

Pleasure, Popularity and the Soap Opera

**by Michelle C. de Montigny, B.A.
Graduate Program in Communications
McGill University, Montréal
January, 1992**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts**

**© Michelle C. de Montigny 1992
All Rights Reserved**

ABSTRACT

This thesis uses the concept of pleasure as it has been applied to cultural artefacts in order to give a description of various characteristics of the soap opera genre. The concept of pleasure is applied to soap opera narrative, characters, visual style and viewing attitudes. Three soap operas, *The Young and the Restless*, *General Hospital*, and *Another World*, are described in detail according to these various types of pleasures. *The Young and the Restless* is a soap that relies largely on visual pleasures and melodrama. *General Hospital's* strongest pleasures are related to its character development and use of humour. *Another World*, the most traditional of the three soaps, is best at stimulating the pleasures associated with talk. Through analysis of viewer commentary supplied by letters sent to *Soap Opera Weekly* and *Soap Opera Update* and Nielsen ratings, it can be concluded that the pleasures that most soap opera viewers seem to value the most are related to visual style, romance and a delicate balance between realistic characters and fantasy in narrative.

Contents

Introduction	1
 Chapter One <i>Soap Operas as Popular Culture</i>	 5
Notes	17
 Chapter Two <i>Pleasure, Ideology and the Audience</i>	 18
Notes	38
 Chapter Three <i>The Types of Pleasure</i>	 39
Notes	78
 Chapter Four <i>The Soap Operas</i>	 79
Notes	126
 Chapter Five <i>Pleasure and Popularity</i>	 127
 Conclusions	 134
Notes	137
 Appendix	 138
 Bibliography	 141

Introduction

A soap opera is a kind of thick sandwich, whose recipe is simple enough, although it took years to compound. Between thick slabs of advertising, spread twelve minutes of dialogue, add predicament, villainy and female suffering in equal measure, throw in a dash of nobility, sprinkle with tears, season with organ music, cover with a rich announcer sauce, and serve five times a week. -- James Thurber¹

The purpose of this thesis is to use the concept of pleasure to describe soap opera texts and the experience of watching a soap opera and to find which pleasures appear to be the most significant for viewers. While the concept of pleasure does have some inadequacies, which will be described in the conclusions, the assumption here is that it is of significant use for the project at hand, which is to determine which aspects of the soap opera contribute to the popularity of the soap opera.

While it may be clear that viewers watch soap operas because they enjoy them (find them pleasurable), what is pleasurable about them is more obscure. I hope to suggest that there are several different kinds of pleasures involved in relating to a soap opera, and that it is the very diversity of these possible pleasures that makes the soap opera so popular to a heterogeneous audience. Some of these pleasures deal specifically with the form and content of the text (pleasures related to the narrative structure of the soap opera and its characters), while others are more closely related to the context of the viewing situation and attitudes toward viewing. I will, then, be using theorizations of the concept of pleasure, concepts of the television audience, and a close description of three different soap operas in order to outline what viewers find most pleasurable about soap operas. This relationship will hopefully lead to answering how and why soap operas

are popular, beyond the simple tautology that they are popular because their viewers enjoy watching them.

My discussion will begin with a brief description of popular myths surrounding the soap opera as well as a short history of the soaps and a summary of literature on them. One of the reasons I am interested in understanding how the soap opera audience relates to the text is because the genre has been devalorized for so long, and its viewers have been stereotyped as unintelligent and/or bored women with nothing better to do than watch melodrama in the middle of the afternoon.

In the second chapter, I will be looking at conceptions of pleasure and the audience, particularly as they have been used in reader-response criticism and cultural studies, with an emphasis on the work done by Ien Ang, Tania Modleski, Robert Allen and John Fiske. Following that, in chapter three, I will describe the different kinds of pleasures associated with watching a soap opera, emphasizing how viewers may achieve greater pleasure out of their viewing experience because of the ways in which soap operas are constructed as texts. Individual viewing attitudes or situations will also be addressed.

In chapter four, I will use descriptions of three specific soaps, generic categorizations of pleasure, and letters from viewers (to fanzines) to try to get a better understanding of what the viewers themselves find pleasurable about soap operas. For this purpose, I will be using *General Hospital*, *Another World*, and *The Young and the Restless*. These three soap operas are from different networks and appeal to different types of viewers; therefore, they may be considered a diversified sample. *Another World* is produced by Procter & Gamble and is shown on NBC at 2pm, *General Hospital* is on ABC at 3pm, and *The Young and the Restless* is on at 12.30 pm on CBS -- in Canada, in the Montréal region, both *AW* and *GH* are shown on CTV at the same times as in the States -- *Y&R* is not available on a Canadian network in this area.

There are two reasons why these programs were chosen. These three soap operas represent three different "styles" of soap opera, particularly since all three are shown on the three different commercial, American networks. The other reason that these three soaps were chosen is that I have been watching each of them for over a year, which gives me adequate knowledge of their plots and intricate character relationships. This means that any comments that I will make regarding each of these soaps will not be limited to surface characteristics of the programs. Much of the negative criticism about soap operas stems from the fact that the critic does not have a deep enough knowledge of the genre or the particular program to fully understand the intricacies of the plot.

The letters from viewers will be taken from soap fan magazines, specifically *Soap Opera Weekly* and *Soap Opera Update*. These magazines contain insightful articles about the soaps and their stars discussing who and what are popular and why. They also contain many letters from fans, which either state their disillusionments with the soap operas or provide encouragement for their favourite actors and the prolongation, elaboration or emergence of what they consider to be good story lines. Most of these letters are highly insightful about what the fans believe happens "behind the scenes" and are intelligently and thoughtfully written. The magazines also provide current Nielsen ratings and editorial comments on soap opera popularity, or suggestions as to what the other soaps should do to gain the esteemed position of number one soap (currently held by *Y&R*).

Using evidence from the soaps and the magazines, then, I hope to determine several of the aspects that make soap opera viewing a pleasurable experience and why. These pleasurable aspects of soap opera viewing should help to formulate a better conception of how the viewers read or relate to the soap opera texts. Comparing three different soap operas that are described in terms of the pleasures that are activated when watching them will hopefully show how well the generic categorizations of pleasure, as elaborated in chapter three of this thesis, work to account for the popularity of soap operas.

In the final chapter, I will look at how useful the concept of pleasure is in understanding why soap operas are popular. Comparisons between the pleasures most articulated by each of the soaps and their relative popularity will be made in order to establish which aspects of the genre are, in general, most pleasurable to its viewers. Finally, I will discuss the utility of the concept of pleasure for the analysis of a cultural artefact.

CHAPTER ONE

Soap Operas as Popular Culture

Soap operas constitute one of those areas within popular culture that is difficult to approach without confronting the preconceptions that have developed around the words or the idea 'soap opera'. Because of this, many people are embarrassed to admit to enjoying watching soap operas. It is commonly held that only bored housewives enjoy watching soaps, although this is far from the truth. In 1981, seventy percent of the viewers were women aged eighteen or more. This means that at least thirty percent of the viewers are not housewives.² And according to Robert C. Allen:

Not only does the soap opera continue to enjoy undiminished popularity among what we have presumed to be its traditional constituency, working- and middle-class American women, but new groups have 'discovered' soap operas, including millions of college students (nearly half of all undergraduate students in the United States), five million non-college-age men, and as yet uncounted adolescents.³

Soap operas have long been considered the worst of television (though more recently 'infomercials' and televangelism probably take that prize), and television itself has not always been lauded. Most of the literature to be found about soap operas has to come to terms with the accumulation of presuppositions that have surrounded daytime serials and their value (or lack of value) within popular culture. Acknowledging the myths that surround the soap opera, not only as an artefact of popular culture, but as a term that is used differently in different discourses, helps to peel away the layers of preconceptions that most people have about the genre. Allen traces the appearance of the term:

By 1939 "soap opera," along with "washboard weeper," had been taken up in the general press as a generic substitute for the less colorful and more cumbersome "daytime dramatic serial." The "soap" in "soap opera" derives from the sponsorship of daytime serials by manufacturers of household cleaning products: Procter and Gamble, Colgate-Palmolive, and Lever Brothers. "Opera" acquires meaning only through its ironic, double inappropriateness. Linked with the adjective "soap," opera, the most elite of all narrative art forms, becomes a

vehicle for selling the most humble of commodities. Also, yoking together "soap" and "opera" marks the distance between the opera's own thematic preoccupations (legend, myth, royalty) and presumed audience (the educated elite) and those of the radio serial: as the 1939 *Newsweek* article defines it, the soap opera brings "the hard-working housewife the Real Life adventures of Real People." The domestic and culturally "unimportant" concerns of the serial drama are by the term "soap opera" made to bear odious cultural comparison with the "rightful" usage of the term. Since the 1930s the soap opera has been defined by what it pretends to be but is not, by what it lacks rather than what it is.⁴

Because of this, it is difficult to determine what the soap opera in actuality is -- whether what the soap opera is what popular myth says, which according to Allen is precisely what it is not, or whether the soap opera is the actual artefact, once the layers of preconceptions about it have been removed. It is difficult to disassociate the myth from the reality, principally as they relate to the soap opera viewers, who are usually immediately categorized by non-viewers, and placed under the rubric of 'typical' soap opera viewers.

One of the ways in which the term "soap opera" is used is to describe overly dramatic situations in everyday life, particularly when it involves unusual twists and turns in someone's romantic life. Another use comes from the critics of culture:

Time after tedious time, when critics suffer an aridity of fresh phrases with which to denigrate a film, play or book, they fall back on 'soap opera'; it has become the classic cliché of derogation.⁵

In this way, "soap opera" has come to designate anything within popular culture (particularly if it is aimed at a female audience) that is excessively dramatic, slow moving, or excessively complex in its plot. Because of this, those people who remain unfamiliar with the genre often believe that it is not worthy of their attention.

There are three main reasons for a lack of seriousness with regard to the soap opera: its relationship to advertisers is clear --- by the use of the word "soap" in soap opera (this also strengthens the argument against soaps as part of popular culture); soap operas are part of popular culture; and the soap opera is a woman's genre.

Looking at the production process of soap operas demonstrates how advertisers are essential for the health of the soap opera industry. Soap operas are very popular and generate a sizeable proportion of profits for the major networks. The soap opera audience "today provides more than \$900 million in revenues for the three commercial television networks -- one-sixth of all network profits."⁶ (One-sixth of profits is a large proportion when one realizes that soap operas constitute less than one-sixth of the time slots on television.) The cost of producing soap operas is minimal compared to the costs of producing prime-time programs, while the amount of money charged for soap advertising slots is considerable.⁷ There are several reasons why the production costs of soap operas remain relatively low. One of the most obvious reasons is that there is no real star system for the soap opera (as there is in prime time). Several actors often portray the same character over time, and while viewers do have favourite actors, it is rare that they will stop watching a particular soap only because a certain actor is no longer working for that soap. This keeps the cost of hiring actors relatively low (once an actor gains star status, he or she pretty much gains control over his or her wages.) The other important element for keeping the production cost of soap operas low is the constancy of the sets. There are usually very few sets for each soap opera, and these sets can remain largely unchanged for years.⁸ In contrast, prime-time programs often have elaborate outdoor sets, or are shot on location, even if their formats are based on the soap opera (as in *Dallas*). But it is largely because it costs little to create a soap opera that the genre has been looked upon with disdain. Soaps are inexpensively produced and profitable, and while this may be one of the factors leading to their longevity as a television genre, it is one of the reasons they have become so forcefully critiqued, particularly by those who argue that soap operas are cheaply produced fodder for female daytime television viewers.

Until relatively recently, most of "popular culture" has not been taken seriously (except for film), and this lack of regard for popular culture is magnified in the case of the soap opera. That is to say, most forms of popular culture such as television, pop music, and drugstore novels have not warranted much attention from academicians. These forms of popular culture were placed under the rubric "mass culture" -- a commercially produced culture that was created for the "masses" -- often assumed to reflect the tastes and values of the "lowest common denominator". It was not until the second half of this century that the importance of popular culture was taken seriously. Previous attempts at understanding popular culture generally debased it, particularly in comparison to "high" culture; popular culture enthusiasts were considered to have less "taste".

Herbert Gans was one of the first to try to re-evaluate popular culture in *Popular Culture and High Culture -- An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste*, written in 1974. Gans tries to objectively differentiate "high" culture and popular culture by exposing the reasons why this dichotomy between two different classes of culture emerged. He successfully criticizes what he terms "the mass culture critique" and derives a concept of "taste cultures" as an alternative to the high culture/popular culture distinction. While the idea of taste cultures does provide a progressive alternative to this distinction, it remains hierarchical in the sense that he classifies these cultures according to the social classes that presumably adhere to them (he does, however, maintain that there is a certain degree of mobility between those taste cultures). His conceptions of types of cultures, however, remain useful as an example of the changes that took place in the 70s in relation to how scholars were conceiving popular culture. According to Gans, one of the main reasons why popular culture was beginning to gain recognition is that the taste of people who enjoyed popular culture was getting better; more Americans were better educated and the media (through the process of

reproduction) were beginning to allow the "masses" easier access to the previously exclusive artefacts of high culture.

The arrival of British Cultural Studies also worked to change perspectives on popular culture. Raymond Williams, for example, traces the meaning of the word "culture" through history. He describes how in some contexts "culture" has come to denote "high art". He explains that culture, in those contexts, serves to maintain the dominant culture's hegemony.⁹ It must be kept in mind, however, that academic work on popular culture (that was not derogatory) was perhaps almost forced to fruition simply because, by the 70's, popular culture was nearly impossible to avoid.

The final reason why soap operas have not been granted much attention from scholars is because it is a genre that appeals predominately to women. And while the genre is not given much consideration, its viewers are given even less. This is a circuitous problem -- if the genre is unworthy of attention, its devotees must also be; meanwhile if the fans of the genre are generally assumed to be uninteresting, the genre is too. Thus, the women who are regular soap viewers are often embarrassed to admit that they are devoted fans of soap operas. The common stereotype of the soap opera fan -- a bored housewife who, when not doing housework or gossiping with her companions, spends her time watching soaps and eating bonbons with curlers in her hair -- does little to ameliorate this problem. There are also anecdotes about soap opera fans who can no longer tell the difference between reality and soap opera; they chase their favourite soap opera actors thinking that the actors are the characters, and try to warn them about the other characters that are taking advantage of them or wishing them harm. While these anecdotes may be well known, it is likely that only a very few soap fans are so serious about their programs as to confuse them with reality. Soap opera viewers, then, usually acknowledge their devotion to soaps only to others who enjoy watching them or in letters

to the fanzines that they read, though the Nielsen ratings and the numbers of magazines related to soaps that these viewers buy prove their dedication.

The ratings prove their [the soap viewers'] enthusiasm, and their magazines flourish -- *Daytime Serial Newsletter* has 50,000 subscribers and *Soap Opera Digest* was printing 1.1 million monthly copies by the time it was six months old -- yet the soap watchers prefer to maintain a low profile. It is almost as though the critics -- numerous, assertive and self-confident -- have convinced the audience that intelligent people don't tune in to soaps.¹⁰

(Currently, *Soap Opera Digest* has a circulation of over 990,000 and *Soap Opera Update* has a circulation of 300,000.¹¹)

Indeed, it would seem that anyone who is not a soap watcher her/himself, does not find soap watching to be worthwhile. It is likely that these non-watchers who tend to criticize soap operas have never really watched soaps themselves and do not understand what the soap opera is, or who the viewers are, beyond popular mythological association. This leads to the interesting question of why popular myth about soap opera viewers developed in the way that it did. As mentioned above, the genre is directed specifically toward women, particularly housewives, who are the people the advertisers are trying to reach. This gives the impression of a viewer who is somewhat isolated from the rest of the world and 'incapable' of interest in anything more 'intelligent'.

Definitions of 'worthwhile' entertainment are usually oriented towards male interests. This devalorizes women's sources of entertainment, particularly if men do not find them entertaining or if the time that women spend on their entertainment somehow infringes on time spent pleasing men. David Morley elaborates this:

What is at issue here is the guilt that most of these women feel about their own pleasures. They are, on the whole, prepared to concede that the drama and soap opera they like is 'silly' or 'badly acted' or inconsequential -- that is, they accept the terms of a masculine hegemony which defines their preferences as having a low status.¹²

Those in power are, generally, in a position to define what is or is not of value, even when it comes to entertainment. Men (and women) who deride soap operas may also cause the people who enjoy these forms of entertainment to have a lower opinion of themselves (because they have "bad taste") or to feel guilty about their pleasures. (Radway observed this phenomenon among romance readers.¹³) This is one of the sources of embarrassment associated with the admission of watching or enjoying the soap opera genre. This argument can be inverted: people may deride soap operas because they wish to maintain power over the people who enjoy them. By telling soap opera viewers that their sources of pleasure are inconsequential, critics are implying that they think viewers' pleasures and desires are inconsequential.

What is of most concern here, however, is not what the non-viewers of soaps erroneously think about soap operas and their viewers. What is of interest is who watches the soaps, and why these soap viewers find the genre so appealing. Some statistics on soap viewers, though slightly out of date, are helpful in detailing who the viewers are:

In 1970, A. C. Nielsen reported that 20 million viewers watched one or more soap operas on the average each day. That audience consisted of mostly women 18 years and older (76% of the total). The remaining 24% were divided among men over 18 (15 %), teenagers 12-17 (about 5 %), and the remainder children 2-11. In 1981, the figures showed little change. There were fewer women 18 and older, down from 76 to 70 percent, and a slightly larger proportion of men and teenagers.¹⁴

Today the audience for network television soap operas is estimated to be fifty million persons, including two-thirds of all American women living in homes with televisions; the cumulative audience for soap operas over the past fifty years is inestimable.¹⁵

Thus, millions of people watch soaps daily¹⁶ many of them more than one program, and not all of them are women -- sizeable proportions of them are men, adolescents and children. Clearly, the number of people who watch soaps daily, the amount of profits they generate for the networks, and their longevity make them worthy of consideration.

Some Historical Facts about the Soap Opera

The history of daytime serials is almost sixty years, if the years of radio programming are included. Soap watchers are generally very faithful to their favorite daytime programs, and often watch the same program for years (this is one of the characteristics of the 'typical' soap viewer that the advertisers and the networks rely on). There are over eleven daytime serials currently on the air in the United States, which total almost fifty-five hours of programming each week. There are even prime-time shows based on the soap opera format (though the deviations from the genre are often as important as the similarities to it), such as *Twin Peaks* and *Knot's Landing*.

The first soap opera, *Painted Dreams*, was created by Irna Phillips in 1930, though Edmondson and Rounds argue that *Amos'n'Andy* (1929) was the first soap opera, not because it is similar to the genre today, but because it was the first daily serial. In the 1930's, Irna Phillips and Anne and Frank Hummert dominated the writing of soap operas. Phillips created *Painted Dreams* (1930), *The Road to Life*, *Guiding Light* (both 1937), *Woman in White* (1938), *The Right to Happiness* (1939) and many more. The Hummerts were best known for the creation of *Ma Perkins* and *Just Plain Bill*, as well as the process of using dialogue writers to fill in the outlines of plots that they themselves created. They originated the "soap opera writing factory", which is still the method used for writing soap opera scripts today.

It was in the early 30's that advertisers realized the effectiveness of daytime advertising, particularly if it was for household products. It was acknowledged that housewives were the greatest buyers of food and cleaning items. The soap opera genre was clearly an effective way to reach female consumers of household goods. By 1939,

\$39 million were spent on daytime (soap opera) advertising.¹⁷ By the 40's, the soap opera became a staple of daytime entertainment.

In 1952, *Guiding Light* was first broadcast on television, and continues to be shown today. By 1956, soap operas were successfully broadcast on television and extended from the radio format of fifteen minutes to be one-half hour long. As *The World Turns* (by Irna Phillips), was the first television soap to remain on the air for more than one season. Initially, the same soap operas were shown on both the radio and television, while the scripts were modified to account for the visual images. *General Hospital's* television debut was on March 1, 1963. *Another World* began on the fourth of May, 1964. *The Young and the Restless*, a relative newcomer, was first shown on March 26, 1973.¹⁸

Soap Opera Research

The first "research" on soaps was done by psychiatrist Louis I. Berg. In 1941, this New York self-appointed soap critic tested his blood pressure and pulse, and found that they rose when he listened to soap operas. He claimed that this proved that soap operas were detrimental to mental and physical health, though it was eventually revealed that his "experiment" was highly unscientific since the only test subject was himself.¹⁹

The next person to do research on soap operas was Herta Herzog, in 1942.²⁰ As summarized by Mateleski, Herzog suggested that there were three main reasons why people (mostly women) enjoyed listening to soaps: "emotional release, fantasy fulfillment, and information."²¹ 'Fantasy fulfillment' and 'emotional release' are familiar categories in explaining the appeal of artefacts of popular culture, while the category of 'information' is rare, and is one seldom thought of today in relation to soap

operas. She suggested that the listeners looked to the soaps for advice (on how to keep a good marriage or to relate to one's children, especially) or information as to how other people lived.

Further research on the soap opera did not appear until the mid-70s when studies on popular culture and television in general were more frequently done. These studies into the nature of the soap opera were empirical, revealing that the women in soap operas appeared in realistic proportions to men (as opposed to prime-time television, where men far outnumber women), or that the professions of both men and women on the soap opera did not reflect reality. Soap operas had exceedingly high numbers of doctors, lawyers, executives and law enforcers ²² -- this is also true of prime-time, the main difference being that women in soap operas also hold these positions but in prime time most of them are men. Other research on the soap operas, in the 70s and early 80s, referred to the number of sex scenes in the soaps (there was apparently some worry in the general public that the soap operas were a little too racy for daytime) and to the topics of conversation or the relationships between men and women.²³

The books written by Cassata & Skill (1983) and Cantor & Pingree (1983) consist largely of this type of empirical research. Cantor & Pingree also include comments about the research done by Compesi on the gratifications of soap opera viewing -- one of the few references to research done on the soap opera audience which is not on audience demographics (the kind of research that advertisers are interested in). Cantor & Pingree summarize Compesi's conclusions:

. . . Compesi found that the most important gratification that viewers derived from the program was entertainment. Respondents said: 'It's fun to watch.' Following entertainment were habit ('I'm hooked on it') and convenience ('it's on at a convenient time'). The fourth most important reason for viewing was what Compesi called 'social utility', reflected in such statements as: 'I like to talk about the program with my friends.' A less important gratification was relaxation and escape from problems ('It helps me to relax and release tension').

Clearly what Compesi found suggests that people watch soap operas mainly for their entertainment value, though some watch more as a social function, and others seem to watch simply because it is the most convenient source of entertainment available at the time that they desire entertainment. Of course, what is meant by 'entertainment' is left rather vague -- what individual people think entertainment consists of will of course differ; what is 'fun to watch' for some will not be 'fun' for others. The term 'fun' is an ideologically loaded term as well, and what is considered 'fun' for some groups usually depends not only on cultural background but also on age, gender and education.

The meaning of 'fun' or 'entertainment' can be explored through the use of the concept of pleasure. Pleasure can also account for the other gratifications mentioned by Compesi. People who claim they watch soap operas because they like to talk about them with their friends also derive a kind of pleasure out of soap watching -- the pleasure of a commonly shared ground with friends or the pleasure of social contact. And those who claim to be viewers because soap operas are on at a convenient time also derive some sort of pleasure out of their viewing, whether or not it has to do with the other pleasures that may be derived from soap watching.

Some work done on the soap opera in the late 70s and early 80s came out of a need to inform the audience about the history of the genre. Edmondson & Round's book, for example, explains the evolution of the soap opera over time, and, although no audience research was done in these books, it was probably of interest to many soap opera fans. Mateleski's work on the soap opera is also mostly historical.

It was not until the 1980s that scholars began to look at soap operas differently, to try to understand their audience and the relationship between the audience and the soap opera text. John Fiske, Robert C. Allen, Tania Modleski, Ellen Seiter and Michael Intintoli tried to get inside the text of the soap opera to understand what it revealed about its

audience. Fiske, Seiter and Allen, in particular, suggest that the soap opera is not a conservative genre, as most people had previously assumed, but a genre that leaves many spaces open for the insertion of meaning by the viewer.²⁵ Modleski, on the other hand, suggests that the soap opera may be popular, not because of its supposed 'message', but because of its entertainment value and its ability to communicate with women in a way that appeals to them and takes their daily activities into account -- fitting into the rhythms of everyday life. Intintoli investigated soap opera production processes and, in doing so, described how the audience could influence production. These ideas all lead to a better understanding of how the audience relates to the text and how the genre changed and remained popular over the years despite a society that was rapidly mutating and a swiftly changing, heterogeneous audience.

Academic interest in the daytime soaps was simultaneously spurred in the 80s by the international popularity of the prime-time soap *Dallas* and its spin-offs and imitations. The immense success of that program is the topic of Ien Ang's book *Watching Dallas*. Similar to the other work done on soap operas (and television) in the 1980s, she sought to understand the audience of the program. One of Ang's methods of understanding *Dallas*' popularity was through the elaboration of the concept of pleasure, a concept which will be further elaborated in chapter two.

-
- 1 Edmundson & Rounds, *From Mary Noble to Mary Hartman*, p13
 - 2 Cantor and Pingree, *The Soap Opera*, p118
 - 3 Allen, *Speaking of Soap Operas*, p3
 - 4 Ibid., pp8-9
 - 5 Agnes Nixon quoted in Mildred Downing's article "Heroine of the Daytime Serial", *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 24, 1974
 - 6 Allen, *Speaking of Soap Operas*, p3
 - 7 Intintoli, *Taking Soaps Seriously*.
 - 8 Ibid.
 - 9 Williams, *Keywords and Marxism and Literature*.
 - 10 Edmondson & Rounds, *From Mary Noble to Mary Hartman*, p229
 - 11 Ulrich's *International Periodical Directory*, 1990-91
 - 12 Morley, *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure*, p 161
 - 13 Radway, *Reading the Romance*
 - 14 Cantor and Pingree, *The Soap Opera*, p118
 - 15 Allen, *Speaking of Soap Operas*, p3
 - 16 See Nielsen ratings in appendix.
 - 17 Mateleski, *The Soap Opera Evolution*.
 - 18 Mateleski, *The Soap Opera Evolution*; Edmondson & Rounds, *From Mary Noble to Mary Hartman*
 - 19 Mateleski, *The Soap Opera Evolution*; Edmondson and Rounds, *From Mary Noble to Mary Hartman*
 - 20 Herzog, "What do we really know about Daytime Serial Listeners?", in *Radio Research*, 1942-43
 - 21 Mateleski, *The Soap Opera Evolution*, p47
 - 22 Cantor and Pingree.
 - 23 *Journal of Communications*, vol 24:2, Spring 1974.
 - 24 Cantor and Pingree, *The Soap Opera*, p129. Cantor and Pingree got the information from Compesi's unpublished dissertation (1976) entitled "Gratifications of Daytime Television Serial Viewers: An Analysis of Fans of the Program 'All my Children'".
 - 25 Fiske, *Television Culture*; Allen, *Speaking of Soap Operas*; Seiter, *Eco's TV Guide -- The Soaps*.

CHAPTER TWO

Pleasure, Ideology and the Audience

"Feminists may feel secretly guilty about their enjoyment of images they are convinced ought to be rejected as politically unsound. In analysing such images, though, it is possible, indeed necessary, to acknowledge their pleasurable qualities, precisely because pleasure is an area of analysis in its own right". Annette Kuhn¹

It has already been suggested that the concept of pleasure is one of the ways through which a better understanding of the relationships between soap opera texts and the readers of those texts may be achieved. What follows is a brief discussion of theories of pleasure followed by an outline of different theoretical perspectives on the audience and a discussion of the concept of pleasure as it relates to the soap opera audience in particular.

Pleasure, as a concept, has been largely ignored by those involved in understanding popular culture until quite recently. The use of the concept of pleasure in communications studies (and related disciplines) seems to come out of a reaction against the proponents of "high culture." As with food, popular myth suggests that what is (culturally) "good" is not usually "pleasurable." As a result, investigations into the concept of pleasure as it relates to cultural artefacts began to appear at approximately the same time as popular culture began to be taken seriously. Roland Barthes² is one of the first to address the issue of pleasure -- of reading for the pleasurable experience it provides rather than (or in addition to) the meanings it conveys. In *The Pleasure of the Text*, Barthes unravels the ways in which reading a text becomes pleasurable:

There is supposed to be a mystique of the Text. --- On the contrary, the whole effort consists in materializing the pleasure of the text, in making the text an object of pleasure like the others. That is: either relate the text to the "pleasures" of life (a dish, a garden, an encounter, a voice, a moment, etc) and to it join the personal catalogue of the sensualities, or force the text to breach bliss, that immense subjective loss, thereby identifying this text with the purest moments of perversion, its clandestine sites. The important thing is to equalize the field of pleasure, to abolish the false opposition of practical life and contemplative life. The pleasure of the text is just that: claim lodged against the separation of the text; for what the text says, through the particularity of its name, is the ubiquity of pleasure, the atopia of bliss. ³

He tries to see the text as something that people can derive pleasure from instead of something that is read only in order to obtain meaning. Reading, to Barthes, is a pleasurable activity, pleasurable for its own sake, and on different levels. Barthes differentiates pleasure and desire, and points out that pleasure does not have to be viewed in a negative light as it has been from political and psychoanalytical perspectives:

No sooner has a word been said, somewhere, about the pleasure of the text, than two policemen are ready to jump on you: the political policeman and the psychoanalytical policeman: futility and/or guilt, pleasure is either idle or vain, a class notion or an illusion.

An old, a very old tradition: hedonism has been repressed by nearly every philosophy; we find it defended only by marginal figures, Sade, Fourier; for Nietzsche, hedonism is a pessimism. Pleasure is continually disappointed, reduced, deflated, in favor of strong, noble values: Truth, Death, Progress, Struggle, Joy, etc. Its victorious rival is Desire: we are always being told about Desire, never about Pleasure; Desire has an epistemic dignity, Pleasure does not. It seems that (our) society refuses (and ends up by ignoring) bliss to such a point that it can produce only epistemologies of the law (and of its contestation), never of its absence, or better still: of its nullity. Odd, this philosophical permanence of Desire (insofar as it is never satisfied): doesn't the word itself denote a "class notion"? (A rather crude presumption of proof, and yet noteworthy: the "populace" does not know Desire -- only pleasures.) ⁴

Pleasure, then, does not depend on desire; it has its own existence outside of desire. This idea is important because it suggests that specific pleasures are not necessarily sought out before they are achieved. Barthes also speaks of the relationship between ideology and the pleasure of texts:

The pleasure of the text does not prefer one ideology to another. However: this impertinence does not proceed from liberalism but from perversion: the text, its reading, are split. What is overcome, split, is the moral unity that a society

demands of every human product. We read a text (of pleasure) the way a fly buzzes around a room: with sudden, deceptively decisive turns, fervent and futile: ideology passes over the text and its reading like the blush over a face (in love, some take erotic pleasure in this coloring); every writer of pleasure has these idiotic blushes (Balzac, Zola, Flaubert, Proust: only Mallarmé, perhaps is master of his skin); in the text of pleasure, the opposing forces are no longer repressed but in a state of becoming: nothing is really antagonistic, everything is plural. I pass lightly through the reactionary darkness. For example, in Zola's *Fécondité*, the ideology is flagrant, especially sticky, naturism, family-ism, colonialism; nonetheless I continue reading the book. Is such distortion commonplace? Rather, one might be astounded by the housewifely skill with which the subject is meted out, dividing its reading, resisting the contagion of judgment, the metonymy of contentment: can it be that pleasure makes us objective?⁵

What Barthes says suggests that the pleasures one obtains from reading a text are not necessarily intended by the creator of the text and these pleasures change the ways in which we read the text considerably. Also, the pleasures that the creator of the text speaks of are not necessarily pleasurable. Ideology that is encoded into a text is not necessarily read as the creator(s) of the text intended: the reader may take pleasure in reading portions of text that are obviously ideological, but not necessarily because he or she agrees with that ideology. It is possible that pleasure makes the reader objective, if only because, as Barthes says, the reading and the text are split because of the pleasure obtained through reading. Thus, Barthes opens the ground for discussions of the pleasures involved in reading texts (not only literary texts) and viewing the functions of desire and ideology from alternative perspectives.

Pleasure has also been approached from a political economy perspective, usually in a manner quite different from Barthes'. From this more traditional perspective, pleasure is linked to manipulation and desire (and thus to politics and psychoanalysis). The political economists who investigate popular pleasures usually decry those pleasures because they are said to pacify and/or perpetuate the existing status quo. Rosalind Coward⁶ is an example of a feminist who uses the concept of pleasure from a political angle; she believes that pleasure is linked to desire and used negatively by those in

power in order to sustain the status quo -- "The pleasure/desire axis sustains social forms which keep things as they are."⁷ Yet, as Barthes points out, there can be pleasure without desire. It is possible that desire (and the subsequent search for pleasure to fulfill that desire) sustains social forms, but pleasure, when it is not sought, need not do so. While Coward's look at "female desires" does point out some truths about the relationship between women and the ways in which popular culture manipulates their desires, manipulation of desire has very little to do with the pleasures of the text that are elaborated here. These textual pleasures do not tend to play up the anxieties that women have about their bodies and their homes as much as other popular forms directed at female audiences do. For example, women's magazines like *Cosmopolitan* and *Better Homes and Gardens* play on women's anxieties to, respectively, look as attractive as possible to men or to have spotless, well-decorated homes. Women, however, may feel guilty for enjoying the pleasures that they feel or activate in relation to the soap opera text, but this is probably related to the fact that women are made to feel guilty about their pleasures in general.

Colin Mercer⁸ discusses the formation of conceptions of pleasure from a political and historical angle. He suggests that the ways in which pleasure is conceived are related to notions of subjectivity or individuality, to how control over individuals (and their pleasures) is maintained by the dominant order. "Analysis of régimes of representation and the ideological formation of subjectivity is important because it lays the ground for a critique of the connection between pleasure and subjectivity."⁹ Conceptions of subjectivity and individuality are important to building theories about the television audience. What stands out in the following discussion about the soap opera audience and the pleasures it obtains from soap opera texts is the idea that the audience consists of a heterogeneous groups of individuals who all have differently formed subjectivities. Each individual, because of his or her specific subjectivity (though most individuals do share

similar subjectivities because subjectivity is culturally, historically, sexually and socially specific) will read the soap opera text differently (no individual reader is a perfect "model reader") in order to activate it in such a way as to make it most pleasurable to him or her.

Conceptions of the audience

The television audience has been approached in a variety of ways by various areas of contemporary criticism on popular culture. What these areas have in common is an attempt to understand the relationship between television viewers and television texts on a primarily theoretical level. Most of these approaches use ideas from post-structuralism and semiotics (particularly about individuality and subjectivity) and go on to try to elaborate how individuals understand, interpret and relate to televisual texts. Among the major strands of contemporary criticism are: reader-response criticism (feminist or otherwise), psychoanalytical film theory, cultural studies, ideological criticism or political economy, and post-modernism. Each of the following paragraphs will outline one of these major strands in contemporary criticism.

Reader-response criticism tries to uncover how readers respond to texts. Ien Ang, Janice Radway and Robert C. Allen are among those who have this theoretical slant, though the work done by Ang and Radway is sometimes also referred to as ethnography because they use the reactions and opinions of readers of specific types of texts (*Dallas* and romance novels, respectively). According to Allen, reader-response criticism focuses on the idea that "works are made to mean through the process of reading."¹⁰ That is to say, meaning does not rest in a text waiting for the reader to pick it up, but is activated through the process of reading as the reader relates his or her own individual history or situation to what is in the text. This idea stems from Husserl's phenomenological philosophy. While there are divergent opinions as to how far the text

controls the reading (the use of the concept of a "Model Reader" [Eco] or "preferred readings") or the reader controls the text, the important premise behind reader-response criticism is that reading a text is a process whereby the reader activates the text in order to make meaning.

Psychoanalytical film theory, as applied to television and its audience, seeks to underline the differences between the ways that television viewers relate to television, and film spectators relate to films. The differences are due to the technologies: while watching a film may be analogous to dreaming, television viewing is a fragmentary and social experience. While the psychanalytic process that a spectator goes through when watching a film has been elaborated by film theorists, little of the theory has been elaborated for television,¹¹ though it would be possible to do so, and doing this could lead to a better understanding of the television audience's relationship to the televisual text. Flitterman-Lewis discusses the differences between television and film and characterizes the television viewer as "distracted," and emphasizes that television only requires that the viewer glance at the screen whereas film viewers gaze at the screen. She states: "The quality of viewer engagement [with television] . . . is one of continual, momentary and constant visual repositioning, in keeping with television's 'glance.'"¹²

Cultural studies and political economy or ideological analysis are all related in that they try to develop an understanding of the institution of television. All of these "criticisms" originate from Marxist theories and the ways that they approach culture. Mimi White states that:

Ideological criticism is based on the assumption that cultural artefacts -- literature, film, television and so forth --- are produced in specific historical contexts by and for specific social groups; it aims to understand the nature of culture as a form of social expression. Because of this social and historical specificity, artefacts express and promote values, beliefs and ideas that are pertinent to the contexts in which they are produced, distributed and received.

Thus, media are used as vehicles to promote the values and beliefs of the dominant class. The "classical" position holds that the television audience becomes victim to "false consciousness", "duped" into adhering to the dominant class' ideology (through their entertainment) during leisure time instead of acting to change the existing order.

Subcultural readings of entertainment texts, however, are possible, and this is where cultural studies comes in. The theory of hegemony as used by cultural studies creates a site for "ideological struggle" ¹⁴. This suggests that it is possible to interpret the televisual text from a position other than the one that dominant class ideology posits.

Stuart Hall's concept of reading as summarized by Fiske is as follows:

Reading or viewing television, then, becomes a process of negotiation between the viewer and the text. Use of the word 'negotiation' is significant, for it implies both that there is a conflict of interests that needs to be reconciled in some way, and that the process of reading television is one in which the reader is an active maker of meanings from the text, not a passive recipient of already constructed ones.¹⁵

Cultural studies' importance lies in its analyses of how subcultural readings are made of the cultural artefacts of the dominant classes. It also goes further to understand how the dominant order appropriates subcultures (or their products, fashions, or ideas) into the mainstream, thereby decreasing their subversiveness [Hebdige].¹⁶

John Fiske merges the cultural studies approach to the television audience with the concept of pleasure.¹⁷ His central argument surrounds the concept of pertinence or relevance:

Meanings are pleasurable when they are pertinent to the social allegiances of the viewer and when the viewer has been active in generating them. The pleasure is greatest and the attention given to the screen is greatest when the viewer is actively engaged in the production of socially pertinent readings. . . the viewer makes meanings and pleasures from television that are relevant to his or her social allegiances at the moment of viewing; the criteria for relevance precede the viewing moment.¹⁸

Fiske's position on relevance is further supported by studies done on "cultural imperialism" which suggest that the messages that foreigners receive from American programming reflect their own values or traditions (including gender roles).¹⁹ It has not, however, been suggested that the American programming has no influence. Fiske elaborates his position further:

The implication of this position is that only those texts which offer socially relevant meanings will be accepted and will thus become popular and that the more open and the less hierarchical their discursive structure is, and the more discourses they contain, so they will be able to be made relevant to a greater range of social allegiances and thus, finally, will be more popular.²⁰

This last comment can refer specifically to the soap opera, reaffirming that one of the reasons for the soap opera's popularity could be that it is open to a variety of "socially relevant meanings," particularly in regard to inter-personal or familial relationships (areas which are traditionally of concern to women.)

Pleasure and popular culture

Ien Ang, Janice Radway and Tania Modleski also use the concept of pleasure to try to understand the popularity of certain popular cultural products, and why these products hold such a fascination for them (and many other women) despite the fact that they may find the messages that these cultural products convey run contrary to their political or moral beliefs or values. Ang:

Pleasure . . . is the category that is ignored in the ideology of mass culture. In its discourses pleasure seems to be non-existent. Instead it makes things like responsibility, critical distance or aesthetic purity central -- moral categories that make pleasure an irrelevant and illegitimate criterion. In this way the ideology of mass culture places itself totally outside the framework of the popular aesthetic, of the way in which popular cultural practices take shape in the routines of daily life. Thus it remains both literally and figuratively caught in the ivory towers of 'theory'.²¹

Using the concept of pleasure in order to understand the appeal of soap operas, then, is a convenient way of avoiding making any aesthetic or moral judgments about the genre, particularly if these judgements could obfuscate what is actually going on in the context of daily soap watching (the relationship between the soap opera text and the reader of that text). While it is important to understand the political or moral assumptions embedded in soap operas, judgments about these assumptions are somewhat counter-productive. Making critical judgments does not explain the mechanisms of the soap opera or the ways in which the people who enjoy watching the soaps relate to them. Nor does it explain why people enjoy watching daytime serials. By investigating what is pleasurable about watching soap operas, it becomes possible to understand what is entertaining about the genre. Understanding how pleasure works should also clarify the relationship between the audience and the cultural product. It is in the meeting between text and reader of text that pleasure is felt and meaning is made. The viewer is most likely to activate the meanings of the text that are most pleasurable for her. Because of this, pleasure can be an important factor in trying to uncover the ways in which the audience decodes the text.

According to Ien Ang,

. . . pleasure must be conceived of as not so much the automatic result of some 'satisfaction of needs', but rather as the effect of a certain productivity of a cultural artefact. . . It is in the actual confrontation between viewer and programme that pleasure is primarily guaranteed.²²

This means that pleasure does not arise out of a fulfillment of some sort of pre-existent desire, though some desires may exist in relation to what viewers expect out of a text. Rather, pleasure emerges from a dialogue between the viewer and the text. The meeting of text and viewer produces a plurality of possible pleasures (as will be seen below), and it is the viewer who, in a sense, picks and chooses which elements of the text, which of the possible pleasures, are pleasurable for her. The confrontation between the text

and the reader of the text may also create a multiplicity of displeasures. Displeasures are those aspects of meaning created in the dialogue between the reader and the text that run counter to the viewer's ideological position. Because the reader of the text needs to activate the text (decipher it or interpret it) in order to understand it, if she is familiar with the text, it is sometimes possible for her to avoid displeasure by choosing not to activate it, or by ignoring it, as far as possible while still making sense of the text. Any displeasure that the viewer encounters, then, is often avoidable if it is a function of personal taste (for example, disliking the sound of a person's voice or the way a person dresses). It is likely that any displeasure that a viewer activates is of the same "type" as the pleasures that this viewer activates. This is because when reading the text in a certain way that generally stimulates a pleasurable encounter with it, the viewer may accidentally feel displeasure associated with reading the text from that particular angle. For example, if the viewer finds looking at the styles of clothing that a character wears one of the more pleasurable aspects of soap viewing, this viewer will more likely find it quite displeasurable if that same character wears a clothing item that the viewer finds distasteful -- the viewer is looking for a certain kind of pleasure associated with the act of soap viewing and is disappointed when she is not shown what she is looking for. Probably, if displeasure of a certain kind is activated more often than pleasures of the same kind, the viewer will cease to attempt to activate that kind of pleasure, and that aspect of the text will be "ignored" (or avoided as much as possible without interfering with a general understanding of the narrative; the reader will cease to apply that specific kind of interpretive framework to the text.) In the above example, this would mean that if the stylish character began to appear more consistently in "distasteful" clothing, the viewer would probably cease to expect a pleasurable association with the character's dressing.

What is pleasurable also depends on the context. Because pleasures are activated when the viewer meets the text, the time and place of viewing are important considerations. This is related to what the viewer of a soap opera expects out of the genre or the specific program (or, more generally, out of television). There are certain expectations associated with the medium (television) and with fashionable (current) attire and ideas. While current fashions are usually taken for granted in the soap operas, if the viewer is presented with something that is not fashionable, it can prove to be highly displeasurable. It is, however, possible that the unfashionableness could provoke a response that is pleasurable to the viewer, such as ridicule of the character or a feeling of superiority.

Ang states

Any form of pleasure is constructed and functions in a specific social and historical context.²³

This construction of pleasure partially refers to the meeting between the text and the reader of the text. Because the text itself is produced in a specific social and historical context in which the reader is also situated, the pleasure formed through their encounter must also be so contextualized. Viewers expect soap operas to be in tune with current affairs and fashions; the characters are living their lives in similar time frames to the viewers (holiday celebrations on the soaps are the clearest examples of this). What is pleasurable for the viewer will also reflect her attitudes toward current fashions. Fashion is being used here in a broad sense -- it includes fashionable topics of discussion and "timely" storylines. While it may be acceptable in the 1990s to discuss such things as birth control, sexual discrimination in the work place, or artificial insemination, it is not likely that these topics were even alluded to in previous decades. The idea of "fashion" is ideologically grounded. Dominant ideology usually dictates the boundaries of fashion. The specificity of historical and social context also explains why

the same text is read differently (and provides different pleasures) for the same reader at different points in that individual's life. For example, if one were to watch a soap opera from the 70s, one would not have the same pleasurable experience when looking at the styles of dress of the characters (the pleasure in looking at the styles could take on the form of nostalgia or ridicule rather than admiration or appreciation) as a viewer did in the 1970s.

The specific historical and social context of the cultural artefact is also related to the discourses that surround that artefact, which often have an effect on the ways in which the viewer understands the artefact. For example, if one is told that a particular soap opera is critically acclaimed, one is more likely to look for the aspects of it that have been praised -- for some viewers, those aspects might otherwise have remained unnoticed. Soap fanzines constitute one of the major sources for discussion about soap operas. Also, what the reader brings to the text, her own personal frame of reference, which is often dependent on her own social and historical position, largely conditions her interpretations of the text and thus places limitations or restrictions on what is pleasurable.

A characteristic of the soap opera as a genre is that there is a new episode almost every weekday all year round -- there are no re-runs. This means that soap opera viewers are all watching the same episode of any given soap on the same day (or close to the same day, if they videotape them). Most viewers, then, are sharing a similar historical and social context, if only because they are all watching the same episode on the same day in the same continent. It is partially because of this, but mostly because of the limitations of the text itself, that viewers may interpret the text in a very similar way. While I am arguing that there are many possible ways of interpreting a text so that it is pleasurable for a variety of individual viewers, I would not suggest that any text has no interpretative boundaries. Texts represent both material objects and abstract ideas,

whose cultural meanings, though they may be varied to some extent, are interpretable in similar ways. This similarity, or the taken for granted assumption that there is a large degree of similarity, is what allows for communication to occur in the first place. For example, most people recognize that a wedding is a wedding, and not a funeral, although the second-order significance that they attach to the wedding may be vastly different. In other words, texts all have denotative meaning (which constitute the interpretive barriers) and connotative meaning (which depends on the viewer's interpretative frame of reference, and can vary greatly from one viewer to the next).

Modleski's reason for understanding the pleasures of soap watching (and the pleasures related to other forms of entertainment directed at women, is to be able to outline what kinds of pleasures women are looking for in entertainment and thereby challenge (with an alternative ideological framework) the present forms of popular culture directed at women with genuinely feminist artistic products that are equally pleasurable:

Clearly, women find soap operas eminently entertaining, and an analysis of the pleasure these programs afford can provide feminists with ways not only to challenge this pleasure but to incorporate it into their own artistic practices.²⁴

While this is a legitimate reason for understanding the pleasures associated with watching soap operas, Modleski's task attributes too much importance to the possibility that the pleasures soap operas produce are counter-productive to feminist goals (the pleasures are used in the service of patriarchy). She may be partially correct, but in saying the above she implies that people who genuinely enjoy soap operas are also anti-feminist. It is possible to read soap operas from a feminist perspective, particularly when one compares the soap opera to predominantly male forms of television entertainment. If the viewer is a feminist, she is more likely to look for feminist readings when she is interpreting the text (this does not mean that the soap opera is an ideal feminist text). Modleski's work, however, points to a beginning of an investigation

of the pleasures that women derive from popular culture, and the relationships between ideology and pleasure. Modleski states elsewhere:

I believe it is crucial to understand how women's popular culture speaks to women's pleasure at the same time that it puts it in the service of patriarchy, keeps it working for the good of the family.²⁵

Understanding how the soap opera is used "in the service of patriarchy" is complicated. It is difficult to delineate how patriarchy manipulates popular culture on a conscious level, though it could be argued that the ideology of patriarchy is so pervasive that it infiltrates all cultural practices whether or not the producers of these cultural artefacts are aware of it (this is what ideological analysis does). The links between desire and pleasure are complex -- if it is thought that pleasure can only exist if there is some sort of pre-existent desire that can only be satisfied through that pleasure, and pleasure is used to the advantage of the dominant order, it would mean that patriarchy, in some sense, would be able to control, create, or manipulate desire (this is similar to Coward's argument). The pleasures that popular culture provide would somehow help allay the desires that patriarchy has created, while simultaneously perpetuating those very same desires, creating a never-ending cycle of desire for and consumption of popular culture, or, in this case, the soap opera. This would mean that there would be no way out for those who do not abide by the dominant discourse. In fact, it would mean that no discourse outside of the dominant ideology would be able to sustain itself. It can only be concluded, then, that while patriarchy may use the soap opera as a vehicle for transmitting and reinforcing its ideology (morals, values and material practices), other orders may use it as well. Thus, it can be inferred that the pleasures associated with watching soap operas are not dependent on or created solely by patriarchy and its ideological framework. That is to say, the creation of the soap opera text involves the use of a mixture of the ideologies of all those involved in its creation -- with the creation of the soap opera text, various ideologies may be encoded (though it is likely

that the dominant discourse comes through most clearly) -- so that it could be possible to decode the text from any of those ideological positions or any combination of them.

The viewers of the soap opera, then, may choose to watch the soap opera from a position within the dominant ideology, but they are not necessarily forced into patriarchal viewing positions. Many ideological positions may be available for the viewer, though the pleasures the viewer activates in relation to the soap opera (those pleasures which are associated with the apprehension of meaning) will differ according to her ideological stance. This ideological stance is usually determined by the viewer's individual social/historical background as well as gender, age, class, race and education. What may be pleasurable to a viewer who situates herself unquestioningly within patriarchy may be displeasurable to a feminist, for example. The feminist, however, may find other aspects of the soap opera highly pleasurable, and if the pleasure gotten from those aspects of the program are greater than the displeasures that stem from being in an ideological position aberrant to the dominant one, she is likely to enjoy the program anyhow.

Allen and Seiter suggest that it is possible to read the soap opera text from a variety of positions, though this is not because the text is "open" (to use the terminology that Allen borrows from Umberto Eco [1979]). Allen believes that the soap opera text is closed (though this is difficult to maintain when using Eco's model because there is little narrative closure in the soap opera), which means that the authors and producers of the soap opera do not intentionally create a plurality of reading positions allowing (or encouraging) the reader to view the text from various ideological positions. A "closed" text, as Eco describes it, tends to allow the reader to settle into a fixed reading position. It is possible to read "against the grain"; in other words, it is possible to read a text in a position other than that of the "model reader." Allen suggests that this is because of the soap opera's "signifying complexity":

While it is certainly possible for women (and others) to construct readings of soap operas "against the grain," the limiting of "allowable" readings to a unitary decoding, anticipated by the text and its authors, overlooks the television soap opera's signifying complexity.²⁶

Allen further explains:

As does *Ulysses*, the soap opera most fully engages its Model Reader, and conversely, the soap (like *Ulysses*) contains an interpretive threshold below which the reader cannot fall and still "understand what's going on," except in the most superficial sense. This minimal interpretive threshold in the soap opera is based upon intratextual familiarity rather than extratextual lexical and literary skills -- the soap opera is, after all, designed to reach the largest possible audience. Above this threshold, however, the reader may engage in multiple decoding strategies -- plugging soap opera events and relationships into personal frames of reference via the operation of a number of different codes.²⁷

It is the possibility of simultaneously employing a range of codes, not in substitution for one another but in addition to one another, that renders the soap opera text "overcoded" and complex.²⁸

While the soap opera is a "closed" text, then, its repetitive and circuitous form, which at first glance seems relatively simplistic, creates layers of meaning which may allow the soap opera viewer to view the text from a multiplicity of positions simultaneously. In sum, Allen says:

The soap opera represents an "overcoded" narrative form, in which characters and relationships are endowed with plurisignificative possibilities far exceeding that required by narrative function alone. It is this very indeterminacy created by the soap opera's over-coding that helps to account for the form's longevity and the breadth of its contemporary appeal. This is not to say that the soap opera is ideologically neutral or that it can be read in an infinite number of ways, but we must not confuse presumed ideological intent with either reader response or ideological effect.²⁹

Soap opera producers and writers might be approaching the task of creating the soap opera text from a fixed ideological position, but the oversignification of the codes may allow the soap opera viewer to disregard the intended ideological message. Allen's point is that assumptions regarding the presumed "conservative" nature of the soap opera (the soap opera is considered to be conservative in the sense that it stresses the importance of the family and of attaining material and emotional satisfaction), or the

effects of the ideology of its producers on its audience are probably exaggerated. Further, his statement implies that it is the diversity of possible readings of the text that accounts for the popularity and long-standing appeal of the soap opera. The diversity of possible reading positions in relation to the text increase the probability that interpreting the text will be pleasurable for a large, heterogeneous audience (though the pleasure obtained from watching a soap opera is probably greatest for the "Model Viewer.") Conversely, soap opera viewers probably maintain a diversity of reading positions in relation to the soap opera text because they are presumably viewing soap operas with the intention of achieving as much pleasure as possible from their viewing experiences. Thus, viewers probably slip into and out of various viewing positions or reading relationships with the text, depending on how pleasurable each position or reading is at any given time. That the text can allow for several reading positions is important, but what is even more important is that the viewers are searching (not necessarily consciously) for the most pleasurable positions themselves.

Taking the concept of pleasure a step further, various 'types' of pleasures that are specific to the soap opera genre, including pleasures associated with narrative, characters, 'ironic viewing' and social interaction and escapism, will be described below. This elaborate description of the different categories of pleasure will hopefully allow for a discussion on how well the use of pleasure theory works for close description of the various narrative devices of the soap opera and the ways in which the soap opera interpellates its viewers. While Allen uses pleasure to describe the narrative devices of the soap opera, the following description is more elaborate and specific.

The classifications used here are not necessarily exclusive. There are probably other possible ways of categorizing the different kinds of pleasures that are provoked while

watching soap operas. These particular categories were chosen because of the generic characteristics of the soap opera. One of the soap opera's central distinguishing features is the way in which the narrative works, defying closure. Because the soap opera narrative is so obviously different from most other television narratives, its particularities deserve investigation. It has been suggested (Allen, 1985, 1987, Fiske, 1987; Modleski, 1982) that the soap opera narrative works to produce an especially feminine kind of pleasure. The characters of the soap opera are essential to its form as well, and it is well known that the characters and plollines (mini-narratives) are what differentiate the various soaps. While it is possible to include pleasures associated with listening -- comparable to visual pleasures -- since dialogue is an important part of the narrative, it has been left out, for the sake of avoiding repetition. This does not mean that the viewers do not derive any pleasure out of listening; listening to conversations is one of the greater pleasures of soap viewing -- it is simply that the broader category of "narrative pleasures" includes the conversations between the characters. (Conversation is, in fact, the principle way through which the narrative progresses -- it is a narrative vehicle.) The other categories of pleasure are associated with viewing attitudes and not with the form itself. These attitudes toward viewing soap operas or modes of viewing are often as important to the production of pleasure as the text itself.

Any individual viewer may activate only one type of pleasure while watching her favourite program, or may drift in and out of various types of pleasure, or may be experiencing more than one type at a time. Within each type of pleasure, there are also levels of pleasure, or different ways of producing pleasure that are related to the same category. Some mechanisms that produce pleasure work simultaneously within two or more categories or work differently within different categories, either reaffirming pleasure or working against the grain of certain kinds of pleasures. There are also things that contradict pleasures -- things that the viewer may not be interested in

watching or things that interfere with the pleasures of viewing. It is to be understood, however, that pleasures generally outweigh aggravations or irritations (for if the annoyances were greater than the pleasures, it is presumed that the viewer would lose interest in the program, unless the viewer finds pleasure in discomfort and/or is somewhat masochistic). Sometimes the contradictions stem from the simple opposites of pleasures (as is the case with visual pleasure where there is a simple ugly/beautiful dichotomy.) It is, however, often the case that when there is a contradiction going on in the soap opera text (like that between fantasy and reality) that the contradictory aspects can both be pleasurable to the viewer or that the space of negotiation between the two contradictory aspects is what is pleasurable (which is what happens in the dialectic between lack of narrative closure and ideological boundaries).

The general trends of soap operas over the years should explain what kinds of pleasures were more important in what historical context, or how audience pleasures differ within different demographic groups, and which pleasures are more important overall for the continued popularity of soap operas. That is not the aim of this discussion, however. This space will be limited to trying to outline what kinds of pleasures are most likely produced while watching soaps, and applying these pleasure classifications to a few different soaps in order to better understand how the structures of soap operas promote certain kinds of pleasures. One of the questions that will be addressed below is how the soap opera, as it is a woman's genre, directly speaks to women's pleasures in particular. This entails trying to determine what kinds of pleasures are more specifically feminine in nature, as well as understanding how the soap opera activates the female gaze, encourages feminine identifications with characters, and negotiates feminine perspectives of the world.

The different categories of pleasure that will be discussed below include: narrative pleasures, character pleasures, visual pleasures, pleasures linked to an 'ironic viewing

attitude', 'social' pleasures, and escapist pleasures. Many of these 'pleasures' overlap or contradict each other in some ways.

-
- 1 Kuhn, *The Power of The Image*, p8
 - 2 Barthes, Roland, *The Pleasures of the Text*.
 - 3 Ibid., p 58-9.
 - 4 Ibid, p 57-58.
 - 5 Ibid, p 32-33.
 - 6 Coward, Rosalind, *Female Desires*.
 - 7 Ibid, p 13.
 - 8 Mercer, Colin, "A Poverty of Desire: Pleasure and Popular Politics"
 - 9 Mercer, p98.
 - 10 Allen, Robert, "Reader Oriented Criticism and Television," in *Channels of Discourse*., p 75.
 - 11 Sandy Flitterman-Lewis discusses how psychoanalytical film theory can be applied to television in her article "Psychoanalysis, Film and Television" in *Channels of Discourse*.
 - 12 Flitterman-Lewis, p. 195.
 - 13 White, Mimi, "Ideological Analysis and Television" in *Channels of Discourse*, p136.
 - 14 Fiske, John, "British Cultural Studies and Television," in *Channels of Discourse*, p259.
 - 15 Ibid., p 260.
 - 16 Hebdige, Dick, *Subculture, the Meaning of Style*.
 - 17 Fiske, John, "Critical Response: Meaningful Moments, in *CSMC* , Sept. 1988. and *Television Culture*., 1987.
 - 18 Fiske, John, "Critical Response," p 247.
 - 19 Salwen, Michael, "Cultural Imperialism: A Media Effects Approach," 1991.
 - 20 Fiske, John, "Critical Response," p 248.
 - 21 Ang, Ien, *Watching Dallas*, p 116
 - 22 Ang, Ien, *Watching Dallas*, pp 9-10
 - 23 Ibid., P 19
 - 24 Modleski, Tania, *Loving with a Vengeance*, p 104
 - 25 Modleski, Tania, *The Rhythms of Reception*, p 69
 - 26 Allen, *Speaking of Soap Operas*, p82
 - 27 Ibid., p83
 - 28 Ibid., p91
 - 29 Ibid., p94

CHAPTER THREE

The Types of Pleasures

Narrative Pleasure

This term, 'narrative pleasure', will be used in reference to the kinds of pleasures associated with the storylines of soap operas. In order to understand how these narrative pleasures are produced, it is first necessary to examine the structure of the soap opera narrative.

The soap opera has sometimes been called non-narrative, in the sense that its narrative is non-traditional because it never reaches complete closure. Edmondson and Rounds provide examples of soaps that have been taken off the air. These soaps tried to neatly resolve their plots by the end of their last episodes, but were unable to, mostly because the various plotlines had become so entangled that it was impossible to neatly resolve all of them without contradicting previous events or the integrity of the characters. Soap operas may be considered narrative in structure, however, since they involve the telling of stories that clearly progress over linear time. Most soap operas follow at least three or four different main storylines at the same time; often these storylines involve overlapping characters. This overlapping of characters is one of the devices used in order to maintain a continuity throughout all the storylines (so that the three or four storylines are never completely separate or unrelated). The storylines also overlap because most of the characters in the soaps know each other (either directly or indirectly), and many of them are related, if not through birth, through marriage or previous relationships. Because of this, the resolution of one storyline (whether

complete or partial) will have resounding effects on the entire cast of characters. The 'resolution' of one storyline often directly leads into the beginning of a new storyline. The various storylines that are followed at any particular point in time are also usually at different stages of progression: one plotline will be in resolution, one will be approaching climax or in climax, and another will be just beginning. Usually a plotline in resolution will lead either to a storyline that is just beginning or to the picking up of a storyline that was never quite resolved, but put aside in order to allow it to mature. Pregnancies are typical of that kind of storyline. The story of how the woman got pregnant is separated by questions about the paternity of the father or the relationship between the baby's parents, by several months -- not necessarily nine, because soaps often speed up or slow down pregnancies for practical (plot or real pregnancy) reasons. What this means is that the various storylines are all at different points of progression -- beginning, middle, resolution, or apparent resolution -- at almost any point during the evolution of the soap. This is important for the concept of narrative pleasure, as will be elaborated below. Another aspect of narrative that is particular to the soap opera is the apparent disconnection between the storylines; they are not, however, actually disconnected, because there are several connections made through the relationships between the characters. This apparent disconnection ("syntagmatic gaps") between the various scenes shown during a given episode or between the storylines is one of the fundamental reasons why viewer participation is so essential to the understanding of the text of the soap opera.

There are three spaces where narrative pleasure can be produced. The first space is an invitation to the viewer to participate in the construction of the narrative of single storylines -- the viewer simultaneously processes elements from the past, present and future time frames of each storyline; this includes the pleasures associated with

listening to the conversations between characters. The second space is in the gaps formed between storylines or scenes which the viewer is invited to fill in, what Allen calls syntagmatic gaps¹. The third comes from the viewer's preference for a particular type of storyline or for a particular phase of progression in a storyline, which is reflected by the diversity of the storylines. These three different spaces for the production of narrative pleasure are directly interconnected and depend on each other for a greater activation of viewer pleasure. The first two spaces, in particular, are almost inseparable; both of them demand viewer participation.

The nature of the soap opera narrative -- its interruptions or gaps -- encourages the participation of the viewer, which helps produce pleasures of other types because the greater the participation of the viewer, the greater the possibility for producing pleasure. When the viewer is committed to participating in the narrative, the viewer is deeply engaged in producing meaning out of what the text presents to her. Thus, the invitation to the viewer to participate in the narrative may help to increase viewer understanding of or identification with characters; these will be discussed later when the concept of character pleasures will be outlined.

One of the most important facets of the apparent discontinuity of the soap opera narrative is that while it asks the viewer to participate in order to make sense of what is going on in the narrative, the viewer is also asked to insert her own world view or ideology into the gaps in order to make meaning. This aspect of soap operas is of particular interest to feminists and others interested in finding ways of challenging the dominant ideology:

The importance of small discontinuous narrative units which are never organized by a single patriarchal discourse or main narrative line, which do not build towards an ending or closure of meaning, which in their very complexity cannot give a final ideological word on anything, makes soap opera uniquely 'open' to feminist readings.²

The lack of narrative closure in the soap opera allows it to have a more open structure, leaving room for a greater diversity of readings on the part of the viewer. The possibility of reading the text in a plurality of ways also leaves room for a plurality of pleasures. *The soap opera viewer is not forced into a single fixed ideological position in order to make meaning out of the text.* This is partially because narrative closure is one of the chief ways in which ideology is finalized. The lack of narrative closure, then, diminishes the possibility that a dominant ideology encoded in the soap opera will cause displeasure for the viewer if it is aberrant to the viewer's own ideological framework. *The viewer is allowed to think that the ideological position that the text apparently takes coincides with her own because she is almost imperceptibly inserting her own ideology in order to create meaning.* This can be a pleasurable and reaffirming experience for the viewer; she can believe that others share her point of view. Meanwhile, however, the ideology that the text itself adheres to is clearly bounded; certain topics are taboo on the soap opera (the most obvious being homosexuality) while others are dealt with frequently (incest, adultery, psychological problems). There is, then, a dialectic between the lack of narrative closure in the soap opera and the obvious ideological boundaries (which has been previously referred to as "fashion" in a broad sense). While lack of narrative closure allows for more ideological openness when reading the text, the ideological boundaries (which most viewers are familiar with because of the generic limits of the soap opera) limit which problems, issues or topics are approached and guide the viewer into reading the text within those boundaries. Ideological boundaries are usually not perceived by the viewer.

An additional way of understanding the appeal of interruption (or gaps) in soap opera narratives is to relate the way the interruptions coincide with the rhythm of life in the home. The way Modleski understands these interruptions, as can be seen below, is that the similarity between the rhythm of life in the home and the rhythm of the soap opera's

narrative structure, in addition to the lack of closure of the text, allow for an especially feminine narrative-related pleasure:

I propose not to ignore what is 'feminine' about soap operas but to focus on it, to show how they provide a unique narrative pleasure which, while it has become thoroughly adapted to the rhythms of women's lives in the home, provides an alternative to the dominant 'pleasures of the text' analyzed by Roland Barthes and others. . . . The formal properties of daytime television thus accord closely with the rhythms of women's work in the home. Individual soap operas as well as the flow of various programs and commercials tend to make repetition, interruption, and distraction pleasurable.³

Interruptions also may serve as devices which create suspense or allow for the return to other storylines. Thus, if interruptions lead the viewer to a storyline she is more interested in, they are pleasurable, but, inversely, they can be annoying if they lead to a storyline that is less interesting.

Interruptions may be, as Benjamin thought, one of the fundamental devices of all art, but surely soap opera relies on them to a far greater extent than any other art. Revelations, confrontations, and reunions are constantly being interrupted and postponed by telephone calls, unexpected visitors, counterrevelations, catastrophes, and switches from one plot to another. These interruptions are both annoying and pleasurable: if we are torn away from one exciting story, we at least have the relief of picking up the thread of an unfinished one.⁴

Commercials are probably the most annoying interruptions, as they are with all other television programs. They have received much attention from those studying the phenomenon of the soap opera particularly, probably because the connection between advertising and soap operas is more obvious than it is in other television programs (Procter and Gamble still produces several soaps). While all television in North America (except PBS) has had to build itself around advertisements, soap operas adapted to the commercial aspect of television especially well. The structure of soaps is such that the interruptions made by the commercials are very similar to the interruptions made between different storylines -- they seem disconnected. But whereas the individual viewer has to make the leap into making sense between the various segments of the soap, (when the soap does not do it for them, which it does occasionally during

party scenes when everyone is gathered together), the commercials usually do not need to be made sense of. Flitterman takes this idea one step further in her discussion of commercials:

Although the soap opera thrives on a process of anticipation and frustrated desire, the self-enclosed micro-narratives of television commercials, those discrete syntagms, offer a kind of containment and fulfillment by their very form. . . . Far from interrupting the narrative flow of stimulated yearning for a just conclusion and perpetual indication of its impossibility, commercials are small oases of narrative closure, homogeneous and systematic units of unproblematic meaning. They do not function as interruptions because rather than frustrating the overall impulse for narrative, they prolong and maintain it.⁵

However, while it is true that commercials are often discrete narrative units, many people who watch soaps tape them to watch at later dates, which means that it becomes simple to fast-forward through the commercials.⁶ Also, many people who watch television 'tune out' during the commercial breaks, not paying enough attention to them to derive any satisfaction out of them. Another reason why commercials may not be as important as Flitterman suggests is that commercials themselves are becoming less clearly narrative in structure, which implies that they do not provide closure or satisfy some kind of "impulse for narrative." It remains true, however, that most commercials shown during the daytime, particularly the P&G commercials (for products such as "Mr. Clean" and "Tide") are narrative in form. The commercials that are less narrative in form, beer and car ads in particular, tend not to be shown as often in the daytime. In addition, people who watch soaps in groups tend to use the commercial breaks as times to keep each other abreast of plot developments that the others may have missed, or to try to foresee future plots, or simply to converse freely amongst themselves.⁷ And some groups of people who watch soap operas are not the ones that the commercials are directed at.

Ironically, the subjects of many soap opera commercial messages -- laundry products, diapers, household cleaners -- encourage the use of commercial gaps

for social soap opera reading among college-age viewers, since these products are largely irrelevant to their lifestyles.⁸

Flitterman's argument implies that there is never complete satisfaction to be found from watching a soap opera, that the narrative structure (which, she suggests, is built around a lack, that of narrative closure) causes a perpetual frustration of desire. This would mean that once a person began watching soaps, they would never be able to stop because soaps would create a continual desire for narrative closure without ever satisfying it. Commercials, then, would be very effective at gaining the attention of the consumer, because they would satisfy (while perpetuating) the desire for narrative closure that the soaps are "incapable" of satisfying. Flitterman's ideas, however, open up an important question as to whether soap operas create unfulfilled desire because of the lack of narrative closure (and whether or not commercials sustain or reinforce this desire.) There is abundant evidence both for and against this claim. It is often said that people are "addicted" to soap operas. Yet, the same people who are "addicted" to soaps turn them off when they no longer enjoy them. Many soap watchers write to the soap magazines about some aspects of their ex-favourite show and admit to no longer watching those soaps (or contemplating switching the channel):

I will probably turn *GH* off, as I won't waste my leisure hour watching this actor (Tristan Rogers) absorb huge quantities of air-time and be swathed in mountains of publicity all because he happens to be the favorite of one producer who thinks she can come back and increase the ratings by turning the cast inside out.

*R. Matthews, Wheeling, W.Va*⁹

I am about to pull the plug on my all-time favorite, *Y&R*.

*J Thixton, Ft. Smith, Ark.*¹⁰

I've been out here in Operation Desert Storm for five months and do not miss *Y&R*. And there are a lot of people here who feel the same way. When I get back, I don't intend to watch it again -- they're probably on the same storyline that they were on when we were deployed here.

*P. Foster, Fort Hood, Texas.*¹¹

Clearly, commercials can and should be considered when speaking about soap operas, as they should whenever television is being considered, but they should not be accorded too much importance, thereby clouding the importance of the entertainment text itself (which is the real reason why people turn on the television set in the first place). Advertising is an important part of the production process in the commercial American networks, and any considerations of advertising and their relationships to soaps would require a deeper investigation into this production process.

This leads to questions about why the lack of closure in the soap opera is not necessarily uncomfortable. One of the reasons is because there is not necessarily a pre-existent desire for narrative closure. Modleski suggests that it is because the process of telling the story is more conducive to a feminine type of narrative pleasure than is the final outcome, which is related to classical, male pleasures of the text which emphasize a final climax instead of cycles or mini-climaxes. Whereas soap operas have been criticized for their lack of gratification of the desire for closure, Modleski suggests that "the mini-climaxes of soap opera function to introduce difficulties to complicate rather than simplify the characters' lives."¹² It is the working through of difficulties and complications (and the conversations and thoughts of the characters in relation to these difficulties) that are pleasurable to the female viewer, rather than the resolution of these difficulties. Lack of narrative closure, then, allows the viewer to think and feel along with the characters while engaging herself in the narrative process; it encourages viewer participation in the text.

Viewer participation is not only stimulated by the discontinuities of the narrative or its lack of closure; the viewer is also encouraged to continually engage in the past, present and future of the storylines. The viewer may predict future happenings while maintaining an adequate understanding of the unfolding of the narrative and retrieving memories of past occurrences or revising those memories; flashbacks occur frequently

in soap operas, aiding the viewer in this process. Also, characters often talk about the past as explanation for their current actions, even if the viewer was never shown this past in the context of the narrative. This link of past, present and future storylines (or the past, present and future of an individual character's life) happens partially because of the interconnectedness of all the characters in the soap environment -- all actions have effects on other characters. When a character is in the position of making a decision, the ramifications are potentially endless. The more important the decision is, the more people will feel the consequences of the action or decision.

One example of an important decision in *Another World* was Paulina's choice to keep secret the fact that Ken used her as a prop in his scheme to get at the Cory fortune. He had told her that she was Mac Cory's daughter and produced false evidence to support this. Later, he introduced her to the Cory family while she remained innocent to the scheme. When Ken finally divulged the truth to Paulina and told her that he wanted to tell Rachel Cory (Mac's widow) the truth because he had grown to love and respect her (Rachel), Paulina begged him to remain silent. Paulina's choice to remain silent led to Iris Wheeler's (Mac's daughter, not by Rachel) plans to expose the truth (about there being no proof that Paulina was Mac's daughter) and Jake MacKinnon's attempts at blackmailing both Paulina and Iris. Paulina eventually shot Jake. Half of the women of Bay City were suspected of the crime. Marley MacKinnon (Jake's ex-wife) was the prime suspect, but was eventually cleared. Jake, now recovered, continues to blackmail Paulina with the threat of exposing the truth about the night that he was shot.

As a storyline is unravelling it becomes clear that characters must make choices. Most storylines involve making choices or disclosures of secrets; sometimes, they are mostly action, particularly on *General Hospital*, with its preference for spy/adventure storylines, but that is rare. The viewer is invited to project into the future, particularly if the characters themselves are involved in trying to understand what the

future consequences of their actions may be (the flashforward is sometimes used as a narrative device in the soap opera, usually in the form of a dream or a fantasy). In conjunction with this projection into the future, the viewer must make sense of what may happen through an understanding of the past relationships between the characters involved in that storyline. Sometimes this involves determining whether the character who is making the decision has a full understanding of the situation, or if that character really understands the ways the personalities of the other characters work. The viewer simultaneously follows what is being presented at that time on the soap opera: shifting relationships, introductions to new facts, changes in personalities or in situations and disclosures of secrets. Because of this, the better a viewer is acquainted with the characters and past narratives of a soap opera and the relationships between them, the more pleasure may be obtained from the narrative. Knowledge of characters, combined with a knowledge of previous storylines and the sense that the viewer is allowed to know more about each of the characters than any of the other characters do, provide the viewer with a powerful feeling of having more knowledge than any of the characters which helps to increase the pleasure of watching soap operas. A viewer who is very familiar with a certain soap opera will probably derive more pleasure out of understanding the narrative and making connections between the past, present and future, taking advantage of the pleasure of having power of knowledge, but the first time viewer may enjoy her position of uncertainty (lack of sufficient knowledge about the text or the genre in order to read it in a "model" way), taking advantage of it to invent her own connections in whatever way she desires, and thus participating further in the text. It is possible to watch a soap opera for over a year without understanding who had been married to whom, who is related to whom, and why relationships between characters did not work. Secrets can be kept for years, especially if they involve the questionable paternity of a child. Thus, both lack of sufficient knowledge about a given

soap opera text and full knowledge of the text, though contradictory, are both productive of textual or narrative pleasures.

First time soap viewers probably obtain most of their narrative pleasure from trying to make sense of the present (diegetic time) unrolling of the storylines of the soap opera. The more familiar a viewer is with the characters and the past storylines of a soap opera, the more deeply involved the viewer becomes with projecting into the future and making sense of the past, or reconstructing the past from the clues given in the soap (unless the viewer is creating her own fictitious past and possible present). Soaps try to give the viewers many clues as to what past relationships were, presumably to make it easier for a new viewer to understand what is going on. This is one of the causes of the repetitiveness that is so often criticized. Some people seek to explain this by referring to the interruptions associated with watching television and the life of a woman working in the home.¹³ While these ideas of interruptability may explain some aspects of the soap opera, they leave out the importance of the accessibility to new viewers, Fiske's idea of "excess" as productive of pleasure (polysemy or multiple codes), and the idea of syntagmatic gaps as proposed by Robert C. Allen.

Fiske states that "the conjunction of these multiple codes and textual devices generates far more meaningfulness than the text can control,"¹⁴ suggesting that the overcoding of the text (because of its excess or polysemy) can be productive of pleasure because it allows the viewer to read the text in ways that are alternative to the model readings. Allen argues that the syntagmatic gaps of the soap opera leave room for the insertion of the viewer's own ideology or perspective in order to make sense of the narrative, to provide a continuity between the various scenes and storylines.¹⁵

The repetitiveness of the soap opera may also be a function of the producers' knowledge that many people do not have the time to watch every day. The narrative, then, allows

for people to easily pick up the pieces of the narrative where they left them. (Newspapers often have phone numbers to call to get updates on what is happening in the soaps, and magazines such as *Soap Opera Weekly*, *Soap Opera Digest* and many others write updates for the viewers as well as predictions of future happenings.) Several storylines are generally followed at once; thus the repetitiveness serves as a sort of easing into the next storyline, to which the viewer may need to readjust when it is first re-introduced. However, excessive repetitiveness may be annoying to some viewers, particularly those who watch the soap operas attentively every day. It is important to note that some soap operas are much 'slower' than others; viewers are able to choose their preferred soaps according to how fast or slow they prefer their storylines to progress. *The Young and the Restless*, for example, is criticized by its fans for being slow -- the comment from the ex-viewer who was in the Gulf, above, is indicative of this. Another viewer of *Y&R* comments "slow storylines (I've seen snails move faster)".¹⁶ Some viewers clearly appreciate the slowness of storylines, however, possibly because it allows them more time to contemplate the storylines or to do other things (possibly to do housework or eat lunch) while watching the soap.

Storylines

The final kind of pleasure that can stem from the narrative structure of the soap opera is related to the diversity of storylines. This diversity allows viewers to feel pleasure according to whatever kind of narrative phase they prefer. Whether viewers prefer the feeling of satisfaction that comes from the (temporary) resolution of a storyline, the suspense of a storyline nearing climax, or the gradual evolution of a problem that constitutes the beginning of a storyline, they will almost always be guaranteed that at least one storyline is at one of those phases. Anticipation, however, plays an important part in every phase of the narrative. Anticipation is not to be confused with a desire for narrative closure; the feeling of anticipation itself is often what is pleasurable for the

viewer. Viewers also frequently enjoy trying to predict what future storylines may be (even before any evidence is given), and if they feel that their idea is exceptionally good, they may even write it to either the producers or writers of the soap or to one of the fanzines. Producers and writers are known to keep viewer input in mind when developing future plotlines. Some viewers do this if none of their favorite characters are in the spotlight at any one time.¹⁷ For example:

As a longtime viewer of *General Hospital*, there is something that has been puzzling me lately. When is Amy Vining going to get a life? She is young and reasonably attractive. Yet it seems all we ever see of her is when she is working at the hospital (and even then only for very brief periods of time). Doesn't she ever date or have any kind of social life? I think it's time that the writers gave her more of a storyline.

S. Eisner, So. Weymouth, Mass.¹⁸

And a viewer of *Days of Our Lives* makes the following suggestions (among others):

- Bringing back Yvette and letting what had just been starting between her and Roman really blossom.
- Having Victor and Julie develop a relationship so that he will stay out of everyone else's love life.

J. C., Waltham, Mass.¹⁹

The diversity of storylines also works in favour of narrative pleasures because typically each storyline focuses on a different type of story (romance or illness or mystery). This diversity, however, can also function inversely, for the very same reasons that it may be pleasurable (some viewers may appreciate romantic storylines over the other types of storylines and find that a storyline dealing with a character's fatal illness is unappealing). The types of storylines that are elaborated at any given time are designed to appeal to as wide a variety of viewers as possible. Generally, one involves a romance going bad, one involves a romance that is either going well or just starting, and one involves mystery and intrigue. For example, in December 1990, *General Hospital's* storylines were the following: Alan and Lucy Quartermaine's breakup; Dekker and

Dawn's happiness at being together at last; Felicia and Frisco's continuing happy marriage and the storyline surrounding Bobbie's adopted son and his birth-mother, Cheryl, who did not know it was her son, and their connections to an illegal baby-selling operation.

This means that there will usually be at least one storyline involving young people, in their late teens or early twenties (Dekker and Dawn), one plotline involving high-powered career people in their mid-twenties to forties (Alan and Cheryl), and another one that involves either older people or children, including young adolescents (the baby). Often there is also a storyline that involves the work place, though this type of storyline often involves one of the three categories mentioned above. This may be because often the settings are in either hospitals, law offices, or police stations. However, in these work locations, the characters are generally not seen working, unless they are doing some form of counseling; the characters are usually talking, and much of the talk has to do with legal or medical problems. Using several storylines at once has the added advantage of using different sets of characters, which increases the chance that the viewer's favourite character(s) will be involved in one of them.

Talk

One of the most important narrative devices in the soap opera is the dialogue. Except for the infrequent action/adventure/mystery sequences, most of what goes on in any soap opera is based on conversations among characters. Thus, another pleasure that is activated through the narrative structure of soap operas is that of listening, both on the part of viewers and characters. This appeals to the viewer's pleasure in listening to and watching intimate moments in the lives of the characters; it appeals to the pleasure of voyeurism (in the sense of listening and watching without being a part of the action; the pleasure of knowing without being known.) The large amount of talk on the soap opera

also appeals to a specific, culturally feminine, type of pleasure, and can be related to the way women enjoy speaking to each other about their problems. Listening to people conversing and emoting about their problems is generally pleasurable whether or not it advances the plotline, which is another reason why plotlines on soap operas tend to be slow and why there are several scenes in one episode. Switching from listening to one conversation to another can increase the feeling that the viewer has the power to listen in on several private conversations at once and could therefore prove to be quite pleasurable because power and pleasure tend to reinforce one another.

Another kind of power that stems from the amount of talk in and around the soap opera is the power of subversion or resistance. For example, Mary Ellen Brown looks at how women's oral culture and gossip is reflected in soap operas and used by soap opera fans in talking about the soap operas. She suggests that the ways in which women use language presents a challenge to patriarchy:

[soaps] codify life in some humorous and grotesque ways, ways in which utterance takes precedence over the language. They help us to laugh at ourselves and the absurdities of subordinate cultural positioning. As consumers of soap operas and the products they advertise, women do participate in the process of consumption, but the extent to which women can be said to be the passive objects or 'victims' of dominant discursive practices by watching and enjoying soap operas is limited by the women's use of these same cultural forms to affirm their own positions of subjectivity in a women's discursive tradition. This breaking of the rules is a source of pleasure, and the act of taking that pleasure entails defiance of dominant reading practices which attempt to shape the construction of meaning in our culture.²⁰

"Utterance" (gossip or women's talk) can be seen as a way of resisting dominant ideology, or language, which in this case means the dominant method of making meaning. Because the soap opera is about talk and encourages talk, or to use Brown's term, "utterance," it can be perceived as a way of breaking through the codes of patriarchy.

To summarize, the narrative structure of the soap opera allows the viewer to participate in the narrative and the multitude of storylines that are presented at any given time. In short, the narrative structure allows for diversity, in both content and possible relationships that the viewer may sustain with it. The soap opera narrative structure, then, may appeal to a large and diverse audience by allowing that audience to use the text in order to produce the pleasures associated with the viewer's own personal frame of reference and desires (in terms of what kinds of narrative pleasures the viewer is looking for when she is watching a soap opera and how the viewer fills in the syntagmatic gaps), as well as providing that audience with a diversity of storylines which appeal to different tastes for narrative types. There is however, a limited number of types of storylines used in the soap opera -- I do not mean to suggest that there are no generic limits. Most soap operas deal only with storylines that involve family problems and interpersonal (romantic or otherwise) relationships, though storylines often contain elements of mystery or crime and sometimes aspects of other genres like science fiction or horror. The soap narrative, because its chief method of unfolding is through talk or the revelation of secrets, appeals to culturally feminine pleasures associated with talk. The soap opera narrative also appeals to a feminine type of narrative pleasure that deals more with process than progression. This may be why even when there are summaries of future plotlines readily available to most viewers, viewers continue to watch in anticipation of how the characters will deal with the problems that the viewers already know will confront them. On the other hand, these plot summaries allow viewers to keep track of the plotlines even when they do not have the time to watch the soap operas, so that soap opera fans may continue to derive pleasure out of the soap opera narratives even if they watch infrequently. There is also the appeal of having storylines in different stages of progression; the viewer may obtain the pleasures associated with anticipation, resolution (real or apparent) and suspense all in the same episode. The

soap narrative provides a mixture of fantasy and reality, both of which appeal to the viewers. Its lack of narrative closure allows for ideological openness while its ideological boundaries limit the types of readings that can be made of a soap opera: the ideological openness allows the viewer to read the soap opera from her own perspective (which is pleasurable) while the ideological boundaries serve as limits which help the viewer conform to model readings. The viewer, then, weaves her way between the boundaries when making sense of the soap opera in a way which is most pleasurable to her. The narrative structure also explains why there are so many characters. The multiplicity of storylines requires a large number of characters to act in them, though the diversity of the characters in themselves may activate an entirely different set of pleasures.

Character Pleasures

The characters and their complex relationships to each other serve as the connecting points between the various storylines. There are usually over thirty characters to be found in any soap city, as well as a few characters who are "away" (on business, travelling, or to "find themselves.") It is the characters of the daytime serial that provide cohesion and continuity through time and across the plotlines. While the plotlines directly involve only limited amounts of characters, the other characters are generally present to react to the situations and to give them more colour and flavor. These "subsidiary" characters also act as the intimates of the characters that are in the spotlight, allowing the viewers to become acquainted with their (the main characters') inner feelings or plans for the future. This device may give the viewer a feeling of omnipotence, because only the viewer receives the confidences of all the characters. Thus, while these encounters between main characters and subsidiary characters may

seem to prolong the plot unnecessarily (to the uninitiated), they are an essential part of the soap opera's structure. They give the viewer a window on the character's psychic structure and the possibility that she understands the characters better than they understand themselves. This device of ensuring the viewer's access to the inner thoughts of characters is an important element of most television and film. The soap opera, however, uses it more frequently. Secrets and confessions are the motivating forces behind many of the plotlines. While in more traditional narratives, the secrets are revealed at the moment of resolution, in the soap opera it may take years, and the process of confiding in others who will share the secrets without revealing them ensures that they are not forgotten. Meanwhile, as Modleski points out, the process of listening to confessions (maybe partially because their effects are 'ambiguous') may point to a kind of pleasure to be found in language:

In soap operas . . . the effects of confession are often ambiguous, providing relief for some of the characters and dreadful complications for others. . . . Perhaps more than men, women in our society are aware of the pleasures of language -- though less sanguine about its potential use as an instrument of power.²¹

Modleski suggests that women are more aware of the pleasures of language -- this is because women are believed to use language in order to support and nurture one another as well as to try to understand each other, whereas men use language more sparingly, when it is necessary for communication to take place. Thinking about how each revelation or disclosure will affect each of the characters while a confession is taking place increases the pleasure that can be obtained in listening to a confession. Making connections and understanding shifting relationships are also part of the pleasure of listening to confessions.

The viewer, through listening to confessions and secrets, becomes well acquainted with all of the characters, both inside and out (the emphasis on extreme close-ups in the soap opera practically forces the viewer into recognizing every crack and blemish on each of

the characters' faces). If the characters retain a quality of realness, it is because the viewer becomes so intimate with them, perhaps more intimate than most people she or he encounters in daily life (mothers, children and lovers are probably the only people with which one can achieve such intimacy). Because of this intimacy, the viewer becomes aware of all the faults and qualities of each of the characters, and the feelings that she accumulates with regard to each character may become very strong. This is intensified by the fact that the viewer grows older with the characters, who may remain on a soap for the better part of the actor's adult life. The characters age in much the same way as the viewer does. And the relationships among the characters grow more complicated as they all grow older, giving them more time to form relationships with new people.

The majority of characters have multi-faceted or at least two-sided personalities. Most characters, whether "good" or "bad", display some contradictory traits. A "good" character will be "good" in all the wrong ways, or do "wrong things for the right reasons," while a "bad" character may only be bad to those people whom she or he feels hold a grudge against him or her. It has been suggested that one of the reasons that these characters are rarely one-sided is that there are several writers for each soap, each with slightly different perspectives of what kind of personality traits each character should have. Intintoli²² found that many actors also try to "play against the grain" of what their characters are supposed to be like, ensuring room for change in their characters later on. They rightfully believe that characters who are either too good or too bad disappear or die off quickly --- one-sided characters are not believable enough to last long in the soap world. All of these factors produce characters who have a highly believable or realistic mixture of vices and virtues (this is not to say that there are no characters that are "better" or more "evil" than others). Some soap operas, *The Young and the Restless*, for example, are less adept at portraying well-rounded characters than

others. For example, the character David has no redeeming virtues, apart from being physically attractive: he is a liar, a thief, a con-man and a murderer. Meanwhile, Cricket appears to have no faults -- she is intelligent, caring, honest, faithful and innocent. The contrast between David's "badness" and Cricket's "goodness" further intensifies each of their traits. It is possible that in some cases the viewers find it reassuring that some characters are entirely wholesome or entirely evil because it allows them to wholeheartedly hope for a just resolution. This would mean that the viewers do hope for some sort of ideological (and narrative) closure, which is the triumph of "good" over "evil." It is rare for complete closure to happen in these situations because while completely evil characters often die off, they are often "reincarnated" in the form of a villain who will take over where the last villain left. Thus, a viewer would hope that Cricket could expose David for the murdering schemer that he is and would feel justified for hating him and relieved if justice is done. While justice probably will not be done immediately in the way the viewer wishes it to happen, the viewer probably finds it pleasurable to be able to maintain strong feelings against David.

There are over thirty characters in each soap opera; this means that there is a good mixture of men and women characters of all ages, though the majority of the characters are between the ages of eighteen and forty. There is also a blend of characters of different ethnic backgrounds, though the ethnic blend may not be representative of society as a whole. Most of the characters are rather wealthy, from an upper-middle class environment. What this means is that the viewer seldom has to listen to the characters griping about financial concerns,²³ though some greedy characters are perpetrators of interesting plotlines. Lucy Coe Quartermaine of *General Hospital* tries to have affairs with wealthy men in order to obtain more money; she also used pregnancy as a form of blackmail to get money from her husband, Alan Quartermaine, who wanted to

divorce her. The characters' relative wealth allows them to dress well and to attend various formal affairs. Most of the characters work in the professions, so that their careers and places of work are excellent stages for conversations between characters (preferred careers are doctors, lawyers, detectives, and high-powered business executives). Doctors almost always work in hospitals, where relationships amongst themselves and with their patients are explored. Lawyers, on the other hand, are privy to many of the secrets of the other characters, and are often the first ones to learn of plans to divorce or marry and are trusted with various financial problems (trust funds, wills, questionable ownership of enterprises, etc.).

Types of characters of course differ from soap to soap -- few generalizations can be made about dominant types of characters because few characters are simple enough to be described with labels. The existence of at least two families that are rivals in some way or another (in business, usually, though often a past romance between family heads is an added or alternative cause of rivalry) is one of the only staples. Each of these families almost always has an older, matriarchal figure, whether she is benign and wise, or scheming and devious. (Kay Chancellor in *Y&R*, Rachel Cory in *AW*, Lila Quartermaine in *GH*: Rachel, Lila and Kay had been scheming and devious when they were younger, which is what got them where they are now, but they are all benign and wise at present.) Most of these strong female characters are lonely because they are too rich and powerful (and therefore man-like) to attract the kind of men with whom they are interested in having relationships. Apart from this matriarchal figure, the only other type of character that is consistent throughout the soaps is the existence of an attractive young male villain who takes advantage of the innocence of rich young women or lonely yet still rich older women. (Jake in *Another World*, Edge in *General Hospital*, David in *The Young and the Restless*.)

There are several different kinds of pleasures associated with the way in which characters are developed in the soap opera. The first, and most obvious pleasure, is that of voyeurism. While the concept of voyeurism was initially developed in film theory, it can be used in discussing television, as it deals with the pleasure of looking, although the way that voyeurism is being used here differs greatly from the way it has been used in film theory. In film, voyeurism describes the sustained gaze and explains a relationship of power between the viewer and the text (where the viewer feels empowered because of "his" gaze). In the case of television, or at least in the present context, I am using voyeurism to refer to the way the viewer is allowed to view and listen to the private lives of the characters. While voyeurism also refers to the pleasure of looking (at beautiful objects or bodies) without having the look returned or acknowledged (the pleasure stems partly from the knowledge that the gaze can be prolonged to what is usually forbidden in real life situations), this is not how it is being used here; this way of understanding voyeurism will be termed the "pleasure of looking". Voyeurism, then, as described above (seeing and listening without being seen or heard), entails the pleasurable omnipotent feeling of being able to be everywhere and see and hear everything. This position, of knowing everything any character knows, is a powerful one for the viewer, because in soap operas it is the holders of secrets who are in positions of power. The "pleasure of looking," on the other hand, refers to the spectacle of the male body (dressed or undressed) and that of the female body dressed in beautiful gowns most likely beyond the means of the viewer, or dressed in lingerie, in which case the viewer may be experiencing pleasure in looking and living vicariously along with the character.

A second type of pleasure associated with characters is that of identification. Identification occurs when the viewer feels as if she could be put in the position of a character. This may occur because the viewer identifies with the character on an

emotional basis, for example crying with the character while he/she is going through a traumatic experience, or feeling joy when the character hears good news. Emotional identification is probably the easiest to attain. Identification may also occur if the character lives through an experience similar to one that the viewer has had (situational identification). Identification with the motivation of characters is also important, for example, identifying with a character's desire to become a successful career woman (motivational identification). For motivational identification to occur, it is not necessary for the viewer to agree with the character's methods of attaining the desired goal. For example, a viewer may identify with a female character's desire to get the attention of a particular man, but not agree with the actions she takes in order to achieve this (like stealing his car). Another type of identification occurs if a character's age, gender, race and/or social situation are the same or similar to those of the viewer (positional identification). While it is rare for a viewer to have all of these traits in common with a character, positional identification can occur if the viewer feels one or a couple of these traits is what identifies her as different from most people. For example, teenagers probably easily attain positional identification with teenage characters despite the other differences between them and the characters because being adolescents is what differentiates them as a group, and is often more important to them than race or social status.

Fascination is another possible relationship between the viewer and the characters. Viewers who do not identify with certain characters may relate to them via fascination. Characters that are fantastic or excessive are probably more likely to be looked at with fascination on the part of the viewers. These types of characters include the extremely wealthy, foreigners, exaggerated characters (whose personalities are one-sided -- either too good or too evil) and others who do not lead lives that the viewers are personally familiar with (for example, Robert Scorpio, who is often involved in

outlandish criminal investigations). Viewers may also be fascinated by how different characters act in familiar situations, for example, how a character reacts to the discovery that his wife is having an affair. This fascination extends to the lives of the actors as well, whose lives can be quite exotic compared to those of the viewers (in the fanzines there are photo-spreads of honeymoons to tropical locales, and parties where soap actors are brushing elbows with the rich and famous).

Another pleasure associated with the characters has to do with the actors themselves -- following the gossip about the "real lives" of the soap characters as told in the various fanzines, or reading articles about the actors and what they think about their characters. This could be voyeurism, as well, in the sense that looking at someone's -- a soap star's -- private life is voyeuristic. The soap magazines often take advantage of voyeurism, showing full colour photographs of the soap actors dressed up for parties or benefits.

Voyeurism, fascination and identification are not necessarily mutually exclusive -- when the voyeurism is based on the spectacle of feminine accoutrements of style, identification (for the female viewer: identifying with the process of dressing up) and fascination (because the viewer is unlikely to have as lavish reasons for dressing up or as expensive or beautiful clothing) are also involved. This is one of the ways in which soap operas articulate a specifically feminine pleasure (male viewers are unlikely to feel that double construction of pleasure as readily as women; it is likely that heterosexual male viewers will feel pleasure in looking at the women dressed up, but will not identify with them as easily).

Voyeurism (listening to and watching the private lives of the characters) and the pleasurable feeling of having the power of knowledge over the characters was discussed above in relation to narrative pleasures. Voyeurism, then, has little to do with character pleasures. The pleasure in looking, however, is an important element in

understanding why soap opera characters are the way they are. This is the main reason why the great majority of characters on soap operas are extremely beautiful (though beauty is relative, it is reasonable to assume that most of the actors were chosen as much for the way they look as for their acting talent). Acknowledging that the audience is mostly composed of heterosexual women, soap operas (and the discourses surrounding them) play upon the physical attractiveness of the male characters in such a way as to promote female desire. For example, attractive men often find excuses to take their shirts off: Brad, during the opening sequence of the *Young and the Restless*, is shown bare-chested. And, it is usually men who have stage careers: Danny Romalotti of *Y&R*, Dean Frame of *Another World*, and Frisco Jones of *General Hospital*, are all rock stars or aspiring rock stars. This male on-stage presence works in a similar way to the female on-stage presence in classical Hollywood cinema, as discussed by Laura Mulvey in her article *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*.²⁴ Mulvey suggests that male viewers identify with male characters while the male characters form part of an audience looking at a female stage performer, which reinforces the pleasure of looking at the female performer. The reverse happens in the soap opera. The use of the male body is especially evident in the network advertisements for the soap operas, where the attention of the potential viewer is grabbed through the use of the "attractive" male actors (young, healthy, muscular and well-groomed). CBS's current advertisement -- "Who says a good man is hard to find . . ." -- is an example of this. Soap magazines also attract readers with their full-page colour photographs of "Sex-sational men"²⁵ Male viewers may not be lured to the audience through this device, but it must be kept in mind that female characters are also extremely beautiful and there is great pleasure for both genders in looking at beautiful people despite their sex.

Another way in which the spectacle is a vehicle of pleasure for the female viewer is through the use of style and dress. While "style" is emphasized in even ordinary

situations in the soap opera (most of the actresses always dress "well" -- fashionably and expensively), there are frequent formal occasions when characters dress exceptionally elaborately. These formal occasions are sometimes obviously staged for the sake of spectacle (though they are also used in order to bring much of the cast of characters together in one location). *Y&R*, in particular, is fond of creating formal occasions (frequent dinners at the expensive and exclusive Collonnade Room). While the pleasures associated with these formal occasions work mainly on a specular level for male viewers, they also work on an identificatory level for the female viewers, who may identify with the process of dressing, doing the hair, putting on the jewels, and otherwise trying to look as attractive as possible. The viewers may also identify with the anxieties that the characters have about their position as spectacle for the male gaze -- they usually seek assurance that they are indeed attractive. The spectacular aspects of dressing are magnified by the fact that most soap opera watchers would never be able to permit themselves (or afford) such lavish clothing and jewels (their fascination with the characters may allow them to vicariously experience what it would be like to wear glittery full-length ball gowns decorated with gold and jewels). Thus the spectator's possible desire to attend formal gatherings (or to wear the clothing appropriate to such occasions) is both vicariously fulfilled and perpetuated by the soap opera. As mentioned above, *Y&R* is the soap opera that makes the most use out of this type of spectacle. The spectacle of bourgeois female style, along with the identification with the character's desire to be glamorous and attractive or a fascination with this desire, may serve as one of the ways in which soap operas get more viewers interested, if *Y&R*'s popularity is any indication of this. This use of spectacle on the soap opera may be one of the things most easily criticized by feminists because it seems to perpetuate stereotypes of women wishing to be glamorous and attractive to men. While it may be true that perpetuating those desires and stereotypes is counter-productive to feminism (by encouraging women

to dress in such a way as to please men and not for themselves), it must be remembered that glamour is only one pleasurable aspect of the soap opera as a genre.

In addition to the pleasure of looking are pleasures stemming from identification with the characters. Because there is such a great diversity of characters in terms of both their specific positions in society (gender, class, age, etc.) and their personality types, positional identification with at least one character is likely. Above and beyond positional identification, however, is an identification with characters that the structure of the soap opera seeks to reinforce by its very nature (the invitation to take part in the narrative); viewers are asked to identify with characters on an emotional basis in order to understand the motivations of the characters despite their actions. This is an aspect of any melodrama which relies on emotional intimacy with characters. There are, then, various levels of identification with characters, the strongest probably being present when the character is both similar in position to the viewer and in a position in the soap opera that seeks to stimulate (emotional and/or motivational) identification on the part of the audience.

Identification with a character can prove to be both quite pleasurable and somewhat aggravating. Identification with a character is more often pleasing if the character is not suffering, although there may be a sort of pleasure provoked by identifying with a character who is heartbroken, even if that character is suffering. Emotional identification can be gratifying and even pleasurable, even if the emotion that one is identifying with is sorrow or pain. This is probably because it allows for emotional release (often this is termed "escapism"), which can be very pleasurable despite the emotion involved.

Another reason why identification can be aggravating is that it (identification) tends to diminish the pleasure that stems from the feeling of omnipotence which the position of

spectator seeks to encourage. That is, identification with characters, if it is too strong, discourages the viewer from having the privileged position of understanding or seeing the motivations behind all the characters' words and actions. It also discourages viewing with an "ironic attitude." Modleski discusses identification in terms of the feeling of disempowerment it may generate:

If, as Mulvey claims, the identification of the spectator with 'a main male protagonist' results in the spectator's becoming 'the representative of power,' the multiple identification which occurs in soap opera results in the spectator's being divested of power. For the spectator is never permitted to identify with a character completing an entire action. Instead of giving us one 'powerful ideal ego ... who can make things happen and control events better than the subject/spectator can,' soap operas present us with numerous limited egos, each in conflict with the others, and continually thwarted in its attempts to control events because of inadequate knowledge of other peoples' plans, motivations, and schemes. Sometimes, indeed, the spectator, frustrated by the sense of powerlessness induced by soap operas, will, like an interfering mother, try to control events directly.²⁶

The spectator, however, is aware (has adequate knowledge) of "other peoples' plans motivations and schemes," because she is given the opportunity to listen to each of the character's confidences and to watch them as they begin to plan or scheme. So, although the spectator is never allowed to dwell comfortably in identification with a single character because of that character's position of power, the spectator herself has the power of knowledge above the characters, which may give her or him a pleasurable feeling of superiority over the characters. The sense of powerlessness that Modleski describes would probably only occur if the spectator over-identified with one or a handful of characters, losing some of the empowerment that voyeurism entails. This kind of over-identification has been known to exist -- there are acknowledged occurrences of soap opera fans who believed that the characters were real and tried to warn them of plots against them. In these cases, the fan loses sight of where her privileged position of omnipotence comes from. Modleski's criticism of the viewer's sense of powerlessness also neglects that since the soap opera is a feminine genre and

classic Hollywood cinema is a traditionally masculine genre, the process of identification is different. Women are accustomed to feeling powerless (this may explain the appeal of masculine genres to women -- they are allowed to experience vicariously the power that the male characters in the film are endowed with); a genre, such as the soap opera or romance novel, in which the characters are somewhat powerless, may reflect the reality of the powerless conditions that most women, and many men, live in. This is not to say that a feeling of powerlessness is pleasurable -- rather, the powerlessness is not as displeasurable or uncomfortable as it would at first seem. This is partially because this powerlessness reflects the powerlessness most viewers probably experience in reality (as opposed to some sort of male fantasy of being all-powerful that exists in Hollywood cinema), and partially because, while there is no power associated with identifying with a single "powerful ideal ego", the viewer is empowered by the knowledge that she or he has over the characters in the soap opera. There is also a feeling of power that comes from knowing secrets; a character that holds the power of knowledge over others may be pleasurable to identify with. Conversely, there may be a thrill involved with identifying with characters who do not have knowledge that the viewer has -- the thrill of being in suspense or attempting to go through the emotions that the character has in relation to the situation. Identification is not the only way in which viewers relate to characters, either: there is also fascination.

There is, therefore, a balance between identification, fascination and voyeurism that allows for a greater production of pleasure in watching soap operas. If over-identification occurs, the spectator may go so far as to believe the character is 'real', and try to warn the character of ensuing danger -- she (he) may feel the desire or the need to control (interfere with) the narrative so that a pleasurable identification with that character can be maintained. On the other hand, without any identification with the characters, the viewer is not producing some of the possible pleasures associated with

watching soap operas. Emotional release, associated with emotional identification, for example, is left out. There is one important pleasure, however, associated with the empowerment of voyeurism and a lack of (or diminished) identification with characters: pleasures that stem from an ironic viewing attitude. It is likely that most soap opera viewers drift in and out of different types or levels of identification, fascination and voyeurism producing a multiplicity of different ways of relating to the different characters in any given episode. Since each of these ways of relating to characters will differ according to the individual viewer and the specific character, the viewer is likely to relate to characters in ways that will produce the most pleasure for her. It may happen that a viewer is relating to a particular character in all three ways at once. For example, a viewer may be fascinated by Ashley Abbott's (*Y&R*) beauty, intelligence and wealth, and find looking at her pleasurable, while identifying with her on different levels. A viewer might identify with her emotionally when she feels upset about her marriage falling apart. Motivational identification may occur when Ashley tries to take control of the situation to get her husband's trust and affection back. The same viewer may, however, find it impossible to fully identify with Ashley because her character is virtually flawless and quite unrealistic (Ashley is "too perfect"). Thus, there is a sort of dialectic between fantasy (Ashley's perfection) and realism (her marital difficulties, which may be similar to those of many viewers) that create different viewer relations to her character, with fascination relating to fantasy and identification relating to realism. This dialectic fulfills the viewer's desire for fantasy as well as the viewer's wish to see pertinent storylines that can be related to daily life.

Visual Pleasures

Visual pleasures consist of two things: the voyeurism discussed above, and the pure aesthetic pleasure of looking at something which is visually pleasing. While more traditional soap operas remain visually stark (the only things worth looking at are the actors and their facial expressions; the sets are plain), visual style is becoming more elaborate and consequently more important to the success of a soap opera (if the success of *The Young and the Restless* is any indication). Usually the visual aspects of the soap opera are "transparent" (sets and locations are only noticeable insofar as they indicate where the characters are -- a house, a hospital, a lawyer's office) except for the looks of the actors and the way they are dressed. However, each soap opera has its own distinctive visual style; some soaps are quite obviously more aesthetically pleasing than others. The "look" of a soap opera, along with its storylines and characters, is becoming one of its defining characteristics. It is rare, however, for something to be visually displeasing; usually the sets, the fashion, the lighting, etc., are used either in neutral or aesthetically pleasing ways.

Ironic pleasures

The idea of ironic pleasure is based on what Ien Ang calls the 'ironic viewing attitude'. In *Watching Dallas*, Ang presents an ethnographic study of the viewers of *Dallas*; her motivating question is "How does *Dallas* present itself as pleasurable?". She printed an ad in the Dutch magazine *Viva* in which she expressed her ambivalence about the program and asked the viewers of *Dallas* to write to her, expressing what they thought about the program. She received 42 responses -- only three of the replies were by men or boys; the rest were by women and girls. She then went on to do a "symptomatic" analysis of these letters, and found that most of the readers fell into one of three groups

in regard to their feelings toward *Dallas* -- those who liked it straight and mostly took it at its face value; those who intensely disliked it and could give reasons why; and those who liked to mock it, because although they recognized what the faults of the program were, they found it pleasurable to watch.²⁷ This last group of viewers watched with what she termed the "ironic viewing attitude." These people often found the characters of *Dallas* unbelievable either because of their exaggerated characters or because of the unbelievability of the entire framework (the plots, the settings) of *Dallas* and would find occasion to ridicule the show's characters.

People who watch with this ironic viewing attitude maintain a distance from the characters (they do not form any strong identifications with them, or only enough identification in order to be able to understand what is going on), which gives them a power associated with "omnipotent" voyeurism. These spectators would make fun of the characters when they appeared on the program, and claim they were not seduced by the world of *Dallas*. Their claim, however, is unjustified, for they continued to watch *Dallas* anyhow because of the pleasure associated with the "ironic viewing attitude."²⁸ According to Ang, most of the people who described their viewing habits in the manner that she interpreted as "ironic" were aware of the "ideology of mass culture." They knew they were not supposed to like *Dallas*, because of its popularity and its American-ness. Watching with an ironic viewing attitude allowed them to reconcile the pleasure of watching the program with the ideology (of mass culture) that they adhered to. Keeping a distance between themselves and the program allowed them to maintain a sense of superiority (over the people that mass culture is assumed to be directed toward) and the pretense that they were not being seduced (as the other millions of *Dallas* fans were) by the program.

This "ironic viewing attitude" and the pleasures associated with watching a program with that kind of perspective are very important to the soap opera genre. In some cases, the

soap opera encourages the viewer to take up the ironic viewing attitude (*General Hospital* does this in scenes with Lucy Coe by making her character excessive in every way); in other cases, the viewer chooses to take the position herself, probably because the character or characters toward whom this viewer takes up the position are difficult for her to identify with. When identification does not occur, a character loses his or her credibility and sheds any semblance to a 'real' person -- the illusion of a parallel reality on the other side of the television screen cannot be maintained and the character becomes a caricature. This is what happens with characters that are too one-sided in their personalities (too angelic or too evil), or characters that are inserted into the soap opera narrative to create comic effects (maids are often caricatured in this sense - characters who are on the periphery to the main storylines but who often serve as confidants; Esther, Kay Chancellor's maid from *Y&R*, is an example).

Most of the pleasure that arises from the ironic viewing attitude is associated with laughter, mocking, and a sense of superiority over the characters. The viewer feels superior because she relies on the empowerment that is associated with listening/voyeurism without tempering it with the disempowerment that identification fosters. The viewer is more likely to be fascinated with characters viewed with an ironic attitude rather than identify with them. The viewer may also feel superior because she knows that the producers of the soap opera are not seducing her; she may feel empowered for having "resisted" seduction. Because soaps sometimes insert a couple of characters that are intended to be viewed ironically, or at least comically, this resistance to seduction is not, in fact, taking place. "Ironic" or self-mocking characters are meant to seduce viewers through their irony, so that viewers who intentionally view with an ironic attitude, who think that they are resisting the form of the soap opera, may not always be resisting -- they are in fact reading the text in the way that its producers intended them to. For some viewers, this serves only to remind them that the soap opera

is seducing them and this causes a form of discomfort (when the soap opera is self-mocking, but the viewer generally takes it seriously, the viewer is forced into questioning the form that she might have preferred to take for granted). Probably, the more "sophisticated" the viewer (sophisticated here means being aware of attitudes taken while watching a program or understanding the viewing relationship one has with the program), the more she will enjoy viewing with an ironic attitude (and being aware of it). The pleasure that is produced by the ironic viewing attitude is very much a part of the pleasure of control, of feeling superior to the text (whether or not the superiority is illusory).

An important element of this ironical viewing attitude is the supplying of commentary. According to Michel Foucault commentary is a type of discourse that has the aim of dominating the object: by supplying commentary to something one affirms a superior relation to that object.²⁹

Because the pleasure that a viewer may construct with the help of the ironic viewing attitude relies heavily on a feeling of superiority and controlling the text through providing commentary (if the text itself is not providing its own self-mocking commentary), it is often most easily produced when the soap opera is being viewed in a group or may be commented about with friends who watch the same programme. This leads to the pleasures that are produced in a social viewing context.

Social pleasures

The soap opera consciously walks the line between texts that can be read as fiction and those which, for various reasons, constantly spill over into the experiential world of the viewer as few, if any, other fictions do.³⁰

There are several ways in which a soap opera may be extended, on the part of the viewer, outside of the context of a one-to-one relationship between the individual viewer and the soap opera text. Most of these extensions encourage the viewer to derive more pleasure

from the soap opera. One of these extensions is discussed above in relation to the ironic viewing attitude. Other extensions include watching in groups, reading the magazines devoted to soap operas, talking to fellow watchers about the soap, and feeling part of the larger soap viewing community (which includes participating in soap-sponsored activities such as conventions and cruises).

Watching soaps in groups is particularly common of the college age watchers who generally share TV sets or watch in common rooms. (It is likely that more college age men watch soap operas because of this viewing situation; since so many other people are watching, principally women, young heterosexual men become more interested in watching them with these women -- part of it may also be curiosity as to why all those people watch soap operas or because soap operas come on at a time that coincides with their daily schedules.)

Soap opera audience research indicates that some audience groups -- most notably college students -- prefer to watch soaps with other viewers, thus making a public viewing situation in a dorm lounge or union television room into a social reading act.³¹

Other people listen together on the radio at the work-place. Watching in groups often proves to be pleasurable because it increases the possibility of watching with an ironic viewing attitude or of feeling in control of the text. Some members of the group can also provide insight into the storylines if other members are not as well versed in the history of the soap or its characters. Some people who watch soaps in groups probably derive more pleasure from activity with their friends than out of watching the soap opera (such as the possible male viewers above).

Even if the individual viewer does not watch in a group, she may be in contact with other friends or acquaintances who enjoy the same soap opera. Talking about the soap with friends is one of the more important pleasures of watching. This also enhances viewing with an ironic attitude and the prediction of future events. It allows the viewers to share

insights into the personality traits of the characters and to comment on their consistency or lack thereof. Viewing with groups or talking about soaps with friends sometimes takes on the quality of a game to see who can point out any subtle changes or faults with the program.

Being a soap watcher also gives an individual access to other activities, many of them pleasurable, that are soap opera related. Reading the magazines is the most obvious of these pleasures; the magazines not only assist the viewer in clarifying relationships between the characters and helping her predict future events, but also allows the viewer to gain access to the private lives of the actors (through close-ups, interviews and gossip columns). Most magazines (*Daytime TV*, *Soap Opera Update*, and *Soap Opera Weekly*, for example) include "previews" of what is to come and "reviews" of what has been happening in all the soap operas, allowing the viewers to keep track of all the developments in their favourite programs without having to watch every day. The viewer is encouraged to write letters to the magazines, either to complain or compliment the programs that she watches.

There are several activities that involve getting to know the stars, including tours to shopping malls, television and magazine interviews, cruises (spend a week on a boat with the cast of *General Hospital*), conventions (where soap aficionados from across North America can meet each other), and photo-spreads of the real families or friends of the actors (often times the real husbands and wives of the actors are their soap husbands and wives, as is the case with Frisco --Jack Wagner^L and Felicia Jones -- Kristina Malandro -- of *GH*).

The key to social pleasures is that they give the viewer a sense of control (real or fictive) over the narrative of the soap opera. They highlight the fact that the viewer is not alone, that the viewer is not a single person trying to search for her own individual

pleasure. The social experiences of soap opera viewing allow the viewers to create experience out of the act of watching the programs and to generate their own meanings as to what soaps are about (it allows them to create their own discourses about the soap opera which may be different from the popular myths surrounding soaps -- they can re-define what it means to be a soap opera viewer for themselves).

Another pleasure that soap opera viewers may negotiate that relates to the social sphere is the family bond that the characters of a soap city have amongst themselves and the viewer enters when she tunes into the world on the other side of the television screen. Because extended families are rare in the 1990s, the soap opera viewer may enjoy seeing an extended family on the soap opera -- the viewer may even feel as if she has adopted the soap opera families as her own extended family. It fulfills a longing or a fantasy for the kind of family community that has become unusual for most people.³² It can be argued that the present society cuts the bonds of the extended family and that the soap opera allows those who feel the need for those bonds to maintain them.

This is one of the ways in which the soap opera is used by those who feel lonely. Numerous psychology related articles outline the possible therapeutic values of soap opera viewing and discuss the potential benefits of the ways in which the genre helps to make the viewer feel as if she is part of a larger family.³³ One of the other benefits of soap viewing that the psychoanalysts suggest is that of releasing tension or escaping from everyday problems.

Escapist pleasures

Many people claim to enjoy popular culture simply because it allows them to 'escape'.³⁴ But to 'escape' may mean several different things, including relaxing, having time to one's self, releasing tension, shutting off the world, shutting off the mind, or being

allowed to let one's emotions reign free. Possibly it is because popular culture is often used for the pleasure of escaping that it has so often been criticized, particularly by Marxists who would prefer to see people politicized or working toward material change than turning on the set and tuning out.

The pleasure afforded by escape, even in reference to the soap opera, is accessible to anyone -- it does not require as much participation on the part of the viewer (though it may be argued that the more the viewer engages her mind in the text of the soap opera, the less room she has for dwelling on her real day-to-day problems). It may be, in fact, the search for escape that initially leads the viewer to the search for tomorrow. It could be that after watching the soap opera for escape, the viewer realizes that the text allows for (and stimulates) the production of greater or more expansive pleasures. The viewer would then find the soap opera genre more appealing and return to it more often.

Summary

In short, there are several different categories of pleasure related to watching soap operas that are specific to the genre. Narrative pleasures include pleasures related to the diversity of storylines, the method of narrative progression (conversation), the staggered stages of narrative progression due to the diversity of storylines, and the dialectic between realism and fantasy. Character pleasure deals with the ways in which viewers relate to characters, through identification, fascination and voyeurism. Visual pleasures occur because soap operas are televised and address the pleasures of looking. Ironic, social and escapist pleasures describe viewing contexts and attitudes toward viewing.

The next chapter will use these categories of pleasures in order to describe three soap operas in terms of how they articulate these pleasures or seek to take advantage of them in order to increase, or keep, their audiences. Viewer reactions to aspects of each of

these soaps will be looked at as a check on which pleasures seem to be most important to them, particularly in relation to the soaps they speak about.

-
- ¹ Allen, Robert C , *Speaking of Soap Operas*
 - ² Allen, p 120, quoting Ellen Seiter
 - ³ Modleski, Tania, *Loving with a Vengeance*, pp 87 and 102
 - ⁴ Ibid , p 101
 - ⁵ Flitterman, Sandy, "The Real Soap Operas TV Commercials", pp 93-94
 - ⁶ Allen and Fiske both mention the videotaping of soap operas There are several references to videotaping soaps in order to be watched at later dates by the soap operas fans in their letters to *Soap Opera Weekly*
 - ⁷ Both Ien Ang and Allen support this.
 - ⁸ Allen, *Speaking of Soap Operas*, p81
 - ⁹ *Soap Opera Weekly*, 02-19-91
 - ¹⁰ *Soap Opera Weekly*, 02-26-91.
 - ¹¹ *Soap Opera Weekly*, 05-07-91.
 - ¹² Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance*, p 107.
 - ¹³ Modleski, "The Rhythms of Reception".
 - ¹⁴ Fiske, *Television Culture*, p92
 - ¹⁵ Allen, *Speaking of Soap Operas*
 - ¹⁶ *Soap Opera Weekly*, 01-22-91.
 - ¹⁷ Intintoli, Michael J , *Taking Soaps Seriously*
 - ¹⁸ *Soap Opera Weekly*, 01-22-91
 - ¹⁹ *Soap Opera Weekly*, 04-16-91.
 - ²⁰ Brown, Mary Ellen, "Molley Moments; Sosp Opera, Carnival, Gossip and the Power of the Utterance," p. 198
 - ²¹ Modleski, Tania, *Loving with a Vengeance*, p107
 - ²² Intintoli, Michael James, *Taking Soaps Seriously: The World of Guiding Light*

23 Recently, (May 1991) *GH* has changed considerably, due to a change in producers. Gloria Monty, the new producer, has changed the cast considerably in order to have a large amount of working class characters. As a result, *GH*'s ratings are dropping quickly, (see appendix) though it is difficult to determine if it is because there were too many changes too fast or because the storylines are now centered around working-class characters.

24 Mulvey, Laura, "Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema"

25 *Soap Opera Update*, 2-04-91

18 Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance*, p 91

27 Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas*, Pages 1-14, p96

28 Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas*

29 *Ibid.*, p 96

30 Allen, Robert, "On Reading Soaps: A Semiotic Primer", p 105

31 Allen, Robert, *Speaking of Soap Operas*, p81

32 Modleski, Tania, *Loving with a Vengeance*, p108

33 Kilguss, A. F. -- (1974) "Using Soaps as a Therapeutic Tool", *Social Casework* 55

Kilguss, A. F. -- (1977) "Therapeutic Use of a Soap Opera Discussion Group with Psychiatric Inpatients", *Clinical Social Work Journal* 5

Lazarus, H.R. and Bienlein, D.K. -- (1967) "Soap Opera Therapy" *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy* 17

Falk-Kessler, J. and Froshauer, K.M. (1978) "The Soap Opera: A Dynamic Group Approach for Psychiatric Patients" *American Journal of Occupational Therapy* 32

34 Radway, Compesi.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Soap Operas

The various categories of pleasures (narrative, character, visual) associated primarily with the soap opera text and with the viewer's reading relationship to it (either social, "ironic attitude", or escapist) apply differently for individual viewers. These pleasures are also different according to the soap opera texts -- the different texts encourage (or allow for) different degrees of pleasure and stimulate different responses depending not only on the viewer but also on the soap opera. To those unacquainted with soap operas, their similarities are more evident than their differences. To the viewers, however, the differences become more important, and are difficult to dismiss. Subtle differences in style, types of storylines, and development of characters can turn the viewers "on" to or "off" the soaps.

Soap Opera Update recently printed a survey about which soaps the viewers started or stopped watching and why. The four soaps for which the magazine listed the "turn ons" and "turn offs" are: *Loving*, *One Life to Live*, *Santa Barbara*, and *The Young and the Restless*. For *Loving*, both the "turn ons" and the "turn offs" were the acting. For *OLTL*, the "turn on" was a murder mystery plotline, and the "turn off" was the slow pace of the story lines. For *SB*, the "turn on" was actor Robert Barr, and the "turn off" was the quality of the storylines. *Y&R*'s greatest asset was the consistency of the characters and its greatest fault was the length of the storylines.¹ Clearly the characters, actors, and storylines were the things that the viewers either liked or disliked about the soap operas (they did not discuss the visual styles of the various soaps).

Obviously, different viewers have different reasons for watching soaps. They express divergent opinions on why they prefer certain soaps over others. While they tend to complain about or praise the same types of things (acting, characters, storylines), what they find pleasurable about these things can vary greatly. One person's favourite actor can be another's most despised, for example. Because of this, the comments of the viewers (in their letters to the magazines and in surveys done by the magazines) prove useful in elucidating what aspects of soap watching can be pleasurable. What follows is a look at three soap operas, *The Young and the Restless*, *General Hospital*, and *Another World*. Their plotlines, characters and visual style will all be discussed, since these are apparently the things that the viewers consider important when choosing which soap opera to watch.

First, a brief look at what their audiences are supposed to consist of, according to Mateleski in *The Soap Opera Evolution*, will create a demographic picture of who watches which soap opera. While the statistics being used here may be incomplete, partially because they are out of date, partially because of the small sample that Mateleski used in her research, and partially because it is nearly impossible to get accurate figures on a shifting television audience, the figures do nonetheless point to general trends in audience composition.

Currently, *Y&R* is the number one soap opera, with *GH* close behind in second place (until March 1991). *AW* is trailing far behind at ninth place. 2

The Young and the Restless

The Young and the Restless seemed strongest in viewer appeal for the women in the 21-45 age group. When asked about this soap, most said they like the wealth, glamour and fantasy-like lives of the characters . . . Popular plotlines between 1983 and 1985 included pregnancy/parenthood issues, romantic rebounding, heroes vs villains, and high-powered careers and finance.³

The Plotlines

The current plotlines on *The Young and the Restless* involve a few major stories and their spin-offs that involve larger groups of characters. As usual, the plotlines are intertwined because the past histories of all the characters are complicated and they are all in some way related. One of the longest standing plotlines in *Y&R* (from at least December 1988, when I started watching it) is the feud between Victor Newman and Jack Abbott. Both are extremely wealthy, attractive, powerful and intelligent businessmen. They have hated each other for years and try to ruin each other's lives on both financial and emotional levels. To complicate matters, Victor is married to Ashley (Jack's sister of whom he is particularly protective) and Jack is married to Nikki (Victor's ex-wife and the mother of his only children, Nicholas and Victoria). Through manipulation and devious deals, Victor has gained control of the Abbott family's cosmetics company, Jabot. Currently, Jack is using Ashley to try to regain control of Jabot. Nikki and Ashley have become pawns in Victor and Jack's vicious power game. Others have also become involved, most notably Brad Carlton, top executive of Jabot and Victor's heir-apparent. Brad was married to Traci Abbott (sister of Jack and Ashley), but was recently tricked into marrying Cassandra Rollins, soon before reconciling with Traci. Apparently, Cassandra and Jack plotted this together -- Cassandra wanted Brad, and Jack wanted him out of the way. This particular plotline or sub-plot seems to be very irritating to viewers:

[A] problem *Y&R* viewers have is the fiasco of a marriage between Brad and Cassandra. "The marriage between Brad and Cassandra is so silly! She is such a vicious character, and I think that between her and Traci, the latter is much more appealing," proclaims R. Lynch in Washington, D.C. Exclaims Agnes in Tennessee, "Brad married Cassandra at gun point? Get real!" The Miles family in California agrees, "It's really stupid that a minister or priest is dumb enough to go through with a ceremony like this." Dee in California thinks that, "this manipulation of Cassandra's has gone a little too far. How many times is Brad going to hurt Traci? Why doesn't he just hire Paul to find out what really happened?"

"MAIL CALL"⁴

"Mail Call" is a forum that the editor of *Soap Opera Weekly* writes in order to summarize opinions held by several soap viewers. She summarizes what the majority of the letters' main points are. Recently, it appears that more and more viewers of *Y&R* are growing disillusioned with its plotlines; this example of the Brad and Cassandra storyline is but one of the things that is currently irritating many *Y&R* fans. The writers of *SOW* also keep abreast of the latest happenings in all of the soaps, and each week they pick out the best and the worst elements of the week. They shared the same opinion as their fans when it came to the Brad and Cassandra storyline:

Miss ... Brad and Cassandra on *The Young and the Restless*

Can someone please explain why *Y&R* decided to put these two together? They make a good-looking couple, but that's about it. They lack chemistry and their scenes together are dreadfully stale.

This storyline is also filled with countless inconsistencies, which make this Barbie Doll duo even more difficult to swallow. Cassandra went from heroine to villainess overnight, and her drugging of Brad gave me a massive bout of déjà vu. Remember when Lisa -- another blonde-haired, porcelain-faced villainess -- spiked Brad's drink and slipped into bed with him two years ago? Cassandra not only bedded Brad, but married him in the process, making golden boy look even more lame.

To boot, this dubious twist comes on the heels of Sheila's drug-induced seduction of Scott, who, like Brad, woke up with a headache and unconvincingly bought the, "you drank too much," line. And didn't Nina pull the same trick (minus the mickey) on Phillip three years ago? Boy, has *Y&R* given new meaning to recycling plots!

"Hit or Miss" ⁵

Another major plotline involves rich young heiress Nina Chancellor and her conniving husband, David. They married about a year ago with a strict pre-nuptial agreement. David is now trying to adopt her son and heir, little Phillip, which will allow him to have some of her money. Everyone tries to warn Nina (as they have been for about a year) of his deceitful personality -- these friends include Jill Abbott, Kay Chancellor, and Cricket and Danny Romalotti -- but she is blinded by love and will not heed their warnings. This aspect of the Nina-David storyline has many spinoffs, because he tries to destroy the lives of all of Nina's friends so that she will not trust them. Cricket and Danny's marriage, for example, was put off for months because of one of David's schemes. Fans of *Y&R* have found this storyline to be excessively unbelievable and long:

Fans of *The Young and the Restless* are getting a little tired of watching David get away with all his evil deeds "How long will he last -- until he kills everyone on the show?" asks a Connecticut fan. A California viewer is wondering "Aren't there any police? He's killed two women and still no one is wise to him."

MAIL CALL⁶

One of the other current storylines involves the newly arrived African American characters Nathan, Olivia, and Drucilla, in a classic love triangle with sibling rivalry thrown in. Olivia and Drucilla (long lost and newly found sisters -- Dru is the "bad" one) both love Nathan, but he loves Olivia. Dru is going through a pygmalionesque reformation to gain his affections, and it appears to be successful so far.

Another storyline handles a love triangle. Young Doctor Scott Granger had a one-night stand with attractive nurse Sheila; she became pregnant. Meanwhile, his wife Lauren became pregnant. Lauren found out about Sheila's pregnancy and asked Scott for a divorce, though she still loves him. Scott does not know that Lauren is pregnant. Sheila is having a miscarriage. The plotline suggests that there is a possibility for future reconciliation between Scott and Lauren.

The last major plotline involves a bit of comic relief. Advice columnist Leanna Love has captured gallant and charming Rex Sterling's attention, but being a pseudo-feminist and frightened by men (she is the kind of person that fits some of the stereotypes of feminists: she fears men and believes that "all men are scum." She does not, however, try to fight for women's rights), she refuses to have sex with him. This plotline involves several humorous scenes where Rex tries to unsuccessfully seduce her.

There are many other things going on in Genoa City, mostly to allow the viewer to keep abreast of the lives of the characters not involved in major storylines. For example, Paul has become Lauren's confidante and Cricket and Danny spend much of their time being a cute and perfect couple while discussing how to convince Nina that David is evil.

These plotlines are rather representative of the plotlines on *Y&R*. Most plotlines involve attempts to gain money (either legally or illegally) or to win the affections of someone who is not interested -- this includes love triangles. Often, months of scheming and plotting on the part of the "bad" characters go into each plot before any action or change is seen. Anticipation of the consequences of the plots seems to be more important than the consequences themselves. This could mean that the ways in which the plotlines are set up encourage the viewers to achieve more pleasure out of anticipation or projection than out of resolution, as opposed to other soap operas (*GH*, for example) which place a greater emphasis on actual occurrences. Anticipation, however, is one of the strongest sources of narrative-related pleasure in all soaps. The plotlines on *Y&R* often last inordinately long periods of time. One example, which lasted well over six months, is the time Brad was kidnapped by his ex-wife, Lisa, and kept captive in a cage, while she tried to convince him to fall in love with her once again. There were scenes of Brad thinking about how to escape accompanied by scenes of his wife Traci, who was unable to believe that Brad had just run away, almost every day. While the storylines are slow, the dialogues are very repetitive (even in comparison to other soap operas).

For example, when Cricket's mother (Jessica) was dying -- a process which took several months -- Cricket could be seen telling her mother how much she loved and admired her for her strength, despite all the pain she was going through, almost every episode. The conversation, if not exactly the same every time, conveyed the same sentiments.

It is usually the slowness or the length of the plotlines that the viewers dislike the most about Y&R. "The storylines last too long on Y&R. Their storylines aren't fresh." ⁷ According to *Soap Opera Update's* survey, the biggest "turn off" was the length of the storylines.

Recently, however, more and more viewers have expressed distaste for other aspects of the plotlines of *The Young and the Restless*, as can be seen from the letters complaining about specific storylines above. The thing that irritates viewers about Y&R storylines (apart from their length) is their lack of consistency. Four letters complain about inconsistencies:

I have been an avid fan of *The Young and the Restless* for eight years. I'm sure other fans will agree with me about an inconsistency in one of the soap's recent storylines. Within this past year, David has threatened Cricket's life, but suddenly she became his friend, and then finally she and Danny became suspicious of him and his sincerity -- well it's about time. Y&R should not resort to inconsistent tactics not befitting a soap of its caliber!

Tina Adamopoulos, Cliffside Park, NJ ⁸

and

The writers of *The Young and the Restless* must think their viewers are idiots!

First of all, do they really expect us to believe that Nathan did not know that Drucilla and Olivia were sisters? They not only share the same last name, but they both have an Aunt Mamie working for the Abbotts. Give us a break! This man is a detective!

Also, why is Nikki traipsing around in high-heel spiked shoes if she has such a severe back injury? Surely she would have enough common sense to wear sneakers. And why hasn't she consulted a chiropractor? She keeps commenting that she would try *anything* to avoid back surgery.

On a final note, I can't believe that Cricket and Danny didn't invite Scott's wife Lauren to their wedding. They knew that Scott and Lauren had just reconciled. And the writers didn't even give Scott a chance to tell Lauren he was leaving for Hawaii. Leanna was invited, but not Lauren. It was downright rude!

It is clear that the storylines are being manipulated without regard to the characters' behaviour, and it is annoying. Y&R is obviously taking its No 1 rating for granted, but, rest assured, if they continue in this same pattern, they will lose their viewers.

*J. Dimassimo, Rochester, NY*⁹

For many years I have been a big fan of *The Young and the Restless*. I always thought it was one of the more true-to-life soaps on television today. But now I have been proven wrong. Get real, Y&R! How could Victoria Newman leave for Switzerland a few months ago as a 7- or 8-year old with blond hair and blue eyes and be shown now as a teen-ager with dark hair and dark eyes? And what about her brother Nicholas? A few months ago he was shown as a toddler, and now he's 4 or 5. Before you know it, Victor and Nikki (their parents) will be grandparents!

*K. Gunter, Vienna, Ohio*¹⁰

I am about to pull the plug on my all-time favorite, *The Young and the Restless*. Nina's stupidity regarding her husband, David, is beyond belief. Nina was never very bright, but this is ridiculous. This has gone on so long I don't care if David kills her. Then Chase could gather evidence, David could go to jail, and Danny and Cricket could raise little Phillip. This would produce some interesting storylines.

And get rid of Cassandra (Nina Arveson doesn't act -- she purrs) and Brad! Don Diamont hasn't had a good scene since he stopped wearing his swim trunks and working poolside.

I always admired Lauren for her spirit, so casting her as the confused and suffering wife is completely out of character. Poor Paul, who once was suckered by Cassandra, should be a pushover for Lauren, who has twice Cassie's looks and personality. Let her and Paul get back together!

Traci deserves better than an ex-husband like Brad who can't figure out how he got married. Gina has been taken in yet again by con man Clint Radison. And gorgeous Nikki can't cope with pain and is becoming a lush. If this series continues like this they should change the name to *The Dumb and the Helpless*.

*J. Thixton, Ft. Smith, Ark.*¹¹

Long-time fans of *Y&R* are growing disenchanted with what they consider is its creators' disrespect for them and the characters of the soap. Considering the number of letters complaining about the plotlines, and their inconsistency, length or unbelievability, it can be concluded that the plotlines can sometimes get more annoying than pleasurable for many of the viewers. It is possible, however, that the fans are deriving pleasure out of complaining and/or are hoping that the creators of *Y&R* will listen to their criticisms and act accordingly. Judging by these letters, viewers seem to want creativity, intelligence, realism, and consistency out of soap opera narratives. The plotlines were often criticized but rarely received any praise. The only praise they received was in this letter; the author nevertheless acknowledges that they move too slowly:

I think *The Young and the Restless* has the highest ratings because it is the best of the "traditional" soaps -- slow storylines (I've seen snails move faster!) and cardboard characters left to the actors to flesh out. I only have to glance at it once every month or so and know what is going on -- but it's a dinosaur, a tail-finned cadillac.

*V. Washington*¹²

Although it is clear that she intends to be making a compliment in her assessment of *Y&R*, it is unclear why she considers it to be a "classic" and thus worth watching, except for, perhaps, the very attributes that other viewers seem to often find aggravating (slow storylines and one-dimensional characters).

A first-time *Y&R* viewer had this to say about why she thinks it has such high ratings: "It surprises me. The reason it is the highest-rated show is probably because it has a lot of southern and midwest viewers who live life at a slower pace and have time to watch the slowly evolving storylines." ¹³

Another reason that *Y&R* might be popular despite the slowness of the plotline development and the complaints of its viewers is that the viewers may find pleasure in complaining about the program. Obviously, the narrative is still captivating and

pleasurable despite these complaints because *Y&R* is consistently the number one soap opera. The fantasy world of this soap is clearly very appealing -- one of the elements contributing to this fantasy is the one-sidedness of the characters, which allows for retribution when the characters are "evil." Also, it is possible that *Y&R* is more successfully slow-moving than the other soaps because it is more visually complex and pleasing. The slowness allows viewers to pay more attention to sets and clothing, hair and facial expressions. *Focussing on facial expressions increases the melodrama.* *Y&R* is more melodramatic than the other soaps, and there may be a broad appeal based on plotlines that concentrate on the struggle between "good" and "evil" (characters). The more prolonged the struggle, the more the viewer gets irritated and desires a just conclusion. This may be part of the reason viewers complain about plotlines. They know what kind of conclusion they want, and are quite certain of seeing it eventually, so they are aggravated when the "bad" is not immediately punished and the "good" continue to suffer. Viewers know that villains eventually die, go to jail, or disappear, and hope for that to happen soon, though they are interested in seeing what havoc the villains will produce. What the viewers are complaining about, then, is that their satisfaction is being delayed, but many of them keep watching, knowing that eventually justice will be done. They also enjoy having their satisfaction delayed, perhaps because it allows them to savor the final outcome when it eventually comes. Current complaints about *Y&R* are more about the naiveté of the "good" characters than about the actions of the villains. Thus, one of the strongest pleasures associated with the plotlines of this soap opera is that of the struggle between good and evil (and the eventual, though constantly delayed, victory of "good" over "evil").

The Characters

V. Washington comments that the characters need to be "fleshed out by the actors". This is generally true of most of the characters on *Y&R* and reflects the quality of the dialogue, which is not very good: it is repetitive, and characters too often restate the obvious, even within the same program. For example, when Ashley was speaking to Brad about her sister Traci, she kept referring to her as "my sister, Traci," even though Brad knew that she was her sister, and one reference to their relationship (Ashley and Traci's) would have been enough for viewers unfamiliar with these characters. This is one of the reasons why *Y&R* is so easy to watch for new viewers, though this device quickly grows tiresome for those well acquainted with the show. This repetition, however, may serve to constantly remind viewers of the problems associated with these particular relationships (in the short lived love triangle between Ashley, Traci and Brad, the fact that Ashley and Traci are sisters is significant). This is also a case of over-coding, perhaps permitting the viewer to think over what she thinks sisterly relations should be like, particularly in that specific type of situation.

Many of the female characters are quite naive (they trust even the least trustworthy individuals), generally "good" (would never do anything that is against the law, or would hurt any other person, intentionally), and very attractive, in an All-American sort of way. These characters include: Nina, Cricket, Nikki, Ashley, Gina and Traci. All of these characters have long blond hair (none of them look like natural blondes), light-coloured eyes, and are aged between eighteen and thirty-five (all of child-bearing age). Olivia is the African-American version of these characters -- she has long, straight black hair, which is a wig, and apart from the colour of her skin, looks "white" (she has features that resemble those of European Americans). Most of these women are easily fooled by men who want to take advantage of them; they trust even the most obviously deceitful people (apparently, this is beginning to irritate the fans). Needless to say, they spend

most of their time suffering. Nikki, for example, is suffering from a back injury and refuses to have surgery because during the time that she would be in the hospital, she would not be there for her husband and her children. Nina is currently on trial for the attempted murder of David, though he is the one who used her and was plotting her murder (her naiveté led her to fall into his trap). The viewers are aware that Nina shot David in self-defense. However, while most of these "good" female characters know each other, they do not support and encourage each other (their innocence seems to be taken for granted by everyone.) The fact that most of the female characters are innocent is important; it adds to the melodramatic nature of the soap opera and creates a greater fear on the part of the viewers that these female characters will be taken advantage of. There would, then, be a greater satisfaction when the villainous or less angelic characters get retribution for their schemes.

Kay Chancellor is the older female character of the program (played by well-known actress Jeanne Cooper), and is considered to be wise, and fair, but somewhat lonely. She is one of the richest people in town (along with Victor Newman, Lauren Fenmore, Cassandra Rollins, Nina Chancellor, and the Abbotts -- who, along with their families, comprise about half of the characters). She is also a recovered alcoholic. She has been with Y&R longer than any of the other characters. Although she had been married to Rex Sterling, they had a divorce when she was kidnapped and replaced by a look-alike imposter; she is, then, a single woman, though she has a supportive network of friends and family. One of the other older female characters is Jill Abbott, who constantly struggles to get more power and male attention, usually unsuccessfully. Jill is a classic villainess; in the 1970s, she had a scandalous affair with millionaire Phillip Chancellor, who was Kay Chancellor's husband at the time. Jill has been slowly converting to an older character who supplies advice to the younger characters. Cassandra Rollins is the new villainess, stopping at nothing to get the men or power

after which she lusts. Drucilla is a young disadvantaged woman who has suddenly been given a good break (Nathan tutored her through school and John Abbott offered her a job at Jabot); there is no telling, as of yet, whether her character will be balanced (a rarity on *Y&R*) or "good" or "bad". Interestingly, Dru does not have straight hair (she wears it in several small beaded braids, signifying an ethnicity that is usually avoided in the soap opera context). She does, however, try to win Nathan's attention by learning ballet (appealing to his desire to partake in "high" culture). Lauren is the only female character who is well-balanced. She usually means well, but she is not naive, and spends a lot of time worrying about decisions she is making. At present, she is devoted to becoming a good mother, with or without her husband. She is strong and independent, yet she is able to have deep relationships with men. Leanna, the comic character, is incredibly naive, but unbelievably smart when it is least expected. Convinced that what she thinks is right, she does not let anyone push her around, though she does not push anyone around either. While the first set of "good" female characters inspires mostly sympathy (or a desire to look as attractive as they do), the characters of Lauren, Kay and Jill deserve respect, and are probably easier for the audience to identify with, since their characters are better developed and less one-dimensional.

If the female characters tend to be one-sided or underdeveloped, this is even more true of the male characters. Jack and Victor are both power-hungry, eager for revenge or control over the other. Both, however, are gentle and caring with their wives and families. They are attractive in a rugged, mature sense (Jack is in his forties, Victor in his fifties). These two have the most developed personalities, probably because they are central to the traditional feuding family storyline, and because both of them have good qualities and faults that are realistic and often assumed to belong to rich and powerful men. Paul Williams and Brad Carlton, two of the younger and good-looking men, although good at their jobs and successful, are constantly being used by the villainesses

(Cassandra, for example, took advantage of both of them.) They are incapable of scheming and "nice" in the sense that they are supportive and understanding when spoken to, though they are somewhat lacking in personality and easily manipulated. Nathan, Brock, John Abbott, Danny and Rex are all strong, manly men, who are nurturing and supportive to women, but do not have strong personalities -- their personalities are even less well developed than those of Brad and Paul. They are all attractive, tall, and have deep, soothing voices. They are the "good" guys, and are, of course, not quite as good-looking as Paul and Brad (they also come in all ages -- from Danny who is in his early twenties to John who is in his sixties). The other men in Genoa City are the "bad" guys. David and Clint fit into this category. They are both expert con-men. Both of them are dark-haired and, although attractive, have smaller eyes and slightly scarred faces. While David is a higher-class con-man, these two characters are very similar in that they are using the women who love them in order to obtain money illegally.

While there are more subtle differences to each of the characters, their basic attributes are as outlined above. In general the characters of *Y&R* are very much one-sided (either good or bad). Female characters in general seem to be better developed than the male characters. Characters are consistent, though. A "good" character almost never does anything bad, and a "bad" character usually cannot be reformed. The really "bad" characters (David, Clint) are more likely to be male, while the really "good" characters are likely to be female (Cricket, Ashley). While this consistency is praised by some viewers, it is also the cause of the one-sidedness of the characters. The consistency of the characters also comes in marked contrast to the inconsistency of the storylines. What is clearly an advantage (pleasurable consistency of characters) to some viewers is an aggravation (lack of character development) to others. However, while it may be difficult to create characters that are both consistent and well-developed, it is possible. There are a few characters that are better developed -- Jack, Victor, Lauren, Leanna,

Kay and Jill -- and these characters are consistent as well, which may be why these are some of the preferred characters of Genoa City. These last two characters may be better developed due to their long histories on the program. With long and convoluted past histories, they cannot help but be complex. It is therefore not surprising that the characters and actresses the viewers seem to prefer are these four women, as well as Nina. The consistency of characters may also be pleasurable because it allows viewers to project into the future (or hope for future occurrences) based on a particular character's traits. It also allows the viewer to maintain a consistent attitude toward the characters; the viewer does not easily become confused by relating to a character's qualities while despising that character for his or her actions or plans (because a good character on *Y&R* will not be scheming and devious under any circumstances). Viewers can rely on character consistency for unambivalent relationships to characters: characters are either fully likeable or fully detestable.

Because the dialogue for *Y&R* is so thin, the actors are the ones who give it texture. Therefore, the best actors often fill out their characters, giving them slightly more interesting personalities. The acting on *Y&R* is consistently very good. The actors playing Cricket, Cassandra (Nina Arveson), and Brad (Don Diamont) are the only poor actors. Cassandra and Brad are played by the best-looking actors on the show, if looking like a fashion model (or Barbie or Ken doll) is considered the standard for beauty (the current American standard of beauty broadly consists of being tall and slender, having clear skin and healthy, thick hair, a pearly smile, wide-set eyes, high cheek bones and pouty lips). It is partially because of this that the scenes with those characters are irritating to the viewers (as indicated in the above letters). The actors portraying Kay Chancellor (Jeanne Cooper), Jill Abbott (Jess Walton), Victor Newman (Eric Braeden), Nina (Tricia Cast), Leanna (Barbara Crampton) and Lauren (Tracey Bregman-Recht)

are excellent, and it is no wonder that scenes or storylines with these characters seem to be preferred -- along with the characters themselves.

Soap Opera Update's survey revealed that *Y&R*'s actors are a significant "turn-on". One fan who switched to it commented: "*Y&R* has wonderful acting".¹⁴ None of the fans complained about the acting (with the exception of the negative comments about Cassandra and Brad above). One fan preferred the acting talents of characters Lauren and Traci.

We're thrilled that Beth Matland is in the thick of things again and are looking forward to a romantic reunion between Brad (Don Diamont) and Traci. Beth and Tracey E. Bregman Recht (Lauren) are the most underused actresses on the show. They both deserve front-burner storylines.

C. Jordano, Waukegan, Ill. ¹⁵

Another interview with a soap opera viewer by *Soap Opera Update*, entitled "First Impressions", followed the reactions of a soap opera viewer as she watched a new soap for the first time. In the February 25, 1991 issue, *SOU* interviewed a fan of *General Hospital* who watched *Y&R* for the first time. She thought that Jeanne Cooper (Kay Chancellor) and Tricia Cast (Nina) were impressive actresses. Her favourite character was Leanna.

The characters of *Y&R* do not seem to present any problems for the viewers. Nor do they appear to be particularly interesting. It can be assumed that the characters of *Y&R*, though one-dimensional, are well enough developed so as not to be displeasurable (and the one-sidedness is even pleasurable because it allows for character predictability and easy categorization). The acting of *Y&R*, similarly, is rarely criticized or praised, and the looks of the characters are rarely commented on, except in a complimentary fashion. At the present time, the irritation caused by the inconsistency of the plotlines seems to overshadow any comments concerning the

characters. (Inconsistency because they make favourite characters look stupid: Nikki's high-heeled shoes and Cricket and Danny's blindness to David's schemes)

Style

The visual style of *Y&R* is very sophisticated -- the sets are elaborate and include many details (particularly of expensive objects -- beautiful furniture, china, silverware, fresh long-stemmed roses). The people of Genoa City seem much richer than the people of Bay City (*AW*) and Port Charles (*GH*). The characters wear expensive-looking clothing and jewelry, always in fashionable cuts and colours. They often have formal parties or dinners, where the men wear tuxedos and the women wear evening or ball gowns (dinners at the Collonnade Room, engagements parties, birthdays, and other celebrations). The strong emphasis on the looks and the visual style of *Y&R* (even the lighting is more sophisticated than most other soaps; it is softer and the use of shadow is more elaborate) implies that the viewers of this program find a lot of pleasure in spectacle (fashion, glamour). Visual pleasures are more intense than for most other soap operas.

The "First Impressions" article in *SOU* indicates that the visual style of *Y&R* is one of its most outstanding features. The first-time viewer commented: "The lighting and the sets look better than *General Hospital*. Everyone seems to have a beautiful home," and the wardrobe was "very nice."

Most of the female characters tend to have the same "look." They do their hair in very similar ways; almost all have long, blond hair, either straight or slightly wavy. They also wear the same styles of clothing, and usually wear skirts and blazers or dresses and high-heels, even if they are only lounging around their own homes. Jill Abbott wears

what looks like cocktail dresses to work at the office. The men rarely wear anything other than suits. The opening credits of *Y&R* show the main characters wearing evening gowns, cocktail dresses, tuxedos, or almost nothing (Brad). Clearly, the pleasure in looking is emphasized by the producers. Specifically, the pleasures of looking at current fashions in evening wear and beautiful people is emphasized

The editing on *Y&R* is an important stylistic mark of the program: in cuts from one scene to the next, there is usually a long pause, focusing on the face of the character who last spoke. Theme music accompanies each pause. (The music is played on a piano and is usually quite dramatic. While the other soap operas have music that can be identified with certain characters or groups of characters, *Y&R*'s music is not as varied.) The other soaps will occasionally pause to focus on one of the character's faces before a cut, but only if the scene was exceptionally emotional; *Y&R* does this for almost every cut. This adds to the melodramatic feeling of the soap (which is the most melodramatic of the soaps discussed here). Pausing on a character's face allows the viewer to contemplate what the character is thinking or how he or she is reacting to the previous scene. Another characteristic of *Y&R*'s visual style is the way in which characters are placed in front of the camera when they are in groups: one character will often stand in front of another, with the character who is further behind looking over the first character's shoulder. The camera alternates between focusing on one or the other of the character's faces, depending on which character is speaking. This technique allows the viewer to see the facial expressions of more than one character at a time when there is a group conversation going on, which also increases the melodramatic feeling.

The world of Genoa City is very glamorous and fantasy-like, and very beautiful but easy to understand (the motives of the characters are almost always clear). *Y&R* is much

easier to begin watching than most soaps, most likely because the pleasures first addressed by *Y&R* are visual pleasures (which do not require any prior understanding of the text) and because the characters are one-dimensional. The relationship between viewers and characters is more likely to be one of fascination than one of identification since the characters are wealthy, attractive and ideal (ideally "good" or "bad"). Also, the pace of *Y&R* is one of the slowest of all the soap operas, making the process of following the storylines relatively easy, even if the viewer watches infrequently. The plotline does not require much participation on the part of the viewer in order to understand it (this is partly because it is slow moving and partly because characters are one-dimensional and it is clear who is "good" and who is "bad".) *Y&R* does not encourage the ironic viewing attitude, though it is certainly possible to view it from that angle (mostly because the characters' personalities and motivations are obvious to the viewers but not to the other characters and because identification with the characters does not tend to be very strong), but the strong element of viewer fascination with characters probably prevents many of the viewers from viewing with an ironic attitude.

Y&R probably appeals to viewers whose preferences are to be dazzled by a glamorous world full of beautiful people in beautiful surroundings (upper and upper-middle class American life-style, including all the expensive accessories that go with it). Viewers who prefer to watch soap operas that require less involvement (fewer viewings, less speculation to fill in the gaps) would probably also prefer *Y&R* to most other soaps. The way *Y&R* pauses before cuts almost forces the viewer to fill in the gaps by contemplating the thoughts or emotions of the particular character that the camera focuses on. The cuts also inform the viewer that a new scene is coming and thereby prepare her for that new scene. In many ways, *Y&R* is the daytime serial that most closely resembles night-time soap/melodramas such as *Dallas* and *Knot's Landing*. The world of Genoa City is much more clearly a fantasy world (almost on the level of "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous")

than the worlds presented by the other soaps (though the world of *GH* is quite fantastic too, it is in a very different way; it uses elements of science fiction and thriller). However, *Y&R* is supposedly a more 'liberal' type of soap opera because it deals with issues such as AIDS, abortion, illiteracy, and homelessness. The values of the characters on the program, nevertheless, are very conservative; most characters would not question the validity of the bourgeois lifestyles that they lead, the law or the "American dream". The ideological boundaries of this soap are rather clear and do not stray from dominant ideology about the family or American life-styles. The characters are, even so, open-minded about the problems of others -- they express tolerance of or a desire to help those less fortunate than themselves and are reluctant to pass negative judgment (except on people who commit illegal acts, or alcoholics). While the characters are often willing to help those less fortunate than themselves, it is usually minor characters who have lower class status that are confronted by issues or problems such as homelessness or illiteracy. This helps to maintain the fantasy surrounding the lives of the major characters. It is also assumed that once those who are less fortunate are helped (taught to read and write, for example) and have overcome their difficulties, they are capable of attaining a similar status to those who originally helped them. (Maintaining the fantasy or idea that acquiring the values of the upper classes helps one to become part of them.)

Y&R's popularity may be due to its representations of glamour; it has a visually pleasing style and resembles night-time soaps, even though the portrayal of the characters is often very simplistic (this is true of night time soaps as well) and the storylines are rather slow paced and often inconsistent (to the integrity of the characters). *Y&R* is more 'exotic' (wealthier) than other soap operas, and this may be rather appealing. Viewers may be attracted to the element of fantasy that wealth conveys -- it can be assumed that most viewers are foreign to the lifestyles that the wealthy

characters of *Y&R* lead. It also has a large cast of relatively young actors, some of them in college (Cricket), which may explain its appeal to younger viewers who find themselves identifying more readily with characters their own age. Because of the immense popularity of *Y&R*, it can be concluded that a visually pleasing style is extremely important to the success of a soap opera (this may be further supported by the fact that *GH*, which is more visually sophisticated than *AW*, is also more popular). Dealing with controversial issues is increasingly important to a soap opera's popularity (the three most popular soaps are the ones that deal with controversial issues the most), though in *Genoa City* they are usually handled in a very conservative manner (the person with AIDS in *Y&R* was a woman; homosexuality and intra-venous drug use are taboo), and only one at a time. Perhaps *Y&R* is successful in dealing with controversial issues because the rest of the program is so fantasy-like. There is an attitude that the terrible problems or decisions that confront many American women in their everyday lives could never affect the main or wealthy characters of *Y&R*, largely because their wealth allows them to overcome many of these problems. They can hire maids to do the cooking, cleaning and shopping, they don't have to worry about paying bills, they can afford adequate healthcare. Viewers may be attracted to *Y&R* because it is the most melodramatic of the daytime soap operas. The appeal of melodrama may be that characters are easy to categorize as either good or bad and good eventually triumphs over evil (though it is usually a long and arduous process, involving a lot of suffering on the part of the good characters). Another thing that must be kept in mind when trying to understand why *Y&R*'s popularity is outstanding is that, because of the pleasures associated with the social sphere, many people may be watching *Y&R* because it is popular or because their friends are watching it. The convenience of the time at which it is shown is also important for its popularity (12:30 pm to 1:30 pm in the Northeast of the USA, 4:30 pm to 5:30 pm in the Midwest) -- these times coincide with lunch breaks

and after work or after school for many people, who might otherwise watch the other soaps.

General Hospital

After 22 years, *General Hospital* was still a very popular soap opera in 1985. High percentages in all age groups from 11 to 60 listed this drama as one of their favorites; in fact, female college students and males from ages 21 to 40 listed it most often as their top choice. However, some of the people interviewed at this time indicated they were becoming disenchanted with *General Hospital* because of the increasingly unbelievable storylines and slow plotline development. Themes they preferred were along the lines of those found in the 1983/1984 season -- international travel, criminal investigations and job concerns.¹⁶

The plotlines

At the present time (mid-February, 1991) *General Hospital* is undergoing a complete change, because of a recent switch in producers (Gloria Monty has taken over the position of Joe Hardy). *GH* is presently in that rare state of limbo between interesting plotlines. One of the storylines that is reaching resolution concerns Cheryl, and her stolen baby, Lucas, who was illegally adopted by Bobbie, who was incapable of bearing children herself. Cheryl now has her baby, and Bobbie is being shunned by the community for keeping the identity of her baby a secret for so long. This storyline is also related to the fate of real estate magnate and lawyer Mark Broxton, who was blackmailing Bobbie; he knew about baby Lucas, and promised to keep quiet in exchange for her silence about the polluted waters that were running to the condos that he owned (and caused many of the residents to be gravely ill). Of course, the illnesses of the residents, in typical *GH* fashion, had to be investigated by the doctors (Tony Jones, Bobbie's husband), investigators (Frisco Jones, Sean Donnelly, and Anna Lavery) and the police commissioner, Robert Scorpio. With the mystery solved and the baby returned to its birth mother, the storyline that involved half the cast of Port Charles has been mostly resolved, leaving Bobbie to lick her wounds and Cheryl to start a new life with her baby.

The other storyline of interest at the moment is related to the one above. One of the main characters (Dawn) in this second storyline became ill because she was a resident of the condos. Dawn has finally been able to be with her love, Dekker (after months of being kept apart for various reasons). But Dekker is beginning a shady business with his friend, Edge, making pirate videotapes. They are doing this so that they can make quick money in order to support the women that they love.

A few other storylines are presently on the "back burners"; presumably they are there only to be retrieved at a later date and to keep the viewers in touch with some of the more interesting characters of Port Charles. Lucy Coe Quartermaine, who is on a cruise (because she is pregnant in "real life"), is suing her husband, Alan Quartermaine, for causing her recent miscarriage. However, because she is away, this storyline is not being developed at the present time. Another storyline shows Frisco's boredom since he left the police force; his wife Felicia leaves him at home to take care of the baby. This storyline allows for comic relief, as will be seen below, in relation to the ironic viewing attitude. It also causes the viewer to anticipate Frisco's likely future involvement in some sort of adventure.

The storylines of *GH* may be on hold at the present time because of producer Gloria Monty's return. Gloria Monty is best known for revolutionizing the soap opera with *GH*'s controversial Luke and Laura storyline of the early 80s. In this storyline, Luke "raped" Laura ostensibly because of his great love for her. They later became a couple, when Laura finally admitted that he did not really rape her (a year later). Viewers now expect interesting things will happen soon in Port Charles. Also returning to the program is Tony Geary, who played the part of Luke so many years ago.¹⁷

The plotlines of *General Hospital* are its most distinguishable characteristic; they often involve mystery and suspense and are frequently unpredictable. Hence, *GH* uses

plotlines involving space aliens, international spy rings, terrorist plots, and murder mysteries (though murder mysteries have often been used in soaps). This makes the storylines less believable, but more 'fun', and encourages the ironic viewing attitude. Although none of these types of plotlines are currently being used, some summaries of past storylines may serve as examples. The most recent "fantasy" storyline -- of spring/summer 1990 -- involved an international spy ring (to which the characters Anna, Sean and Robert are connected) an alien being, and the "bad", oppositional spy ring, which wanted to use the powers of the alien for its own purposes (gaining more power for itself in order to control others). Eventually the three regular characters were able to send the alien back to where he came from by collecting special crystals, and stealing one of them from "evil" César Faison (of the bad spy ring).

The plotlines of *GH* are usually much faster in pace than the plotlines of other soap operas. They are also more likely to contain science-fiction or adventure elements. There are, however, always plotlines or scenes with characters that are very realistic, and these realistic scenes are so well done that they appear to be "slices of life." The over-use of these types of scenes, however, can become tiresome. Soap operas, to be successful, have to maintain a delicate balance between realism and fantasy, it appears that too much of either one aggravates the fans, though fans often comment that they want more of one or the other. These "slices of life" often show caring parents with their children. One example is the mother/daughter relationship between Anna and Robin. One viewer writes about her opinion of this relationship:

I commend the writers of *General Hospital* for finally waking up and doing something about the character of Anna Lavery as a mother: they're finally showing the mother inside of her. She's not the perfect mother and she has her faults, but who is a perfect mother? Robin's the only child that she'll ever be able to have, so Robin will always be her "baby." Anna chooses her child above career and men. Where is it written that a woman has to have a husband to be totally fulfilled? Anna takes the time to be with her daughter and that shouldn't make her old-fashioned, ancient and antique. I say more power to Anna. I just wish that Robin could be more sensitive and understanding when it comes to her mother's feelings.

*GH fan. Panama City, Flor.*¹⁸

The way that the viewer talks about the relationship between Anna and her daughter makes it obvious that she almost takes this type of realism for granted and that she agrees with the way that *GH* is using it. What the fan writes also indicates that she takes the character of Anna seriously and identifies with her.

Other viewers are disappointed with the plotlines. One viewer complains that there is not enough romance and suggests what she thinks would make an interesting storyline:

I was so disappointed in *General Hospital* this summer. Where was the romance? That's what *GH* is famous for. But I'm happy to see that they are getting back to it. I can't wait for Anna (Finola Hughes) and Shep's (Brad Lockerman) romance to take off. They are great together. I'm also happy that Joseph Hardy took my advice and brought back Cheryl (Jennifer Anglin). I think a triangle between Cheryl, Robert (Tristan Rogers) and Katherine (Edie Lehman) will be great!

*A. West, Oak Ridge, Tenn.*¹⁹

Another viewer writes that she thinks the amount of sex (or allusions to it) shown on *GH* is inappropriate:

I see where the movie ratings people have done away with their X rating for films. If this rating is rattling around somewhere loose, without a home, I know the perfect place for it. ABC's *General Hospital* has been asking for such a rating for some time now, and after this past week (Sept. 24-28) there is no doubt in my mind just where that nasty old X should go.

First, another rape took place, this time between Rico (John Vargas) and Carla (Laura Herring). To me, there seemed to be no good reason for this. Just to give the viewers a bit of shock? I guess, but who needs it? Next Lucy (Lynn Herring) has spent several painful days casing Port Charles for someone to go to bed with. This is comparable to one of those trashy tabloid escapades.

From the look of current episodes I see that Cheryl (Jennifer Anglin) arrived back in fertile old Port Chuck and wasted no time in having a "one-night-stand" with one of the eligible males. I was so hoping that finally we would get to see the mercurial Cheryl and the fascinating Mr. Scorpio (Tristan Rogers) in a well-written, strong storyline. There's certainly plenty of material there.

GH seems to have lost its classy core, which once led this show to the top of the daytime roster and kept it there. I used to look forward to the mid-afternoon hour that produced such great entertainment. Now I'm grateful that I don't have

children who might be looking on. Promiscuity is certainly not an item that does anything to enhance our society.

*K. Chapman, Richmond, Virginia.*²⁰

It is interesting to note that these fans did not comment on the storylines that involved more action, but were more concerned with the interpersonal relationships of the characters and their romances. Another viewer shared her opinion about the Anna/Robert relationship and how she thinks it should be pursued:

I strongly disagree with the writer who hopes that Gloria Monty (GH) will dissolve Robert and Anna's friendship and destroy their relationship. The idea that two people cannot be close and enduring friends, simply because they used to be married to each other, is ridiculous! It is to GH's credit that they created and preserved the wonderful friendship between Anna and Robert, and the one between them and Sean. (Although Joe Hardy did run it through the shredder a time or two). Lovers come and go, but true friendship can last a lifetime and deserves respect. It is the only truly viable basis for a lasting love.

I also disagree about Anna having done something so terrible that she cannot ever be forgiven by Robert. She made a mistake when she was very young, and got caught up in something from which she could not escape.

After she became involved with Robert, she tried in every way to correct that mistake and start a new life with him. She was not allowed to do this. Instead, she was betrayed by Faison and Sean, who set her up to deliberately destroy her marriage.

In the end, Anna did whatever was necessary to save Robert's life. Half of the "heroes" on daytime have done worse and been forgiven.

*B.L.N., Salem, Ore.*²¹

Yet another viewer comments on one of the "slice of life" scenes that brought the real world closer to Port Charles:

How very thoughtful of ABC, Gloria Monty and the *General Hospital* writers to include a patriotic Christmas tree decorated with yellow ribbons in one of their episodes. How lovely Anna Lee (Lila) looked in this heartrending scene as she spoke poignantly about remembering the soldiers who would not be home for Christmas.

M. Benjamin, Aurora, Ohio ²²

By remembering the soldiers, *GH* was adhering to the ideas that the majority of Americans had about the war; whether or not they supported the war, most people felt they should "support the troupes." Also, by acknowledging that there was a war in the Persian Gulf, an impression of realism was given (as some other people across America were probably thinking about friends or relatives in the Gulf during the holiday season.)

While plotlines on *GH* often stray from those of the traditional soap operas, the emphasis remains on interpersonal relationships. It is the unusual storylines that test and try relationships instead of (or rather, in addition to) storylines about adultery, power struggles or secrets. Characters in Port Charles tend to help each other in difficult situations that come from the outside world. Plotlines tend to show that the characters live in a mostly friendly community, and, when not of a fantastic nature, are quite realistic and sometimes humorous (dialogues often involve witty banter between friends or friendly rivals). The type of narrative pleasure that *GH* addresses most clearly is that of listening to dialogue. The dialogue is well-written, and often very witty. *GH* is also very good at using a well-balanced mixture of fantasy and reality that can appeal to most viewers, whether they prefer fantastic storylines or realism.

The Characters

In comparison to *Y&R*, and most other soap operas, the characters of Port Charles are very realistic, except for the characters that are intended to be taken humorously or who are visibly intentionally exaggerated. Thus, the characters of *GH* largely fit into two categories: those who are "real" and meant to be taken seriously, and those who are meant to be taken with an ironic attitude. The first group includes the bulk of the characters, though in some scenes or for certain plotlines some of them may be used humorously (Frisco and Anna for example). These characters are well developed,

especially because *GH*, more than any other soap opera, allows the viewer to enter the homes of the characters even if nothing seems to be happening in terms of advancing storylines. Because of this, it is easy to identify with most characters, who often worry about the same types of things as the viewers do in everyday situations (changing diapers, hair styles, doing exercises to stay in shape). This device is peculiar to *GH*, and helps increase one of its strongest pleasures: identification with characters (unlike *Y&R*'s fascination with ideal characters). These scenes, however, can be less pleasurable in a narrative sense, providing little action. This may be annoying to those viewers less interested in becoming intimate with the visible citizens of Port Charles, though the realism used in the portrayal of these characters makes the fantastic storylines more palatable and enjoyable -- the viewer can identify with the characters as they live through bizarre, fantastic experiences.

There are also some characters on *GH* that are impossible to relate to except from the ironic viewing attitude (Lucy Quartermaine and Scott Baldwin for example). These characters are excessive in all their attributes, to the point of being comical caricatures of what they represent. Lucy Quartermaine is an excessive villainess; she is less "evil" than childishly greedy and selfish. She is the little girl who never grew up -- she pouts, throws tantrums, lies, and cheats, and all the other characters are well aware of it. Her scenes are so excessive that they cannot be taken seriously; none of the characters of *GH* take her seriously, and it is likely that the viewers do not either. The music used in scenes with Lucy further reinforce the excessiveness or ridiculousness of her scenes (it sounds like circus or carnival music). Scott Baldwin, a "bad guy" turned "good" for the sake of his love for Lucy similarly cannot be taken seriously. When he tells Lucy of his feelings for her, it seems impossible to believe him, despite (or maybe because of) his excessive sincerity. This is because it seems impossible for anyone to have serious emotions for Lucy. Nevertheless, Lucy's greed and childish selfishness are

important for several storylines involving the Quartermaine family. It seems that the creators of *GH* recognized the need for a classic villainess but realized that someone with all the attributes of a villainess is difficult for the audience to take seriously or to identify with; they take advantage of that situation and make it humorous instead of ridiculous and unbelievable, as it was (and sometimes still is) in "classic" soap operas (like *Y&R*) and prime time soap operas (*Knot's Landing*). This is one of the more important ways in which *GH* takes advantage of the "ironic viewing attitude", encouraging it in a playful way.

The quality of the acting on this soap is excellent. It is rare for an actor to forget his or her lines. The acting also has a look of spontaneity to it -- it seems as if the characters and the actors have the same personalities; sometimes it even seems as if the characters are not acting. The actors usually seem to dress in their own clothes and styles, which also adds to the realism of their characters. *GH* seems to slip into and out of reality more than the other soaps; while watching, it is easy to have the impression that one is watching the lives of the actors and not the lives of the characters. This is further emphasized by the knowledge that some of the actors whose characters are involved with each other on the program have real life relationships.

Anna Lavery, Cheryl Stansbury and Katherine Dellafeld seem to be some of the fans' favourite characters. These three characters are strong, independent and intelligent women, and it may be because of this that they are favoured. They have all been involved with Robert Scorpio, which may also have something to do with their popularity, though some viewers have become disillusioned with the character of Robert Scorpio and his inconsiderate attitude toward these "wonderful" women:

I have lost all respect for the character of Robert Scorpio on *General Hospital*. He has become an insensitive, insincere, arrogant jerk. I used to be a fan of his, but no more. Robert's treatment of Katherine during 1990 was totally disgusting. For the two years that she was in Port Charles, Kate never did one thing to hurt Robert. She was always devoted to the man she loved. I think Kate

would have fared a lot better with either Colton Shore or Shep Casey. Those two knew how to act toward a lady. Because of Robert's uncaring attitude and his refusal to marry Katherine, I am checking out of *GH* permanently.

Jennifer Rinehart, Massillon, OH 23

The recent arrival of the character "Edge," on the other hand, appears to appeal to some fans. His character is clearly designed to appeal to a younger audience (he is a music video director). His success has even brought back the following old-time fan of *GH* and proves that having attractive male characters is important for the success of a soap opera:

General Hospital has a gold mine in Mark St. James, who plays Edge. His scenes with Finola Hughes (Anna) are red-hot. I hope they develop this relationship with Anna. I've been a fan of *GH* for about 13 years, but last year I switched to *Guiding Light* because I was tired of *GH*'s stale, boring, repetitive storylines. However, it looks to me like *GH* is back on track. The writing is again excellent and the storylines are suspenseful. I feel like the writers are finally showing some respect for the characters and trying to keep them consistent once again. Besides, Mark St. James is suddenly the sexiest man on daytime TV. Someone in ABC casting did something very right.

Anonymous, Edwardsville, Illinois.²⁴

The characters of *GH* are very important to its success. For this soap opera, more than others, it is difficult to separate the narrative from the characters, since a substantial amount of the narrative is devoted singularly to character development. Characters tend to be consistent over time. Most of the actors are extremely attractive, particularly the younger men (Edge, Frankie, Dekker and Ned.) Viewers seem to relate to the characters mostly through identification or humour (the ironic viewing attitude). Character development is stressed rather than consistency; it seems that viewers relate more to the characters as they would to friends than as to stable representations of types of people (like on *Y&R*). Thus, the pleasures of identification with characters and viewing with an ironic attitude are stressed by *General Hospital*'s style of plot and character development.

Style

Stylistically speaking, *GH* lies somewhere in between *Y&R* and *AW*. Characters dress well (neatly, in contemporary styles), but they often appear in jeans. Set designs are attractive but largely unnoticeable -- they do not have many details except for functional purposes. There are more scenes outdoors and on location in *General Hospital* than most other soap operas. Visual pleasure is important, but it is not emphasized. *GH* also tends to make fun of itself as a genre more than other soaps -- it utilizes the ironic viewing attitude to its advantage. It is more innovative in style and tries new topics and narrative devices rather frequently. Characteristics of this soap opera include fantasy plotlines (using mixtures of other genres, like science-fiction or detective fiction), "slices of life" and humour (associated with mocking the soap opera genre.)

One example of a scene that mocks the soap opera genre shows Frisco watching daytime television while he is babysitting his daughter (his wife, Felicia, works during the day). The television set he is watching is supposedly directly below the camera. Frisco has become addicted to the fictional soap opera "All My Problems," for which Felicia and Anna tease him. He is watching this soap opera while the viewer is allowed to hear the dialogue of the soap he is watching and look at his facial expressions. The plotline of "All My Problems" fits the stereotype of the soap opera genre -- one hears about a twin brother who convinces his love that he is the brother that she loves, only to have the real brother come in and shoot him. Frisco's reactions (anxiety that the woman will believe the "bad" brother, tears and anger when one of them is shot) fit the stereotype of the female soap opera viewer (and he is folding laundry while watching it.) It is clear, then, that pleasures associated with humour and the ironic viewing attitude are stressed.

GH is the second most popular soap opera. Its popularity probably is related to the way *GH* encourages the ironic viewing attitude (the way it uses humour and mocks the soap opera genre), its use of unusual storylines which are attractive precisely because of their unbelievability (such as the space alien story line of June 1990) and its distinctive, realistic characters. *GH* stimulates the viewer to engage in all the different kinds of pleasures discussed above but fantasy, involvement in the narrative, and the various kinds of character pleasures (especially identification) are most important. It activates narrative pleasures in the same ways as other soaps because it does make use of the conventions of the genre and does follow a few 'conventional' storylines at any given time (while narrative pleasures associated with suspense, mystery and action are also emphasized.) Anticipation of consequences is important, but *GH* tends to actually resolve more storylines than other soaps do. Identification with characters can be very strong, though sometimes it is discouraged in favour of stimulating the ironic viewing attitude. While visual pleasures may not be as accentuated as they are for *Y&R*, there is certainly nothing visually displeasing about *General Hospital*, and some of the characters are very attractive (Edge) and stimulate the pleasure of looking. Viewing with any kind of attitude is possible for this soap opera, partially because of a diversity of narrative devices, including some lifted from other genres. *GH* is a soap opera and more -- it sometimes serves as the innovator for the other soap operas; if *GH* tries something new and there is an overwhelmingly good response, the other soap operas often follow suit.

GH probably appeals to a wider range of viewers than *Y&R* and *AW*, as Mateleski found in her survey (*Y&R*'s and *AW*'s audiences were more clearly delimited), though the audience tends to be young. People who prefer standard soap opera fare, however, are "turning off" *GH* to watch the more conventional soap operas. The program is becoming more appealing to those who find it pleasurable to watch with an ironic viewing attitude,

which is probably something the younger viewers do (teenage and college age viewers). Because it is broadcast at 3pm, *GH* is accessible to teenagers and seeks to appeal to them as viewers by having a central thirteen year old character (Robin). While *GH* is losing some of its older, more conservative audience, it is gaining on its younger audience, which is attractive to the advertisers, demographically speaking.

One long-time fan of *GH* sums up why it is a successful soap -- because of its thrilling storylines and excellent actors:

In my eyes, *General Hospital* has never been better. It has been exciting, heartwarming, full of comedy and has a superior cast. . . I have watched *GH* for 12 years and I hope they keep me on the edge of my couch for another 12.

L. Welch, Austin, Texas 25

In summary, then, viewers can relate to *GH* and its characters in a variety of ways. This diversity can be productive of pleasure. *GH*'s main strengths, apart from its diversity of narrative styles and types of characters, are its interesting and unusual storylines, its way of creating a community of characters, and its mixture of realism and humour. *General Hospital*, more than any other soap opera, appeals to its audience in a variety of different ways.

Since Gloria Monty's return, there have been many changes to the cast and the storylines of *General Hospital*. The changes have been so swift and drastic that some of the actors who Gloria Monty did not fire will be leaving Port Charles. The lead character Frisco Jones (Jack Wagner), for example, is leaving -- Jack Wagner will be playing a lead role in *Santa Barbara*. Among other characters to leave are: Dawn, Dekker, Edge, Cheryl, Simone, and Ashton. The new characters include an entire working-class family -- the Eckerts -- their neighbours, and a group of people living and working at a rehabilitation center. Since these changes occurred (beginning in March 1991), *GH*'s

ratings have been changing constantly. Many fans are disgruntled by Monty's abrupt changes:

Now, along with everything else we've been forced to accept, *GH* is trashing the memories of our favorite romances. Why? Anna and Robert aren't worth it -- orgasms and all. Being patient while Gloria Monty, Finola Hughes (Anna) and Tristan Rogers (Robert) make fools out of us is one thing, but insulting the time we have invested in wonderfully romantic storylines is another. The sad part about it is it's unnecessary -- there's no need to make comparative remarks. Anna and Robert getting back together is enough.

*An anonymous GH fan.*²⁶

Why didn't Gloria Monty simply start a new soap instead of messing up *General Hospital*? Tristan Rogers' contract was almost up, and he was ready for a change, so she should have just signed him for her new show. Instead she chose to get rid of all the characters with established fans and bring in all new people. There are more new characters than old on *GH* now. And obviously the fans (or should I say ex-fans) don't like it, because according to the Nielsens, *GH* is making a steady decline.

Monty, it seems, is too wrapped up in her "friends" to care about other actors on *GH*. She should really pay more attention to what the fans think while her show still has fans.

*P. Ellis, Stafford, Texas.*²⁷

Another World

Statistically, *Another World* seemed most popular with males and females in the older demographic groups (50 and over). However, due to the fact that only a small number of people surveyed claimed to watch this soap opera, this analysis may be misleading. In any case, *Another World* was characterized as very traditional in nature. Popular themes from 1983 to 1985 were romance, drugs, criminal investigations, job-related problems and illness/injury.²⁸

Plotlines

A recently resolved major plotline on *AW* ²⁹ involves the attempted murder of Jake McKinnon (which took place last November). Marley McKinnon (his ex-wife) was the number one suspect, but Donna Hudson (her mother) eventually confessed to shooting him; presumably to protect her daughter. Most of the characters are in some way related to this storyline -- lawyers, policemen, private investigators, suspects and their friends or relations encompass most of the characters. Jake was aware of many secrets and was blackmailing several people; during the course of the trial many hidden truths surfaced. This storyline (Jake's having been shot) and the related secrets occupied most of the viewing time since November '90. Three other storylines that are not directly related to Jake's shooting take up most of the rest of the time. One of them involves the budding romance between Sam (recently divorced from Amanda Cory) and Olivia. Another deals with Sharlene (who had a split personality but was cured) and John (her husband), and the intervention of her ex-therapist and "friend", Taylor Bensen. Taylor has fallen in love with John, and is trying to cause Sharlene to relapse in order to gain his affections. The last storyline of importance introduced new, younger characters, while giving the younger characters already on the program a chance to be developed. Orphan Jenna, aspiring musician Dean Frame, and the youngest Cory, Matthew, are developing a close friendship and a love-triangle is in the offing.

Plotlines on *AW* usually consist of problems arising out of distrust, dishonesty and the keeping of secrets. Secrets are often kept from one's romantic partner, family, community or even oneself. For example, Sharlene had a split personality, keeping part of life a secret from herself; Ken kept secrets about Paulina which he didn't reveal to his love, Rachel Cory, until recently; Donna kept her secret about having an affair with Jake from her husband Michael and daughter Marley; and, in order to preserve family honour, the secret of Evan's relationship to Amanda was hushed by the Cory family. In this sense, *AW*, more than *Y&R* and *GH*, tries to uncover the psychological, emotional and moral processes surrounding talk. Usually, *AW* tends to give the message that "honesty is the best policy". How the telling is done, however, is as important as the telling itself. Most individual characters suffer for keeping secrets (usually of feelings of guilt). The secrets usually evolve because the desires of the characters conflict with their morals. Characters often do "wrong things for all the right reasons".

AW is one of the more traditional soaps -- dealing mostly with conversations and emotions and very little with plots or schemes (*Y&R*'s emphasis) or "adventures" (like in *GH*). One of the most important pleasures activated when watching this soap is that of voyeurism, or listening to the revelation of secrets. Another important pleasure is quite simply listening the talk between the characters (there is little plotting and scheming and little action and adventure going on in *Another World*.)

The problems that face the people of Bay City are more likely to be real human problems than problems associated with the world of high finance and big deals or spying and international intrigue, though the Cory family is extremely wealthy. This is what defines *AW* as a traditional soap opera. Because of its traditional nature, the pleasures associated with the soap opera narrative work almost exactly in the way they were described above in association with how the narrative progresses and having a diversity of storylines at once.

Viewers of *Another World* did not write any complaints about the storylines. Any letters referring to the storylines were generally complimentary. Only one letter voiced a slight complaint -- that Jamie and Marley made a "boring" couple, as opposed to the previous pair made by Vicky and Jamie:

On *AW*, I thought that Jamie and Vicky made an interesting couple. They were a perfect example of opposites attracting. But Jamie and Marley are boring.

F. Park, Hackensack, NJ. ³⁰

Any other comments about the storylines that were made by the fans suggested that *AW*'s storylines were interesting and improving (see the letters by C. Croci and G. Boyer below.)

AW viewers, then, derive their narrative pleasures from listening to revelations of secrets and watching or anticipating resolutions of problems that arise from exposed truths. The strongest pleasure associated with watching *AW* is that of listening. Thus, the pleasures associated with the empowerment of seeing all and hearing are also important for *AW* viewers. Enjoying gossip or talking about the soap opera characters are probably important to an increased pleasure in watching *AW* as well.

Characters

Because the viewer is exposed to all the inner dilemmas of the characters, the characters of *AW* appear to be very richly developed. No characters are clearly "good" or "bad". They all share a common goal: the pursuit of happiness. Even the "worst" female characters -- Iris Wheeler and Donna Hudson -- are good when it comes to protecting their families (though they usually go about it in the wrong way, either illegally or through deception). The only truly "bad" character (for whom the viewer can feel no

compassion) is Jake McKinnon. He went so far as to rape Marley, the only person in the world he claimed to really love (and swore he would protect forever). "Good" characters often hurt others with their good intentions. In contrast, *Y&R*'s good characters can do no harm, but tend to suffer constantly in the hands of the bad characters.

The looks of the characters of *Another World* are diverse. The women have all sorts of different hair styles and colours. Only three of them appear to have dyed hair -- Paulina and Amanda Cory and Iris Wheeler. Not all of them are exceptionally beautiful either -- though none of them are unpleasant to look at. Some of the characters dress extremely well, but the way they dress is usually representative of the character and his or her social status. This adds to greater diversity of character, unlike *Y&R*, where most of the characters have the same "look". The male characters of *AW* are even less likely to be attractive than the female characters. Some of them (Cass Winthrop, for example) are almost unpleasant to look at. On the other hand, the more attractive male characters (Ryan Harrison and John Hudson), while not necessarily more physically attractive than those of *Y&R* or *GH* are especially attractive because of their personalities, which are multi-faceted as opposed to the one-dimensional characters of *Y&R* (Brad, for example).

Because the characters of *AW* are richly textured, they are easy to identify with. So while the pleasure associated with looking at the characters on a surface level may be less than that for *Y&R* or *GH*, pleasures related to identification with characters are probably more intense. Characters are often faced with moral dilemmas, and this may prove to be fascinating to the viewers who watch the characters make difficult choices (which are not always the "right" choices.)

The quality of the acting on *AW* is not very consistent. Some of the acting is excellent, particularly that of Anne Heche as the twins Marley and Vicky. Other actors (for

example Sandra Reinhardt playing the part of Amanda Cory) sometimes give good performances but occasionally visibly forget their lines, fumble, and apparently read off of the teleprompters. Most of the acting is good, but the occasional mistakes prove to be quite distracting and displeasurable. (*GH* has a few acting problems as well, but less often than *AW*. *Y&R* very rarely has acting problems. Whether this is because *Y&R* has a larger budget and can afford to re-take scenes with problems or because the actors are simply better prepared is difficult to say.) The only program for which the difficulties with acting are really distracting is *AW*. But only a couple of actors are at fault -- Sandra Reinhardt, Carmen Duncan and Victoria Wyndham -- the rest of the acting ranges from excellent to merely passable. The mistakes in acting, however, may increase the possibility of watching *AW* with an ironic viewing attitude.

One new viewer of *Another World* claims that the characters and acting of the soap are what made her change her "critical views" about it:

For several years now I have thought of *Another World* as being a valid reason for a small nap between *Days of Our Lives* and *Santa Barbara*. However, my critical views of *AW* have changed. I now stay glued to the tube between 2 and 3 pm, and have arranged all of my college classes so I can keep up with this excellent show.

I know *AW* has been on forever, but it is really improving daily. With a top-notch cast, *AW* has consistently presented likable, realistic characters in real situations with a flair lacking in NBC's other shows.

Anna Holbrook (Sharlene) delivers the most believable split personality storyline I've ever seen. She even made Sharley appealing to viewers and had us on the edge of our sofas just wondering what she would do next. Eventually, Sharlene became a stronger person and endeared herself to viewers.

Alice Barrett (Frankie), Linda Dano (Felicia) and Stephen Schnetzer (Cass) are a breath of fresh air. Felicia and Cass are perfect role models who prove that men and women can really be just friends. That Frankie can accept their friendship makes it even better.

Anne Heche's performances as twins Victoria and Marley are truly exceptional. It is not easy to believe that one actress can portray two different characters, but Heche has done it with style and grace that should earn her an Emmy.

G. Boyer, Wytheville, VA. 31

Other viewers comment on the attractiveness and talent of a couple of the male characters:

Paul Michael Valley is the best thing to happen to *AW* and to daytime in years. He has a great screen presence, is extremely talented, and his scenes with Anne Heche are wonderful. He is certainly one of the sexiest men on TV. Ryan and Vicky are making a super couple.

*Maryanne Camopolini, QC., Canada.*³²

I recently had the pleasure of meeting Kale Browne, who is my favorite star. He is as handsome and charming in person as he is when playing Michael Hudson. I cast my vote for Kale Browne as the handsomest man on the soaps.

Joanne Maley, Terra Ceia, Fl. ³³

So, while the characters of *Another World* are generally less attractive than characters of other soaps, there are still some very attractive male characters, such as Michael and John Hudson, Jake McKinnon, Ryan Harrison and Sam Fowler.

The characters of Bay City tend to be more complex and well-rounded than characters of the other two soaps. It is often difficult to predict how *AW* characters will react to certain situations, especially if they are "main" characters. Because the characters are textured so richly, they are easy to identify with (they are "real" and very human -- their weaknesses as well as their virtues are well developed). There are, however, some male actors (Kale Browne and Paul Michael Valley) who seem to be liked as much for the characters that they play as for their attractiveness. The main attraction of the characters "living" in Bay City is their personalities, but looks are important as well, particularly in the male characters.

Viewers relate to *AW* characters chiefly through listening to them (as if they were friends) or through identification. Because few characters are exaggerated or one-sided, it is rarer to view them with an ironic attitude than it is on other soaps. While there is

also an element of fascination involved, the relatively small amount of fantasy (in life-style or plotline) on *AW* tends to discourage that type of viewer-character relationship. Fascination in the case of *AW* would be more likely to take on an aspect of trying to understand moral decisions.

Style

The visual style of *Another World* is obviously much less sophisticated than those of *General Hospital* and *The Young and the Restless*. The most obvious difference is in the lighting, which is very simple and very bright. At the present time, however, *AW* seems to be experimenting with its lighting techniques, becoming more creative with its uses of shadow and editing. The sets are very plain in Bay City, and bright colours seem to be preferred. Sets are usually decorated only so that it is obvious what kind of room the characters are in (a room in the Cory mansion or a restaurant, for example).

Music is almost unnoticeable, used only to punctuate the feelings of certain scenes or as required background music in bars or restaurants. The sets are so simple that details are difficult to remember -- the camera almost never lingers on an empty set. Characters dress according to their personalities; there is no real style of dress that could be termed "*AW* - style." Even the use of make-up differs between characters. The editing is usually "transparent," unnoticeable. (There are exceptions to this; scenes involving Sharlene's split personality are edited differently to warn the viewer that the situation is not normal.) The "transparency" of the camera, the sets and the editing serve to focus the viewer's attention on the characters themselves and their conversations and facial expressions.

AW, then, is much less visually spectacular than *Y&R* and *GH*. It is said to be one of the more conservative soaps -- this does not mean that it never deals with controversial contemporary issues, though it does so less than *Y&R* (because *AW* is produced by

Proctor & Gamble and wants to avoid creating a stir by getting directly involved with issues such as abortion -- P&G does, however, sponsor *Y&R*, meaning that it advertises many of its products during the *Y&R* time slot, while it does not do so for *GH* in the Montréal area, which is somewhere between *Y&R* and *AW* when it comes to talking about controversial issues). *AW* is conservative because its style (characteristic of NBC soaps and P&G soaps) is more traditional -- it relies less on sophisticated visual stylistics (*Y&R*'s strong point) or on unusual or outlandish plots (*GH*'s specialty), and more on the intricate development of characters and their relationships to each other. The actors are not, in general, as outwardly beautiful as the actors on the other soaps. There is obviously much less to look at that is pleasing in terms of pure visual aesthetics (that is not to say that the visuals are not important, but that their relative importance in the structure of the whole program is minimal).

The pleasures that are most stimulated by *AW* are probably identification with the characters (on all levels) and voyeurism in the sense that it allows the viewer to be "spying" on all the activities of all the characters (listening pleasures). The relationships between the characters in *AW* are also more complex, because new characters are more rarely introduced than in the other soap operas. The storylines in *Another World* most often have to do with love and romance and police and law related activities, but most storylines emphasize the complexities of the bonds between the characters. The storylines do move quickly however, and there always seems to be more going on on any given day in Bay City than either Port Charles or Genoa City (there seems to be more storylines going on at once on *Another World*.) *AW*'s lack of popularity probably comes from its simple and bare visual style as well as the looks of the actors (who are still exceptionally good-looking, but less good-looking than the other soaps), and its lack of fantasy. The occasional acting difficulties, which are quite annoying and

probably easily avoidable, must also diminish the size of the audience, though they may increase the possibility of viewing with an ironic attitude. It is clear, however, that the rest of the show discourages viewing with that attitude so that most viewers probably only find it annoying. Its time slot also hampers its popularity. Because it is shown on NBC, the least popular network for daytime serials, fewer people are likely to watch *Another World* only because it comes between or before or after another favorite soap on the same channel (in Canada, however, it is shown on CTV directly before *General Hospital*. It is likely that the Canadian audience is greater, proportionately, than the American audience.) *AW* is more difficult to 'get into' than the other soap operas, because the characters are extremely well developed and the relationships between them are rather complex and the storylines have a quicker pace. But for those viewers who find character identification and involvement with the narrative to be the most pleasurable aspects of soap opera watching, *AW* has no equal.

The following letter, showing a fan's distress at the fact that *AW* is losing popularity (she or he is probably afraid that *AW* will no longer be shown in her or his area), points to some of the reasons why *AW* is appealing to its fans.

I would like to appeal to all of the *Another World* viewers and fans out there. *AW* needs our help! *AW* has always been a great show, it's sort of like a fine wine -- it improves with age. This show has a cast full of great, dedicated, hardworking actors and actresses. Plus, the storylines get more and more exciting, yet it's still way down in the Nielsen charts.

AW needs all of us to help make it No. 1, where it should be. We need to write either letters or postcards to NBC and let them know how great we think *AW* is, and also vote for all your *AW* favorites in the daytime TV magazine polls.

I hope that all of you loyal *AW* fans and viewers will join me in showing our dedication to this show, by trying to make 1991 the year *AW* moves to the top, where it belongs.

C. Croci, Montgomery, N.Y. 34

This *AW* fan asserts that watching *AW* improves with experience, reinforcing the claim that the pleasures associated with character identification, listening and narrative involvement accrue when familiarity with the text is increased, while the pleasures associated with spectacle are immediate and do not require an accumulation of past experiences (the pleasure is immediately obtainable).

In sum, pleasures associated with watching *Another World* are greatest when the viewer is well acquainted with the text and have less to do with viewing situations or attitudes than the pleasures associated with watching the other two soaps discussed here. On a superficial level, however, *AW* is clearly less pleasurable than its counterparts.

Summary

The texts of the three different soap operas are more likely to stimulate certain kinds of pleasures, on the part of the viewers, than others. *The Young and the Restless* relies mostly on visual pleasure and is highly melodramatic; *General Hospital*'s strongest point seems to be its style in terms of the way storylines and characters are developed and the way it uses a dialectic between realism and fantasy; and *Another World* is best at stimulating the participation of the viewer, since its character development and plotlines are more complex. Based on this information, it can be assumed that visual aesthetics and melodrama are some of the most important elements contributing to the popularity of a soap opera, particularly because many of the fans of *Y&R* seemed disenchanted with its storyline development and inconsistencies in both plotlines and characters. One reason why *Y&R* may be so popular is that visual pleasures work on a more superficial level and it is relatively easy for viewers to switch from one soap to another if they are watching because of the pleasing visual qualities of the soap; another reason may be because of its melodramatic attributes emphasizing a struggle between good and evil. *Another World*'s lack of popularity seems to be partially due to inertia, because it was a less interesting soap opera in the past. It is taken for granted that it mostly appeals to older viewers (though this perception of *AW* is changing; one of the letter-writers was a college student.) Newer viewers of *AW* tend to agree that the characters and plotlines are interesting and well developed. Its low ratings may also be due to the fact that it is on NBC and its visual style is less attractive than those of most other soaps. While *General Hospital* continues to be a popular soap opera, particularly with younger audiences, it sometimes crosses the line past what "soap opera" is, and this is uncomfortable for some viewers. Other viewers enjoy watching *General Hospital* because it is more innovative and does not seem bound by soap opera conventions.

It is important to note that there are variables other than the pleasurable qualities of soaps when it comes to audience preference in watching soap operas. Apart from all the different kinds of pleasures that the soap opera text stimulates that were outlined above, there are the variables of time and convenience. The convenience of the times that *Y&R* and *GH* are shown contribute to their popularity.

-
- 1 SOU, 2-4-90, p62-65
 - 2 For Nielsen ratings, see appendix. The ratings for GH have fluctuated greatly in April and May 1991 due to the changes made by producer Gloria Monty.
 - 3 Mateleski, *The Soap Opera Evolution*, p 46
 - 4 SOW, 2-12-90
 - 5 SOW 2-19-91, p34
 - 6 SOW, 2-12-91
 - 7 SOU, 2-14-91, p65
 - 8 SOU, 2-25-91
 - 9 SOW, 1-29-91
 - 10 SOW, 2-19-91
 - 11 SOW, 2-26-91
 - 12 SOW, 1-22-91
 - 13 SOU, "First Impressions", 2-25-91
 - 14 SOU, 2-04-91
 - 15 SOW, 12-25-90
 - 16 Mateleski, p 45
 - 17 This information was obtained from SOW
 - 18 SOU, 2-04-91
 - 19 SOW, 10-30-90
 - 20 SOW, 10-30-90
 - 21 SOW, 12-25-90
 - 22 SOW, 02-05-91
 - 23 SOU, 02-25-91
 - 24 SOW, 10-30-91
 - 25 SOW, 10-30-90
 - 26 SOW, 06-11-91.
 - 27 SOW, 05-28-91
 - 28 Mateleski, Marilyn, *The Soap Opera Evolution*, p 44
 - 29 In late January and early February 1991.
 - 30 SOU, 2-04-91
 - 31 SOW, 2-12-91
 - 32 SOU, 2-4-91
 - 33 SOU, 2-25-91
 - 34 SOW, 12-25-90

CHAPTER FIVE

Pleasure and Popularity

The analysis of the different kinds of pleasures associated with the soap opera in chapter three indicates that there are several aspects of the soap opera, that are specific to the genre, which articulate very specific types of pleasures. What is specific to the soap opera is its mode of narrative progression, its large cast of regular and well-developed characters, and its abundance of dialogue. The analysis in chapter four, of the specific soap operas, shows how the different soaps rely on different aspects of the genre more heavily than others. Viewers have individual preferences, but, in general, the aspects they enjoy the most are romantic storylines, well-written dialogue, well-developed characters, visual aspects (fashionable clothes, beautiful actors, decorative sets), fantasy (mostly in storylines), realism (relevance and realistic characters), melodrama, and the cyclical process of narrative progression (which includes the disclosure of secrets and the labour of working through problems through talk). Attitudes toward viewing are also important, whether viewers take the soaps at face value or view them with "ironic attitudes." One of the most important aspects of the genre, however, is the amount of discussion that it generates, and the degree to which the viewers participate in this discussion. It is clear that the people who write letters to the fanzines derive pleasure out of writing their letters, even if the letters are letters of complaint.

What distinguishes the soap opera from other genres is its method of narrative progression, its abundance of dialogue, its melodrama, and the way it focuses on interpersonal relationships (particularly romantic or familial relationships). Therefore, these aspects of the soap opera must appeal to the viewers in a way that other genres do not. In the previous discussion, it was suggested that these things, in

particular, appeal to women. Knowing what appeals to soap opera viewers, however, does not necessarily explain why these aspects of soap opera viewing are pleasurable to them. Understanding why these aspects are pleasurable is the key to getting a better understanding of the soap opera audience's relationship to the text. Before looking at why these aspects are pleasurable, a look at what the viewers themselves think is important to the success of the soap opera might help to elaborate how the viewers believe they derive pleasure out of the watching experience.

The following letters include suggestions as to what should be done to soap operas in order to increase their popularity. These letters are by women who wrote to *Soap Opera Weekly* following a request by its editor for letters that suggested ways to improve the ratings of daytime drama. This first letter suggests that relationships are of utmost importance:

During this age of working women, not many women have the time to watch several daytime dramas, even on tape. Unless the networks are giving them something wonderful, most women will forgo their soaps in favor of family, housework, school, etc.

How do you give them something wonderful? Get back to the relationships! That's the key. When *General Hospital* divorced the Quartermaines and destroyed Duke and Anna, Colton and Olivia, Lucy and Scott and Robert and Katherine, I became a much less faithful viewer. Those relationships had potential and were broken up willy-nilly.

All My Children is another soap that seems to have no regard for marriage and stable relationships. There isn't room here to enumerate all the good, popular couples that AMC destroyed. And to what purpose?

Creativity is badly needed among the ranks of the writers. Keeping relationships together and interesting requires immense creativity. Alan and Monica on *GH* were written into a corner by piling adultery upon adultery until that relationship had to falter. It was the result of a certain lack of creativity in the writing. Adultery is not the only problem that a married couple can have! I am hoping that when they remarry, adultery will be a thing of the past, and writer creativity will find other conflicts within that great family.

Relationships that have substance will help save daytime dramas. Musical spouses, lovers, etc., is not what the fans want. Creativity is necessary to maintain these, and it should be the object of a widespread search on the part of the executive producers.

*M.E. Core, Pittsburgh.*¹

M. E. Core clearly feels that relationships are the key to the success of a soap opera, and more creativity is needed. She acknowledges that obstacles are necessary for interesting plotlines, but believes that love triangles and adultery are over-used. It is obvious that she remains a viewer despite her complaints, and feels confident that she knows what the fans are looking for.

Another viewer wants soap operas to become more innovative, and refers to Santa Barbara as an example:

What should the daytime network bosses do? Thanks for asking. First they've got to look at their calendars and see it's not 1950. As *The World Turns* is my idea of a '50s soap -- it's traditional and doesn't strain the disbelief suspension system much.

I say this after watching ATWT for two weeks when the "pros" judged it to be the best show a while back. After two weeks of dreary dialogue and storylines with not even one laugh, and a casting disaster -- Margo, the daughter, looked five years older than her mother -- I bid ATWT a fond adieu.

On the other hand, there's SB, impudent and innovative, and often making fun of the genre. I think the soap of the future is going to be more in the *SB* mold than in the *ATWT* one. Plots and characters are developed quickly on *SB*, and a viewer needs a VCR...

... But it's not really the storylines that grab viewers in the first place. Unless a soap viewer cares for the characters, there's no storyline that's going to grab .

... It's the characters that attract me to a show, daytime or prime time. That means good writing and acting aren't just lucky circumstances, they're required. *SB* has attracted first-rate actors by giving them good writing and honest, three-dimensional characters to play. Other soaps should feel obliged to follow its lead.

The three major networks are going to have to admit they are never going to get the daytime ratings they once had. They should realize those days are gone forever.

Another problem is that the networks continue to interrupt daytime for special news reports. That's a terrific way to alienate daytime viewers. I think it's the utter disrespect and contempt such interruptions convey to the daytime audience that incenses me so...

*I. Walker, Rio Rancho, N.M.*²

Ms. Walker thinks that well-developed characters and respect on the part of the networks is essential to maintaining a daytime audience. A well-developed character depends on good dialogue and a certain amount of acting talent; apparently, without these, a soap opera will be less successful. While this is true, when one is reminded of the popularity of *The Young and the Restless*, which has repetitive dialogue and one-dimensional characters, it is difficult to believe that dialogue and character development are the most important factors leading to the success of a soap opera. Her comments also suggest that "ironic attitudes" are important for enjoyable viewing and that what the "pros" think influences her decisions to try to watch new soaps.

Yet another reader expressed her opinion about what she thought viewers expected from soap operas in the column "A Reader's View" of *Soap Opera Weekly*:

"A Reader's View -- The Three R's of Daytime in the '90s"

In a recent column, your editor, Mimi Torchin, asked what viewers expect from soaps in the 1990s. The answer for this viewer is relevance, romance and respect.

Women make up the majority of daytime viewers and, despite the conventional wisdom that soaps are junk food for the mind, I believe that women are intelligent and deserve to be presented with better material than most soaps offer.

Relevance: Rape is an overused plot. Rape is a horrible crime. It is the ultimate objectification of the female victim -- the rapist sees the woman as merely an object, not a human being, and vents his rage on her in a most humiliating and violent act. Rape is a plot that can make a very compelling story, but it is used much too often. I am an NBC viewer and -- right now -- rape is a major storyline on all three of their soaps. . .

I would be more interested in seeing a realistic domestic violence, AIDS, or pro-choice vs. anti-abortion storyline. There are many more important and interesting issues that confront today's women -- rape is one, but it's not the only one.

Romance: Romance is the mainstay of soaps, and a good romance can raise ratings better than a rape storyline. I am very tired of the overused romantic triangle. Triangles most often are dragged on and on until the participants just look foolish, fickle and desperate. The only triangles that work are the ones where you equally like all of the characters involved. . . There are more imaginative ways to keep star-crossed lovers apart than the ubiquitous third party. . .

Respect: I would like to see evidence of more research and continuity in the storylines. Fantasy is OK -- but so often it just becomes silly. . .

The soaps should respect the mostly female audience by presenting better, smarter and stronger heroines. . . I need my heroines to be smarter, stronger and wittier!

NBC's ratings speak for themselves. Perhaps I need to switch channels before I judge all soaps so harshly.

*By J. Reed, Wichita, Kan.*³

J. Reed feels that she needs to be respected, treated as an intelligent woman interested in serious issues and able to feel humiliated when soap opera producers and writers treat her as if she would not notice inconsistencies in storylines. She also wants to see more romantic storylines, apparently with stronger and more intelligent heroines and dealing with some of the issues that confront most women in their everyday lives. Her remarks refer equally well to soaps on other networks -- both *The Young and the Restless* (CBS) and *General Hospital* (ABC) fit the criticisms. That she comments specifically on relevance is interesting and fits in with Fiske's idea that relevance is important to the way in which people read televisual texts.

Other viewers agree that rape is overused as a daytime plotline:

The number of women being raped and physically and mentally abused is growing. Daytime is wrong in insisting on being part of the problem instead of part of the solution. If *Days* wants to get back and keep their audience, they had better stop this attitude. They have male characters who are worth watching and who have always shown respect for women while still being macho and sexy. Characters like Bo, Roman, Shane, the Horton men and Marcus are clearly going to attract a female audience in droves. And in *Jack* they are showing hints of sensitivity by making him suffer in his relationship with Jen because he raped Kayla, and by making him seek therapy, not making him an overnight hero. Please, *Days*, let your new rapist/felonist, Lawrence, remain an antagonist. We've been insulted enough.

*M. Karson, K. Sealy and others.*⁴

These viewers feel that men who commit crimes should be somehow punished for them. They also enjoy looking at attractive male characters, particularly if they are sensitive or have good personalities..

These letter-writers suggest that they want to see storylines that deal with relevant issues (abortion, AIDS) in a realistic manner. The viewers claim they want to see romance treated in a creative fashion (and not constantly being threatened by adultery or triangles). This may be because of relevance as well: in reality, relationships encounter many obstacles which have nothing to do with romantic disloyalty. They want rape to be dealt with responsibly (this theme was found in many letters) and realistically; they want to see the characters deal with the problems that rape causes, and they want to see justice done to the rapists. Viewers also want to see stronger female characters. This suggests that the viewers would like to see soap operas that coincide better with a feminist perspective.

It is clear why the viewers who wrote letters find relevance in soap opera storylines productive of pleasure. When something speaks to a person, either because of that individual's past history or because of his or her social and cultural position, it is more interesting, and therefore more pleasurable. This is also why a certain degree of realism in soap operas is called for: It reflects the problems or situations that many of the viewers live through. Fantasy, on the other hand, is also pleasurable, because it allows for escape and further fantasy in the mind of the viewer. It also allows for greater creativity, which the viewers would appreciate seeing. Fantasy is also pleasurable because it allows the viewer to forget her daily problems. While at first glance the wish for both realism and and fantasy may seem to be a contradiction, the soap opera text is capable of sustaining both elements (fantasy and realism) at once because of its multitude of characters and diversity of storylines. There is a dialectic between fantasy and realism going on here, and it is the dialectic that is productive of pleasure.

Viewers clearly enjoy talking about the various qualities and faults of the different soap operas (much in the same way as men talk about sports teams). Social pleasures of soap opera viewing exist mainly because women find it pleasurable to talk about (or hear about) other people's problems or lives, even if these people are the fictional characters of a soap opera (or the soap stars). The women who wrote the letters to *Soap Opera Weekly* felt as if they were spokespeople for the community of people who watch soap operas. Their comments suggest that their experience tells them what they and their friends enjoy about soap operas or what they look for in watching soaps.

The more general comments in these letters suggest that the previous analyses of the different soap opera texts and the letters written in relation to these specific texts accurately portrayed what soap opera viewers find pleasurable about soap operas. The reasons why certain aspects of soap operas are found to be pleasurable have also been looked at in relation to each of these pleasures. Feminine pleasures surrounding talk are the reasons why social pleasures and the soap opera's mode of narrative progression (through dialogue and the disclosure of secrets) are pleasurable. Soap operas allow viewers to slip in and out of reality and fantasy; this is why the mixture of realistic storylines and characters with fantastic storylines and characters are pleasurable. While soap operas are not per se feminist, they can be read from feminist perspectives or from the dominant perspective; this is why soap operas can remain pleasurable for viewers despite their ideological orientations. Visual pleasures work through the display of beautiful people or fashionable attire; these things are pleasurable to most people. Different viewing attitudes allow for pleasures because viewers are encouraged to watch the soap opera from any or all of these attitudes. In short, all of the different aspects of the soap opera described in chapter three can be articulated as pleasurable because they build upon pleasures that already exist for women outside of the act of watching a soap opera.

Conclusions

The main task of this thesis is to find out which aspects of soap opera viewing are pleasurable and to describe three different soap operas in terms of these pleasurable aspects of the genre in order to determine which of these aspects is most important to the viewers of soap operas. The concluding remarks of chapter four indicate that the most important aspects of the soap opera in terms of popularity are the following, in order of most important to least important: visual pleasures, melodrama (romance is included in this category), dialectic between realism (relevant storylines) and fantasy (unusual or creative plots), strong character development, modes of narrative progression (heavy reliance on dialogue), use of humour or mocking (viewing with an ironic attitude), and, finally, social pleasures, which should not be considered of least importance. Social pleasures can help to enhance or detract from any of the other pleasures.

At this point, a criticism of the concept of pleasure is in order. A look at the concept's place in relation to other theories of the television audience should be of help in this critique. The concept of pleasure relies on an active conception of the audience, in opposition to early "hypodermic" models of the television audience or later theories based on cultivation analysis. Pleasure theory, then, emphasizes the role of the audience in the interpretation of the text over the determinacy of the text itself. In this way it is similar to earlier uses and gratifications theories which also considered the audience to be active. These assumptions of an active audience predetermine what kinds of relationships between the text and the audience are found in any descriptive analysis. Thus, these results, which are based on the idea that the audience interprets the text according to the pleasures that can be obtained from it, have the same faults as any other studies based on the concept of pleasure. One of the main faults with the concept is that it overemphasizes the audience's ability to interpret the text from positions outside of

dominant ideology. In other words, the concept does not allow for the idea of hegemony or the idea that dominant ideology is transmitted through popular cultural artefacts. It is an optimistic concept that depends on a more rationalist perspective of the individual than do concepts based on stronger media effects. Notice, for example, that the description of soap operas offered here rarely discussed how the soap operas articulated or reflected dominant ideology.

The other critique that is often directed at the concept of pleasure is that it tends to glorify popular culture because of its popularity or the pleasure it affords. While the intention of the concept of pleasure is not to glorify popular culture, the fact that it does not provide negative criticism of it is enough to support this critique. This critique could easily apply to this thesis as well; it would seem that the lack of criticism against the genre implies condonation. This is not the intention here. The main reasons why no criticism was made here are because it is not in the nature of the concept of pleasure to criticize and because criticisms of soap operas are commonplace (see chapter one).

There are some other faults inherent in pleasure theory in addition to the problems caused by the concept's lack of criticism and unwillingness to acknowledge the ideological effects of popular culture. One of these faults is its inability to adequately address issues of production of cultural artefacts or the histories of the development of these artefacts. Issues of history and production are not antithetical to the concept of pleasure, however, and can be addressed in conjunction with the concept when describing a particular cultural artefact. The reasons why history and production were not considered here are because the scope of this study is by nature too small to adequately incorporate these issues.⁵

The concept of pleasure nevertheless has its uses. This description of soap operas and the reasons why viewers enjoy them would have been difficult to elaborate without the

help of pleasure theory. The concept also helps to legitimate the study of popular culture, though the critique that it glorifies mass culture should not be ignored. The relative importance of each of the different kinds of pleasures associated with watching soap operas is valuable information gained through the use of this concept. It is clear, however, that if one were to accomplish a detailed study on the viewers of soap operas and how they interpret texts, the concept of pleasure has only limited use. In order to accomplish such a study, an ethnography of soap opera viewers would have to be undertaken. Hopefully this discussion of the soap opera through the application of the concept of pleasure will prove to be useful, as a point of departure, to anyone who would attempt such an ethnography.⁶

¹SOW, 2-12-91

²SOW, 1-22-91

³ SOW, 1-29-91

⁴ SOW, 2-05-91

⁵ For a look at the production processes of a soap opera, see Intintoli. For a history of the development of soap operas, see either Mateleski or Edmondson and Rounds.

⁶ Seiter et al. conducted an ethnography of soap opera viewers. These viewers made comments very similar to those of the letter writers in this thesis.

Appendix

Nielsen Ratings:

Week of October 1-5, 1990:

1.	<i>The Young and the Restless</i>	7.6/31
2.	<i>General Hospital</i>	6.4/24
3.	<i>All my Children</i>	5.3/22
4.	<i>As the World Turns</i>	5.7/23
5.	<i>The Bold and the Beautiful</i>	5.5/21
6.	<i>Guiding Light</i>	5.2/19
7.	<i>One Life to Live</i>	5.0/20
8.	<i>Days of Our Lives</i>	4.5/17
9.	<i>Another World</i>	3.5/14
10.	<i>Santa Barbara</i>	3.1/11
11.	<i>Loving</i>	2.9/12
12.	<i>Generations</i>	2.0/8

Week of November 26-30, 1990:

1.	<i>The Young and the Restless</i>	7.8/30
2.	<i>General Hospital</i>	6.5/23
3.	<i>All my Children</i>	5.9/21
4.	<i>As the World Turns</i>	5.7/22
5.	<i>The Bold and the Beautiful</i>	5.6/20
6.	<i>Days of Our Lives</i>	5.3/19
7.	<i>One Life to Live</i>	5.2/20
8.	<i>Guiding Light</i>	5.2/18
9.	<i>Another World</i>	3.7/14
10.	<i>Santa Barbara</i>	3.1/11
11.	<i>Loving</i>	2.9/11
12.	<i>Generations</i>	2.2/8

Week of December 17-21, 1990:

1.	<i>The Young and the Restless</i>	7.8/29
2.	<i>General Hospital</i>	6.6/22
3.	<i>All my Children</i>	6.1/21
4.	<i>As the World Turns</i>	5.9/21
5.	<i>The Bold and the Beautiful</i>	5.8/20
6.	<i>Days of Our Lives</i>	5.4/18
7.	<i>One Life to Live</i>	5.3/19
8.	<i>Guiding Light</i>	5.2/18
9.	<i>Another World</i>	3.8/14
10.	<i>Santa Barbara</i>	3.2/11
11.	<i>Loving</i>	3.0/11
12.	<i>Generations</i>	2.6/10

Week of March 18-22, 1991:

1.	<i>The Young and the Restless</i>	8.6/32
2.	<i>General Hospital</i>	6.3/22
3.	<i>All my Children</i>	6.2/21
4.	<i>As the World Turns</i>	6.2/23
5.	<i>The Bold and the Beautiful</i>	6.0/21
6.	<i>One Life to Live</i>	5.4/20
7.	<i>Guiding Light</i>	5.4/18
8.	<i>Days of Our Lives</i>	5.1/18
9.	<i>Another World</i>	3.7/14
10.	<i>Santa Barbara</i>	2.8/10
11.	<i>Loving</i>	2.7/10

Week of April 1-5, 1991:

1.	<i>The Young and the Restless</i>	8.4/32
2.	<i>General Hospital</i>	6.1/22
3.	<i>All my Children</i>	6.0/22
4.	<i>As the World Turns</i>	6.0/23
5.	<i>The Bold and the Beautiful</i>	5.8/21
6.	<i>One Life to Live</i>	5.3/20
7.	<i>Guiding Light</i>	5.1/19
8.	<i>Days of Our Lives</i>	4.8/17
9.	<i>Another World</i>	3.6/14
10.	<i>Santa Barbara</i>	2.9/10
11.	<i>Loving</i>	2.8/11

Week of May 13-17, 1991:

1.	<i>The Young and the Restless</i>	7.6/31
2.	<i>All my Children</i>	5.9/23
3.	<i>General Hospital</i>	5.9/22
4.	<i>As the World Turns</i>	5.3/22
5.	<i>One Life to Live</i>	5.1/21
6.	<i>The Bold and the Beautiful</i>	5.0/19
7.	<i>Guiding Light</i>	4.9/19
8.	<i>Days of Our Lives</i>	4.8/18
9.	<i>Another World</i>	3.7/15
10.	<i>Santa Barbara</i>	3.0/11
11.	<i>Loving</i>	2.9/12

The first number is the rating, a percentage of the 93.1 million TV homes tuned to a given show. (A rating point equals 931,000 TV households.) The second is the share, a percentage of sets in use tuned to a given show.

Nielsen ratings and commentary obtained from *Soap Opera Weekly*.

Bibliography

- Allen, Robert C., *Channels of Discourse*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1987.
- Allen, Robert C., *Speaking of Soap Operas*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1985.
- Allor, Martin, "Relocating the Site of the Audience" and "Reply to the Critics: Theoretical Engagements" in *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, Sept. 1988.
- Ang, Ien, *Watching Dallas and the Melodramatic Imagination*, Methuen, London and New York, 1985.
- Barthes, Roland, *The Pleasure of the Text*, Doubleday Canada Ltd., Toronto, 1975.
- Barthes, Roland, *Mythologies*, The Noonday Press, New York, 1972.
- Brown, Mary Ellen, "Motley Moments; Soap Opera, Carnival, Gossip and the Power of the Utterance" in M. E. Brown (Ed.), *Television and Women's Culture*, pp.183-200. Sage Publications, Newbury Park, 1990.
- Cantor, M & Pingree, S., *The Soap Opera*, Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, 1983.
- Cassata, Mary B. and Skill, Thomas, *Life on Daytime Television: Tuning-in American Serial Drama*, Ablex Publishing Corporation, New Jersey, 1983.
- Coward, Rosalind, *Female Desires*, Grove Press, New York, 1985.
- Downing, Mildred, "Heroine of the Daytime Serial", *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 24, 1974.
- Eco, Umberto, *The Role of the Reader*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1979.
- Edmondson, Madeleine, and Rounds, David, *From Mary Noble to Mary Hartman, The Complete Soap Opera Book*, Stein and Day, New York, 1976.
- Fiske, John, *Television Culture*, Routledge, New York, 1987.
- Fiske, John, "Critical Response: Meaningful Moments," in *Critical Studies in Mass Communications*, Sept. 1988.
- Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality, An Introduction, Vol 1*, Vintage Books, New York, 1990.
- Gans, Herbert J., *Popular Culture and High Culture*, Basic Books, Inc., New York, 1974.
- Geraghty, Christine, *Women and Soap Opera*, Polity Press, Cambridge, U.K., 1991.
- Hebdige, Dick, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Routledge, London and New York, 1979.
- Intintoli, Michael J., *Taking Soaps Seriously: The World of Guiding Light*, Praeger, New York, 1984.

- Kaplan, Ann, Ed., *Regarding Television, Critical Approaches -- An Anthology*, University Publications of America, Inc., The American Film Institute, 1983:
- Allen, Robert C., *On Reading Soaps, A Semiotic Primer*, p 97-108
- Brunsdon, Charlotte. *Crossroads: Notes on Soap Opera*, p 76-83
- Flitterman, Sandy: *The Real Soap Operas: TV Commercials*, p 84-96
- Modleski, Tania: *The Rhythms of Reception: Daytime Television and Women's Work*, p 67-75
- Kuhn, Annette, *The Power of the Image*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1985.
- Kuhn, Annette, "Women's Genres", in *Screen*, 1984.
- Lazarsfeld, Paul F. and Frank Stanton, *Radio Research, 1942-43*, Pirell, Sloan and Pearce, New York, 1944.
- Mateleski, Marilyn, *The Soap Opera Evolution*, McFarland, Jefferson and London, 1988.
- Mercer, Colin, "A Poverty of Desire: Pleasure and Popular Politics", *Formations of Pleasure*, ed. by The Formations Collective, Routledge, London, 1983.
- Mills, Kay, "Fighting Sexism on the Airwaves," *Journal of Communications*, 1974, Spring, Vol. 24 2.
- Modleski, Tania, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-produced Fantasies for Women*, Archon Books, Connecticut, 1982.
- Morley, David, *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure*, Comedia, London, 1986.
- Morley, David, "Changing paradigms in audience studies." In E. Seiter (Ed.), *Remote Control. Television, Audiences and Cultural Power* (pp. 16-43), Routledge, New York, 1989.
- Mulvey, Laura, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", in *Movies and Methods, Vol. II*, Nichols, Bill, Ed., University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1985.
- Radway, Janice, *Reading the Romance. Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1984.
- Salwen, Michael, "Cultural Imperialism: A Media Effects Approach," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, March 1991, Vol 8:1.
- Seiter, E., Borchers, H., Kreutzner, G., & Warth, E. M., "Don't treat us like we're so stupid and naive": Towards an ethnography of soap opera viewers. In E. Seiter (Ed.), *Remote Control: Television, Audiences and Cultural Power* (pp. 223-247). New York, Routledge, 1989.

Turow, Joseph, "Advising and Ordering, Primetime," *Journal of Communication*, Spring 1974, Vol.

Williams, Raymond, *Marxism and Literature*, University Press, Oxford and New York, 1977.

Williams, Raymond, *Television: Technological Form*, Schocken Books, New York, 1975.

Williams, Raymond, *Keywords: A Vocabulary and Society*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1983.

Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory, 1990-91, R.R. Banker, Div. of Reed Publishing, New York.

Popular magazines:
Soap Opera Update
Soap Opera Weekly
Daytime TV
Soap Opera Digest

