

## Task for *Grace*

### **Erotomaniac's Letters: Learning Task**

Carl Gerard Brand is the primary antagonist of the novel, presenting a threat to the personal safety of the protagonist. Drewe explores this threat through a mental delusion known as 'erotomania', where the sufferer is under the mistaken belief that another person, usually unknown to them, and often a famous or significant public figure or celebrity, is in a romantic relationship with them. Carl's effort to control Grace is through an attempt to control and rewrite her identity. The effects of his beliefs on Grace provide the primary plot device for moving her to the outback, the location of her recovery; as well as being a technique through which issues such as territories, gender relations, trauma and recovery can be explored.

Examine the letters of obsession that Carl 'The Iclander' writes to Grace, and consider the questions and activities that follow.

\* This task may be undertaken as a group activity (perhaps even a Jig-saw) where each group is given a different series of questions and activities to complete, which they then report back to the class about.

#### **The first letter ("Grace of the Crocodiles", pp. 38–41)**

*My dear Grace*

*I hope I don't insult your obvious education and intelligence to say that I first made your acquaintance at the checkout counter at Bi-Lo. I flipped open the mag alongside the chewing gum and pink lady razors and there you were. The same serious and studious beauty (glossy hair, expressive eyes, sensual mouth, delicate neck and so forth) of my favourite actress, Winona Ryder. You two could be twins! But looks aren't everything and I am educated enough not to put an attractive woman on a pedestal. Your brains are another matter! Since following your career I've learned what a clever mind and delightful turn of phrase you possess.*

*I'm known as a tough nut to crack romantically but credit where it's due you've accomplished it! You've won me over Grave Molloy! I'm even no longer offended that you are often sarcastic about films I like(d). Now I take your criticisms 'on the chin'. After six consecutive viewings of 'Moulin Rouge' I must admit I'm coming round to your way of thinking. I included a copy of your review (ouch!) in my last letter to Nicole where I pointed out some things about her performance, sexuality, hair, voice, height, standoffishness, attitude to Scientology and so forth that she neglects at her peril.*

*Is that a jealous frown I detect? No need to worry. I'm afraid I can be pretty blunt when dealing with insincerity and treachery. Anyway Nicole's and my relationship is over, finite, kaput. Frigidaire Kidman can go back to the arms of the Vatican and Microsoft and the Pentagon for all I care. Enter 'the Gates of Hell', Roman Catholic Nicole, for flirting away in that photo with Bill Gates and George 'Monkey Boy' Bush. Hugging them! What's the matter with a dignified handshake for someone in your position? Once a Mick always a Mick, I say! Who cares if you have dinner at the White House with the Masters of Evil? No one respects a flirt, as my mother used to say.*

*Getting back to us, darling Grace, why you are frowning in your photo is a mystery to me when you have the entire film-going and magazine-reading nation at your feet. Or is that just you being intellectual and 'interesting'? (Relax, I didn't take it personally!)*

*Don't get me wrong, I'm sure it's our mutual appreciation of each other's intelligence, charm, with and so forth rather than shallow 'sex appeal' that will bind us together. Bottom line, our natural charisma will win the day. (One in the eye, hey, for that charisma-free zone Bill Gates!)*

*If I may be so bold how about this idea in the meantime? Ask the editor to run a full-length (enlarged) photo of yourself in the next issue. Why should you end at the neck just because you're an intellectual? No reason on earth why a brainy woman can't also be a 'fun chick'.*

*I recently read this important gender-studies academic stating that feminine garb (push-up bras, short dresses, stiletto heels and so forth) were 'empowering' for bright young women! The headline was Babes Fight Back. Right on! I like to keep up to date with contemporary ideas. Far from being a mindless macho moron (I hate beer, drugs, rap 'music' and 'football'), I am definitely a 'male feminist' in my attitudes. I am incredibly sensitive to a woman's needs. It will soon be obvious that I have 'been around'. You are dealing with 'Mr Experience' here.*

*Since 'Now' introduced us to each other I must say it has become my 'Bible'. Who would have guessed how much vital information it provides? Like that recent candid photo of Winona leaving the AIDS benefit with Gwyneth Paltrow, which reminded me that although Winona is tiny she is also 'full-figured'. (Gwyneth? Forget it! Another member of the breastless Vatican-Pentagon axis.) Correct me if I'm wrong but ever since starring in 'Girl, Interrupted' with Angelina Jolie, Winona seems self-conscious about her feminine shape. Like all us mere mortals she has had her 'problems' with authority but why on earth kill your inner 'chicky babe'? (She should take a few tips from Angelina!) Next thing she'll be binding her chest like in days of old so no one realises how 'stacked' she really is!*

*Can your editor have a word to her agent and tell her to throw back those milk-white shoulders? The loyal readers have spoken! And their words are, 'If you've got it, flaunt it, Winona!'*

*Here's another idea that came to me in bed last night. Why not proudly show your readers the similarities between yourself and Winona? (But not the bust-denying Winona!) You could wear various strapless gowns, swimwear and so forth resembling hers. Here are some suggestions – 'Now' magazine clippings, Winona-website printouts and my own artwork attached. I'm no da Vinci but notice how successfully I have superimposed your head on Winona's body . . .*

### **The second letter ('Adoration' – pp. 58–60)**

*My darling*

*What hell it has been to wait but I had to postpone writing until your 'Nashville' review came out. What suspense! Since our meeting I have been unable to sleep (not that I need more than an hour or two a night) out of embarrassment at my behaviour and fear that our intensity would make you call 'Time Out' in our relationship! What a relief that the reverse was the case!*

*I got the message loud and clear in your review and I accept The Critic's 'rap over the knuckles'. I deserve it. It's not my place to suggest what garments you should drape over your gorgeous body if any. And I detected a hint of jealousy at my mentioning a certain Ms Ryder (and the unmentionable redhead N.K.).*

*Let me say that after repeated private viewings of 'Nashville' (I think I've worn out Video Ezy's copy!) I understand how you could have trouble deciding whether I am the famous 'director' throwing his weight around or the coolly sexy but shiftless Keith Carradine character singing 'I'm Easy' as he calmly seduces all and sundry in the country music world.*

*Rest assured that I am not a Keith. That was not the real 'me' but just a Keithlike 'mask' I present to the world. We all wear a mask, don't we? Even that homo fag with you in the leather jacket with the arty farty air posing as your 'boyfriend'. What's his problem? Don't bother, I know the type. Film school perhaps? Or media and cultural studies I bet. The arrogant possessive way he let his elbow lie up against yours on the armrest it was all I could do to keep my cool and not rip his arm off!*

*But the 'director'? I get it! (Altman = Alternative Man = Yours Truly.) You're definitely on to something there. What insight! I am very flattered.*

*My thanks again for the gift. I will always treasure it. Already it has pride of place in my residence. (I'm gazing at it as I write!) The best presents are the simple ones, aren't they? And water is the mainstay of life after all. 'If I were called in to construct a religion I should make use of water.' So says the noted poet Philip Larkin in my Oxford Book of Quotations. Phil obviously knows his stuff! How sensitive of you to instinctively know that too! If I turn the bottle to the light in a certain way I can still see your fingerprints on it. Such delicate spirals, and so complex, like the amazing vortex of your mind.*

*That's how I see our relationship. As close as a fingerprint on a Cool Ridge spring water bottle. (You are the fingerprints and I am the bottle!) Pardon me getting all poetic but I believe our love will also boldly stand out if only we can expose it to the sunlight.*

*Never fear, unlike Keith I am not 'easy'. I am 'hard'. A hard nut to crack but true. No one but you (no, not even Winona!) has ever cracked open my heart and stolen the kernel of my love. That you regard my 'direction' as a triumph (to quote you – 'He brilliantly controls his mosaic of human relationships') is a blessing I shall remember all our days together . . .*

**Another letter; the third presented, although there have been a number of confrontations and court cases since the second letter ('Adoration' – p. 92)**

*To Grace the Murderer,*

*Although I have become used to your cold-hearted cruelty nothing could prepare me for the shock of your latest brutality. It tears me up to even write the word 'abortion'. Even in my wildest dreams I never thought you would destroy our unborn child.*

*Devastated*

*Carl*

**The fourth letter: intercepted by John Molloy, but not passed on to Grace ('The Capricorn Mug' – pp. 178–181)**

**URGENT FAX TO:**

*Grace Molloy*

*NOW Magazine*

*Sydney*

*From: Carl Brand*

*Please pass on immediately to Ms Molloy!*

*My dear Grace,*

*I'm sending this open letter to you at NOW on the off chance you are merely on extended leave or working in an important 'behind the scenes' capacity. If not I presume your whereabouts are known to the magazine staff and they will be kind enough to pass this fax on with urgency and the utmost seriousness.*

*'Long time no see.' I hope you are as healthy and happy as I am. Occasionally I wonder where on God's earth you are. As a loyal reader and cinema lover I'm naturally curious why you suddenly vanished from the public eye. I hope you aren't sick or in any way incapacitated.*

*It has come to my attention that the film reviews are now written by someone called 'Grant Walker'. At first I thought it might be you playing journalistic tricks so I waited outside the Sydney Film Festival and kept asking 'film buffs' (what poseurs!) in the theatre foyer to point out 'Grant Walker' to me. Finally a nondescript chinless guy came over to me looking confused*

*and wearing the same glasses and leather jacket as in the photo over the film reviews but with less hair. What a loser! My heart sank at his existence but I am prepared to acknowledge that he does seem to exist. I must say he was totally disinterested as to your whereabouts and rudely walked away while I was still questioning him.*

*But enough of Grant Walker. He's wasted enough of my time already. Not money, fortunately! These days I check out the magazine in the supermarket rather than buy it. The checkout chicks don't care. (Sorry, NOW editor. It's a fabulous magazine and worth every cent! Ha ha!) First thing every Monday publication day I'm at the supermarket checkout 'checking out', praying today I'll strike it lucky and Grant Walker's goggle-eyed loser face will be gone and yours will be staring out from the film page again.*

*Stop rambling Carl! Bring her up to date on your life! Well, so much has happened since our paths last crossed. I have the best possible news! My Kafkaesque disagreements with the legal and mental health systems are now water under the bridge. I AM A CHANGED MAN!*

*After the embarrassing incident in your back yard (chemical imbalance, wrong medication, blah blah, plus undue harassment from the authorities, deepest apologies, enough said!) you might find this hard to believe but the confused 'perpetual adolescent' is no more.*

*Truly, I have a newfound calm maturity befitting my years and extensive education. Can I ever forgive those government shrinks and quacks and bloodsucking bureaucrats their damaging pseudo-science, their evil onslaughts into my bloodstream and nervous system and various artificially induced states of (un)consciousness? Yes I can! Because – after much trial and error – they worked! Thanks to a Simple Little Pill I am stabilized as the old Carl again!*

*Now you would go a long way to find a less obsessive personality than mine. The only nut I am these days is a health nut. Any more spring water and I swear I'll burst! (Only Cool Ridge of course!) I have given up meat, sugar, dairy, alcohol, tea and coffee and am much better for it. Tobacco is a little more difficult but I'm working on it with nicotine patches. So far so good. Terrible taste though! (See – I have the serenity and insight to joke about myself these days!)*

*My current interests? Obviously the cinema because of our deep shared involvement. I have also resumed my childhood hobby of breeding bantams which I find very restful after the hassles the 'real world' has thrown up these past few years. Are you familiar with bantams? I must say I favour the featherfoot breeds, Buff Brahmas, Black Silkies and Porcelains, rather than the clean-leggeds. Beauty versus drabness – it's no contest. I don't know the extent of your bantam experience (some areas of your life are still a wonderful mystery to me!) but in my humble opinion featherfoots are truly the flower garden of the poultry world!*

*Just as successful as bantams in resolving tension are the many new friendships I have made on the chat room circuit. Incidentally, let me know your email particulars. My details follow.*

*I gather you've moved house. To a less sleazy and aggressive area I hope! No offence, but I don't know how you could live amongst those sort of people. Or were you just 'soaking up atmosphere'? The two 'confirmed bachelors' living there now were no help and quite offensive to my civil request as to your whereabouts.*

*Do let me know where you're living and/or working now. We could have a quiet drink or a meal and catch up. Don't be a stranger.*

*Yours with the utmost affection and the happiest shared memories*

*Carl*

[coolcarl@ezymail.com](mailto:coolcarl@ezymail.com)

**The fifth letter, the second letter intercepted by her father, which he also does not tell her about ('Dark Lady of the Cinema' – p. 254)**

*My Dark Lady of the Cinema,*

*Yes, this is what you have become to me. Where once you stood high on a pedestal, a goddess out of filmdom's Technicolor myths, your head constantly surrounded by a golden light of purity and joy, now I see only a cold, dark cloud around you. Your aura is grey and malign, your lips are the black of deceit, your flesh has turned to icy white marble.*

*You defy everything I believe in. God Almighty knows I have been patient but this latest wanton behaviour has but me too deeply to bear. My eyes have finally been opened. Your exhibitionist sexual behaviour takes my breath away. It wasn't enough that you fled our relationship like a thief in the night! That you aborted out babies! Now you humiliate me with blatant adultery.*

*There are so many counts against you that my patience is exhausted. Immediately return to your senses and passionate romantic nature towards myself. The clock is ticking. Resume your loving wifely duties towards me under Jesus Christ Our Lord or I can no longer accept responsibility for the consequences.*

*Carl*

*Betrothed but Betrayed*

**The final letter, given to her by Angela at Crocodile Gardens: it arrives a few days before the confrontation with Carl, but the letter is not given to her until after the event. (pp. 355-356)**

*The envelope was addressed to her by name and, in bigger capital letters, by another epithet: ABORTIONIST WHORE. She snatched it and shut the door in Angela's face. She needed to open the envelope to discover how he'd found her. She had to know. Her hands were shaking: she barely had the strength to rip it open.*

*Inside was a page cut from a colour travel supplement in the Sunday Telegraph headed 'Discover the Kimberley'. The main article, 'Impossible Luxurious', lauded a new exclusive resort at Impossible Bay that prided itself on its 'barefoot luxury'. But it was the feature below it, 'New Smile on an Old Croc', about the facelift at Crocodile Gardens, that was furiously circled in black ink.*

*Her face started out from a photograph whose colour register was surprisingly sharp. There were several gradations of brownness between the khaki of her shorts, the tan of her legs and the liver-coloured woodchips of the path. Framed by fronds of jungle green, she stood on the Ecosystem Nature Walk smiling vivaciously beside a grinning older man. He was silver-haired and tanned and wearing a loud hibiscus-print shirt. He had a proprietorial arm around her shoulders. At their feet, as if it were this roguish couple's droll pet, squatted the ubiquitous wallaby.*

*Scrawled diagonally across the picture in more mad black capitals were two words: YOU DARE!*

### Activities:

This task may be undertaken as a group activity (perhaps even a Jig-saw) where each group is given a different letter, and within the group members take on different tasks. After working their different elements with other similar students, they report back to their home group. The home groups then report back to the class about their findings.

The task may also be undertaken individually: students complete the following questions for one of the letters; they then find a class member for each of the other letters and share their ideas.

1. At what point in the text does the letter occur? When did Grace first receive it, and what was her reaction? Why is it raised at this point in the text, and what does it reveal about Grace?
2. What initial knowledge does the reader gain about Carl's character and mental state? At what point in the stalking is this letter sent? What knowledge do we gain about erotomania and erotomaniacs?
3. What is Grace or John Molloy's reaction to the content of the letter? Find a quote that illustrates this.
4. What language or structural features are significant in the communication? What do they reveal about Carl's or Grace's characters? Why is the form/genre of the communication significant at this point?

[\(ACEEN021\)](#), [\(ACEEN022\)](#), [\(ACEEN023\)](#), [\(ACEEN024\)](#), [\(ACEEN025\)](#), [\(ACEEN028\)](#), [\(ACEEN030\)](#),  
[\(ACEEN035\)](#)[\(ACEEN039\)](#), [\(ACEEN040\)](#)