

CREEPY & MAUD

DIANNE TOUCHELL

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Hilarious and heartbreaking, *Creepy & Maud* charts the relationship between two social misfits, played out in the space between their windows.

Creepy is a boy who watches from the shadows keenly observing and caustically commenting on human folly. Maud is less certain – a confused girl with a condition that confuses her parents and assures her isolation.

Together Creepy and Maud discover something outside their own vulnerability — each other's. But life is arbitrary, and loving someone doesn't mean you can save them. *Creepy & Maud* is a blackly funny and moving first novel that says; 'You're okay to be as screwed up as you think you are and you're not alone in that.'

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dianne Touchell is a middle child who feared Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, the Tooth Fairy — and any other stranger who threatened to break into the house at night. She has worked, amongst other things, as a nightclub singer, a fish and chip shop counter girl (not with Pauline Hanson) and a bookseller. Dianne would rather talk to her dog than answer the phone.

I wanted to write the sort of book my son needed to read about the time he was throwing *Twilight* into the recycle bin. I wanted to write the sort of book I wanted to read when I was sixteen. I didn't want to teach them something; I didn't want a moral to drip from the pages. I wanted to write something funny and pertinent and real, something that entertained whilst making them think; something that made them laugh and feel compassion; something that would encourage discussion and there never be a right answer to any question asked; something that said You're Okay To Be As Screwed Up As You Think You Are And You're Not Alone In That (hey, that's a great title). I wanted to write something that left a residue. For just one young adult to decide they might pick up another book now 'cause, hey, that one was okay.

STUDY NOTES

A. Before Reading

1. What is the power of names? Why do parents put so much thought into deciding on the names of their children? What do the names 'Creepy' and 'Maud' convey to you? What are your expectations of these characters?
2. Think about the different people in your life and the expectations they have of you. Do you always meet these expectations? How do people react when you do or do not meet their expectations of you?
3. The novel is concerned with the idea of *looking* and *being looked at*. Do you agree that our society has become obsessed with looking at others? If so, in what ways? In what parts of our lives do we actively allow ourselves to be looked at? Who has power in these situations?



B. During reading

Chapters 1–4

4. Describe the relationship between Creepy's parents. Then discuss the following:
 - a. How does Creepy feel about his parents' relationship? How do you know that?
 - b. Why do you think Creepy uses humour to describe a relationship that's so deeply damaged? Give examples of Creepy's use of humour and sarcasm.
 - c. How does Creepy's humour make you feel? Does it offend you? Why or why not?
 - d. Why do you think the author of this book chose to use humorous language while she deals with serious subject matter?

5. What is your initial impression of Creepy? Justify your ideas with textual evidence.

6. *At once, but once, she lifted her eyes,
And suddenly, sweetly, strangely blush'd
To find they were met by my own.'*

This excerpt of Lord Alfred Tennyson's poem 'Maud' (1855) opens Chapter 3. In what ways does it apply to Creepy's vision of Maud? (Once you've read some of Maud's story, add to your answer how you think it applies to Maud's vision of herself.)

7. Why does 'Slap Day' (page 27) precipitate Creepy's first contact with Maud?

Chapters 5–6

8. Creepy's first message to Maud is an excerpt from Lewis Carroll's *Alice In Wonderland*:
'Alice explained as well as she could that she had lost her way. "I don't know what you mean by your way," said the Queen:

"All the ways about here belong to me."' (page 29)

How does Creepy intend this message to be interpreted, and how is it in fact understood by Maud? What is the significance of this miscommunication?

9. How does the reader know that Maud is a 'watcher', just like Creepy? Whom does she watch? What observations does she make?

Chapters 7–8

10. *'I love Maud but I would never tell her. It's more than a secret, it's a war wound. It's deep and bloody and rotting from inattention and age.'* (page 46) What does Creepy communicate through this metaphor?

11. What lessons did Creepy learn from Owen Liddell's experience?

Chapter 9

12. Creepy's chapters open with a quotation, and Maud's end with a coda. What do the use of these literary devices tell the reader about the characters?

Chapters 10–16

13. Creepy often notes the origins of the words he uses or hears.

The study of word origins is known as Etymology.

Look up the origin and meaning of the words in the table below. When you have finished, comment on any interesting connections or conflicts between the word's origin and its modern usage.

	Definition	Origin
Etiquette	Conventional requirements as to social behaviour	From old French (900-1400AD): label, ticket
trichotillomania		
rhinotillexomania		
Idiot		
Gorgon		
Religion		
Stealth		
Voyeur		

14. Maud asks Creepy if he wants to touch her bellybutton piercing (pages 73–76). What does this interaction reveal about their relationship?

15. *'Carl Jung reckons that symbols are signs of things that can't be made clear.'* (page 84) Draw the symbols that represent who you are. Explain them to a partner or in a group.

16. What does the gold apple charm represent to Creepy and Maud? What is the significance of her threading it onto her bellybutton ring?

Chapter 17

17. How does this chapter present the contradictions in the way we feel about others and the way that these feelings actually manifest? For example: *'Na-na-was-my-friend ... I hated going to see her.'* (Page 101)

Chapters 18–20

18. How do the various characters in this chapter respond to the Mr Thornton – Stephanie Morcombe incident?

19. In what ways are the characters in the novel defined by their misery? Why do you think that Creepy tells Maud to *'take them off'*? (page 124)

Chapter 21

20. Creepy writes to Maud that *'No man is an island'* (page 129), to which she responds, *'I AM AN ISLAND.'* (page 131) What does each of them mean?

Chapters 22–23

21. How does Maud change when she begins pulling her hair out again? What does this suggest about her *'problem'*?

22. Why does Creepy abduct Sylvia?

Chapters 24–29

23. *'I always want to talk to the sad girl.'* (Page 154) In what ways does this experience in Nancy's waiting room mirror Maud's relationship with Creepy?

24. *'Tear-one's-hair-in-grief'* (page 156) Does Maud pull her hair in grief? Why does she do it? Give as many examples as you can of different emotions and situations that lead to Maud pulling out her hair.

25. What emotions does Chapter 27 elicit from you? What is the effect of Maud's plea: *'S'il te plait, maman, non. S'il te plait, maman, non.'* (page 168)?

26. In what ways has Maud's mother gained a measure of power through the breakdown of her marriage and Limo-Li's leaving?

Chapters 30–32

27. Creepy suggests that friends bringing food to his mother after he is expelled from school is a pointless exercise but required by etiquette. What are some other examples where our actions are determined by etiquette rather than practicality?

28. 'I was following the other Maud in the school library when I found it.' (page 195) How do you react to the idea of Creepy having another 'Maud'? Does this somehow diminish his relationship with her?

C. After reading

29. 'Shortish and curvy. Titian hair. No freckles. A dark, smudgy birthmark about the size of a ten-cent piece on the back of her left calf. A nose piercing Limo-Li knows about and a bellybutton piercing I assume he doesn't. Has a bald spot on the side of her head, which she hides with hats and headbands. Likes Jeff Buckley, Disturbed, Vivaldi. Has a large hardcover gift edition of Alice In Wonderland on a bookshelf and not much else.' (page 19) What does this novel communicate to you about the nature of beauty? Write a paragraph on this, using textual evidence to support your argument.

30. Consider the many relationships in the novel using the table below.

Characters	Features of the relationship	Who holds the power	Power is derived from
Creepy and Maud			
Merrill and Creepy's mother			
Maud and Limo-Li			
Bev and Limo-Li			
Maud and Bev			
Maud and Nancy			

31. 'I am in love with the girl next door ...' (page 13) Love is described in many different ways in the novel, and rarely in the stereotypical manner we have come to expect from novels and films. Write an essay comparing and contrasting the ways that the author represents love in the story. Ensure you make use of textual evidence and page numbers.

32. 'I would like a real friend but I do not know how you get them. I asked Nancy if you could be friends with someone you do not talk to and she said no: communication is the bedrock of any relationship.' (page 34) What does Nancy mean by this? Are Creepy and Maud real friends? Justify your answer.

33. What is the effect of the unusual narrative structure – that of having two narrators – in Touchell's novel? Explore the text for examples of when:

- Creepy and Maud describe or understand the same situation in differing ways .
- One of the narrators seems to ignore something that the other clearly thought significant .
- Both narrators seem to agree on the way they interpreted an event or situation .

34. Examine the construction of the characters of Creepy and Maud with reference to at least three key scenes.

35. The story ends with Maud preparing to leave for a residential mental health institution. Write the next chapter of the book from either Creepy's or Maud's point of view.

36. Creepy refers to the flyers his school produces when something controversial happens. Individually or with a partner, create one of these flyers. Use the book to guide you as to the type of situation, tone, and language that you should use.

37. Reflect on the ways that the characters in the novel deal with their issues. Rank them according to who you believe is the most well adjusted. Justify your answers in a class discussion.



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