barn than do dishes.... I guess I should have been born a boy." (p. 20) She thinks her name is too feminine for her tall, big-boned frame. If she were allowed to develop along the lines of her inclination, a positive female image might emerge, but her mother says, "Probably every girl wishes she were a boy at some time or another.... But you'll outgrow it. Being a woman is something I wouldn't want to trade." (p. 20)

Angie does "outgrow it", but does she have to? In her mother Angie sees a woman with "a special quality". She

had "a way with people, just as she had a way with cooking, or with decorating, or with making a blouse and skirt look like a costume." (p. 21) To her mother, being a woman means being feminine in traditional ways. Why must Angie, who prefers to think of skiing rather than boys, be forced into this feminine mold? Pressures are such that despite her lack of interest in boys she is embarrassed to admit she has not yet had a date. (p. 115) She is so confused that when her ski instructor tells her she skis with "the verve and courage of a man," she asks, "Is that bad?" (p. 154) Gregg, an excellent skier, says he is glad his example makes Angie want to improve. But, he warns her, "A man doesn't necessarily like a girl who can beat him at his own game." (p. 233) Angie does not quite understand. "Here was a masculine philosophy which she hadn't taken into consideration. In a way she understood; but still it was upsetting because it undermined her competitive instinct. She still wanted to be better - to be best!" (p. 233)

The heroine may well be applauded here, but a scant thirteen pages later, her doubt is more pronounced - in favour of the male. Angie now does not know which she would like better, being a good skier, or being proud of her boyfriend Gregg. To which the lad replies, "That is a very sweet - and a very feminine thing to have said." (p. 246) The transition ("growth"?) appears complete. As a result, the once dynamic Angie is seen at the end of the book as a triple "object". She has just come in second in a race and,



as a prospective Olympic skier, is being toasted by three men: "To the skier I discovered!" says Dave; "To my most promising pupil!" says Jacques; "To my best girl!" says Gregg. (p. 255) In each toast she is seen as an object or appendage of a male rather than as a person in her own right. It was she who discovered skiing for herself, she who worked out her problems. Why can not she take credit for her accomplishments?

A similar compromise is found in A Girl Can Dream (1948). Rette Larkin is reading from Antoine de Saint-Exupery's Wind, Sand and Stars:

"Flying is a man's job." Rette read again.... When she read sentences like this she wished, almost desperately, that she had been born a boy. It seemed to her that a man's life was so much more direct than a woman's. You simply chose a goal and worked toward it, and there was nothing, given youth and strength, that couldn't be achieved. You didn't have to be glamorous or charming or even particularly attractive. You weren't caught in a web of artificiality, like a girl. (p. 18)

Yet Rette does not view success in terms of her achievements in sports. To her, "success is walking into a room smiling at the boys, as Elsie Wynn does." (p. 22) Rette has inherited only her mother's eyes and her husky voice which have gained for her the reputation of "tomboy type" - a title she hates. Yet she feels compelled to continue the pose because at least it accounts for her not having dates. (p. 16)

Rather than breaking free from these feminine restrictions, Cavanna has her heroine ultimately say, "You know, Mommy...I used to wish I was a boy -...I don't any

more. I think being a girl's kind of fun." (p. 178) Whereas in the beginning she wins a prize in an essay contest, which was primarily directed to the boys in the school, about why she would like to fly, in the end she wins a prize for an essay entitled "Homemaking as a Career". Cavanna seems to be saying: "Go ahead. Be a tomboy. Get it out of your system and then get down to the business of being a girl."

Some of Cavanna's books have in them a nonconformist who enjoys her individuality and shuns traditional "female" worries about how she looks or how to catch a boyfriend. A character like this is Silence Crawford in Fancy Free (1961). But Cavanna depicts her as being too career-oriented and sees to it that in the end she, too, comes around to the business of being a female. Fancy, the heroine, does not regard Silence as "normal, amusing and gay", while Silence, on the other hand, feels lucky to have a career all lined up. (p. 16) Both are on an archeological expedition in South America: Silence by virtue of her skills as an archeology student; Fancy by virtue of being the daughter of the archeologist in charge. Silence, reading from Seventeen magazine about "how to be beautiful", and "how to attract men", complains, "they all assume that we have nothing to think about but ourselves." Fancy asks, "What's wrong with that?" and Silence answers, "Nothing. But isn't there anything else girls like to read about? ...We can't be that shallow!" To which Fancy replies, "Face it, Silence. You're different." Silence gives in, "I suppose you're the more normal." (p. 138)

Silence succumbs, allowing Fancy to "fancy" her up. Sleeping on rollers that are destined to curl her hair and make her beautiful, Silence again complains, "Torture. Pure torture! And for what?" "For Jack!" says Fancy. "So that you'll look like a girl." (pp. 232-234) Silence does not feel like herself when the process is complete but Fancy sees this as a positive sign: "The mere process of feeling like somebody different is marvelous for the moral!" (p. 232) and assures Silence that she will learn to like the boys' teasing.

The "new" Silence is a hit! Later when she wants to buy an alpaca jacket as a souvenir of her summer in South America, Fancy convinces her that rejuvenation at Liz Arden's would be a better investment. (p. 244) Another character conforms to the role society has rigidly defined for her, but it is difficult to accept the sudden change in character.

Similarly the delightful girl, Missy, in Spurs for Suzanna (1947) whose interests are decidedly "tomboy" reveals that she too is not immune to the pressures of becoming "feminine". After a summer of exposure to Suzanna Scot, Cavanna has Missy, who is "straight as a stick, brown and boyish", envying Mrs. Scot her "fashion-plate beauty". (p. 177)

To Cavanna growing up also means wearing different clothes. In one book the reader is told, "Clothes consciousness comes to some girls gradually," implying however that it does come. (Headley, b, p. 129) Judy, in The Black Spaniel

Mystery (1945), felt her appearance had gone against her when trying to get help at the police station: "From now on she intended to dress like a lady - in public, at least."

(p. 47) Clothes are shown to have a direct bearing on the girl's self-confidence. Kathy McCall, in Accent on April (1960), needs a new dress for a date. Her mother agrees. The dress gives Kathy self-confidence and she "would have been less than feminine had she not enjoyed the surprised expression she saw on the face of Brenda." (p. 186)

Another heroine, dressing for a date, is careful in her choice: "She had to feel glamorous and feminine tonight." (Cavanna, f, p. 129) Despite economic difficulties, one mother considers the Winter Carnival Dance of sufficient importance to buy her daughter a new dress, although when the daughter had wanted skis to fulfill her passion for skiing, the mother had felt unable to help. (Cavanna, q, p. 236)

As Rette Larkin grows up, her mother decides it is time her daughter was in high heels. Mrs. Larkin decides on an impractical frivolous pair because "[she'd] never seen [Rette] look more incompetent and feminine in [her] life" (Cavanna, e, p. 164) - as if it were a virtue.

Prudence, in Lasso Your Heart (1952), feels more at home in a dress, but she and her mother keep trying on one party dress after another until they find the "right" one for her cousin's debut. When they find it, Prudence "felt a surge of anticipation.... Maybe something really exciting will happen to me...." (p. 24) and she imagines herself with

a tall blond hero who sees the real her. Remembering her mare's impending foaling, which had until the dress-buying expedition occupied her thoughts, Prudence feels momentarily guilty. She realizes "how complicated things are." (p. 24)

The changes required of the young girl in the maturing process entail denying her natural inclinations to assert herself. Instead she finds it necessary to eliminate anything "masculine" in her character in favor of the "feminine" ones.

#### Boy Friends become "Boyfriends"

The process of growth also entails relating to boys differently. Paintbox Summer (1949) tells us "Getting along with men was important by both Valerie's and Barbara's standard. It was one of the things Kate knew she must learn to do." (p. 42) And it is, in fact, what she does learn in her maturing process. Early in Maggie Page's life, "She became increasingly wary of boys as a social group and pretended to herself...that she wasn't interested." (Cavanna, r, p. 107) When there is a specific boy the heroine has in mind the problem becomes acute: "Kathy, who had never especially craved approval, wanted Rad to think well of her." (Cavanna, t, p. 29) Kathy, who has not been "trapped" by fifth grade crushes, who has accepted the easy companionship of the boy her own age without pretending to understand the adult technique of flirtation, now finds everything different. Now she wants to make Rad proud of her, to become the sort of girl

whose company he would seek. (p. 29)

How much of a change is required of the young girl in relation to boys is evident at the end of this chapter when it is demonstrated that the boy, in fact, becomes her goal.

### The Mother's Role

Mothers are responsible to a large extent for this socialization of their daughters. In The Scarlet Sail (1959) in which Andrea learns the skill of handling a sailboat, her mother is concerned about "launching" her daughter. (p. 146) The girl of whom the mothers in A Girl Can Dream (1948) most approve is Elsie Wynn because of her beauty and popularity with boys. (p. 11) In speaking about "pushing" mothers Prudence's cousin admits that "Half the places I went when I was your age were little ideas Mother dreamed up." (Cavanna, p. 143).

In the same novel the invitation to a debut is the initial event. "Sort of like a wedding invitation," says Prudence, half amused, half impressed. "That's supposed to follow next," her mother says. (p. 13) Prudence does not understand - yet! Her mother is, in fact, somewhat disapproving of the debut but sends her daughter anyway to get a taste of something other than ranch life. Later she apologizes for pushing Prudence. She realizes that Prudence will have to hit her own stride. (p. 153)

Sometimes reluctantly, but inevitably, the girls enter the social whirl, and always at the end there is the feeling

that the difficulties encountered were worthwhile since "new doors" were opened for them.

### Slow Transition Recommended

Usually in the process of growing up, Cavanna suggests a slow process as opposed to the precocity of the "femme fatale". Although initially the heroine envies and tries to copy the self-assurance and popularity of the "femme fatale", eventually in her "growth" toward femininity, dependence and - though it may sound contradictory - confidence, the heroine realizes that this is not her way.

In The Scarlet Sail (1959), Andrea envies the slender, attractive Faye, and wants to bask in her companionship. Andrea was "quite happy in being accepted as part of a familiar group without wanting to be outstanding in any special way." (p. 31) Yet at a dance, Andrea observes another girl who "was the sort of girl who had a middling good time at dances without ever hoping to be the belle of the ball" (p. 92) implying that only the latter could have a really good time.

Similarly, in Passport to Romance (1955), Jody begins by tagging along at the heels of the popular Mary Lou. Eventually, Jody begins to feel disdain for this boy-crazy girl but at the same time realizes it would be humiliating to admit she had not yet had a date.

Meg Sanderson, who longs for individual recognition, initially tries to copy the ways of her popular older sister,

thereby losing any individuality she might have had. (Cavanna, g, p. 57) But she too realizes that "glamour girl" methods are not for her. Her father tells her, "You're not a glamour girl, honey. You never will be. But you're mighty pleasant to have around." (Cavanna, g, p. 90) Meg accepts this definition of herself. As she watches Randy, who is dancing with her sister, "feeling masculine and attractive as Joanna could always make boys feel," (p. 192) Meg is not concerned. She no longer feels resentment because she did not think Joanna could help herself. "Yet Meg knew that while Randy was completely absorbed by Joanna right now, he would come to her later. Joanna's sparkle could hold him just so long." (p. 192)

In other Cavanna novels as well the heroines, after watching, envying and even attempting to imitate the "femme fatales", often decide that what "works" for one person does not necessarily "work" for them. Usually it is a matter of timing.

Prudence Foster, in Lasso Your Heart (1952), likes herself the way she is, yet envies her cousin's "essential femininity that gave her a power Prudence had never known." (p. 101) She is confused, and the author spells out the problem: "She didn't know that it was just her way of finding out about herself, and she realized only dimly that she was hopelessly involved in the process of growing up." (p. 101) In the same story the precocious Cissy in explaining her love for Mac, and the likelihood of early marriage says,



some girls grow up quickly. I'm one of those. You're not. You're what Mother calls the slow-maturing type. You haven't any sense of urgency...the way I have. You don't feel that you've got to grab life now, before it passes you by. (p. 138)

But the secret engagement between Mac and Cissy causes Prudence to long for childhood innocence. She thinks Cissy is turning time forward and should instead "lasso her impetuous heart." (p. 152) Eventually Prudence talks Mac out of eloping with Cissy, and Cavanna makes it appear like the intervention of the holy virgin: "The very attitude of her hands, clasped in supplication, told him how earnest she was...." (p. 176) Prudence has caused them to delay the marriage for a year and everyone seems happy at this result.

Cavanna seems to be saying that slow growth is preferable to speedy maturation even though the end result may be the same. When Rad asks Kathy to go steady at the end of Accent on April (1960) Kathy says it would not be fair to him. "Can't we just be friends?" she asks. He apologizes for rushing her, and she reaches up to kiss him. "'Please,' she said. 'Please!' But she didn't know what she was begging for, and then she leaned against him for a moment and sighed, 'It's lovely just being alive'." (p. 255)

"Being alive", however, here seems to include having Rad to lean on.

In Diane's New Love (1955) Diane is introduced into "a man's world" by finding herself fought over by two boys. Toby treats her like a possession. "You can have the dog," he says to Jim. "I've still got the girl." At this Diane

rebels, but Jim offers, "You could be mine." (p. 230) She asks for time to decide, and that is all it is a matter of: not whether she will belong to someone, but rather whose position she will be.

### Emphasis on "Being Natural"

Invariably when a heroine is caught trying to be someone she is not, she is told to "be natural". Yet there is a paradox involved here. Growing up means leaving "nature" in a sense, yet remaining "natural". Simone de Beauvoir writes

as a member of society, [the young girl] enters upon adult life only in becoming a woman, she pays for her liberation by an abdication. Whereas among plants and animals she is a human being; she is freed at once from her family and from the males - a subject, a free being. She finds in the secret places of the forest a reflection of the solitude of her soul and in the wide horizon of the plains a tangible image of her transcendence....  
(de Beauvoir, 1952, p. 341)

Often Cavanna's heroines, too, seem to find their former confidence and freedom in nature. In Prudence's confusion about what she wants out of life and about where "growing up" is leading her, she finds that the countryside has a healing effect on her: "Prue felt almost whole again." (Cavanna, j, p. 70)

Many of the heroines have similar reactions either with the outdoors or with their horses and dogs. For example, Meg, who has been having trouble accepting herself, also has trouble getting the new horse, Romy, to trust and accept her. Yet as she stands in the stable honestly re-

examining herself she suddenly finds the horse trusting her. Cavanna seems to be saying that when Meg is "being herself", "being natural", instead of trying to be someone else, good relationships can be established.

Often it is a young man who points out the reason the heroine is having difficulties adjusting to adolescence. One young man tells the heroine he likes her better now that she is "being natural" than he did before when "she was just trying too hard!" And he adds, "Maybe it's a fault of the sex." (Cavanna, f, p. 93) Perhaps it is, but if it is, it is likely due to the frustrating difficulty involved for young women in trying to deny their former autonomous identity when a new one of submission is expected of them.

Rad urges Kathy to be "natural". He reminds her of a conversation they had had earlier, "I said you'd be a perfectly enchanting woman some day, and I meant it - then!" (Cavanna, t, p. 169) Being "natural" in the context of this story means devoting her life to the world of men, since the original occasion for Rad's comment was Kathy's paying him a compliment, that is, supporting his ego.

#### Popularity is Not to be Sought

Cavanna's views on popularity, which are related to her views on being natural, recur in several novels. The cover flap on Spring Comes Riding (1950), describes the book as follows: "How Meg discovered the secret of popularity, gained new poise, and was able to cope with her more glam-

orous sister is told in a true-to-life story done in the best Betty Cavanna fashion." This suggests that popularity might be held up as a goal, but suggests also that it can be achieved through being natural rather than through striving towards it. Kate Vale, the heroine of Paintbox Summer (1949) is told "...popularity isn't the be-all and end-all of existence. It's fine for some people, but the social whirl that Valerie and your mother love just isn't your meat." (p. 24)

Victoria's boyfriend Pietro in Almost Like Sisters (1963), asks, "Is being popular with boys a virtue?" (p. 131) He sees the popular Chrissy as a pretty, vapid fool while Victoria he sees as perfectly natural. "Perfectly natural" in this case, again means a woman who will be submissive to her husband since, in another conversation, Pietro says "I'm not sure I'll allow my wife to work." (p. 250) Since the prospective wife at this point can be assumed to be Victoria, the fact that both she and Pietro will have had university training makes no difference. There is every indication that Victoria's "naturalness" will be defined by Pietro who knows "what a woman's role is." (p. 251)

Cavanna is careful to show us that the popularity enjoyed by some girls is just a facade. The popular Faye in The Scarlet Sail (1959) does not have the security and strong sense of identity that Andrea had attributed to her. (p. 211) Prudence Foster in Lasso Your Heart (1952) recognizes the confidence of Colin and Cissy as "surface sophistication". (p. 45) Furthermore, in observing the behavior of popular

friends, a girl like Jane, in A Boy Next Door (1956), is likely to realize that their "Machinations were not in her line." (p. 43)

Occasionally when the heroine herself is the popular girl, Cavanna sees to it that she undergoes some soul-searching. Francesca in Fancy Free (1961) had always been popular. She achieved "grades just good enough to get by." In fact it "was her private opinion that girls shouldn't be too clever or knowledgeable, because boys don't like that type. The male animal, Fancy was convinced, needed to feel superior." (p. 16) If Fancy were proved wrong in her assessment the reader might well be left with a positive image. However, although she does undergo some change, it is merely a compromise.

In Fancy's exposure to the two archeology students, Silence and Chris, her "intellectual curiosity" is stimulated. For the first time she decides she might go to college; it "might be fun." (p. 253) Chris criticizes her Vogue model appearance, preferring, as he says, a girl who is "more natural".

During the course of this novel Fancy moves towards a more "natural" position, while at the same time, Silence moves away from it. By the end of the novel Silence has become feminized. She says, "I used to despise the kind of girl who spends half her time playing up to men..." (p. 258) and yet now finds herself doing the same thing. She does not want to be called brainy; she does not want a "friend!" What

Silence wants is a boyfriend, specifically, Jack, who, although he is not too bright, appeals to her maternal instinct. (p. 221) Fancy, on the other hand, decides it might be all right to be called brainy since Chris obviously prefers a girl with intelligence. It is assumed that she is going to college, though she is unsure of her goal. Chris, however, has the answer to that question. He thinks of her as "the wife and mother" type. (p. 247) Cavanna seems to be saying that both femininity and intelligence are required for a girl to be successful.

Even in the two books Secret Passage (1946) and A Touch of Magic (1961) which fall into the category of historical fiction, the stress on "naturalness" is seen. In both cases the heroines come from Quaker backgrounds and show more independence than other girls their age. This may be due to the Quaker influence, since in Quaker meetings women are expected to participate as fully as the men. At any rate the message in these books is the same as in the ones with a modern setting: the girls with "naturalness" will do well; that is, they will marry better in the long run. All the beauty and superficiality of the sought after "femme fatales" lead to hardship or sorrow, whereas Cavanna pictures a heroine such as Hannah Trent happily married as a result of exhibiting "naturalness" and devotion to her young man.

Thus, in Cavanna's novels, "being yourself" or "being natural" inevitably means for a girl to take her "natural" place subordinate to a male. While popularity with a large

group is not to be sought, acceptance by a male is. It can, however, only be accomplished by submitting to established societal patterns.

#### FACTORS LIMITING THE "FEMININE" GIRL

##### Stereotyped Roles: Dominant Male and Subservient Female

Stereotyped roles are evident throughout these novels. Prominent as an established figure in Cavanna's view of the world is the dominant male figure. The existence of this figure markedly limits a girl's options in life.

Fancy's father causes her to feel inferior; she believes his opinions as she would laws. (Cavanna, u, pp. 25, 105) Andy feels it is completely natural for Mike to order her around like a domineering drill sergeant. (Cavanna, s, p. 85) The first time Andy's stepfather steps in during an argument she and her mother are having, Andy feels he is being a real father. Her mother, incidentally, adds, "You might care to know right now that I don't intend to buck any decisions [your stepfather] may make." (p. 112)

On a date with Philip, Claire Farrell, whose father is a domineering man, heads for her car. Philip says, "'Suppose I drive.' It wasn't a question. It was a command." (Cavanna, h, p. 85) By the end of this book Cavanna tells us Philip had "taught [Claire] a lot." (p. 176) In Almost Like Sisters (1963), when Stan, a friend of Victoria's widowed mother, comes to Boston, he tells Victoria's mother to

"grow up". Usually she argues with him when he becomes dictatorial, but now she succumbs. When they announce their engagement, Stan speaks "with a sudden radiant look of proprietorship." (p. 251)

Other heroines are similarly over-awed by the strong men in their lives. Peter Page, Maggie's father, "was the rock to whom they all clung in times of stress." (Cavanna, r, p. 79) At the end of this story Maggie, in regard to her father, thinks, "What a lot she had to live up to - and how glad she was to try!" (p. 256) Jenny Kimura finds that when Alan takes her hand she "became a captive, no longer a general who could hope to command." (Cavanna, x, p. 199) Brooke wears flat shoes to allow David "a respectable two inches of dominance." (Cavanna, z, p. 12)

The effect of the male exercising his dominance usually results in the girl's feeling "feminine". When Carlos commands Peggy not to wear a beach cap, he "made her feel utterly feminine and desirable." (Cavanna, v, p. 58) Prudence's father did not ask for her mother's hand; he just took it. They supposedly have a wonderful marriage. (Cavanna, j, p. 15) After Maggie has made great progress towards independence Scoop Barton convinces her to sing when she is unwilling. He "willed her to come" and Maggie, "essentially feminine,...yielded with a smile." (Cavanna, r, p. 238)

According to Brooke's father in A Breath of Fresh Air (1966) a marriage cannot work "Unless, of course, [his wife]



subordinated herself to his needs." (p. 117) His wife, who has finally refused to do so, is applying for a divorce as a result. Brooke feels her father is less than a man since he allowed his wife to become "the doer" while he became "the dreamer". "It was always her mother, never her father, doing the outdoor work," is said as a negative statement by the sympathetic heroine. (p. 13) The divorce is due to this role reversal. "If only the sexes were reversed it would have been easier...." (p. 33) After her boyfriend David's accident, Brooke decides she needs David since he is "a tower of strength on which all her life she must be able to lean." (p. 211)

In another book Dana, showing Paris to Mindy, remarks, "It's fun to shepherd this little lamb." (Cavanna, aa, p. 191) Mindy likes his solicitude and "obediently admires the things he points out." (p. 220) She later chooses him as her mate.

Other stereotypes, mostly concerned with what it is to be "feminine" or "masculine", occur throughout these novels. Accent on April (1960) may be taken as an example. Women have "a typical female sense of humor." (p. 8) Girls, says Mrs. McCall, "have more social perception. ...They aren't so violent." (p. 137) Per and Jon do Kathy's table duties, but only because she is late. (p. 182) Opening soft drinks "isn't a girl's job." (p. 193) Regarding things mechanical, Mrs. McCall finally repairs the furnace herself. When asked how she did it by the incredulous men, she an-

swers, "in a gesture of royal disdain for masculine inadequacy...[and] assum[ing] a Mona Lisa smile, 'I kicked it'." (p. 158) Watching her husband, whom she had been about to ask to do a domestic chore, Mrs. McCall "could only contemplate his retreating back indulgently." (p. 108)

In Jenny Kimura (1964), as in other books, when males explain something mechanical or "difficult" the girls are totally absorbed - in the boy. (p. 80) In the same book when Dick tells Jenny she is interested in "boys and clothes in that order just like any other girl," Jenny is pleased. She feels cherished and secure. (p. 172)

Men have a "masculine saneness" to their point of view which appeals to girls. (Cavanna, o, p. 232) A male is often "lost to [the girl] for the duration of the game, absorbed as only a man can be in sport." This in turn made the girl "feel deliciously feminine." (Cavanna, g, p. 147) The "feminine inconsistency" of some of the females is accepted by the author. (Cavanna, j, p. 42) A woman's southern accent made her "feminine and appealing." (Cavanna, v, p. 16) A foal is described as standing "in quiet enjoyment to be curried and brushed. Just like a little lady." (Cavanna, j, p. 42) If a room is untidy it is called "masculine". (Cavanna, p, p. 25) A young man says "Girls are always late" and he is unchallenged. (Headley, c, p. 193)

Claire's grandfather says she is selfish, "Takes after me, takes after Gregory.... But it isn't becoming in a woman. She ought to be taught." The author seems to approve

this double standard since only Claire is "taught".

(Cavanna, h, p. 61)

"Sometimes," says Diane's father, as he encounters her draped in a towel, fresh and fragrant from a cool shower, "I would settle for a woman's world." Diane and her mother have had an indescribably hectic day, but Diane makes no comment to her father; "Her mother had taught her it doesn't pay to argue with a man." (Headley, b, p. 38)

And the list of stereotypes continues. It can be argued that the inexperienced reader, identifying in part with the heroine of the story, will accept the stereotypes as true also for herself.

#### The Need to Bolster the Male Ego

The dominant male - submissive female stereotype in Cavanna's books mean that man's ego must constantly be supported, even if this means feigning inability at times. In referring to a party at which her son Jon has made a fool of himself, Mrs. McCall says to her daughter Kathy, "Well, at least you're more able to cope. All women are.... I'll tell you a secret. We're the superior sex." (Cavanna, t, p. 177) This is the only time in Cavanna's novels that this viewpoint is stated. The important thing to note is that while Mrs. McCall believes females are superior, she also believes that the trick is not to let on. Why should it be kept secret? Obviously in order to continue getting the small and secret gains eked out for centuries by women. But certainly this

does nothing to aid equality or humanity. It is simply maintaining the status quo.

Though Fancy admits that she is "superficial and lightweight" at the outset of Fancy Free (1961), she takes charge with unexpected authority when she finds a new-born llama which has lost its mother. (p. 111) Later, her harrowing drive from the town hospital to the camp-site instills in her new pride and confidence in herself. Yet this same girl continues to play up "prettily" to the boys and convinces Silence to relinquish her lofty intellectual stance if she wants to attract Jack. He feels she is "way beyond reach." (p. 230) Silence is encouraged by Fancy to "lay on a little more allure" which translates to using lipstick, curling her hair, and playing helpless.

When Maggie's mother collapses under the stress of her son's accident, Maggie realizes any action taken will be up to her.

In that instant Maggie understood more about [her mother] as a person than ever before. She knew now why it had been easy for her mother to give up a theatrical career for marriage without a single regret. She was the sort of woman who operated successfully only within the orbit of a very strong man. She could be a good wife and mother, could manage a house and provide a pleasant and suitable background, but it was Peter who made every decision, Peter who called every move. Annette protected Peter...but she also leaned on him, so heavily that when his support was taken away she became utterly distraught. (Cavanna, r, p. 81)

The fact that it is Maggie, the sympathetic heroine, who sees this implies criticism of the mother. Maggie finds strength in taking charge of arrangements in regard to her brother.

She "had a sense of competence, a feeling of command."  
 (p. 85) But instead of using the confidence and strength to forge her own individuality she is soon playing all the old games, or at least trying to. When her date does not have a good time she sees it as her fault; "Instead of arguing, instead of picking fights, she could have jollied him along, played up to him. She'd watched the other girls do it, but she couldn't seem to pick up the knack." (p. 105) However, she eventually learns. Shortly afterwards, her father is entertaining an influential producer. "With unerring feminine instinct Maggie realized that Mr. Brower was the sort of man whom a moderately attractive girl could invariably charm." (p. 136) And she proceeds to do just that. Determined to play the sponsor-client game for her father, Maggie is called "delightful".

Similarly, when Fosters' horses break out of the pasture, Prudence behaves in a very capable manner. After her arduous afternoon her father acts like a neglected child because she did not have time to work on his manuscript. (Cavanna, j, p. 114) Instead of being exasperated, as she had every right to be, Prudence soothes her father and soon has his article in publishable condition.

Clearly the traditional soft-glove treatment of the male ego is called for by Cavanna. As Mrs. Jamison tells her daughter Peggy, they must go see Mr. Jamison's office, "Because it's his. ...And you must be admiring. The male ego is very tender and should be treated accordingly."

(Cavanna, v, p. 31) Another woman says she gave up golf when she began beating her husband: "There's no place for a woman golfer who wants to play with other than her own sex."

(Cavanna, x, p. 94) A girl watches while her mother made her boyfriend "feel important, necessary and attractive - every inch a man!" (Cavanna, w, p. 242)

It is often the older women, usually the mothers, who encourage the girls to feed the men's egos, and regardless of whether the girls are skeptical or not, they soon are found to be carrying on the established practise. When one of the girls in Diane's New Love (1955) suggests they offer to pay half the expenses on dates, she is greeted with, "Never! ...You can't trample on a man's ego." (p. 187) Victoria knows "with a sixth sense that was as infallible as it was feminine" that one of the reasons Pietro liked her is because "she not only let him talk, she listened with rapt attention to all he had to say." At seventeen, she felt like a woman who "was fulfilling an unsuspected function... - this constancy that she was discovering to be so important to a man." (Cavanna, w, p. 168)

The absorption of the technique may be unconscious. When Kate Vale remarks as Manuel helps her into the boat, "How did you ever get so strong?", the author says that Kate did not realize "she was following an age-old feminine formula to attract a man." (Cavanna, f, p. 105) Occasionally, on the other hand, a heroine, unaware of what is demanded of her in a masculine world, finds herself making a tactical

error in relationship with a boy. An example of this occurs when Angela wants to share her new skiing skills with Dave, her original instructor. He is upset that now she wants to teach him, and their relationship suffers as a result.

(Cavanna, g, p. 132)

Thus the girls sooner or later realize that one aspect of coping in a masculine world involves hiding their own capabilities or at least excelling only in traditional "feminine" territory.

#### Limited Choice of Careers

Although it is permissible to show competence or superiority in "female" areas, such as babysitting, Cavanna's girls seldom make Angela's mistake of excelling in "male" areas.

The careers held by the few working women in these novels are usually women-oriented professions, such as fashion-associated jobs, or careers that have been traditionally shared by both sexes, such as writing. An exception to this would seem to be seen in Silence Crawford, the budding archeologist, but it has already been suggested that her career ambitions are soon superseded by her marriage ambitions.

A more valid exception might be the female flying instructor in A Girl Can Dream (1947), but she is not a major character, and we learn little about her. Another minor character, Dr. Helvig, is an anthropologist, but she is described as being stocky and square, with a voice as deep as

a man's. She is depicted as lop-sided in her interests, and boring. (Cavanna, y, p. 27) Both these characters are single women.

Suzanna's mother, Mrs. Scot, who is a commercial photographer, works primarily because her husband is in a tuberculosis sanitorium. But her mother's work is the bane of Suzanna's life. (Cavanna, d) Brooke's mother has gone into the antique shop business due to the refusal of her husband to support her and her children. But her work has cost her a great deal. She was "a vigorous woman, but it wasn't easy to run the shop and manage the house with the efficiency she demanded of herself." (Cavanna, z, p. 23) Furthermore "the gentleness which had made her charming disappeared." (p. 23) The fact that her marriage is ending in divorce suggests that Cavanna disapproves of the circumstances which led to this woman's working.

Mindy's widowed Aunt Alix has opened a dress shop. She says, "No business can begin to fill the gap Bill left, but I had to have something challenging to occupy my time and some of my thoughts. The 'Country Cousin' has really pulled me through." (Cavanna, aa, p. 19) Her career is a second choice, but it appears to be a fulfilling one.

In the same novel Cavanna describes a woman who is married to an architect but who works as a salesclerk in a dress shop because she loves clothes. She is described as "inwardly serene." (p. 56) This woman who works, not because she has to, at a job that demands little responsi-



bility, may be Cavanna's answer to the marriage and/or career problem.

Kate Vale's Aunt Dot is single, "small, quick-eyed, with an unmistakably chic figure." (Cavanna, f, p. 12) She is a buyer who lives in New York. When Kate accompanies the artist Peter Hunt on a working trip to New York, she is treated maturely and begins to feel like a businesswoman like her Aunt Dot. Aunt Dot, incidentally, is "an old lady of twenty-nine." (p. 144)

Angela's mother, Mrs. Dodge, is also widowed. She runs a hostel in her home to support the family. Again, strains are put on the family as a result of Mrs. Dodge's double duty. (Cavanna, q)

Maggie Page's mother cannot understand her daughter's desire for a career even though she herself once had one. Maggie's question of whether her mother misses her career in the movies elicits this response: "Heavens no!" Maggie cannot understand: "But lots of girls manage both - a career and a husband", but her mother replies, "They get both, but do they manage both? That's the question." Maggie argues, "Not all Hollywood marriages break up." But her mother again replies, "Not all...but too many.... I wouldn't have been a very good actress anyway. Confidentially, my sweet, I was saved by the gong." (Cavanna, r, pp. 57-58)

The implication, as always, is that priority number one is a husband, and that husbands "save" women. Maggie continues, despite her parents' advice, to pursue a career,

but by the end of the book, her career success coincides with romantic success. Scoop Barton, Maggie's boyfriend, watching Maggie's theatrical success, says to a perfect stranger in the audience: "You know something? Maggie Page has grown up!" (p. 256) It can be assumed that he is now ready to take his "rightful" place in her life since he has been influential in her growth, and she is now ready for him. Where this leaves her career can only be guessed at.

Sometimes Cavanna pictures marriages as not only between man and woman but also between their careers. Claire Farrell's parents are an editorial team, (Cavanna, h) while Timothy Lyle's parents are both artists. (Cavanna, o) The former, however, seem to neglect their daughter, while the latter wrong their son. Though both children are admirably independent, Cavanna has the heroine, in Passport to Romance (1955), accuse the Lyles of not providing a stable enough home for Timothy. They eventually take her advice and settle down in New England. Another couple jointly own a ranch but their tasks are traditionally split into "masculine" and "feminine" jobs. (Cavanna, y)

In Jenny Kimura (1964), Mrs. Harrington, formerly an editor, had given up her job after the birth of her child, and had turned to book reviewing at home with great success. Though this seems a sensible compromise between career and marriage, Cavanna implies a criticism. Mrs. Harrington's housekeeping suffers as a result of her work, and her life is described as bohemian - a lifestyle which was itself severely

criticized in the earlier novel Almost April (1960). Mrs. Harrington asks Jenny if she has decided what she wants to do yet, but Jenny feels uncomfortable. It was a "boy's question, not a girl's." (Cavanna, x, p. 143) Mrs. Harrington's idea "that boys and girls aren't so different when it comes to brains" is a novel idea to Jenny; yet at the end Jenny contemplates her future in relation to the three men in her life, and only secondarily in regard to education and a career. (Cavanna, x, p. 216)

#### Viewing Spinsters as Unfortunate Women

In addition to the few married or widowed working women there are the spinsters. They fare even more poorly at Cavanna's hands than the working mothers. In The Boy Next Door (1956) we meet Miss Plunkett. She is one of Jane's mother's "lame ducks"; she is invited to dinner because she is pitied. "Miss Plunkett was the passed-by type", a music teacher whose most important possessions were her piano and her cat. To Jane she is "more tragic than peculiar. Was that what happened to girls who didn't know how to get along?" (p. 142) It can be assumed in the context of this story that she means, "to get along with boys."

In Spring Comes Riding (1950) a similar statement is expressed. Miss Dolly and Miss Grace Truesdale are two landladies of a house which caters particularly to girls who come to the college town on weekend dates. They watch the girls being met by their dates and "It was quite obvious, even to

Meg, that this was the Misses Truesdale's moment, this was their chance to brush with a life they saw through rose-coloured glasses." (p. 129) Meg pities these women who have missed so much.

Miss Anna, an unmarried teacher in A Breath of Fresh Air (1966), tells Brooke, who has contemplated herself at thirty, "a tall, dark, charming woman, unmarried by choice rather than necessity...impeccably dressed, sought after, independent", that "A spinster's life is not an easy one." (p. 54) Neither, it might be added, is the life of a married woman. However, Brooke takes Miss Anna's comment seriously and soon discards her visions of independence in favor of marriage to David.

Victoria's advisor in Almost Like Sisters (1963) is described as "a stout, sturdy, Vermont spinster." (p. 87) In each case, the spinsters are described in an uncomplimentary fashion, with often an implication that they have in some way "failed", because they are not married. This is made very clear in Two's Company (1951), although in this novel is found a spinster with a twist.

In Two's Company, Claire's Aunt Rosemary, a Williamsburg spinster, has the "final degradation of being a hostess at the Whyte House", yet she enjoys it. (p. 21) Eighteen-year-old Claire thinks:

It would be...simply awful, to be without a future and cherish only a past. That was why, if she allowed herself to become morbid, it would be possible to feel terribly sorry for poor Aunt Rosemary. It was healthier to face facts and recognize that her aunt must have been

an especially stupid young girl. Otherwise she would have got herself married and away from here. (p. 21)

Claire regards her aunt as an "impossible fuddy-duddy." (p. 31)

Through the guidance of Philip, Claire begins to realize her aunt has certain merits. She has a sense of humor a gift for conversation. When her aunt appears in a bathing-suit, though the suit is old-fashioned Claire observes that her aunt "was holding up well for her age." (p. 59) When the visiting movie producer praises Rosemary as "a young woman who combines breeding with wit, a good mind with a truly feminine viewpoint" the reader realizes this is no ordinary Cavanna spinster, and Claire is surprised to realize that Mr. Hartman actually likes her aunt.

Eventually it is revealed that the only reason Rosemary has not married is "because her parents depend on her" financially and otherwise. (p. 163) When that problem is resolved, Rosemary marries Mr. Hartman. The "old fuddy duddy" is "radiant" now. She has a "serene loveliness" that Claire somehow had not noticed before, or which had not been there. Rosemary has been "saved" by a man. Prophetically, Claire catches the bouquet at her wedding.

#### The Married Woman as Housewife

Primarily, however, the adult women in Cavanna's novels are housewives. As housewives they are pictured as attractive, youthful and dutiful. In several instances they are shown getting their way with their husbands through

trickery. For example, Mrs. Graham cancels her golf game with her husband at the last minute, and then suggests that he clean the garage instead since it will be impossible to find a new partner at such short notice. (Headley, b, p. 53) Similarly, Andrea watches with admiration as her mother, with seeming innocence, "inveigle[s] her husband" into a shopping trip. (Cavanna, s, p. 49)

Most of the mothers are described as being competent and creative as well. Mrs. McCall has her art class, Angie's mother runs the hostel, Mrs. Sanderson operates the stables and so on. In each case their activities include running the household as well.

Occasionally the mothers are quite incompetent. Sometimes Brooke feels "as though she were the adult and her mother the child." (Cavanna, z, p. 152) Vicky's mother, a widow, is gay, charming, more like a girl than a woman. (Cavanna, w, p. 12) She solves some problems with "charm", as, for example, the problem of her daughter's overdue school bills. She would "charm the bursar, who, fortunately, was a man." (p. 17) Victoria is aware, however, that on the whole her mother "just can't cope." Her mother's theory is that "A man doesn't like a girl to be too bright." (p. 124)

Diane's mother is also described as incompetent. She drives through two European borders without stopping and then, realizing her error when flashing lights converge on her, makes Diane promise not to tell her father. (Headley, c, p. 212)

Peggy's mother states, "Mother raised her girls to be helpless, so they'd marry rich." (Cavanna, v, p. 51) Though this mother is not always described in a favourable light, the author offers no criticism of this comment.

When a widow has remarried, it is regarded as a fortunate thing. Andrea's mother had been "rejuvenated" by her marriage. She felt "as though life had again become an adventure." She is a "changed woman" and feels very much "in her place." (Cavanna, s, p. 33) (Her daughter, as yet, does not, but there is every promise that she soon will.)

Andrea's stepfather is a professor who reads in his spare time, while her mother makes curtains and collects antiques as a hobby. She supposedly feels this is a fulfilling life.

Generally, therefore, it would seem that an acceptable option held out to the young girl by Cavanna is that of becoming a serene, creative housewife. She is not to be incompetent, for the incompetent housewives, although they are forgiven their weakness, are criticized. Precisely why serenity magically descends when a woman is legally bound to a man is not explained.

#### College is Encouraged but Career Interests are Seen as Secondary

Unlike their mothers, who are primarily housewives, the heroines themselves often think in terms of having a career. Since in stories such as Almost Like Sisters (1960) and Stars in Her Eyes (1958) the mother is pictured as less mature in some ways than her daughter - in both books the

heroines take over in crisis situations with which their mothers are unable to cope - it may be assumed that it is the daughter's values in which Cavanna is interested.

Choosing a career - usually art, decorating, costume design or writing - involves going to college, and Cavanna stresses the need for education. Claire Farrell, having come under the influence of Philip, who is destined to teach her much, is for the first time reluctant to admit she was the product of finishing school, not college. (Cavanna, h, p. 81) When Mindy is refused by a college her mother says, "There's always secretarial school", but Mindy shudders. (Cavanna, aa, p. 138) She is however, eventually successful in applying to a college of design. The girls not planning to go to college, due to early marriage plans, are described as looking lost and ill at ease as the end of the school year approaches. (Cavanna, z, p. 194) Prudence's cousin suggests a college for her to develop her writing talent and give her polish. (Cavanna, j, p. 138)

Again Cavanna might well be applauded for encouraging her heroines towards college and career as a possible choice in life. However, college and career are soon found to be secondary in importance. This is revealed, for example, in Almost Like Sisters (1963). Despite her mother's plans for her, Vicky initially determines to go to a northern prep school in order to get into a good college. Vicky "forgot her craving for sweets, because she felt a new, gnawing hunger for learning." (p. 66) She decides her past life has



been too superficial and she tries no longer to yearn for beautiful clothes, hoping to concentrate on becoming a truly educated person. However, just as she is beginning to feel at home in the academic atmosphere, she is introduced to Pietro and allows herself to be swept off her feet. She returns to the lectures, not to hear them, but to see Pietro. She studies only because he thinks it important. No longer concerned with the "magical kingdom" of education, he has become her goal. (p. 234)

The pattern is repeated in other books. Simone de Beauvoir, in writing about education says:

Along with his regular program of work, the male student amuses himself with free flights of thought, and thence come his best inspirations; she will think about her personal appearance, about men, about love.  
(de Beauvoir, 1952, p. 346)

The female student gives only what is strictly necessary to her studies and her career, not because she lacks intelligence, but because of a "division between interests difficult to reconcile." (de Beauvoir, 1952, p. 346)

The divergent interests are invariably reconciled in Cavanna's novels by making the career interest secondary. College, for the girls, is often just a way to find a more suitable husband. As one character tells us, "brains and youth" are weapons with which to fight for a man. (Cavanna, w, p. 224)

Girls' Role "Defined" by  
Male Catalyst

Just as the stories concern themselves with the girls' growing up, they also concern themselves with the girls' progressing from having no goal to having a specific goal - a man. In Cavanna's novels it is the male who acts as catalyst in the girl's maturing, it is the male who "defines" the girl, and it is the male who is the ultimate goal.

In Two's Company (1951) Philip suggests to Claire that she get a job to while away her time. She does and finds that the advice was good. Philip assists her growth in other ways. He tells her she will be "nice" when she is "thoroughly educated", when she is not being "unnecessarily feminine". He is presumably successful in "educating" her because when she tells him at the end that she no longer intends to see his rival, Whit, he responds with, "You baby .... You youngster. You darling..." and kisses her. "The night," the author says, "now and forever, was theirs." (Cavanna, h, p. 189) Significantly, Claire has caught the bridal bouquet at her aunt's wedding. What she will do to "while away her time" after the wedding is not indicated.

Prudence, throughout most of Lasso Your Heart (1952), wonders what she wants most in life. She meets Colin, who, like most of the heroes in these books, knows exactly what he wants to do. Prudence decides, partially through his influence, to pursue a writing career, yet shortly afterwards the career becomes secondary. She sees "...what her mother's

life was, rich and full and incomplete only as her children were incomplete. And she realized that someday she - Prudence Foster - would be a woman looking after a son or a daughter just as [her mother] was now." (p. 176) She knows this more clearly than she knows about a career. She is excited about going to college, but primarily because there she has the prospect of constantly seeing Colin.

At the outset of Accent on April (1960) Kathy McCall is "interested in everything and accomplished at nothing in particular." (p. 24) She would like to work on the school newspaper but does not want to infringe on what she regards as her brother's territory. Their young Norwegian boarder, Per, convinces her that she can write well and encourages her to think of her future. Through Per, and another friend, Rad, Kathy finds a direction to her life; "She felt reborn, as though she were coming into existence equipped with an entirely new set of hopes and dreams and desires.... She was ready to spread her arms and welcome life afresh.... Life - and Rad!" (p. 172) The timelessness of this pattern is underscored when her mother remembers a similar incidence in her growing up. Eventually, Kathy discovers "that she was enamored with writing as well as Rad." This may be seen as a healthy by-product, but in her writing for the paper, she continually does most of the work and allows the males on the newspaper staff to take the credit. Significantly, she is appointed feature editor, while her brother becomes editor-in-chief. At the Commencement exercises Kathy has a

"glimpse of an adult world so important that everything else paled by comparison. Everything except Rad..." (p. 247) that is.

In Time for Tenderness (1962) Peggy Jamison, finding out that her friend Carlos wants to be a doctor, pictures what it would be like to be a doctor's wife. She thinks in terms of his success, not her own. (p. 80) She goes to work in a clinic, not because she likes the work, but because that is where Carlos is. (p. 129) Although in this book the heroine leaves Carlos to return with her family to North America, he has been involved in her "time of awakening" and there is no indication that Peggy will change her view of her place in regard to a male when she leaves.

Mike, who is Andrea's sailing teacher, is responsible to a large extent for her acceptance of her new stepfather. Mike's respect for her stepfather causes her to view him in a new light. In this story the difference between boys as friends and boys as boyfriends is made clear. As long as Mike is teaching Andrea to sail he treats her on equal terms, but when he starts liking her as a girlfriend he becomes protective and makes excuses for her errors. The fact that she has almost mastered the art of sailing and has come in second in a race is seen as secondary to her date with Mike: "because," as Andy says, "first of all there was tonight!" (Cavanna, s, p. 256)

Thus, heroine after heroine learns to accept herself and those around her in relation to some transcendent male in

her life. He "defines" her, he guides her growth, and therefore he compromises her independence.

### Compromise Between Marriage and Career

In Betty Cavanna's books it becomes apparent that for the girl who accepts herself fully only in relation to man, the ultimate goal is marriage. Thus, there is generally a compromise between career interests and marriage interests.

Like other heroines, Maggie Page is defined by a male. She muses about "belonging" and says, "I could [be included] if I were with Scoop Barton. I could because he thinks I'm attractive.... And because he thinks I am, I could be, I'm sure!" (Cavanna, r, p. 34) Scoop himself later says, "If you're big enough to take a job for the summer you're certainly big enough to consider an older man in your life." (p. 113) A girl whom Maggie meets in Paris and who has been working at a publishing house tells Maggie ecstatically, "I've met a man!" (p. 189) Maggie says she spoke as though she'd been given a "ticket to paradise." (p. 198)

In Paris Maggie learns how to sing with greater sensitivity. Her singing teacher guesses the reason, "Ah, this is because it is springtime - or is it perhaps because you have met a young man?" (p. 214) Maggie is aware of the difference in her, "How could I sing a sentimental song when I had never known how exciting the touch of a hand could be? A vista seemed to open up before her - love, marriage, child-

ren." (p. 215) This is the girl who was so determined to have a career.

Another Cavanna heroine, who revered Louisa May Alcott, imagines herself in the future as an independent thirty-year-old single woman with writing as a career. A girlfriend tells her that she wants to get married as quickly as possible because, "Fortunately I have no personal war to wage. I'm not the intellectual type." (Cavanna, z, p. 109) This is the most explicit anti-feminist statement made by the author. At the end the heroine opts for marriage to Dave, succumbing to his likes and dislikes and repressing her career ambitions. "Poor Louisa," she murmurs with both "compassion and anticipation" as David holds her in his arms. (p. 223) She and David "belonged together like river and meadow..."; she cannot understand how Louisa May Alcott could determine to be a spinster at such an early age. (p. 223) Not only does this not square with her earlier views of freedom, but also it suggests that anyone who chooses a career over marriage, even if the latter involves compromise, is a poor unfortunate who is missing something wonderful.

This compromise between career and marriage is found in other Cavanna books as well. In Paintbox Summer (1949) Kate Vale's father, because he needs time to pay her sister's wedding bills, tells her, "Don't you dare get married until you're thirty...." (p. 17) The implication is that she will, however, eventually marry. Kate's friend, about to be married, "...has found her niche at last." (p. 168) Kate

thinks these words are alarmingly final, as, indeed, they are. However, she does not rule out marriage, but simply decides to choose carefully the person she will marry. She realizes she would be too restless to be Manuel's kind of wife, but the artist, Bill, is another matter.

Jenny Kimura is described attending a wedding. She liked it; "Like every girl who has ever attended a wedding, she was envisioning her own." (Cavanna, x, p. 105) By this time the reader will agree with the character who said, "Education isn't so important for a pretty girl." (Cavanna, x, p. 121) And Jenny, like so many heroines before and after her, is found at the end of the book contemplating her future primarily in relation to the men in her life, and only secondarily in regard to education, or career, or her own goals.

#### SUMMARY

The maturing process in Cavanna's books involves a certain amount of despair; however, the despair seems to be not so much concerned with the nature of the growth, but rather, as Julie says, "about not having the technique, the personality or anything required to make boys want to be with her." (Cavanna, c, p. 39) She, like other heroines, "had devoured the subdeb pages in women's magazines for years now. Go out with a boy you know, go with a crowd, and do something .... All the advice was the same." (p. 160) As is indeed Cavanna's.

The years of adolescence can certainly be frustrating

ones because of the changes required of the young girl. Cavanna is aware of the problems involved and suggests a way for the girl to adapt to her new role in a relatively painless way. She is expected to change from being an independent, autonomous individual, to a "feminine", submissive woman who knows, and feels, herself to be subordinate to the man in her life, and who knows and feels this position to be "natural".

Cavanna's advice as to how to go about this abnegation is, first of all, to give up "tomboy" ways. This, it has been seen, seems to include an aggressive or "masculine" behavior. Although she may continue to maintain an interest in sports, she either loses some of the natural co-ordination which enabled her to excel, or she re-directs it. She dresses more femininely because of the pressures of either her mother, her friends or unseen social forces. As a result, she finds acceptance by people previously uninterested in her. Boy "friends" gradually become "boyfriends" as she becomes more used to her feminine role.

It is suggested that the process of becoming passively "feminine" be a slow one and that at no time should the girl be aggressively female since boys do not, in the long run, like "that kind". If the process is entered into slowly the results are more likely to appear "natural". The girl, who may not even be aware of the transition, eventually feels more comfortable in situations previously distasteful to her. As a result, her integrity is preserved.



Frequently, a transcendent male character guides the young girl along to feminine maturity. He gives advice, shows interest, and encourages her when she moves in a "feminine" direction. Praise re-enforces the feminine behavior and soon the young girl is being "feminine" unconsciously or "naturally". Often the young girl finds that the popularity she at one point sought comes naturally when she herself is being "natural", that is, unaggressively "feminine".

Because of the presence of the transcendent male character, usually only a few years older than the heroine, as well as the presence of a dominant father, the girl has become the stereotype of the traditional, "feminine" woman.

Because she has been taught to be submissive, to be object, to be "feminine", she spends a great deal of time waiting. She fritters away her time until the day comes when Prince Charming will arrive:

Thus the supreme necessity for woman is to charm a masculine heart; intrepid and adventurous though they may be, it is a recompense to which all heroines aspire; and most often no quality is asked of them other than their beauty.  
(de Beauvoir, 1952, p. 272)

The heroine, thus, in giving up her "tomboy" ways, her "femme fatale" imitations, becomes "natural" becomes herself, becomes "feminine", becomes beautiful.

She has learned to hide her capabilities in order to bolster the male ego and has directed her abilities into acceptable female lines. She thus acquires a belief in her competence even though her full potential has been curtailed.

As a result her choice of career is limited to

"female" occupations or ones that have been traditionally shared by men and women. However, even though she chooses a career it is implied that it is merely a temporary expedient; it fills in the time while she is waiting. Her real goal, she has been made to realize by now, lies in associating herself more or less permanently with an acceptable male.

The women who have failed to do so, the spinsters, are regarded as failures, unless there is still a possibility of marriage for them. Married women who have been widowed are "saved" when they re-marry. Those who have not re-married may find they have to work, as do some women in married situations. Seldom is the career seen as fulfilling in itself, however. In fact, the most serene, charming women in Cavanna's novels are depicted as creative housewives.

Although the young girl usually aspires to one of the few careers available to her, and goes, or plans to go, to college for this purpose, the career interest is usually forgotten or made subordinate when a young man enters her life. Often this is the same young man who guided her growth in the first place, and whom she originally regarded as a friend. Now the young man, seeing his pupil achieving "feminine" success, is ready to step in and claim his prize, to become her boyfriend and eventually her husband.

It is through Betty Cavanna's insistence on having wedding bells chime offstage more or less distinctly despite the heroine's decision to prepare for and enter a career that her inevitable compromise of female independence takes place.

Although women today are not all married and do not all wish to be Cavanna does not reflect this possibility. Time and again the traditional goals and means of finding one's identity, that is, through the definition of a man, are reflected in Cavanna's novels.

While it is true that in the novels this entire process is treated more subtly than has been stated above, the girl finds herself defined by the male catalyst. Invariably the socially acceptable definition of herself is a compromise resulting in a diminution of her true potential.

## Chapter 5

### CONCLUSION

From the summary of chapter four it would appear that Betty Cavanna's novels are sexist, and therefore debilitating to the growth potential of the young reader. Although Cavanna chooses a heroine rather than a hero about whom to write, the importance of the male in the girl's life is made clear. In the process of the heroine's "growing up" the catalytic agent is inevitably male, the world to which she must adapt is male, and the goal which she eventually chooses for herself is male.

Not only are females in Cavanna's books primarily assigned traditional roles and personalities, but female characters who do not fit into the traditional role are either made to conform or are seen as unfortunate human beings. Cavanna's girls, who seem so splendidly independent at times, do not seem to feel the contradiction between the creative, self-actualizing being within them and the subservient role they are compelled to play. Instead, with smiling submission, they inevitably make a smooth and successful - regardless of how unrealistic - compromise with a male-dominated world. No positive image is given of woman's true physical, emotional and intellectual potential. Invariably,

traditionally imposed limitations intervene.

The tendency for girls to read these books can be seen as natural, since reality to a large extent confirms the patterns on which Cavanna's novels are based. That is, they confirm the cultural patterns based on the belief that the only acceptable role for a woman is that of wife and mother, even though there are many emancipated women whose existence denies the validity of this pattern. Cavanna reflects in many ways a situation which has existed for a long time.

Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society. It is still true that most women are married, or have been or plan to be, or suffer from not being. The celibate woman is to be explained and defined with reference to marriage, whether she is frustrated, rebellious, or even indifferent in regard to that institution. (de Beauvoir, 1952, p. 400)

As a result, when an adolescent girl is asked about her plans for the future, the reply is still very often, "I want to get married." She knows of no acceptable alternative. Yet few, if any, young men would consider marriage as their fundamental goal.

Women's magazines still teach young women the art of "catching" a husband. Since young men mistrust women who want to get married, the hunting process, the "waiting" requires great skill and subterfuge. "Don't aim too high or too low; be realistic, not romantic; mix coquettishness with modesty; don't demand too much or too little," girls are exhorted. (de Beauvoir, 1952, p. 407) Interest in a career is encouraged primarily because it camouflages the pursuing process, or at least occupies the time of the young woman-in-

waiting, and may serve to make the man feel that the woman is more complete and worthy of him.

The girl's choices in life, therefore, are usually quite limited. She cannot be regarded as really free unless she feels free also not to marry. Yet this freedom of choice is not evident in Cavanna. Although presumably maturing towards independence, her heroines are, in fact, "maturing" towards submission.

Cavanna's books, it has been seen, reflect patterns still prevalent in society: woman's place is in the home; a woman is whom she marries; men "save" women; a girl must outgrow "tomboy" ways; and the list goes on. These novels, it would seem, have the effect of perpetuating these patterns. But surely the circle, which can be seen to discourage the full growth of the inexperienced reader, could be broken. Surely Cavanna could have shown a greater awareness of females controlling or instigating some of the important events in their lives, as, in real life, many women do.

Books aimed at adolescent girls which deal with shyness, self-consciousness, and groping for independence, appear to serve a worthwhile function, but boys suffer through these problems as well. Is there anything to be gained by having books "especially for girls" which only emphasize the peculiar "female" nature of what, in reality, are basically human problems? Similarly books about romance, love and dating like Cavanna's are often classed "especially for girls". Boys, too, are involved in romance, yet "boys"

books are about other things.

Although studies indicate that in the past there has been a female preference for books on romance and a corresponding male distaste for them, this may merely indicate the status quo. Norvell (1973) lists sex as one of seven factors affecting young people's reading preferences. He goes on to state that "sex is so dominant and everpresent a force in determining young people's reading choices that it must be carefully considered in planning any reading program for the schools." (p. 47) While evidence indicates that age is more influential in guiding reading choices in the elementary schools, "sex is a dominating influence which attains its maximum during the junior high school period." (Norvell, 1973, p. 49) What these studies primarily do is reflect a situation which needs changing. It has little to do with what is inherently "masculine" or "feminine" territory. On the other hand, there may have already been a change in reading preferences in recent years which have not yet appeared in existing studies.

Cavanna's books are also about women with careers, but rather than teachers, librarians, dancers, writers, artists, designers and the occasional skier, why can she not depict women as doctors, lawyers, employers or astronauts? Limiting the women to careers which have been traditionally regarded as "female" simply re-enforces sex roles imposed by society. Even when a girl in these novels considers a career, the book ends with a compromise in which marriage is con-

sidered more important than a career, and the career is often dropped. Must marriage and career be mutually exclusive? Must marriage always "win" when a choice must be made? This appears not to reflect life as it is experienced by many independent women today.

## IMPLICATIONS

### Implications for Education

There are several implications which arise from this study. One concerns education in general. The question may be put whether the purpose of education is primarily to reflect the culture from which it springs. This may be seen as a conservative function, designed to maintain the existing structure with all its inherent virtues and flaws. Society, however, is not inert. Therefore, in order to exist as an institution, education must change along with the changes that occur in society. As a result, education, however slowly, is in constant process of change.

But is it enough to expect education merely to reflect change, or can it also be viewed as an agent of change? Is it not the purpose of education to open new visions and possibilities for people, to expand their experience of life? It could be argued that the world's past record of chaos and misery are enough to demonstrate the need for new and varied, rather than conforming or stereotyped, reactions to problems.

The nature of humanity is such that the full poten-



tial of the end is seldom, if ever, achieved, yet the growth towards this human potential should certainly be encouraged. Education, then, may be seen as including situations in which students are challenged, stimulated and provoked towards new responses, rather than to ready-made solutions to problems.

As I. A. Richards says,

...bad literature...[is] an influence of the first importance in fixing immature and actually inapplicable attitudes to most things.... The losses incurred by these artificial fixations of attitudes are evident. Through them the average adult is worse, not better adjusted to the possibilities of his existence than the child. He is even in the most important things functionally unable to face facts: do what he will he is only able to face fictions, fictions projected by his own stock responses.

(Richards, 1934, pp. 202-203)

Books such as Cavanna's, which deal with stock responses, stereotyped characters, and pat solutions, in the opinion of the present writer, do not have a place in the process of education. There seems little doubt that formula fiction stifles the achievement of the full human potential.

#### Implications for Librarians and Teachers

The implications for librarians follow from the first implication. Librarians who continue to list and recommend, books by Cavanna and similar authors as "especially for girls" may be doing the girls an injustice. Since these books have been seen to involve compromises on the part of the girl in order that she may assume a socially imposed, but acceptable, role, they are obviously not conducive to the full development of their inexperienced girl readers.

Efforts are being made on the part of some educators and counselors to clarify the factors involved in the career choices of high school girls. Helen Farmer (1971) refers to studies which found that

messages about the inferiority of women and comments like "Your place is in the home" influenced vocational choice significantly. Women who chose to combine family and career were often made to feel that they were cheating the children or their husbands. Those women who chose home only experienced that "something missing" feeling documented by Friedan (1963). ...The effect of social myths on career choice is not limited to a few women but is a general, pervasive phenomenon. (p. 799)

It would appear that the work of these educators would be at cross-purposes with those who continue to recommend, condone, or tolerate the view of life as expressed by writers such as Cavanna.

Some groups and individuals have already made suggestions or taken action in regard to the dangers of sexism. Wilma Scott Heide of the National Organization of Women has gone so far as to suggest that a disclaimer statement be added to the opening page of most books and periodicals reading: "Caution, the sexism in this book/magazine may be dangerous to your health!" (1974, p. 180) In addition, the Welchester Library System recently established guidelines for discarding books which included, in part, that books containing "old stereotypes of the female place in the world" be discarded. (Rush, 1974, p. 42) However, it was agreed "that even dated material with factors no longer prevalently true today can be of value if the characters are not stereotyped, if they come up with some basic truth so that they are true

to themselves and the plot." (p. 42) On the basis of these guidelines the Welchester Library System decided to discard six Cavanna titles.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, there appears to be a need for research on the part of librarians that will assess the "bookbait" quality of inferior literature such as Cavanna's. Not all females read Cavanna's or similar girls' books. The subsequent reading tastes of a group of girls who have been exposed to authors such as Cavanna could be compared to a group who has not. If significant differences can be shown to exist, the recommended use of Cavanna in libraries and classrooms might diminish. In fact, if there is no progressive development toward the reading of better literature through the use of inferior literature, there seems little reason to invest so much of the public's time and money in its encouragement.

How adolescent literature relates to literature in general is a question that has been inadequately answered. If in good literature no automatic acceptance of marriage as a "life-saver" is found, then that in itself might be an argument in favour of good literature as opposed to inferior varieties. In fact, the entire body of formula fiction might well be re-evaluated by librarians. Betty Cavanna's formula

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<sup>1</sup>The books discarded were The Boy Next Door (1956); A Breath of Fresh Air (1966); Country Cousin (1967); A Date for Diane (1964); Diane's New Love (1964); Stars in Her Eyes (1958).

sells, as do many others. The problem may well be not with the invalidity of one specific formula, but rather with formula fiction generally. In order for a formula to work, responses to it must be relatively invariable. This anticipation of expected reactions results in a confined, stereotyped view of life. The tendency towards conformity does little to anyone's full development. On this point Gersoni-Stavn (1974) suggests that those people "principally concerned with the quality of juvenile books can, on feminist/critical grounds, point to the fact that so many juvenile books are so poor because they flagrantly stereotype the female characters" while those people "principally concerned with children can, on feminist/critical grounds, point to how sexist books are stunting girls' ambition and their eagerness to experience and do." (p. 185)

Another implication stemming from an analysis of Cavanna's work for librarians is that they might be well-advised to apply sexist criteria not only to formula literature for adolescents, but also to literature in general. This could include picture books designed for young children right through to the classics. Although it has been stated that "If one seriously wanted to remove all sexist books from libraries, most of the shelves would be depleted," (Gersoni-Stavn, 1974, p. 185) this is not the general wish of feminists. This would be censorship. Classics may prove on examination to be sexist in attitude, but good literature will contain enough of value to make the sexist issue unim-

portant. Besides, it is widely recognized that "The best books are always about human beings first, male or female... afterwards." (Lanes, 1974, p. 186) It has also been said that "different kinds of assessment are valid for different purposes" and that "different standards can coexist within the mind of the same person at the same time." (Gersoni-Stavn, 1974, p. 185) As a result, re-reading a classic in terms of sexism could merely add another dimension to an already worthwhile experience.

Applying sexist criteria to the classics in no way implies that good literature would be discarded but rather that it could be viewed as a reflection of the culture in which it was written. Enlightenment, not censorship, is the goal. The purpose in each case would not be to purge the books found wanting, but to promote general awareness of sexism as a suppressive influence, and, possibly, to supply non-sexist books. Feminist critics generally want what other educators want: that every child experience "to his or her full capacity the enjoyment, and the broadening of horizons, which can be derived from literature." (Gersoni-Stavn, 1974, p. 185)

To offset both the "especially for girls" category and sexism in general, librarians might undertake to focus, for a time, on specifically non-sexist books. These might even be put in a new "especially for girls" category until the need for such a category ceases to exist. It is to be hoped that eventually no book lists which a self-respecting

boy would avoid would be available in the future. (Issues in Children's, 1973, p. 115)

It could, however, be argued that books such as Cavanna's serve a purpose. Perhaps the inexperienced reader finds security in the successful pattern of the Cavanna heroines. The inexperienced reader may identify with the heroines and feel comfortable with their inevitable choices. Is it fair, one might ask, to bring frustration and unhappiness into the life of the young reader by pointing out that life is seldom as simple as portrayed in these books? Awakening the young reader to other possibilities - awareness of her own strengths and initiatives, her own powers of aggressiveness and assertiveness, and, at the same time, demonstrating that real life reveals not all women married, submissive or finding their salvation and identity in the man they marry - might result in a frustrating situation for the young girl. It might seem to contradict the beliefs of her parents and much of society. The protected feeling experienced by the submissive is a comfort many are unwilling to relinquish. The question remains, should they have to?

On the other hand, submissiveness and passivity to a large extent eliminate the need for feeling responsible. To be object involves being acted upon, not acting. But no human being is free from responsibility for his actions. While Cavanna in no case distinguishes exclusively between object and subject categories, her heroines none the less are more acted upon than acting in their struggle for some form

of independence. In aligning themselves with a male, the heroine, by becoming more passive than active, more object than subject, shifts a certain amount of her own responsibility to the male. As a result the young men in Cavanna's novels often shoulder an unreasonable and unrealistic burden. They are not allowed to cry or show fear. They must behave in traditionally "masculine" manner. Thus, not only does the heroine to some extent become irresponsible in accepting the traditionally "feminine" role, but also the heroine's reaction causes the reader's expectations of boys in real life to be unrealistic and dehumanizing.

Could it not be argued that a more healthy, more human approach on the part of education generally, and on the part of librarians and teachers specifically, would be to make clear that rather than the existence of "masculine" and "feminine" characteristics it would be more fair and more humane to speak of "human characteristics"? Because it may be seen that there are only human characteristics, stereotyped behavior from males or females stunt their respective characters, as well as the reader's acceptance of life.

#### SUGGESTIONS TO OFFSET SEXISM

1. One way to offset the negative effects of sexism might be to design courses for junior and senior high school boys and girls in the nature of Elaine Showalter's Women's Liberation and Literature (1971). Showalter uses excerpts from major texts of feminism, literature by and about women,

literary criticism, women as defined by psychologists, and contemporary views of women. These are followed by questions and topics for discussion, research, and writing. Courses such as this could offset the demoralizing effects of books such as Cavanna's. Although sexism has been present for many years it may be regarded as a current topic which requires attention. Therefore, courses such as this need not be seen as inconsistent with the emphasis in this paper on human as opposed to "masculine" or "feminine" potential, since these courses would be a temporary measure only. Once boys and girls are made aware of the source of present attitudes about women and the dangers inherent in perpetuating such beliefs the courses could be abandoned.

2. English teachers might design courses on literature exclusively by and about women, focussing on the problems encountered by the authors, as well as on the insights attained. These courses too might be regarded as a temporary measure until literature can be accepted as written by humans rather than by men or women.
3. Methods used in the past to teach literature might be re-evaluated in view of sexism, as might the selections themselves.
4. Propaganda in advertising might be analyzed from a sexist point of view. The possibilities for similar studies and assignments are many.



5. Book publishers and authors might be enlightened about the prevalence and danger of sex-role stereotyping, much of which has been done unconsciously. If this sort of action proves fruitless, school administrators and librarians might boycott undesirable materials. As William Hoffer (1973) reported in School Management, "Once publishers find they can increase sales by presenting girls with the notion that it is possible for them to grow into creative, contributing professionals they will cater to the new textbook market." (p. 35)

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

There are various suggestions for further research which arise from the comments made above.

1. The validity of the category "especially for girls" should be studied.
2. The validity of the category "especially for boys" should be studied.
3. The validity of the "bookbait" quality of Cavanna novels should be determined.
4. The validity of the "bookbait" quality of any formula fiction could be studied.
5. Application of sexist criteria might be applied to more areas of literature.

6. The effects of the reading of compilations of non-sexist books could be studied.
7. The effects of sexist literature on young men could be studied.

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