

"Reg isn't dead, he's just run off that's all"
An Analysis of Coronation Street and Fandom in Cyberspace

Elizabeth A. Adams

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ABSTRACT

"Reg isn't dead, he's just run off that's all"
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Elizabeth A. Adams

The following case study is an investigation into the uses of history, memory and community in the soap opera Coronation Street and its particular discursive fandom "rec.arts.tv.uk.coronation-st". In this case study both the soap opera and the discursive fandom are analyzed with respect to their utilization of history, memory and community. The idea that history and memory create the foreground for the development of future storylines is understood through both Coronation Street and the discursive fandom, and I put forth examples of the use of history within the storyline of Coronation Street. These examples include a discussion of the sets and props and the narrative. In turn, examples of the fans' discussion is furthered through the use of their dialogue on the internet. The idea of community is discussed in its presentation within the programme Coronation Street including how the internet fans have created their own form of community through this common interest. This thesis promotes a new understanding of the discursive fandom, taking place in cyberspace, that has created a forum for the fans' discussion of Coronation Street; a discussion that spans the globe. Within this thesis I intertwine the text with the study of the fan emphasizing the notion that one does not exist without the other.

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Introduction.....	1
A Short History.....	2
A Short History of Coronation Street.....	6
Problematic.....	1 0
Chapter 1 - Literature Review.....	1 2
Chapter 2 - Analysis of Coronation Street.....	2 9
Characters -- couples.....	3 1
Characters -- single.....	3 5
Chapter 3 - Analysis of the Discursive Community who use the News Group rec.arts.uk.tv.coronation-st	6 1
Conclusion.....	8 4
Bibliography.....	9 1
Appendix.....	vi

Introduction

The following thesis is a case study of *Coronation Street* and the mediation of its viewers and fandom, specifically, the fans who use the news group `rec.arts.tv.uk.coronation-st` as a forum to discuss the programme. I am interested in the attention that the fans give to backstory and the historical aspects of the programme. I have chosen 6 episodes to discuss. I will analyze these episodes, focusing on the use of backstory in the main storylines that are presented within this block of episodes. Backstory is the use of previous plots, storylines and characters that contribute to the understanding of the current storylines. Because continuous serials are the never ending unfolding of the characters lives, the accuracy of the past plays an important role in the development of future plots. My goal is to understand how the fans discuss this aspect of *Coronation Street*.

This introduction encompasses a short history of soap operas and a discussion of *Coronation Street*, including its history and characters. For the purposes of this study it is necessary to place *Coronation Street* in the context of other soap operas. I finish this introduction by putting forth my personal reasons for wanting to study *Coronation Street*. I present these ideas in the introduction because it is not only important to contextualize the programme but it is necessary to understand how I decided to study this form of television programme. Before discussing issues that surround *Coronation Street* I briefly discuss the academic history and the relationship between the concepts of continuous serial and soap opera.

A Short History

The soap opera started on the radio in the 1930's. According to Carol T. Williams the notion that soap opera's grew during the great depression is merely a coincidence. However, there is also the idea that soap operas allowed a little fantasy to creep into the lives of those who were out of work and who's futures were bleak, creating a steady audience of both women and men. This is not to suggest that viewers confused real life with imagination. Williams questions the general belief that only women listened to soap operas this notion is fueled by the idea of the lack of work for men during this period (the women could work as domestics) and also the first soap, "Just Plain Bill" was about a man (Williams, 1992:16). Radio was beginning to come alive, in the United States, during this period therefore interest was high. It is important to note that soap operas were used during the war to further certain social issues. They helped people cope with death or in one soap opera racism was tackled. However, according to Williams, there was a bottom line to this idealism:

To hold down greed, Congress levied an Excess Profits Tax taking up to 90 percent of a company's profits. "ad men" convinced companies to give their money to them instead of the government. The government protested but the advertisers defended the loop-hole, saying that soaps were helping the government ...because their traditional values predictable plotting and the regular listening they wrought created order in the chaos of wartime (1992:21).

This idea adds to the notion of how soap operas were used to create and enforce a certain value system. The radio soap declined in

popularity as audiences preferred watching to listening (1992:19). The downfall of radio soaps was, to come with the popularity of television. The television soap is as popular now. Although the format has changed from the 15 minute radio soap the ideas are similar. The soap opera is still the unending story of peoples lives.

In Robert C Allen's book *Speaking of Soap Operas* (1985) he documents soap operas and their audiences. Allen argues that although soap operas have been around since the 1930's they have been mostly documented in a way that Allen calls *empiricist* -- The historian, in this case, is a disinterested collector of facts (Allen,1985:97). By this Allen is describing the idea that, in general, the history of television programing has been presented in a very technical manner dealing mostly with economic and regulatory history. If soap operas were discussed it was in a flippant manner. As Allen describes, Eric Barnouw's 1975 book *Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television* devotes eight lines to soap operas. In turn, within those eight lines his: "...treatment of soap operas tells much more about their peculiar position in academic mass media discourse than it does about them as historical phenomena" (1985:97). Allen, on the other hand, offers a different view of the soap opera, one that allows for a deeper understanding of the soap existence of soap opera's. He describes the serial as an advertising vehicle. American radio networks realized that the continuous serial drama that permitted people to tune in at the same time everyday created a regular audience. There were various surveys done during the early years of radio which outlined that women held the main influence on the family purchases and that they were the family

member who spent the most time in the home during the day. Therefore the daytime serials, which were intended to secure an audience, advertised products that were important to women who worked in the home. However, the idea that soaps were produced as an advertising vehicle created negative stereotypes of both the soap operas and their audiences.

Soap operas are considered *low art* which in turn means that they are looked down upon and easily dismissed. As Mary Ellen Brown discusses in her book *Soap Opera and Women's Talk*, (1994) the negative response to soap operas in itself begs the question, why do fans enjoy soap operas if they are so widely considered, trash? (Brown,1994:1). There has been an historical link with soap opera and low art. Brown, quoting Janice Radway, believes that the viewers pleasure : "...lies in the knowledge that men disapprove of their taste and in their defiant assertion of their right to pleasure in the face of masculine disapproval" (1994:116). In addition she asserts that the fans of soap operas are in fact reversing the meanings of their activity by showing an unabashed pleasure when discussing their favourite soap. (1994:116) In addition to this Allen believes that the dismissive and exclusionary attitude towards soap operas has only served to formulate meanings around this form of dramatic art (Allen,1985:12) The term *soap opera* is still regarded as pejorative but because of this formulated meaning the term has generated an academic interest Allen suggests that there is still an unease surrounding it.

In his article *Bursting Bubbles : Soap Opera, Audiences, and the Limits of Genre* (1989) Allen mentions that when discussing

Coronation Street academics such as Christine Geraghty, avoid the term soap opera and refer to the programme as a *continuous serial* making a distinction between the British soaps and the American ones. (Allen,1989:50). There is still a hierarchy amongst academics between various television programmes. It is the term that is changed not the programme. Although *Coronation Street* has very distinctive features that sets it apart from other soap operas it also contains themes that can be found in all soap operas (numerous divorces, marriages and deaths and more than a fair share of crises). Therefore whether or not *Coronation Street* is a soap opera or a continuous serial becomes a matter of deciding which term is applicable. However, I see no reason not to define *Coronation Street* as both because although academics such as Christine Geraghty avoid the term soap opera when discussing *Coronation Street* Marion Jordan (1981) defines *Coronation Street* as "Soap Opera Realism" therefore, *Coronation Street* may be, and is, seen as both. However, another aspect that differentiates *Coronation Street* from American soap is that it is presented (in Britain) in the evening three times weekly, Monday Wednesday and Friday at 7.30pm. This may contribute to its being referred to as a continuous serial and not a soap opera, which is generally aired in the afternoon.

According to Charlotte Brunson soap operas are equivocally tied to the idea of "bad drama". As Brunson states: "Frequently, it is to say that the drama is slackly written, cheaply produced, poorly acted. Perhaps more significantly it is to imply cliché, banality, and bathos" (Brunson,1989:116). It is, according to Brunson, the producers of *Coronation Street*, who are resistant to the idea of it

being called a soap opera because this would imply that its audience engages thoughtlessly with whatever is on the television. It would seem that soap operas, continuous serials, soap opera realisms, and any other terms that can be applied to these dramas continually fight to be taken seriously. Although as Brunsdon states in her essay *Text and Audience*, (1989) and Allen also believes, academia during the 1970's brought popular cultural products to the forefront.

A Short History of Coronation Street

Coronation Street was first broadcast in the United Kingdom on the 9th December 1960. In 1993 *Coronation Street* boasted a winter audience of between 19 and 23 million viewers (Coronation Street notes, 1994). According to its creator Tony Warren *Coronation Street* is:

A fascinating freemasonry, a volume of unwritten rules. These are the driving forces behind a working class street in the North of England. Coronation Street sets out to explore these values and in doing so, to entertain (Coronation Street Notes, 1994:3).

According to Richard Dyer *Coronation Street* can be set apart from other soap operas because although it, like other soap operas, has more than its quota of deaths, marriages and disappearances it understands these phenomena within the realm of a particular common sense. Common sense is seen as a solvent to the problems. This idea of common sense is derived from a particular description at a particular moment, the truth is guaranteed by personal testimony.

As Dyer explains this gives common sense a particular authority as a solvent to troublesome issues and perspectives (Dyer,1981:4). In addition Richard Dyer describes how work is rarely shown in *Coronation Street* yet many of the scenes and discussions between characters take place in the work place. The characters are seen discussing problems "over a pint" at the pub or gossiping on a break from work.

This gossiping in *Coronation Street* is the basis by which the storylines are tied together. Christine Geraghty discusses the use of gossip as a commentary of actions by the characters. Gossip allows for different ways to proceed on a storyline, involving the audience to entertain various ideas about the culmination of particular storylines. As we will see there is commonality between gossip within the programme and the discussion that the fans on the internet have about *Coronation Street*. The notion of gossip and community within the text itself is reflected in the interaction between the news group participants.

Coronation Street has built a reputation for having strong, independent female characters. These women in *Coronation Street* are mostly middle-aged, although more recently the programme has introduced some younger women who are equally strong and independent. By applying Raymond Williams notion of "structures of feeling", Terry Lovall explains how the use of strong female characters allows the women viewers of *Coronation Street*: "...a validation and celebration of those interests and concerns which are seen as properly theirs within the social world they inhabit" (Lovall, 1989: 50-51). However, although *Coronation Street* tries to highlight

the matriarchal community atmosphere that is connected with northern England and the working class, there is a good-humoured acceptance of women's roles and in some way how women can benefit from their role. In other words the female characters may have certain powerful attributes but they continue to portray the same position in society that women have held historically. On the other hand, the programme outlines how middle aged women can take care of themselves using what is within their power to get what they want.

I came to study *Coronation Street* because I have, in a way, grown up with the series. On weekly visits to my grandmother there was an imposed silence when the opening soundtrack for *Coronation Street* began. I would occasionally ask her, 'who is that, what happened?' only to be told, "wheisht child" until the end of the episode (we did not watch *Coronation Street* at home). After moving away from Scotland and my granny, who at 93 still watches the programme, I found a comforting nostalgia watching something that reminded me of home. But while watching the programme I began to realize how I was using the early watching years to understand present episodes and how the episodes built upon each other. Within certain storylines the use of history and memory are obvious but the occasional names and props are used to remind the viewer of the history of the characters and the programme. Some of the characters are played by the same actors that I first saw in the early 70's, which allows me to explain the history of present situations that these characters find themselves in to other fans who have come more recently to the programme.

Coronation Street is a fascinating example of British drama. It has a unique way of presenting northern England. It represents an image of the way people live in that part of the United Kingdom. Fans from around the world are able to comment and gossip about the series. This notion of gossip creates a link or a commonality between the text and the fans because the programme itself projects the idea of community and close interpersonal relations between the characters. In addition, the use of history, memory and community within the text is reflected in the news group which is a community of its own that has been brought together by their admiration for *Coronation Street*. With the use of the internet the fans are brought together and different views on the series are uncovered. The news group allows for an unusual discussion from around the world.

The programme itself is playing at different times all over the world. Canada is six weeks behind the U.K. and New Zealand and Australia are months behind the U.K. These factors produce interesting ways of discussing the programme. The news group members use each other as references about storylines and characters. They discuss every aspect of the programme and in addition, for those living outside the U.K., there is often a warning before a message so that any unwanted news about events that have not yet been aired outside the U.K. can be avoided.

Problematic

I intend in this thesis to use the text of *Coronation Street* to understand the uses of backstory and how the fans, with a particular interest in the news group "rec.arts.tv.uk.coronation-st", discuss the historical element of the serial. In this age of electronic community, fans of programmes like *Coronation Street* span the globe. Therefore, the internet acts as a forum for global discussion of the programmes events, in the same way my grandmother discusses *Coronation Street* with her friends. Discussing *Coronation Street* involves history, memory and community which are essential elements because they use backstory to influence the current and future storylines. To frame what I mean by history, memory and community I will, in the next few paragraphs, further a definition of these terms.

When discussing the use of history I am referring to the diagetic history, the characters' history within the series, and the characters' created history. By "created history" I am referring to the characters lives before they became residents of *Coronation Street*. Created history provides a solid background for each of the characters which can be used within the series to better understand a character and why they behave the way they do.

Memory will be used in conjunction with the mediated fandom and the characters. The characters memory within the series is used to remember and refer to past events and dialogue that are pertinent to the current narrative. The fans use of memory refers to the characters and events of the series to both further information to new viewers and verify the accuracy of a characters behaviour.

The notion of community can be seen both within the televised series and the news group I am going to analyze. The series is about the interactions of the characters within the fictional community of Weatherfield. The news group is a form of community in that its members have been drawn together through their mutual interest in *Coronation Street*.

The narrative is not the only way by which history and memory are affected. The sets and props used in the programme reflect its backstory which in turn have an effect on future events. The programme is based on the street life around a pub in northern England. The repetition of this set creates a sense of history in itself. It is a place that the fans have become accustomed to seeing and relating. It is a place which has become an important part of the dedicated viewer's memory. Since *Coronation Street* has been aired for 35 years, the writers have plenty of room to incorporate the backstory and key elements that have shaped the characters and the storyline.

By choosing to analyze the fans who use the internet news group I am presenting a case study of how and what the group users discuss, with special emphasis on the programme's historical themes. In doing so, I will uncover ways in which the fans generate discussion around the series and what the links are between what these fans know and what the programme is presenting us.

Chapter 1

Literature Review

Continuous serials, or soap operas, have been discussed over a broad range of articles which deal with various issues. However in this the literature review I concentrate on the articles and books that follow approaches that are directly relevant to my research problematic. This discussion will provide the basis by which I will analyze *Coronation Street*. Rather than attempting to define a continuous serial I will discuss the ideas put forth by Christine Geraghty in her article *The Continuous Serial a Definition* (1981).

Geraghty defines *Coronation Street* and other continuous serials by breaking them down into three characteristics. The first concerns its regular appearance, that is, the programme appears in the same time slot every week or in the case of *Coronation Street* three times weekly. In addition to this consistent characteristic of time is the idea that the viewers understand the time lapse of a continual serial differently from the time lapse between the episodes of a series. *Coronation Street* in particular will celebrate holidays on the correct day, e.g. bank holidays and Christmas day. If an episode is broadcast on Wednesday then the narrative will present the day as Wednesday. In essence it is as if the viewer can tune in and see what is going on in Weatherfield on that particular day. (However, while it can be seen on Monday, Wednesday and Friday in the U.K. it is broadcast on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday throughout Canada).

Secondly is the sense of future: the constant postponement of the final resolution making the serial an endless story which uses

multiple plot lines that unfold every episode. This idea leads the viewer to believe that the future narrative is not yet written. In addition, a scene which would normally suggest an ending, such as the disappearance or marriage of a character, does not necessarily suggest this in a soap opera. In fact these ideas can be used to open up new storylines. A character will re-appear or a wedding will lead to storylines that follow the marital relationship through the ups and downs of married life sometimes culminating in a divorce which in turn leads to another story.

Geraghty's final continuous serial characteristic is the pertinent appropriation of two or three storylines which are then woven together and presented over a number of episodes. However, although one storyline may be resolved at the beginning of an episode another will commence at the end of the episode which allows the soap to continuously unravel the events in character's lives. A comic storyline is often played out alongside the dramatic in an endeavour to reflect both the mundane and the seriousness that everyday life involves (Geraghty,1981:9-11).

In addition to her list of serial characteristics Geraghty implies that the past is used to engage an audience and keep it. According to Geraghty, *Coronation Street*, particularly, pays a lot of attention to the past. Within the narrative the notion of the past is based in the community, e.g., the use of photographs and memorabilia. These memorabilia will be played up at certain times. For example, when a crisis occurs the focus may turn to a photograph of a deceased husband or close friend who would normally give advice at such a moment. Because *Coronation Street* has been broadcast for 35 years

it can be assumed that a number of its fans have been dedicated viewers for a good number of years. The attention given to the past is important because the dedicated viewer remembers past events and characters.¹ The continuous serial is understood as the unraveling of the lives of various characters. These characters begin building a history which becomes part of the narrative (Geraghty,1981:16) and the dedicated viewer understands the character by what has happened to him/her previously. Therefore history is pertinent to the understanding of future storylines.

Mimi White combines the idea of history with what Geraghty has outlined as a sense of the future. White believes that the use of the past allows for more room to move the plot in the future. On the other hand White also recognizes that the past can be used to : "guarantee[s] the present which in turn surpasses it because it is, more contemporary (and sophisticated) than the dated past on which it is built" (White,1989:290). Although in this case White is discussing television specials of late night talk shows the idea of including highlights of previous shows can also be seen in soap opera anniversary programmes. The anniversary special will, for the relative newcomer, outline the history of the characters and in turn ground the narrative and dialogic tradition of the soap. However, this kind of programme does not appear every week therefore within the narrative of present episodes there are indications of a character's past through dialogue or memorabilia.

¹ Although Geraghty believes that the screen writers can afford to leave some issues unresolved, I would argue that the dedicated viewer will notice when this happens and will therefore question the producer's integrity.

White also invokes the idea of time. Using an episode of *Dallas* she explains how time has been wiped out. The use of a dream has eliminated a whole season of episodes. This use of the dream sequence in *Dallas* which eliminated the 1985-86 season has according to White presented an extreme version of how the narrative re-introduces the return of a character: "For it is not just the case that *Bobby* returned having never really died. Rather none of the events of the 1985-6 season have the status of diegetic reality" (1989:293). *Dallas* took the idea of time lapse further than the daytime soap does by portraying all of the events of a previous season in an 8 hour period. In this instance the un-concluded storylines at the end of the last season are left being explained away as a dream. It seems the writers believe no rational explanation is necessary. The dream idea takes soap opera openendedness to the extreme. However, White explains that this 'new plot' promotes the *forgetting* of last season by offering an alternative version of the story (1989:293). This concept in turn evokes the idea of re-writing a soap's history. Despite this, White asserts that the previous events are still strongly linked in the viewer's memory (1989:294). This notion of audience memory is reflected by the way producers of long-standing serials endeavour to create a sense of place, a place that the viewer will not easily forget.

Producers of long standing serials attempt to create a place which is imbued with meaning. For example, the scripts of *Coronation Street* are created from the writers and producers own experiences and observations. In addition the creation of believable and fresh ideas is a vital part of all of the staff involved in the production of

the script material (Coronation Street Notes, 1994:4). This familiar place is created to make the viewer feel comfortable. The characters must seem to belong and, in the case of *Coronation Street*, characters must be represented as belonging. *Coronation Street* historically addresses daily life around a northern English pub and its regular clients. This allows the viewers a 'sense of place' that has been created by both the set and the actors. The pub is a common meeting place where informal, sometimes intimate, interaction occurs.

According to Horace Newcomb, a sense of place generates meaning and this is an important aspect of a soap opera (1990:31). The role of having a sense of place allows us to distinguish between a location and a place -- a location is essential to production, and place essential to narrative (1990:30). The meaning generated through the creation of place remains with the programme and begins to build a background of knowledge for the audience. The backstory can be re-introduced at a later date which makes it a very important part of the continuous serial. As Newcomb explains the creators of a television series choose locations that bear a significant cultural meaning. The location is then molded into a place, which is imbued with specific meaning. The characters are defined when they come into contact with the place. Consequently, events become significant because they occur in that place. In *Coronation Street* The Rovers Return pub, is the central place although there are other *places* in the serial which are prominent, (e.g. the viewer is allowed to enter character's homes so that they can get a sense of the tastes and values of the individual characters). This, in turn, gives the viewer

the opportunity to establish how the character lives and adds to the viewer's understanding of the narrative.

In his article *Sense of Place in Frank's Place* Horace Newcomb suggests that a sense of place can not be created by a set which is a public premise of a professional nature, for example a court room or a doctor's office (Frank's Place was set in a restaurant in New Orleans) (1990:34). This same idea can be applied to *Coronation Street*. Although it could be argued that The Rovers Return is a public, professional space, it must be remembered that the pub owners live above the pub. This infusion of the private/personal and public/social domain allows a broader narrative to occur within the common space of the pub because it does not separate the working life of the owners from their social life and interaction with other characters. In addition to the sets and narratives, the region and city also play important roles in creating a sense of place. These distinctions significantly influence the sense of place and the way of understanding the characters. *Coronation Street* is situated in the fictional place of Weatherfield, a suburb of Manchester, which is portrayed during the opening credits in an image which reflects Manchester's industrial nature. In the background of the set of *Coronation Street* there is a large 19th century factory building. This building not only re-enforces the idea of Weatherfield as a neighbourhood with a working class history, but also establishes for the viewer strong links to industrial northern England in general. It must be remembered that narrative form also plays an important role in the way that the programme is understood and how the meanings are generated. In *Coronation Street* the dialogue is often

in the form of gossip. Through the use of gossip the characters are able to form opinions of each other and in turn, help each other solve problems. This presents the programme as a 'tight knit' community where the characters know each other intimately

The ever-present use of props and photographs within the sets lends not only to the creation of a sense of place but also to the idea of backstory. *Coronation Street* in particular pays important attention to the idea of history. As Geraghty states:

The *Coronation Street* production team includes a programme historian who ensures that any references to the past are correct. The serial, therefore, operates in a situation in which it must be accessible to all viewers while, at the same time, be accurate about its own accumulated past. This double necessity has certain effects on both the narrative in serials and the audience's involvement in that process (1989:16).

However, *Coronation Street* does not entirely hinge its plot and narrative on past events. Characters are built by the way in which they have behaved and interacted with others in the past. In this case Newcomb's idea of the sense of place or feeling can be clearly seen in *Coronation Street*. Not only are meanings built through the characters but the location becomes important because the idea of class values emanates through the use of narrative as well as location. This makes *Coronation Street* distinct from other programmes. Millington and Nelson's study of the British drama *The Boys From the Blackstuff* discusses Britain's unemployed from a working class point of view and can be seen as an example of the use

of repetition as a way to create a sense of despair. There are only a few locations used in the series, the unemployment centre being the main one because the common denominator between the characters is unemployment. In *Coronation Street* the sense that the characters are from the working class and are from industrial northern England gives them a common denominator. The producers have created not only a sense of place but also a sense of England's industrial north.

In 1982 the producers of *Coronation Street* built a permanent set where *Coronation Street* is shot everyday (Gottlieb,1993:47). This invites the viewer to understand *Coronation Street* through a permanent sense of place, (fans can actually take tours of the set). The idea that *Coronation Street* has a permanent outside set suggests the producers are very concerned with history. Within the set there are different characters inhabiting each house therefore the space begins to hold a sense of the past which can be used within the script. Long-standing serials such as *Coronation Street* begin to build and have built over the years a long standing audience which can relate to the history of "the street" and it's characters. They are aware of the events that have taken place in the characters past and therefore expect future storylines to take into consideration the characters past. As Geraghty explains: ".. some viewers/listeners do remember a serial's past very clearly and expect them to be accurate down to the last detail" (1981:16). The idea of the past is important. Characters must have an intact history; they do not appear from nowhere and there must be a created reality that is connected to each of them. The producers of *Coronation Street* create a past for each character. This past plays a role in the future actions of the

character. Therefore the accurate depiction of characters pasts through the narrative is very important. The notion that the viewers are critically interpreting the narrative plays a crucial role in the writing and producing of every episode.²

In addition to what has been discussed previously in this literature review it must be remembered that there is not just one "type" of person that watches *Coronation Street* but that it is in the interests of the producers to attract a variety of viewers. As Fiske discusses in his book *Television Culture* (1987) "Television's need to be popular in a society composed of a variety of groups with different, often conflicting interests, requires its texts to be what Umberto Eco (1979) calls open" (Fiske,1987:94). Drawing from the theories of Eco, Fiske discusses the need for a text to be open. He

² In her article *Interpreting a Television Narrative: How Different Viewers See a Story* Sonia Livingstone has endeavoured to uncover how the viewers of *Coronation Street* understand the serials' narrative. Using quantitative methodology Livingstone has turned the fan's opinions and understanding of the text into facts and figures leaving little room for emotional responses to the narrative. However, despite this Livingstone is able to present a generalized notion of how the viewer understands a particular episode of *Coronation Street*. In her study she presents an episode of *Coronation Street* to a randomly selected audience. Then after a few days she asks her viewer sample to answer questions about the episode including a section which measures how the viewer identifies with the characters. Livingstone then proceeds to cluster the responses to the episode and characterize her participants by how they answered her questionnaire. There is no room for interpretation of the serial. Rather the interpretation is guided by Livingstone's questions and general understanding of the programme. Livingstone also validates how her study can be generalized. Although she argues that the viewers are active it seems a rather long shot to assume the meanings that she says exist are in fact the "true meanings" put forth by *Coronation Street*. It is an impossible task trying to find a true meaning, especially with a questionnaire that has been created in an attempt to understand specific narrative themes. These themes in turn have been created by the writers and producers of *Coronation Street*. In other words the idea that one can generalize about an audience of 23 million viewers from a sample of 66 dedicated viewers seems almost impossible. However, her analysis does enhance the idea that my research is relevant as a case study. I do not intend to generalize but rather present a study of a particular way that fans discuss the narrative and themes of *Coronation Street*.

states that the open text resists closure. Fiske suggests that Eco has contradicted himself by saying that such texts are exclusive to highbrow and minority tastes (1987:94). However, it would also seem that the open text theory could be applied in any instance. If television's main concern is popularity then the wider the variety of meanings produced, the broader the audience. The idea of the open text may allow a text to able class boundaries, where the dedicated viewer is concerned.

These types of texts have within them a set of themes, that are played out through the storyline. Through the use of the storyline the themes can be easily identified by the viewer. An example of a theme is "crime does not pay" or "violence against women". The storyline will involve these themes by having (as in the violence against women theme) the characters involved in a domestic dispute where the male strikes the female character. Richard Paterson and John Stewart in their essay *Street Life*, argue that the usual practice of the producers of the programme is to have a main theme and a secondary theme (Paterson&Stewart,1981:82). Using an example from an episode of *Coronation Street* they demonstrate how both the main themes and the secondary themes are woven into each episode. The use of serious and comic themes being played off each other is not unusual. The authors also illustrate how the characters are immediately made identifiable to the audience. The viewer can quickly distinguish who is an employed or unemployed character by emphasizing the time of day the unemployed character can be seen buying the morning newspaper (1981:85). In addition Paterson and Stewart present the notion of comical characters. These characters

often allow for relief from a more serious theme that is dominating the episode. These characters are often people who are street residents yet are not quite accepted by the rest of the community. The characters usually act in a way that describes them as people who constantly want to be revered by the other characters but usually end up being the butt of jokes and fail in their endeavour to be envied or revered. However the pattern is set and what is expected of these characters becomes entrenched in the backstory of the serial. This in turn, allows the narrative to incorporate the unusual way in which certain characters understand a specific theme. The individually accumulated histories of each character are used to unravel what might seem as oppositional themes. The different characters are in fact used to identify the changes in British society (1981:98).

Due to its continuous serial format, Paterson and Stewart identify how *Coronation Street* can not afford to introduce enigmatic themes. The authors present a parallel argument to Horace Newcombs' 'sense of place' by allocating the main set location, The Rovers Return, as: "...the space in the Street where the strands are brought together..."(1981:88). In addition the authors explain how episodes can be structured by the use of oppositions, such as men's work versus women's work. Viewer memories of a character's long history of problems with relationships and health problems, or a character's nasty or pleasant temperament are "historical" themes which recur throughout. A character may leave to get married and then return to pick up their old way of life. In this instance the

character must be re-introduced to the programme with their past and absence explained.

The idea of re-establishing the character, re-enstating them in the series, or witnessing a character's continual moves which are entwined with the character's past creates an interesting way of looking at the differences between what the dedicated viewer discusses and what the textual form of the soap is presenting us. It allows the fan to discuss the re-introduction of characters, their past and deem whether or not the return of the character is valid.

Not all viewers of *Coronation Street* are fans. However in this thesis I am specifically concerned with a group of dedicated viewers that have created a news group where they can discuss the series *Coronation Street*. They are dedicated enough to the series to take time out from their daily lives to discuss the programme in detail with other members of the group. These people are not merely casual viewers but can be seen as dedicated to this particular programme making them fans.

The fan is often characterized as a fanatic. According to Joli Jenson the fan has consistently been studied in association with the celebrity and usually from the pathological stance. This account of the fan usually includes the idea that the fan is an: "obsessed loner who (under the influence of the media) has entered an intense fantasy relationship with a celebrity figure" (Jenson,1992:11). In addition to this description Jenson discusses how the fan is also associated with the screaming, weeping teen in a crowd, or a roaring hysterical sports fan (1992:11). It is, however this type of description of the pathological fan which dominates. As Jenson

argues, there is very little literature that investigates fandom as something of an everyday cultural or social phenomenon. Using the notion of class and enlightenment ideas based in rationality to further her argument, Jenson points out that people are considered fans if the:

object of desire is popular with the lower and middle class, relatively inexpensive and widely available, it is fandom (or a harmless hobby); if it is popular with the wealthy and well educated, expensive and rare, it is preference, interest or expertise (1992:19).

Jenson's ideas present a relationship between fans and class. In this instance I raise the question of how internet news group users fit into this description of the fan. Since soap operas are widely associated with the popular, can the group users be categorized as middle and working class? Although this particular thesis will not endeavour to uncover the class of fans who use the news group, it is necessary to establish how self-proclaimed fans are defined by others.

In addition to the distinction between high and low culture there is a further distinction drawn between rational and emotional. Fans are considered to be very emotional; ready to do anything for their sports or celebrity hero. In contrast, aficionados are characterized by their passiveness and undisruptive manner (1992:21). According to Jenson this characterization is drawn from a distinction between reason and emotion, educated and uneducated. However, although these distinctions have been formed, people who

discuss Maria Callas and those who discuss Courtney Love are equally fans although the Love fans are more likely to be associated with irrational behaviour than someone who gets emotional every time they hear Maria Callas sing a Pucini aria. The soap opera fan is often associated with women, irrationality, and a lack of education. Yet the internet has allowed for a re-definition of the soap opera fan who now use computers as a vehicle of communication a vehicle generally associated with rationality and education. For example Henry Jenkins offers a discussion of the fan who uses the net in his *case study: alt.tv.twinpeaks*. This case study describes the fan as someone who has an intricate knowledge of modern technologies: "...these technologically oriented viewers embrace the VCR, like the computer, as almost an extension of their own cognitive apparatus" (Jenkins, 1992:78). However, this is not the only reason that these fans look to the internet for a discussion of their favourite television programme.

According to Henry Jenkins, computer news groups allow fans to feel they are involved in a communal enterprise. The fans who use the net often use other people's texts to add insight into what has happened (occasionally, as Jenkins admits, flaming takes place). The net as, I propose to outline in my research, is as much a part of fan gossip as a group of fans sitting around discussing the programme. As Hobson describes in her article *Soap Opera's at Work* (1989) fans need to reach out to each other and the net is an electronic community which allows fans to do so.

It is important to understand the vital role fan gossip plays. As Jenkins mentions, gossip is all too often dismissed as idle chatter

(Jenson,1992:80). Gossip, in *Coronation Street* is an intricate part of the programme; it is used to outline the historical and set the boundaries of the community. This involves the viewers by allowing them to entertain various ideas concerning the culmination of storylines. In other words the use of gossip is exploited by the programmes' writers to involve the fans, build storylines and offer the opinions of other characters.

When discussing the use of gossip and the internet Jenkins presents the ideas put forth by Deborah Jones who has identified four major classes of gossip all of which can be applied to television fans: "housetalk, bitching, chatting and, scandal"(1992:80). I will outline the various categories that Jones discusses, however I will not be using these categories to discuss my own case study. These categories allow for a better understanding of the importance of gossip as a way of communicating.

Housetalk can be identified as the exchange of information which centres on the domestic, and involves discussions of a moral nature. *Bitching* can be described as the type of gossip that allows television fans to air their complaints in an environment where the anger will be understood and expected. *Chatting* can be understood as the most intimate form of gossip; it is a process of mutual self disclosure which allows for intimate, emotional openness between the participants. Finally the *scandal* category allows for the discussion of moral dilemmas and judging others by their moral behaviour. It also concerns the interest in others' lives. (Jones,1980:196-97). Jenkins asserts that in his case study the fans discuss the personal lives of stars, the production of the series, and

make moral judgements of the characters and the text. They also exchange personal titbits and discuss other unrelated personal issues. Jenkins discusses the power of gossip as a feminine discourse. The soap opera is the ideal narrative for the use of such categories due to its openendedness and its focus on relationships. *Coronation Street* is particularly interesting in this instance because the programme uses the openended format which is typical of American soaps but its focus on relationships is more intense. The characters in *Coronation Street* either live on the street or very close to it. In addition, there is the relationship between neighbours, the interaction within families, the activities among friends, and the flow of characters in and out of the various businesses on the street. Overall there is very little interaction with the outside community. The narrative focuses on "The Rovers Return" and the actual "street" New characters are introduced slowly, often before they are seen physically.

In this chapter I have endeavoured to outline the themes that are directly linked to my thesis problematic. The themes outlined such as Horace Newcomb's "sense of place" and Christine Geraghty's definition of a continuous serial, aid in the creation of ideas that will be further discussed in the analysis of the programme and the news group. The ideas that have been furthered in the literature review are directly linked to the notions of history, memory, and community. These notions aid in the understanding of the uses of backstory within the serial and, in turn, how the members of the news group "rec.arts.tv.uk.coronation-st" discuss the historical elements of the serial. The themes outlined in the literature review will guide the following analysis of *Coronation Street*.

Chapter 2

Analysis of Coronation Street

Coronation Street has been on the air for over 35 years, therefore the use of history in current storylines is apparent. The characters in the programme have, over the years, built a history which can be used to explain and understand how different characters act and react in different situations. In addition to the personal history and memories of the various characters the notion of the past is also brought to the forefront through the use of props. For example, "The Rovers Return Pub" has been a central location since the beginning of the serial. The props inside the pub reflect its history. The backroom, where staff congregate before work, is decorated with "old style" wallpaper and some old and modern furniture. The dining table and chairs reflect the recent past whereas the mirror hanging above the fireplace and the lamp in the corner is post war style. In turn, the physical appearance of the Rovers Return and the characters' homes reflect the period of industrial growth in northern England. The architectural design of these homes embody the notion of the past.

The older characters who live on *Coronation Street* have homes with a kitchen/ sitting room area combined, and a front room that is only used on special occasions. In contrast, the younger characters have renovated their homes, have more modern appliances, and have created a separate living room. Therefore, there is a noticeable difference between the homes of the older characters and those of the younger ones. The older style homes create a sense of history but the renovated homes, in turn, can remind the viewers of past

characters and previous storylines. It is a combination of props and narrative that create the sense of history I am going to discuss further in this chapter.

The following chapter will involve the analysis of the television programme *Coronation Street*. This analysis will involve marking out specific themes and storylines of the programme that involve the use of backstory. This analysis will be (in a future chapter) linked with the news group rec.arts.tv.uk/coronation-st. However, in this chapter I will describe the characters, the dialogue, and how backstory is used to articulate a particular scene. Backstories are the storylines that have been previously developed that in turn, give the fan an understanding and description of the characters. In other words, soap operas are often referred to as the unraveling of the characters lives, which gives each character a history. However, in the continuous serial format, that history has been played out and the fan is aware of the events that have aided in the character's development. Unlike, the mini series, for example, where only a portion of the character's lives are shown, the fans knowledge and understanding of these characters hinges on what is presented during the hours that the series is aired. The continuous serial, in comparison, runs for years and therefore the accuracy of historical themes, or backstories are an integral part of the serials' makeup because fans are loyal and remember past episodes. The accuracy of each character's history is an important aspect of *Coronation Street*. Because *Coronation Street* has been on the air for 35 years, it has a loyal following. Therefore the history of *Coronation Street* is well known by its fans.

I will first give a description of the characters that appear in the episodes that I am using in this thesis. I will discuss the history of these character's according to both personal knowledge of the programme and their backgrounds as provided by Granada Television in their booklet entitled "Coronation Street Notes". It is important to describe each characters background separately so that when describing the programme's narrative I do not have to describe how the characters came to represent a particular ideal and how they interact with each other. The description of these characters allows for an understanding of certain traits which, in turn, act as vehicles to invoke themes. The description of the characters grounds why a certain character is involved in a specific storyline. In addition this character description will provide further evidence of the character's past and historical interactions which, in turn, will lead to a better understanding of the uses of memory and history in *Coronation Street*. The following is a description of characters who appeared in the *Coronation Street* episodes which were aired in Canada on C.B.C. April 1,2,3 and 8,9, and 10th, 1996.

Characters -- couples

Alma Baldwin and Mike Baldwin (Amanda Barrie, Johnny Briggs)

Alma and Mike were married in 1992, although Mike has been a regular character since 1976 and has had affairs with various women including a regular character Deirdre Rashide. At the time of this affair Deirdre was at the time married to Ken Barlow, now Mike's arch enemy. Mike was initially the owner of a clothing factory on

Coronation Street and since its sale in 1989, is the owner MVB motors. He is a suspicious character and is often associated with the Weatherfield underworld. Alma is a 60% owner of a cafe which she received in her divorce settlement from Jim Sedgewick in 1988. Gail Platt owns the other 40%. The Baldwins have no children together, although Mike has a son who lives with his mother, Maggie Redman.

Gail and Martin Platt (Helen Worth, Sean Wilson)

Martin was initially considered to be Gail's toyboy until they married in 1989 and had a son. Gail has two children from a previous marriage to Brian Tilsley. Brian and Gail had a stormy marriage both having had affairs. However, Brian left Gail when she admitted to being pregnant but not knowing who the father was. They remarried in 1988, however Gail, knowing she had made a big mistake remarrying Brian, asked for a divorce soon after the same night Brian was murdered. Gail and Martin met while Martin was working at the cafe. Martin is currently a nurse at Weatherfield general. Gail has been a regular on *Coronation Street* for 20 years. Gail and Martin are residents of no.4 *Coronation Street*.

Audrey and Alf Roberts (Sue Nicholls, Bryan Mosley)

Alf Roberts has been a regular on *Coronation Street* for over 30 years. He married Audrey in 1991. However, he has had two previous marriages both of which ended tragically. He was once the owner of the corner shop, was city councillor in 1967, and has

recently finished his second term as Mayor of Weatherfield. He sold the corner shop to Reg Holdsworth in 1994. Audrey Roberts is Gail Platt's mother. She married Alf after a life of living with various male friends. She has a son Stephen, who lives in Canada with his adopted parents. Audrey is generally considered to have a promiscuous past. She is also good friends with Alma Baldwin.

Reg and Maureen Holdsworth (Sherrie Hewson, Ken Morley)

Reg and Maureen are currently the owners of the corner shop and live off the street with Maureen's mother. They married in 1994 after a 25 year separation.

Jack and Vera Duckworth (Bill Tarmey, Elizabeth Dawn)

Jack and Vera have been married for 37 years. They came to *Coronation Street* as a couple. They have their ups and downs but have managed to keep their marriage together. Jack and Vera have both had various jobs in factories and pubs. Recently they inherited some money and were able to buy the Rovers Return. They have one son, Terry, and a grandson who lives with his mothers parents. Their son sold their grandson to his maternal grandparents soon after finishing a few years in prison. Since then Jack and Vera have not spoken to Terry.

Liz and Jim McDonald (Beverley Callard, Charles Lawson)

Liz and Jim McDonald have been married since they were teenagers. They have had a tumultuous marriage. Liz has had various affairs, some of which Jim knows about and others he does not. They have two sons and have recently been brought closer together by the death of their baby daughter. However, Jim is very jealous and is suspicious of all the men Liz talks to.

Vicky and Steve McDonald (Chloe Newsome, Simon Gregson)

Steve and Vicky own their own print shop where they make T-shirts. Steve is a suspicious character. Vicky is independently wealthy after receiving an insurance settlement from the death of her parents. Vicky is concerned that Steve has married her for her money even though she has committed a crime in order to keep Steve from being sent to jail.

Raquel and Norman "Curly" Watts. (Sarah Lancashire, Kevin Kennedy)

Raquel and Norman have recently married after knowing each other platonically for many years. Norman is the manager at "Bettabuys". Raquel is the barmaid in the Rovers Return. Before marrying Curly, Raquel had various relationships with other regular characters. She is considered to be a sweet but generally naive character. They live in *Coronation Street* home which is owned by Curly.

Don Brennan and Josie Clarke (Geoff Hinsliff, Ellie Haddington)

Although they are not married, they live in Don's house on *Coronation Street*. Don is a widower, although he was separated from his wife Ivy Brennan, for many years. A strict catholic, Ivy would not grant him a divorce. Ivy left Don to live in a convent. After Ivy died, Don had a dispute with the Platts over ownership of the house. Gail's first husband, Brian who was murdered, was Ivy's son therefore Ivy left the house to Gails and Brian's son Nicky. This caused a rift between these two families. However, all was resolved when Don bought the house from Nicky. Don also has a history of depression and mental illness. He became obsessed with the local hairdresser and made prank telephone calls to her late at night. He seems to be more stable now and has settled down with Josie.

Judy and Gary Malett (Gaynor Faye, Ian Mercer)

This young couple recently bought number 9 *Coronation Street* from Jack and Vera Duckworth. They have since alienated Jack and Vera after a dispute over the electrical wiring in the house. They have no children.

Characters -- single

Ken Barlow (William Roache)

Ken Barlow has been a resident of "the street" since the first episode in 1960. He is considered a rather tragic figure. His first wife was electrocuted; his second committed suicide; and he divorced his third,

Deirdre Rashide (then Langton) after he had an affair. He blamed Deirdre for the affair saying she worked too much--and that he could never forgive her for having an affair with Mike Baldwin.

He attempted suicide because of the divorce but has now realized that Deirdre will not have him back. He has recently had a child with Denise Osbourne. However, Denise has left Ken for her brother-in-law and Ken is raising their son Daniel, alone.

Ken is one of the few characters that has been to university and has a degree in Modern English. He has lived at various residences on *Coronation Street* but is currently living at no. 1 *Coronation Street* which was his home after the death of his first wife. He has two grown children from his first marriage they live in Scotland but he never sees them.

Deirdre Rashide (Anne Kirkbride)

Deirdre has been a part of *Coronation Street* since 1973. She is recovering after the murder of her husband Samir Rashide. They were only married for a short time. She was married twice before to Ken Barlow and Ray Langton. Ray Langton was the love of her life -- she was devastated when he left her for another woman. Although she remarried a few years later, the idea of being betrayed has become so much a part of her character that she seems, to expect it. She served on the Weatherfield council for 4 years. She currently lives off the street in a building owned by Mike Baldwin whom she had an affair with when she was married to Ken. She has a daughter, Tracey, from her first marriage.

Andy McDonald and Des Barnes (Nicholas Cochrane, Phil Middlemiss)
Andy McDonald (Steve's twin brother). Andy is more mature and reliable than his brother. He is currently attending university and is dating Anne Malone. He rents a room from Des Barnes. Des is considered a trouble maker. He has been married once but has had affairs with both barmaids at the Rovers Return. His affair with Tanya Pooley cost him his job and his relationship with Raquel. Since that affair, he has had problems coming to terms with being alone. He was nearly involved with Liz McDonald but they both decided it was better not to pursue their attraction to each other.

Tricia Armstrong (Tracy Brabin)

Tricia is a single mother and lives with her son Jamie in the flat across from Deirdre. She has recently spent a week in prison after not paying her TV license. She is currently looking for work. She once dated Curly. Her ex-husband Carl is in prison and has a history of beating up men who even glance at Tricia.

Rita Sullivan (Barbara Knox)

Rita is the owner of the newsagents where she was employed by Len Fairclough in 1973. In 1977 she gave up her job as a nightclub singer and married Len Fairclough, who died in 1983. She has since had a few affairs, one of which ended after her live-in lover threatened to kill her. She suffered a nervous breakdown and he

was killed by a tram. She stays in touch with his daughter, Jenny. She was married one last time to Ted Sullivan. Ted died not long after they were married and left her a large sum of money. Rita currently lives above the Kabin, and employs Mavis Wilton in the shop.

Fiona Middleton (Angela Griffin)

Fiona is a relative new-comer to "the street". She is a hairdresser and has just recently become the owner of Denise's hair salon. She has lived with Steve McDonald who dumped her for Victoria. She has just recently started another relationship with the new mechanic at MVB motors.

Mavis and Derek Wilton (Thelma Barlow, Peter Baldwin)

Mavis and Derek Wilton were married in 1988 after knowing each other for 12 years. Mavis has worked for Rita in the Kabin for the last 20 years. They have no children. The Wiltons take great pleasure in their garden. Before Mavis and Derek married, Mavis had various lovers but none of them quite fitted her idea of the proper husband. Mavis and Derek often have problems concerning Derek's ex-wife for whom he works.

There are of course other characters who appear in *Coronation Street* but they are not important to these episodes although they may have had important storylines in the past.

Outlining character backgrounds is important because each character embodies their own thematic. For example, certain characters will evoke issues of domestic violence while others bring forth the notion domestic bliss. In addition, different character types can be used in the same storyline, summoning different solutions to the same problem or the characters can be seen in opposition to one another, their opposition being used to further a specific storyline. The idea that characters are attached to a certain theme allows the viewers to articulate the use of history and memory to further their understanding of the storyline in a complex way. Therefore the characters' background plays an important role in their development within future episodes of the serial.

The episodes which were aired on the previously noted dates were also repeated on C.B.C. on consecutive Sundays (7th and 14th April, 1996). I video taped them so that I am now able to analyze them. I have in fact taken just a part of *Coronation Street* to use in this thesis. I will begin by describing the main storylines that appeared in the six episodes that I am analyzing. I will then discuss and analyze certain aspects of the narrative which pertain to my problematic. In other words, I will use certain storylines to discuss the use of memory and history as there are specific to past and present narratives within the aforementioned episodes. As is common with all continuous serials, *Coronation Street* ties up storylines and begins new ones while at the same time developing others in certain episodes. Therefore, there is always an overlap of themes as well as storylines. In this particular block of episodes which were videotaped on April 7th, the first episode opens with the

ending of two storylines. The first to end is the storyline that Fiona Middleton needs to raise the money to buy the *Street's* hair salon. Denise Osbourne is leaving *Coronation Street* altogether and is currently trying to sell her salon to Fiona Middleton (Fiona has been manager of the salon since Denise had the baby). However, Fiona does not have the money readily available and has been refused a bank loan. This episode opens with Fiona asking Rita Sullivan for a loan. Rita takes great offence. Fiona leaves the Kabin rather bewildered. She later turns to her brother for the money and after an afternoon of discussing her financial situation, he concedes. Another storyline is beginning to end. The characters involved are Mike and Alma Baldwin; Audrey and Alf Roberts; and Audrey's son Stephen. There is also a minor involvement of Audrey's daughter, Gail. At this point the viewers are aware that Audrey Robert's son Stephen who is in Weatherfield on business/vacation from Toronto in search of a clothing manufacturer for his line of clothing. Alma Baldwin has catered a luncheon for a conference that Stephen has held in order to promote his line of clothing. By the end of this episode it is made clear that Mike Baldwin has won the bid to manufacture the clothing line. Mike has manufactured clothing previously and is now looking forward to re-starting in this line of business. His wife Alma has also had a hand in this investment by organizing the conference thereby sealing the deal for Mike.

The continuous and comical theme in this episode is the ghost story. In a previous episode, Vera Duckworth has seen Ivy's ghost. Ivy was married to Don Brennan and was also Vera's best friend. In this episode Vera continues to discuss Ivy's unrest.

The next episode continues with Vera's sighting of Ivy's ghost. However, at this point, Josie and Don have decided to try and quell Vera's fears by pretending to have their house exorcised. Vera falls for it and is soon over at the Brennan's enquiring about the priest she has seen enter the house. Later that evening, Vera sees Ivy's ghost in the Rovers Return.

Once again the storyline involving Stephen is coming to an end. Underlying this story is the notion that Alma has become attracted to Stephen. Stephen's relatives, via Audrey Roberts, have gathered at his hotel along with Stephen's business associates to celebrate the launching of Stephen's British line of clothing. Using Stephen's room to change her clothing. Alma finds herself alone with Stephen, and mistakes his offer of friendship for mutual attraction. She makes a pass at him. Stephen rejects her and she flees the room bumping into Audrey on the way out. Audrey is suspicious about the events that have taken place in Stephen's room. The McDonalds continue to fight. This time it is because Liz lent Andy, their son, 50 pounds to pay his rent.

Andy pays back the money the next episode. In this episode Alma is feeling guilty. Audrey is very suspicious of the events of the night before. Therefore, she decides to ask her son what happened. Stephen lies to protect Alma saying he made a pass at her. Audrey is still not convinced but her husband Alf tells her to mind her own business. Alma, on the other hand, has told Gail, her partner and Stephen's half sister, the truth. Mike lets it be known to Vicky and Steve that he has the contract for the manufacturing of the clothing and insinuates his business superiority to them.

In the next episode the final scenes with Denise Osbourne appear. Denise has returned to the Street to finalize the selling of her hair salon at which moment she catches a glimpse of her son with his new baby-sitter, Kelly. She follows them to the park and says her good-byes and it is obvious³ she believes she has failed as a mother. Although she regrets having to leave him, she feels it is for the best. Continuing with the ghost storyline -- the idea of having a ghost in the pub has inspired Jack to call the papers and get some publicity for the pub out of it. Vera finally agrees. The newspaper men arrive not totally convinced that they have a story. They get ready to leave when Jack states that he has seen Ivy's ghost in the cellar. Unbeknownst to Vera, Jack is lying.

Alma tells Audrey the truth about what happened with Stephen. Audrey is shocked. In this episode we are introduced to Judy Maletts' mother, Mrs. Smedley, who is currently looking for a job. Judy sends her over to the Rovers Return. Jim McDonald leaves work early suspecting that Liz is having an affair. His partner warns him that he is letting him down on the job and this is the last time he will allow him to leave a job half finished. When Jim arrives home Deirdre is there and Liz is not. Jim is fuming mad and demands to know where Liz is then tells Deirdre to leave. We then see Liz in the pub chatting with Mrs Smedley and Raquel, when Bill comes in alone. Liz finds out from Bill what happened with Jim. She rushes home to find Jim in a bad mood an argument ensues. Jim accuses Liz of using Deirdre to cover for her extra-marital affair. In the end it turns out Liz has bought tickets for the two of them to visit Jims mother in

³ This synopsis is written from a fans viewpoint

Ireland. The episode closes with Jim feeling ashamed for his behaviour and Liz forgives him once again. Josie and Don Brennan have problems of conscience over the fake exorcism.

The next episode opens with a renewed, confident Jim happy about going away the following weekend. He chats with Andy about borrowing his car for the army reunion the following day. Tricia Armstrong makes an appearance and asks Jack for the cleaning job. However before Jack mentions anything to Vera, Vera is seen interviewing Mrs. Smedley for the cleaning job and Jack quickly employs her. Later that evening Vera is seen telling Tricia she did not know anything about her interest in the job. Tricia is livid and goes straight to the pub threatening Jack by telling him she will have her ex-husband Carl beat him as soon as Carl is out of prison.

Andy introduces Anne Malone to his family and they all spend the evening together. Although, Andy and Anne end up fighting over Andy's assumption that Anne will spend the night with him.

Jack has had T-shirts made to advertise their ghost. Vera is not happy about this although in the end she agrees that it will more than likely bring lots of new customers. Josie tells Vera that the exorcism is fake and Jack admits he knew it was a hoax. Vera is not pleased. Alma and Gail continue to discuss Alma's attraction to Stephen. Gail advises Alma not to tell Mike anything.

The final episode that I am concerned with starts with the first day of cleaning by Mrs. Smedley, and Vera's continuing anger with Josie and Don over the fake exorcism. However, as the episode continues, Josie apologizes to Vera and after some thought Vera accepts although she still believes the ghost still exists. Anne and

Andy make up with the help of Raquel and Curly. That afternoon Raquel gave Anne some advice concerning men but later realized that Anne was applying it to Andy. Gail admits to Alma that she too has been in a similar situation and they discuss Gail's affair with her first husband's cousin. After this discussion Alma decides that she must in fact put all her energies into her marriage with Mike and forget Stephen. Liz and Jim are off to his army reunion. They are excited about it and start their evening well. However they leave the re-union rather swiftly when one of Jim's army friends insinuates that he and Liz have been involved in the past. Liz is determined to cover up for this insinuation but on the way home Jim yells and screams at her and his jealousy surfaces once again. Liz tells Jim that she did have an affair with Johnny Johnson but that it was years ago when they were first married. However Jim becomes enraged, Liz stops the car, and Jim runs round to the driver's side. He pulls Liz out of the car and punches her, leaving her on the ground.

The above synopsis is to outline the storylines that are present in the episodes I am now going to analyze. I will continue by giving a detailed description using examples from the narrative of how this programme uses notions of history, memory, and backstory to develop themes in the programme. There may be more than one storyline which reflect the same themes or the use of a repetitive theme which is centred on one particular character. For example Jim McDonald feels shame once again after he realizes Liz's secret shopping was in fact for him. This storyline makes it apparent that shame and jealousy is a common theme where the Jim McDonald is

concerned. However the narrative is not the only place where backstory, memory and community play a vital role.

A sense of history, backstory and memory is created by the Rovers Return pub itself. The pub has been the centre of activity since the first episode, and is therefore steeped in history and some of the patrons like Ken Barlow, Rita Sullivan, Mavis Wilton, and Alf Roberts have been frequenting the pub for over 20 years. The pub is the meeting place for the characters. It is featured both when it is open or closed. Rarely are viewers allowed to see upstairs. Most of the interaction takes place in the bar lounge. There were no glimpses of the upstairs at all in the 6 episodes which I am analyzing. The viewers are, however, allowed into the backroom where, between opening hours the bar staff gathers to discuss the day's work or just have a chat before going into the bar. Since *Coronation Street* has been on the air for over 35 years there have been various landlords. References are made to the previous landlords and their reputation as in the following example: "...turning into a landlady has turned her into a split personality and all. Vera, one minute she's screeching at Don and Josie in her usual dulcet tones and the next she's doing an Annie Walker with poshness" says Rita Sullivan to Maureen Holdsworth, Raquel Watts, and Mavis Wilton after witnessing Vera yelling at Josie and Don Brennan. This is an example of how the writers rely on the longstanding fan to understand who Annie Walker is and why Rita would use her as an example. Neither Raquel nor Maureen question Rita about who Annie Walker is and no explanation is provided. Mavis on the other hand understands since she would have frequented the Rovers Return when Annie Walker

was the landlady. The backstories that involve the pub are endless since the characters meet there to solve and discuss problems. It is inside the pub where things become common knowledge to the rest of the characters. The Rovers holds a vault of history within its walls.

In addition to the Rovers there is a sense of place created by certain character's homes. These domestic spaces are very important to the development of the characters. In *Coronation Street* the fan gets to see inside each character's home at one point or another. Issues that are discussed in the Rovers (a public space) spill over into characters homes (private space). The homes become familiar to the viewer. Since the Granada studios have made the outdoor set of *Coronation Street* permanent, the producers of *Coronation Street* have, as Horace Newcomb would say, molded the set into a place, one which reflects and generates specific meanings about the programme. The set of *Coronation Street* reflects the row houses that are indicative of the working class north. Therefore, the 'sense of place' that is created from the permanent set generates specific cultural meanings about *Coronation Street* and its characters.

Another gathering place, although not dominant in these particular episodes is "The Kabin" (newsagent owned by Rita Sullivan). Although "The Kabin" is not always a central location for characters to meet, secondary storylines are played out there that include a knowledge of backstory to understand the characters involved. In the scene following Rita's comment about Vera, Raquel and Maureen are joined by Liz McDonald who wants to buy a pair of nylons. After some joking around the 5 women are joined by Percy

Sugden, who takes great offence to Rita's comments about women's underpinnings, the second world war, and soldiers. Percy Sugden's reaction is completely natural as fans will expect him to take offence to any comments concerning soldiers. However, it is at once obvious that a knowledge of Percy's character is necessary to comprehend his actions. Again the Kabin is featured when Fiona Middleton asks Rita for money. The same scene could be played out in the Rovers but this place is owned by Rita and the fans knowledge of Rita's background and the development of her character makes the Kabin a more comfortable place than the Rovers or the hair salon which Fiona is trying to buy. Fiona says to Rita:"...there's not enough time to get it all sorted out because Denise needs the money..."

Rita: "You're not asking me for the money."

Fiona: "Well that depends.."

Rita: "On what"?

Fiona: "On whether you think I am a good investment or not."

Rita: "You are asking me for the money"

Fiona: "Well it would be more of a loan. I'd pay you back with interest and everything."

Rita: "listen lady it'll be nothing of the sort....Can I not make an innocent word of encouragement without it being taken as an offer of money? What do people take me for around here-- some silly old biddy with more money than sense?"

Fiona: "Well I 'm sorry I didn't mean to offend you."

Rita: "Well it's too late for that now. I am cast as the guilty party." (April 7th, 1996, episode 1 of 6)

This scene requires knowledge of both character's pasts; especially of Rita Sullivan who reacts harshly towards Fiona. In this instance the writers have used a previous incident involving another character who assumed that Rita would lend her money to explain Rita's reaction to Fiona. Although no actual reference is made to the previous incident, the narrative suggests that Rita has been canvassed for money. The above are examples of how backstory is necessary to understand why a character reacts a certain way or how certain themes are played out with use of backstory. The events in the characters past do not remain in the past but are and can be used in future episodes as a way to better understand a character's reaction in a certain situation.

In the episodes that I am analyzing the storyline involving Ivy's ghost is filled with backstory and therefore assumes the viewer has a certain historical knowledge. At the same time it allows a better understanding of Vera Duckworth's loss. Ivy Brennan was Don Brennan's estranged wife, (she has been absent from the programme for over a year living in a convent until her death). Now through the use of the ghost story, the idea of Ivy and everything she stood for is still quite apparent. The writers are able to use this theme to explain Vera's loss. The use of the backstory keeps Ivy's character alive although she is physically absent from the programme. The ghost story also involves aspects of religion and the state of Don and Ivy's marriage before she left for the convent. The use of this "dead" character creates new dialogue and narrative between Josie, Vera, Jack, and Don and, in turn, between the Platt family and Josie, Vera, Jack, and Don who are implicated because

Nicky Tilsley (Platt) and Sarah-Louise Platt are both Ivy's grandchildren. So the use of historical interactions between all of these characters and Ivy allows for new storylines to be created within the narrative. New storylines between these characters can be furthered because of their initial involvement in the ghost story. For example a disagreement may lead to a new storyline or a common belief is uncovered that allows certain characters to develop in a different way than they did before the ghost story was introduced. With the exception of Josie, the characters have a history with Ivy and knew her intimately before she died, so they bring with them a previous knowledge of the deceased character. This is reflected in the dialogue. The first example I will cite takes place in the pub between Don and Vera although Josie is present

Vera: "I never knew you could be so heartless Don Brennan no wonder she run off to a nunnery."

Don: "I resent that Vera."

Vera: "I don't care. Its true." (April 7th, 1996 episode 1 of 6)

Here there is a continuation of the idea that Don and Josie do not believe Vera has seen Ivy's ghost in their home. In addition to this somewhat daunting storyline a more comical aspect is introduced. Enter the character Roy Cropper, who has been convinced to enter the pub by Des Barnes:

Roy (to Josie and Don):"I don't want to disappoint you. I am quite happy to stay the night "

Josie (laughing)" You what?"

Roy:" You see 99.9% of all sightings are negative. It's the other 0.3% I am interested in. What time do you want me to come round?"

Don:" Let's leave it for tonight. If we need your help we'll get in touch."

Roy:" The offer's there. You'll not be the first satisfied customer."

Josie to Des: "Where did you find him?"

Des:" He makes great fried bread doesn't he Don"

Don: "I am glad you find it funny"(April 7th, episode 1 of 6)

Here the use of backstory has created a dialogue between new characters the introduction of Roy Cropper to Don and Josie. It also intermingles comic and serious storylines and, on the other hand, distinguishes those who believe in "the spirit world" and those who are more skeptical. Employing the past unveils a bit more information about certain characters and their beliefs. Not only does it suggest the existence of ghosts but involves the whole area of how death is dealt with differently by different people. Vera's character represents somebody who is obviously finding it hard to come to terms with her friend's death where, on the other hand, Don is trying to start his new life with Josie.

The ghost storyline develops further when Don stages a fake exorcism. This exorcism incorporates issues of both his lapsed Catholicism and the memory of Ivy's devotion to the church. Once again is the idea that Don is trying to both quell Vera's fears of Ivy's unrest and at the same time stop what might inevitably involve an open discussion in the community of his past relationship with Ivy

and events that took place during that time. Again, this event involves the comical aspect when the priest shows his true colours after trying to punch Roy Cropper in the pub. Through the dialogue we can see Vera's angst surface and her readiness to believe that the exorcism is real, while at the same time giving the viewers comic relief. Vera enters the Brennan house after seeing the priest enter earlier that morning:

Vera: "Well we were next door machinists you know for years - - so you could say I was a friend of the departed."

Don: "Well let's hope we can call her the departed -- oh there is no reason we should say anything to anyone is there father."

Priest: "Well no theological reason. Its up to you Mr. Brennan."

Don: "Well father Baines here, has been doing the business, her being unquiet and everything."

Priest: "No creature on earth is so deserving of our prayers as an unquiet soul."

Vera: "Doing the business?"

Priest: "Well some people like to use the word exorcism. I prefer to say we intercede on behalf of the deceased and release the soul from the last of it's earthly ties. Through prayers and other things we release the soul, I know you are aware of the reasons for this."

Vera: "Oh father I am so glad that were all Ivy needed. You know, a helping hand to the other side."

Vera: "Well you can tell I am very sensitive. You know, I were the first one she appeared to weren't I (to Don) only you didn't

believe me. But you do don't you father?" (April 7th, 1996, 2 of 6)

However, later that evening after closing the pub Vera feels the ghosts presence in the pub which brings her past friendship with Ivy to the foreground again:

Vera:"...I am not surprised Ivy wants to settle in here."

Jack: "Oh come on, you're not still trying to give us that."

Vera: "Well I am only telling the truth because Ivy's here I'm telling you."

Jack: "Look I hope you're not going to be talking like that in front of customers."

Vera: "Look, I'll talk how I like."

Jack: "I'll tell you what they'll think -- they'll think the landlady is balmy and who the heck wants to drink in a pub where the landlady is balmy?"

Vera:"Well it's made me see one thing different Ivy being here."

Jack: Oh for crying out loud."

Vera:"I wonder what she'd think if she could see me up at 7 in the morning waiting on until 11 at night Well I know what he'd say. She'd say slow down Vera or you'll work yourself into an early you know what."

Jack:" That'd be alright you could go haunting together." (April 7th, 1996, 3 of 6).

Although Vera's friendship with Ivy and the loss of that friendship are heavily emphasized throughout the ghost storyline, the relationship between Jack and Vera figures prominently. They have

been married for 37 years and Jack's reaction to what Vera is saying goes without question. The fact that Vera is not dissuaded by anything Jack says suggests that skeptical and disbelieving attitude towards her is typical.

In addition Vera wants very much to believe that in some way she can help Ivy even though she is dead. This theme generates the notion of the past events that have transpired between the characters. Most of the dialogue about Ivy is between Don, Josie, Vera, and Jack. With the exception of Josie, the others are able to use previous events to project how and why Ivy's ghost is restless. The understanding of who Ivy was helps the viewer to understand the current storyline. For example, when Vera talks to Don about Ivy, she implicates Don as being the "bad" person as I outlined in the dialogue quoted from the first episode of this analysis. Within this dialogue there are references to the past. In addition through the dialogue an understanding is created (for the viewer) that there was a certain intimacy between both Don and Ivy and Vera and Ivy although the type of relationship is not fully explained. Here we can see, that through the use of specific dialogue that invokes history and memory the producers of *Coronation Street* are aware that their viewers are longstanding and faithful.

The next storyline and reference area that I would like to outline is the McDonald's saga which is prominent in all of the 6 episodes I am analyzing episodes. The torment of Jim's jealousy effects everyone who comes in contact with Jim and his wife Liz. Throughout the six episodes there are moments of aggression and of joy between the McDonalds. The past is always there and the viewer

is reminded throughout that the McDonalds have always had a rocky relationship. For example Liz and Deirdre are talking in the Liz's kitchen when her son, Andy comes in to, borrow 50 pounds that he needs to pay his rent, (his landlord is Des Barnes). Liz warns Andy not to tell his father about the money. After Andy leaves Liz and Deirdre continue to discuss the money and Deirdre queries about the 50 pounds. Liz turns to Deirdre:

Liz: "Yeah but what if your husband happens to think you're more than friends and what if your husband is right?"

Deirdre: "What you and Des? You're not!"

Liz: "No but we could have. It's the way we were heading. We both said this is going to be a right mess this is -- so that's why I left me job and Des made it look like he were giving me, me cards."

Deirdre: "Oh well you did right the pair of you. I mean living on the other side of the street."

Liz: "Well it never got to anything--well, hardly anything.

Trouble is Jim knows."

Deirdre: " How does he know."

Liz: "Some idiot told him"

Deirdre: "Oh for pity's sake who?"

Liz: "Me. Well I thought if I told him the truth he would realize there were no future to it; nothing for him to worry about. But of course he won't be rational about it."

Deirdre: "Well jealousy isn't very rational is it?" (April 7th, 1996, episode 2 of 6).

In this scene Liz discusses why she left her job and why Jim is acting the way he does around her (checking up on her, being suspicious of her every move). The theme and storyline around how and why Liz left her job was played out in previous episodes, but the idea of the secrecy of Liz's private life is very apparent when she is only now divulging this to her friend Deirdre. There is also the notion that Deirdre understands jealousy. Once again on this occasion the necessity of knowing a character's history in the programme allows for a better understanding of Deirdre's reaction. This scene involves the dialogue, Deirdre's physical movements, the look in her eyes when she is talking to Liz hints a note of experience. Deirdre's backstory has been built in such a way that her character is able to show an understanding of jealousy and betrayal or at the very least an understanding of how Jim feels having been in a similar situation in the past.

The storyline continues and the rage between Liz and Jim climaxes at the end of this particular storyline when Jim and Liz finally attend Jim's army reunion. During the reunion a former friend of Jim's hints that he has had an affair with Liz. Already wary and jealous of his wife's behaviour, the following scene ensues on their way home:

Jim: "So why did JJ say you were just his type?"

Liz: "You know Johnny always talks nonsense when he's smashed."

Jim: "It's not so much nonsense now is it?. I mean she does look like you and you do look like her--you know what I'm saying".

Liz: "Thousands of women look like me Jim. I'm not unique."

Jim: "Why in the name of God would he say you were jealous of his bit of stuff?"

Liz: "Men always think that women are jealous of someone that is a bit younger than them. Look, lets just get home and have a cup of tea"

Jim: "Something happened between you didn't it?"

Liz: "You're flaming paranoid."

Jim: "No I'm not. It's obvious even to me a thick Mic."

Liz: "He did make a pass at me once, after a few drinks."

Jim: "You're an awful bad liar Liz after all these years of practice."

Liz: "Oh for God's sake Jim! Is this how its going to be the rest of our lives."?

Jim: "Yes it is as long as I feel I can't trust you."

Liz: "Airight Jim. We did have a brief fling. It didn't mean anything. You were always away or out with your mates drinking I was always on me own at home with two babies."

Jim: "He was my best friend Liz."

Liz: "It was a long time ago."

Jim: "Well what about the Barne's brothers for God's sake, I mean you didn't have two wee babies then. And all the others"

(April 14th, 1996, episode 6 of 6)

After this dialogue Jim gets out of the car, runs round to the driver's side, drags Liz out of the car, and hits her.

This beating is the climax of the Liz and Jim drama and it falls right at the end of the episodes I am analyzing. The backstory of the

McDonald relationship is played out here in the climatic scene between them. The viewers are also clearly exposed to the relationship between the McDonalds that has been created by the writers about their life before settling down on *Coronation street*. The backstory plays an essential role in understanding why Jim is immediately suspicious of Johnny Johnson's comments -- why he immediately assumes Liz has had an affair with Johnny because she has had affairs with Des Barnes and his younger brother. This scene is obviously the dramatic culmination of the current McDonald storyline. At the same time it leaves room to incorporate the reactions of the family after this incident and hence a new storyline begins.

The final major storyline that I will describe as an example of the use of backstory is the one involving Audrey Robert's son, Stephen. This storyline is winding to an end. Because of the mother/son relationship the idea of Stephen's reappearance on *Coronation Street* is left open. Stephen's presence on the programme has addressed Audrey's personal relationships with her immediate family members. In the episodes that I am concerned with there are references made to Audrey's past. In one example her daughter Gail turns to Audrey and jokingly says:

Gail: "Good job you've not got a picture of him in his school cap or you'd be showing everybody that."

Audrey: "Yeah, well I'm not likely to have a picture of him in his school cap am I?"

The idea that Stephen has always lurked in the background of Audrey's life is made apparent. This theme has not only allowed the

viewers to take a peak into Audrey's past but it has also opened up other storylines and issues of backstory involving Audrey's friends. For example, Alma kisses Stephen and subsequently feels guilty about it. She discusses and seeks advice from Gail (Stephen's half-sister).

Alma: "...You're very excited this morning."

Gail: "Well I am just glad to be getting back to making bacon butties after all the excitement. I'll miss him though."

Alma: "Me too now that I've gotten over my temporary bout of insanity."

Gail: "Listen your no different to any women who lacks a bit of excitement in her life"

Alma: "I acted like a besotted school girl."

Gail: "Well I was worse with Ian."

Alma: "Ian who?"

Gail: "Cousin of Brian's. He came over from Australia."

Alma: "We must be kinky for colonials in this place. When was this then?"

Gail: "About 10 years ago -- before you were around and it went a lot further than a harmless crush. Our marriage was going through a bad time."

Alma: "And you kept all this secret?"

Gail: "Yeah well I don't like remembering the awful time we went through afterwards; especially after Sarah-Louise was born."

Alma: "She was his"

Gail:" No but I thought for a time she might have been"

Alma: "Ooh Gail that must've been a nightmare. Did Brian know?"

Gail: "Yeah but that's all in the past now. I'm only telling you now so that you'll know I understand."

Alma: "Gail Platt you never cease to amaze me."

Gail: "I surprised myself then and all" (April 14th 1996, episode 6 of 6).

Therefore the storyline that involved Stephen allowed the narrative to include more than just the relationship of Audrey and her son. Storylines from the past as the example above outlines, were worked into the text to help the current storyline develop and move forward.

The examples which I have chosen to represent the use of backstory in *Coronation Street* involved characters who have both long and short term appearances on the programme. The intertwining of the storylines which these characters are involved in is the essence of how backstory plays an important factor in the current storyline. As I stated in the literature review, *Coronation Street* pays close attention to the past because it plays a key role in what is going to happen in the future. Not unlike other soaps, *Coronation Street* has other storylines which unfold during the episodes. However, the examples I have cited above were chosen because these storylines were the most dominant in the episodes I was interested in even though other references were made to the past throughout. Little comments by characters reflect the programme's history. For example when Mike Baldwin returns from work he jokes with Alma (who was not expecting him early therefore has her hair in rollers): "Oh God blimey! I thought it were Hilda

Ogden." (April 14th, 1996, episode 6 of 6). Hilda's character has not been present on *Coronation Street* for years but we are reminded by this comment that Mike Baldwin has been a part of *Coronation Street* for a long time.

Overall, I have attempted to outline the importance of backstory in the current storylines. These storylines were chosen because they demonstrated how the characters past is an important aspect of both their future development and that of a storyline. The character descriptions that I provided at the beginning of this chapter are essential to the understanding of how the chosen characters have come to interact with each other. In addition, the advice that they give is based on a bank of knowledge which has been gathered from past relationships or experiences. This is a specific use of history and memory within the longstanding serial. The accuracy of the backstory can stem from a one-line comment about an older character to a long emotional conversation that involves divulging of past events that the viewer may already be aware of. Therefore, backstory, and memory play a vital role in long-standing serials.

Chapter 3

Analysis of the Discursive Community who use the News Group `rec.arts.uk.tv.coronation-st` .

In the following chapter, I will discuss the news group `rec.arts.uk.tv.coronation-st` with a particular interest in the way that history and memory are re-articulated within this particular discursive community. Using examples from the news group's postings I will present the different ways in which the group members discuss *Coronation Street* with a special interest in their conversations concerning the episodes and characters that I have outlined in the previous chapter. Backstory becomes part of the viewer's memory and the news group is a space where fans can openly discuss the historical elements of the programme.

A news group is a place where fans of programmes like *Coronation Street* can congregate and discuss the details of the programme and, in addition, discuss other issues of interest to them. The news group is a wide spanning community of people with the same principle interest. In fact without the internet it is highly unlikely that many of these people would ever discuss *Coronation Street* with each other. The participants in this group predominantly come from the United Kingdom (mostly England), Canada, New Zealand, and Australia and there are a few contributors from the USA. The episodes of *Coronation Street* that are seen in Canada are six weeks behind the British episodes. The New Zealanders and Australians are 3 months behind, and the contributors from the USA catch the programme via satellite from the CBC. The postings therefore, often contain spoilers (a warning for those who have yet to

see a certain episode) so that the future plot is not revealed to those who are lagging behind. However, this generally means that certain storylines will be discussed more than once when fans finally see an episode which has already been discussed. In general, the participants are quite friendly towards each other and a new participant is welcomed by a few of the older members of the group. This news group has only been in action for a year, although the majority of the members of the group have been watching *Coronation Street* for a lot longer.

The fact that I will be taking direct quotes from the news group postings brings ethical concerns to the forefront. In this case I will not be using any of the e-mail addresses or names of the participants. Nor will I cast any judgements on what is said. This chapter is primarily concerned with how fans using the internet discuss soap operas with a focus on *Coronation Street*. In addition the idea of ethics has been discussed by the group and the following is a posting from a discussion that two of the participants had about using any of the information that is generated by the news group:

"...Did you expect that posting to usenet would be a private thing?

This is a public forum and everyone in the world can read it. By the way, everything you have posted has been circulated around the world so anyone can read it, Is that frightening? Not at all I simply find it amusing that any organisation would still want to archive it, given that so much of usenet is purely recreational "

When carrying out ethnographic research, especially in the area involving the internet, ethics must not be overlooked. In his article "Welcome to Cyberia: Notes on the Anthropology of Cyberculture" Arturo Escobar broaches the notion of changes that are being made in society and culture by technological advances. Escobar is discussing the anthropology of cyberculture which includes computer information and its impact on society. However, he also outlines how the analysis of computer mediated communities can be important in understanding the kind of communities humans create with the help of emerging technologies (Escobar, 1994:218). Although Escobar does not discuss ethical issues specifically he does realize the necessity of understanding how the researcher must take ethical concerns into consideration when studying a particular group -- He states:

...We can anticipate active discussion on the proper methods for studying these communities, including questions of on-line/off-line field work, the boundaries of the group to be studied interpretation, and ethics (1994:218).

and in a footnote he adds:

Questions of ethics are significant in virtual communities, including the possibility of assuming different personas, the relationship between 'virtual' and 'real' personas, the disclosure of one's social markers, such as one's gender, race, and class, and the possibility of lurking...(1994:218)

In light of the above remarks all the postings I will discuss from

members of the news group are anonymous and I have not involved myself by posting anything in this group concerning *Coronation Street*, in order to focus on the interactions taking place between the group members.

The postings that I am discussing vary. There is a range of topics that are covered by the group. Therefore before I discuss the debates that are specific to the involvement of backstory I will outline the different aspects of *Coronation Street* that are discussed. There is a lot of information about the programme generated this way and it is important to understand ways the fans interact in the news group.

The fans in this particular news group discuss and suggest (because it has been suggested that a scriptwriter is lurking) how the storylines should unfold:

"How about a farewell to Steve scenario(expanding on the "Vicky must pay for her crime" thread started elsewhere in the group):

The happy couple are blackmailed for bending the true course of justice. Steve send Vicky in (again) to handle matters.

Vicky is "roughed up" and Steve (brother, now the following is a stretch) vows to get even with those that violated his "dear wife" .

This suggested storyline continues until Steve is dead and has dramatically fallen into a canal. This idea put forth by a member of the group suggests a new twist in the storyline involving two of

Coronation Streets characters but also displays disgust for one of the characters.

In another example the group member finds the current storyline boring and is critical of it because it resembles a previous storyline. In turn, this participant makes suggestions as to how ridiculous the storyline can become and adding in another twist to the plot:

"...What next, Sally starts rowing with Don & Josie, takes to the bottle and starts knocking Kevin about and ends up keeping Jim company in prison (do women go to strangeways?). What would be an interesting twist would be if Rita were to lend Kev's dad Bill the money and he became Kevin's boss..."

This fan is obviously disillusioned with the events that are currently unfolding in the soap. In this case the news group gives this fan a forum in which to validate her concerns with other fans. Another fan agrees with the above posting and responds stating that she also is bored with the current plot developments. In another example a fan has noticed that the *Coronation Street* script writers borrow plotlines from films:

"Has anyone noticed that from time to time The Street borrows plotlines or characters? the best story is probably the Carmel nanny from hell story line which was clearly borrowed from the Rebecca De Mornay film 'The Hand that Rocks the Cradle'....."

In this instance the fan also requests as to whether or not anyone agrees with this notion and receives replies from those who are in agreement with this assessment of the storylines, adding their own observations.

The members of this group often discuss the terminology that is used in *Coronation Street*. This is brought about by those who live outside of the United Kingdom. These fans are usually in search of an answer from one of the British fans as they are considered experts because they are able to draw from a common sense experience and an intimate knowledge of the social world that is reflected in *Coronation Street*. In this example a fan discusses his great admiration for one of the characters while at the same time admitting that the dialogue can leave those viewing outside of England guessing:

" Jack actually said this to Tricia in the Rovers:

Well, you see, she's a very awkward women, our Vera. You've got to box clever with her, you see, so I wasn't going to mention it till tonight when I got her in bed, when I could use the fluids on her"

What on earth could this possibly mean besides what I think it means ? Is this a common English expression Anyway, I still can't stop laughing."

In another posting the fan is concerned with the term *ginnel* and what it means. The replies to this inquiry are numerous each fan

contributing a different discussion involving a ginnel but in the end they all agree that most fans outside Manchester would call it an alley. Another discussion centred on terminology is about the various ways the expression balm cake (stupidity) is pronounced around the UK:

"In Glasgow slang, you would use hampot...but you know my relatives in the Midlands would say he's balmy meaning stupid...."

In addition to the general discussion that centres on *Coronation Street* the fans often make references to the other soaps they watch like *Emmerdale Farm* or *The Eastenders*. For example one fan posts:

"Can anyone please tell me the station days and times *Emmerdale* is shown in Canada"

Another fan uses the *Coronation Street* group to find out how the setting up of the *Emmerdale Farm* group is coming along. The Canadian and New Zealand fans are very much interested in hearing about other British soaps that are aired in Canada. These fans do not get into great detail about the other soaps but are more often than not putting forth the idea of creating another news group which involves another soap. They are testing out the idea in the *Coronation Street* news group to see if there are other fans that would be interested. In some instances a small discussion ensues.

Furthermore, in this news group the fans engage with the fictional world of the series by drawing comparisons with their personal lives. For example in the following posting these fans are not only concerned with how *Coronation Streets* reflects of "real life" but they are, in turn, disclosing how they feel about the introduction of "the wheelie bin". They are inevitably, sharing a bit of information about their domestic preferences:

"I noticed that Sally has one of those new fangled wheelie bins in the backyard last night.

We've just been informed by the local council that they will be swapping over to them in a couple of months, has anyone else switched over to these? what are the pros and cons?

I'm a bit of a traditionalist and am quite attached to my metal dustbin with it's number painted in red.

I suppose that Ann Malone's dad and his mates prefer them".

The above posting, as I have previously stated, is an example of how this fan has divulged part of his personal life through the text of *Coronation Street*. This in turn, has evoked a response from someone else who has a wheelie bin (this time in Canada) and this response caused another fan to come to the defense of his wheelie bin.
response from Winnipeg:

"oh, right, Wheelie Bins...

Winnipeg is giving them a test in the older part of the city, but nobody likes them here much. Seems the older folks don't

trust the automation. Afraid the truck will place the bin through the garage window."

In response:

"Wheelie Bins are ok once you get used to them. They can be a handful at first.... When the wheelies were introduced in Thameside a few years ago the only casualty was the old lady who fell in one and careered down the steep hill.. only suffered a few bruises and was otherwise unscathed.

Treat the Wheelies well and they will respond. I kid you not."

In this example there is a response to the idea of wheelie bins and a direct link of the fans personal lives and domestic concerns that they share

The fans also discuss issues concerning the characters. This discussion covers gossip, historical aspects of the actor and the historical aspect of the storyline and plots that are currently unfolding. During the period that I am analyzing there was a lot of discussion generated around the character of Stephen, Audrey's son who was visiting from Canada. It was mostly the Canadian participants in the news group who discussed this character but their debate did evoke responses from other participants.

The following posting is taken from a participant who has noticed an error in the narrative during a scene which concerned Stephen and his sister:

" why did Gail refer to Stephen as her "step-brother?" he's not, he's her half brother, because Audrey is his natural mother."

The storyline involving Stephen, allowed the fans to question the accuracy of any information about Canada. They were also very critical concerning the idea of Stephen's accent properly representing a Canadian accent. One fan didn't have a problem with Stephen's Canadian accent, however it was quickly pointed out by another member of the group that this person was posting from Montreal, Quebec. This idea of accent concerning the differences in Canadians was reflected in another posting when someone claimed to be British Columbian rather than Canadian. In an attempt to quell any infighting another member of the group stepped in and stated that Stephen's accent was

".. a stock attempt at a North American accent practiced by British actors who aren't particularly adept at accents..."

In this particular discussion the fans are not concerned as much about the historical accuracy of Stephen's character but rather the accuracy surrounding Stephen and his assistant's information about Canada and in addition to their representation of Canada and Canadians. In a response to the idea of Stephen speaking with a "stock" Canadian accent it has been suggested in the group that the producers of *Coronation Street* hire a real Canadian:

" Hi there, seeing that most of us were disappointed with Steven's accent, I thought it only right and proper that Granada make amends and have a real Canadian visit Coronation Street..."

In another posting there is a problem with the accuracy of information concerning Canadian nurses:

"...How absurd, suggesting to Martin that there were opportunities in nursing in Canada. I work in a large hospital in the Maritimes (thankfully not as a nurse) and a number of my co-workers are having to leave Canada for the U.S., Saudi Arabia and other places because their jobs are being phased out here due to drastic cutbacks in healthcare. I can't believe that the writers couldn't take the time to find out the situation here before writing that ridiculous scene "

another fan stated:

"...although this bit of dialogue was not crucial to the storyline I wish it had been accurate anyway"

In addition to this the British fans were able to donate trivia about the actor who plays Stephen. They outlined the different programmes that he has starred in and in turn, those scheduled for the future. They also verified that he is an American and it is only in *Coronation Street* that he has been playing a Canadian.

One of the storylines that I analyzed in the previous chapter was concerned with the McDonald family; this storyline led to a discussion that had previously dominated the group weeks before. However, it has recurred because the Canadian fans are 6 weeks behind the British ones and are only now viewing the same scene. For example one participant states that she was aware of the storyline before she viewed the episode:

"And from the SPOILERS I know she exaggerates the injury"

One fan wrote a lengthy posting about how she felt after watching one particular episode of *Coronation Street*. In her posting this group member gives her opinion about the realism of the scene, the historical narrative that has unfolded before this particular incident between Jim and Liz McDonald. The following are various extracts from her posting:

"I finally saw that scene in yesterdays omnibus. with all the advance publicity, I had expected Jim to really lay it on and hospitalize her, not that it was ok it happened at all, but I was surprised when it was just one clip across the face... "

and now the participant gives her opinion on Liz's character:

"More and more I really feel that Liz is and always been selfish and manipulative. There seems to be a pattern where she's been unfaithful with this JJ and later Colin and flirtations

with Des and who knows how many others! and from the spoilers to exaggerate the injury. Why? Jim was always away, Jim has a terrible temper, Jim has a terrible temper Jim drinks to much yadda, yadda, yadda....".

In this particular posting the fan appropriates specific pieces of backstory and historical references about Liz's past behaviour to understand the current situation between the McDonalds. In addition to the backstory that is provided by the programmes historical storyline the fan concludes that Liz is a certain type of person and therefore generalizes that she may have had even more affairs than the fan actually knows about.

In addition to the comments about Liz's character she also makes reference to Jim's character:

"I am not saying that she deserved to get hit! But I do understand why Jim can get so possessive and jealous"..

To understand Jim's character and how he could possibly get to the point where he hits his wife she not only evokes the historical notion that Jim is possessive and jealous but in addition uses examples from her personal knowledge to explain her feelings on this topic:

"He didn't know about JJ but he knew about Colin and probably being away so much, always worried that his gorgeous wife would get lonely. No wonder he went over the edge. It's upsetting seeing a man getting more and more obsessed to

where he eventually loses control especially after hearing more and more about men who stalk and kill their wives after separation, or more when they shoot a houseful of their ex's family members, like what happened in British Columbia over Easter."

In this particular example there is a cross over between the *Coronation Street* character traits and the group members personal knowledge of domestic violence. The fan is moving away in her discussion from the specific storyline to the general theme that has been brought forth in the text. In addition the fan is coming to terms with and understanding what she has seen on *Coronation Street* and how it does and does not imitate "daily life". Near the end of her posting she states that this is the only case in which it was obvious that Liz was going to get beaten. The participant can not understand why she did not leave Jim before they arrived at this point in their relationship. Therefore, the underlying theme in this posting is there could have been an alternative storyline for the McDonalds, a different unfolding of events.

Within my analysis of the episodes that aired in Canada on 1, 2, 3,8,9 and 10th April I clearly outlined examples of how backstory plays an important role in the unfolding and understanding of the text. However, although the community I am analyzing make reference to the backstory, they are concerned more specifically with the history of each individual character and their development. For example, one fan is particularly interested in the accuracy of the

presentation of the characters and questions whether or not his own memories are accurate:

"When the Websters first appeared on the street, didn't Kevin have a sister? A twin maybe? What was her name? Didn't she decide to move away with Bill while Kevin (pre-moustache) moved in with Hilda? Has anyone on the show mentioned her since Bill got back?..."

and someone verifies that the Kevin did have a sister stating:

"..she apparently disappeared into the ether..."

This is a prime example of how the fans of *Coronation Street* are longstanding and in turn do not forget the details of a previous storyline involving the same family. The news group is a forum where fans can verify queries about characters and their whereabouts. In one instance a fan supplies a complete biography of a character that no longer exists on *Coronation Street*. However, this character was very popular in this particular group therefore it is a common to find postings such as following:

"Altogether now, We want Bet, We want Bet !! x22"

Then there is the biography, that was compiled by one one of the fans; it begins with Bet's full name and traces the characters

background pointing out that there are holes in the backstory of this character. For example:

"...From this point in time until 1966, there is no information concerning what she did or where she lived, other than the fact that she had relationships and sexual involvement with a string of men".

The younger fans also verify snapshots of historical reference, through the group, or as in the following example, suggest a storyline only to have someone who has watched the programme for a longer time correct them. One participant writes:

"How about: Alf and Rita? He could tell her about the feelings he has had for her for decades and how he's stuck with Audrey although She's his real love...."

reply:

"There have been at least two such scenes: one. sober, before he married Audrey, and another, drunk, after he was married to Audrey".

The notion of accuracy in the way the characters of *Coronation Street* are presented to and by the fans is important. Their knowledge of past events and the behaviour of the characters is outlined in the above posting. The suggestion of a scene that has been aired

previously is quickly dismissed or corrected even between the group members. In turn, if there is an error in the narrative then it is usually discussed between the participants of the group. These discussions are often repeated when Canada or Australia catch up. A character that is quite new to *The Street* will be observed critically in order to understand his every move. In the following posting a fan notices a discrepancy in the narrative and another comments on how one of the characters was originally presented:

Roy said "99.9% of sightings are negative. It's the 0.3 that interests me? The next day in the Rovers he mentions the 0.3% again Don's friend the "priest". $99.9 + 0,3 = 100.2$ in my books...."

I know Roy is a supposed to be a maths wiz (100.02% notwithstanding) but when Jack was collecting 5 pound notes from everyone, I am positive that Roy handed him a twenty and didn't get any change.

I've played the scene back several times and I am sure that I am right".

The discussion here is centred on a characters presentation and how the fans relate to him. The fans discuss the difference between the background information they have accumulated about a character and the way the character is being presented with the storyline.

Another prominent line of discussion is the "spotting" of *Coronation Street* actors in other television programmes. It seems to be a hobby of one particular fan. However, the response that this

generates indicates that the rest of the fans enjoy receiving this information. This particular fan gives a rundown of the actors appearances in different British programmes. However, if the actor still appears in *Coronation Street* then he uses their characters name but if they are no longer on the programme he uses their real names. For example he states:

"Derek appeared in an item concerning gnome napping on
Simon Mayo's confessions"

Alf Roberts thrown of a roof in 'Get Carter"

Then using her real name the fan tells us that :

"Lynne Perrie (who played Ivy) was on The Paul Ross Famous Show"

Therefore, while the character still appears on *Coronation Street* the fan sees them as that character regardless of whatever else they may be doing. However, once a character has left the show they then become their own person again. This notion outlines how these fans are very much involved with the way in which these characters are perceived by others.

Another level of engagement that appears in the news group is the discussion of a character's current storylines. The fans often get annoyed over how a character is behaving within the storyline and therefore voice their irritation to see how others feel about it. These discussions can involve the characters backstory and how they have acted in previous situations. The fans note if there are similarities in

the way they are responding to a particular situation or if there has been a complete change in personality. The following example outlines how the fans deal with their irritation over Rita Sullivan's development:

"Rita used to be one of my favourite characters, but lately I think she is turning into a shrew. the scene today where she refuses to give Fiona the money was deplorable. I don't think she should have given Fi the \$ just that she could have exercised a little tact when turning her down. Especially after the way she treated Bet. She was supposed to be full of remorse for that little episode!!"

another fan wrote:

"Her outbursts against Bet, Sally and Fiona seem so severe and out of character. They were all centered on money too. Does this mean a new plotline for Rita ..."

or as another fan states:

"I thought it was just me, but obviously not Rita does seem to have undergone some radical change of character."

In these particular postings the fans are concerned with a character that they all liked in the past who has somehow become a character that they can no longer relate to. The backstory that has led to Rita's

current behaviour has, in this instance, not prepared these fans for the current storyline. They are obviously airing their dislike for the way the storylines involving Rita are unfolding. Another fan is disgruntled about the writing out of a character. By using backstory to justify why a character would not act the way he has acted, this fan posted a message discussing how unbelievable this particular storyline is:

"I really miss Reg. I thought he brought a lot of comedy to CS especially when he got things going with Curly and Maude. I also think that it is out of character for him to run off with someone else. I thought Maureen was the love of his life and he would never cheat on her. I liked that they were still "mad in love" even when things were not going well. I hope he comes back to the street".

In addition to the importance of accuracy these fans are concerned with temporality which, in turn, furthers the role of history and memory through the mediated form. There is a time delay between the episodes broadcast in the United Kingdom and the ones broadcast in Canada. Therefore the fans post articles devising ways of having the C.B.C. catch up on their broadcasts. This idea is thrown out for comments by other participants. The idea of having the C.B.C. catch up is so that the group can all discuss the same episode at the same time. The people who read this news group want the time lapse between episodes broadcast outside the United

Kingdom to be altered. This would allow the news group to discuss the storylines simultaneously. One fan states:

"We are all fans of Coronation Street here (I hope!). It's what unites us. But at the same time, it is what divides us because viewers in Canada are about 6 weeks behind. This is a global news group, yet we can't all discuss the same episodes at the same time.

Corrie is moving to 4 episodes per week at some point. This means that CBC in Canada...So the big idea is that CBC should go to 4 episodes per week 18 weeks before the UK does then they would be caught up."

In another example a fan suggests that:

"It's not much fun being six weeks behind in this news group, so let's all bombard the CBC with email asking them to consider getting us caught up..."

These fans are concerned with keeping up to date with *Coronation Street* so that they can all be involved in the group discussions about the twists and turns in the storylines. They have become concerned with the idea that the group might breakdown because of an inability to discuss the same episodes. Therefore the fans use the groups commonality to further their discussions on the net and in turn solidify the future of the group.

The users of this group discuss all aspects of *Coronation Street*; temporality, backstory and the accuracy of character representation. However, the use backstory is important because it enables the fans to understand the present situation that the characters find themselves in and in addition the fans are able to, using backstory, criticize any discrepancies between the information presented previously and the current storyline. This is an important part of the members postings. The members use each other to compare and contrast what they have seen.

One last feature of the group that is prominent is the update. Every week two members of the group post the events that have taken place in previous weeks episodes. These postings are for all the group members. However, they do contain storylines that will be seen later, and as such these postings contain a spoiler. The fans outside the UK can choose whether or not to read them. These postings are stored and then reintroduced at a later date for the Canadian viewers.

These fans are concerned with the longevity of the group and many postings are concerned with this longevity they have come to know each other through this group and have found other common interests. Occasionally a private posting will appear in the news group during the weeks I was analyzing. However, private e-mails are sometimes made public knowledge by a fan so that the rest of the group can respond to questions. During the week I was analyzing what the fans have labeled an "off topic " subject cropped up from time to time. The topic usually concerned the weather or traumatic news items such as the "Dunblane Shooting" incident that happened

in Scotland earlier this year. These off topic subjects are usually short lived threads and after a few responses in answer to any questions, someone will state to e-mail them privately. These fans are a community of new friends that would not necessarily have met to discuss this soap without their interest in the net and the type of environment it creates. They have formed a new type of community which meets in cyberspace. Their goals are to discuss the various subjects that are linked to *Coronation Street* and through this they gain a knowledge of each other, their differences and similarities. They become friends without necessarily having to physically see each other. They communicate through the group and identify with each through the information that each member generates about themselves.

Within this chapter I have presented the different ways that history, memory and community have been discussed by this particular group of fans. These fans discuss memory, history and community over a broad range of topics, most of which refer directly to *Coronation Street*. The British fans, in particular, are seen as experts and use their social experiences to allow other members of the group a fuller understanding of the text. However, the fans vary in the amount of years that they have watched *Coronation Street*; therefore the younger fans look to the older fans (worldwide) for verification of historical events and the accuracy of a character's behaviour. The fans do not always discuss backstory directly but they evoke backstory through their discussions of the characters storylines and themes involved in *Coronation Street*.

Conclusion

I came to study this particular continuous serial through nostalgia. *Coronation Street* represents part of my past, reminding me of another time, which does not exist anymore, but is still very much a part of me. Watching *Coronation Street* meant drinking strong scalding tea and eating salmon sandwiches that tasted too strongly of vinegar and salt. When reading the postings from certain members of the news group I could feel their nostalgia also. Since *Coronation Street* has been televised for over 35 years many of the fans have been dedicated viewers for those years and they display an attachment to and uncanny knowledge of the characters and previous storylines.

The main concern of this thesis is backstory, memory and community. I endeavoured to outline how continuous serials use this notion of backstory to articulate future storylines. In the first section of my analysis I am concerned with the television programme (*Coronation Street*) itself. I describe and analyze the way in which the main themes of the 6 episodes I chose to analyze rely on backstory for a fuller understanding of the text.

I have, in turn, chosen to analyze a small group of fans that use the internet to discuss *Coronation Street*. The internet has become a forum for these fans to discuss their likes and dislikes of *Coronation Street* in the same way that we might discuss *Coronation Street* with a neighbour or friend over a cup of tea. The main difference is that the group on the internet live further apart. Distance is not a problem except that they are unable to watch the episodes at the same time. The news group is open to all participants who enjoy

Coronation Street. They openly welcome newcomers to the group and actively encourage anyone that is lurking to post. Their common interest is the continuous serial. However, like most friends these people discuss other subjects as well. It is often commented upon by other participants that certain discussions should be taken up by those interested in a different place. This creates a common territory and ensures that the objective of the group is to talk about *Coronation Street.*

These fans are concerned with accuracy in all aspects of the programme not merely historically, although historical accuracy dominates. The presentations and in turn representation of the characters is an important part of the fan's discussion. There is emphasis placed on the accuracy of the character's accent or the hairstyle of an actor if it does not properly represent the person. For example, it was been mentioned a few times that the character Gail has had the same hairstyle since 1976. Although this may be read as a humorous comment about the actress's hair it does tell us other things about the fan who made the comment. Firstly, it outlines the fan as longstanding and secondly, it is a good example of how fans watch for the smallest details.

When comparing my analysis of the television programme and my analysis of the fans discussion in the news group, I was surprised at how much they were concerned with the historical accuracy of each character rather than the general historical themes that have been created by the scriptwriters in order to understand the actions of the characters. I was more concerned with the backstory in general when analyzing the television programme and how the

dialogue was steeped in references to the past storylines and characters. Although the fans make reference to the backstory they place a stronger emphasis on the minor details of each individual character.

The dialogue between the characters involved in the storyline of "Ivy's ghost" was laced heavily with backstory and a necessary understanding of Ivy. In my opinion a viewer that has just recently started to watch would be left a little confused with the storyline as references to the past are prominent. The fans, on the other hand, did not discuss the serious issues centred around Vera's loss. Instead they were more concerned with a character that had been introduced to *Coronation Street* recently and only had a small involvement in the ghost story. They were concerned with his representation or rather the change in his representation. This character made an error in a calculation and the fans were confused about this since he was originally portrayed as a mathematical genius. In addition to this they found this particular storyline comical and discussed these issues rather than the serious issues surrounding Vera and Jack Duckworth.

In these episodes the ghost storyline was played off against the issue of domestic violence which involved the McDonalds. This storyline was discussed for a second time in the period that I was analyzing the group. References to the earlier discussion were made. The severity of the debate centred on one particular event in the programme -- when Jim hit Liz. More often than not the fans took this situation and compared it with their personal lives. They often wrote lengthy postings on the subject intertwining *Coronation Street*

and personal situations they have been in or that they knew about which brought the discussion to a more analytical level of engagement with the text. In a few examples the beating was not accepted and the fans did not like the idea of having this kind of "reality" presented in a programme that is considered (by the fans) as family entertainment. This particular incident did not split the group most people just gave their opinions and left it at that.

These fans are clearly comfortable with *Coronation Street* and draw enjoyment from watching the series and discussing it. The "sense of place" that is portrayed by the programme can be seen in the postings. When discussing various storylines that are resolved in the "Rovers Return" these fans reveal their knowledge of "place". They relate to the pub, and discuss how the characters can afford to go to the pub every evening. The way that they discuss the pub is with a certain familiarity that reminded me of someone discussing their local pub that they have frequented so often they know every inch of the wall paper. Comments were made about various props and photographs that were around the pub, reminding the fans that the landlords live above the pub therefore "The Rovers" represents a cross over between public and private spheres. When the camera takes the fan behind the bar and through the back door the fan enters the private lives of Vera and Jack Duckworth but in front of the bar the pub becomes a public place where people come to talk and sometimes resolve their problems. The fans' comfort with the places that appear in *Coronation Street* allows them a fuller understanding of the text.

The fans like to predict how they think that storylines will turn out. One of the reasons this is a popular past time is because it is rumoured in the group that a scriptwriter for *Coronation Street* checks the group to see what they are currently debating. It is often thought that the writers take what the fans have to say and incorporate it into the current storylines.

There are two members of the group in particular that the other fans look to for information concerning the programme. The two provide the names of the characters, their history, and the actors who play these character's activities outside of *Coronation Street*. In addition these particular participants often lead the discussions and encourage a debate between fans. This is not to say that the rest of the group are followers but rather they look to these two particular participants for the much sought after personal information about the stars of the programme. For example when a new actor joins the cast, one of these participants will try to interview the actor and then post the interview for everyone to enjoy.

A community that has been created by fans of *Coronation Street*. Although others have written about fans and how they discuss the programmes they view, the group of fans that I discuss are using a new form of technology to discuss *Coronation Street* - - the internet. I was not just interested in how they watched the programme but I wanted to know how these fans discussed the historical aspects of the programme. In order to do this I had to present what the main storylines of the programme were. I watched *Coronation Street* the same way as the internet fans did. I have watched the programme many times myself, but I had never really

discussed it with anyone or paid great heed to the details. However, I did notice discrepancies when it came to the history of the characters because having watched the programme I knew their pasts. When watching the programme for this thesis I started to realize that there was a great deal of pleasure involved in the dissecting of an episode. The fans I studied gained pleasure from watching, discussing and even disliking *Coronation Street*. When they used the net to communicate their pleasure they drew more enjoyment from discussing this with other people. They enjoyed using the internet and the news group to convey their pleasure.

The question often asked is why do people watch soap operas and why do they discuss them in great detail. In this case study the fans enjoyed the programme. They drew great pleasure from watching the programme and discussing it. I have intertwined the idea of the text with the study of the fan, because the text is often forgotten when studying the viewer. However, I have shown that one does not exist without the other and that it is a combination of the narrative, dialogue and characters that create the discussion. One idea that I did notice was absent in this particular moment in the fans discussion of *Coronation Street* was the notion that the women of *Coronation Street* are strong and represent a matriarchal strength often associated with women in northern England. It could be that during the period I chose to analyze the discussion was not prominent or that it was considered a norm for *Coronation Street* to have strong female characters.

Soap Operas are often associated with women viewers. It is interesting to note the amount of people in this news group who

identified themselves as men. This brings to the surface the question of gender and the internet, which I can not possibly discuss in this thesis. However, it should be noted that the internet is a place where a participant's real identity can remain anonymous.

I hope that this thesis will add to the broader understanding of the role that the fans play and the enjoyment that they gain by discussing their favourite soap opera. In addition this research will allow for a fuller understanding of the news group dynamics and how they continue to create a forum which reflects that of the traditional discussion of soaps but encompasses a larger community of fans.

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Appendix

Episode: 1

Broadcast date: April 1, 1996

Producer: Sue Pritchard

Production Company: Granada Television

Episode: 2

Broadcast date: April 2, 1996

Producer: Sue Pritchard

Production Company: Granada Television

Episode: 3

Broadcast date: April 3, 1996

Producer: Sue Pritchard

Production Company: Granada Television

Episode: 4

Broadcast date: April 8, 1996

Producer: Sue Pritchard

Production Company: Granada Television

Episode: 5

Broadcast date: April 9, 1996

Producer: Sue Pritchard

Production: Company: Granada Television

Episode: 6

Broadcast date: April 10, 1996

Producer: Sue Pritchard

Production: Company: Granada Television