



YA Narratives: Reading One's Age

—Mavis Reimer and Heather Snell

In an article published in the online magazine *Slate* in June 2014, just prior to the release of the film adaptation of John Green's popular and highly acclaimed young adult novel *The Fault in Our Stars*, Ruth Graham berated adult readers for reading "realistic" young adult fiction. Citing the statistic that the "largest group of buyers" for YA "are between ages 30 and 44," she explains that she fears that books such as Green's "that are about real teens doing real things"—as distinct from popular franchises such as *Divergent* and *Twilight*, which she dismisses as "transparently trashy"—are "replacing literary fiction in the lives of . . . adult readers." The perspective that social realist young adult fiction invites its readers to inhabit in relation to the world, Graham argues, is essentially immature and uncritical: "It's not simply that YA readers are asked to immerse themselves in a character's emotional life—that's the trick of so much great fiction—but that they are asked to abandon the mature insights into that perspective that they (supposedly) have acquired as adults." Graham holds

up *The Fault in Our Stars* along with a handful of other best-selling contemporary YA novels—Gayle Forman's *If I Stay*, Rainbow Rowell's *Eleanor and Park*, Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, and Ned Vizzini's *It's Kind of a Funny Story*—as containing examples of narrative features that adult (that is, mature) readers should reject: "simple" and "uniformly satisfying" endings, a lack of "emotional and moral ambiguity," and a preponderance of "likable protagonists." Truly adult pleasures, Graham avows, lie in "messy, unresolved stories" and "in reading about people with whom [readers] can't empathize at all."

Graham's remarks provoked a flurry of commentary, both in the comments section appended to her piece and in blogs and articles that responded to her column. One of these commentators, young adult novelist Caroline Bock, takes offence at Graham's narrow view of the genre, a view that, in her opinion, ignores the plethora of young adult novels that challenge readers with "compelling, thought-provoking, controversial, gripping characters." Riffing on the title of Green's *The*

Fault in Our Stars, Bock claims that the fault lies in “us”—that is, in adults who gravitate toward simple, reductive young adult books and ignore all those that are challenging and complex. Bock’s remarks stand out among the comments on Graham’s article, most of which repeat in various ways the conviction that people have the right to read books of whatever sort that give them pleasure.

This insistence was pervasive in the debate that ensued, despite the fact that Graham pointed out explicitly that she had no intention of trying to “disrupt the ‘everyone should just read/watch/listen to whatever they like’ ethos of our era” and that she was seeking, rather, to prompt adult readers to look again at “the complexity of great adult literature,” a point also underlined by her editor, who pulled out the statement “Read whatever you want” for the précis at the head of Graham’s column. In a *Huffington Post* article entitled “This Is Why Young Adult Books Are Not Only Acceptable, but Beneficial for Adults,” Maddie Crum observes that the “feet-stamping defensiveness” that permeates the responses to Graham sidesteps a critique “of what was originally a nuanced (if problematic) argument.” Graham’s critics, Crum declares, prove Graham’s point while undermining their own claim that “genre books” are “nothing to be ashamed of” and “in many ways beneficial . . . to individuals and society.” Even as she suggests that there might be problems with Graham’s argument, Crum concurs with

her conclusion that young adult novels “don’t typically show or tell us anything we don’t already know,” but, she contends, they do allow adults to remember their former selves and to give them a context for who and what they are at present. In this sense, the nostalgia adult readers might experience while reading YA fiction can help make them better people.

Another commentator who took Graham’s argument seriously was Laura Miller. Writing in *Salon*, Miller focuses on the novel around which the debate coalesced and identifies moments in *The Fault in Our Stars* that trouble Graham’s description of the characteristics of young adult fiction: for example, Miller notes that protagonist Hazel Grace herself reflects repeatedly on her desire for a simple ending to the (fictional) novel with which she is obsessed—Peter van Houten’s *An Imperial Affliction*. Miller remarks that “Hazel is halfway to understanding that van Houten’s refusal to wrap things up tidily might be integral to what she finds meaningful in his work, yet—as even Graham seems willing to admit—her desire to know is still understandable.” Graham’s conflation of author and first-person narrator, Miller argues, leads her to elide those very moments in *The Fault in Our Stars* that might challenge her own reductive reading of popular young adult novels.

Miller is less concerned with the question of *who* reads (or should read) YA narratives, the question that provoked many of Graham’s respondents, than she

is with the question of *how* a reader reads (or should read) YA narratives. There were other careful readers of Green's book and Graham's column who entered the debate about the value and meanings of *The Fault in Our Stars*. Several of these readers shifted the terms of the conversation to include a consideration of not only who reads and how they read but also *why* these narratives have achieved such currency among adult and young adult readers and are the source of such anxiety for other readers. In an article in the online newspaper *The Daily Dot* entitled "The Real Story Behind the War over YA Novels," for example, S. E. Smith observes that

[f]ew categories of literature right now seem to receive the level of hatred reserved for young adult fiction, which is the subject of nearly endless editorials on its supposed inanity, excessive sexuality, darkness, and girlyness. It doesn't escape notice that there's a strong whiff of sexism underlying the wave of YA hate—the genre is heavily dominated by women, and female authors can recount their experiences with sexism first hand.

Smith argues that "there are other factors going on here too," one of them being "the lack of understanding of the Millennial generation," which includes the group that helps to account for the "whopping 28 percent of all YA sales" cited by Graham. Graham's comments reveal a "sociocultural divide" more than

they do any kind of truth about young adult fiction: "The Millennial generation, unlike others that have gone before it, is facing an unprecedented legacy of broken promises. They've faced continuous war for half their lives or more, many are struggling under the burden of outsized student loan debts, and more are struggling with an economy that's extremely difficult to penetrate." Accordingly and not surprisingly, they are not engaging in those life activities recognizable as belonging to adulthood: "They're not marrying, settling down, starting families, and choosing careers for life in their 20s and 30s." Young adult literature might well be appealing to those forced to occupy childhood well into their thirties, because of the preoccupation of the form with periods of transition, uncertainty, and identity formation.

Like Smith, Yale professor Jill Richards sees *The Fault in Our Stars* "as part of a larger sea-wave of dystopian young adult fiction from the last decade," a wave she correlates with "a moment of perpetually rising youth unemployment, student debt, campus occupations, and a larger international movement of squares attributed, in large part, to jobless, disaffected youth populations." Working between Green's novel and the film adaptation of it, Richards begins from the common charge that *The Fault in Our Stars* is a sentimental text designed to manipulate audiences—especially female audiences—into weeping, but moves on to demonstrate that, in fact, the text alternates



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between allowing audiences to “dive” into an “absorption” with characters in which differences between “real and fictional lives” are erased and “jerk[ing]” readers out of such absorption: “Too much crying, and the body calls attention to itself. . . . The accumulating bodily discomforts eventually, at least momentarily, open up a space—literal, snotty, shuffling around—between the *you* in the audience and the *you* on screen.” It is exactly that “lurch” that makes *The Fault in Our Stars* “a story about growing up, though not a nostalgic one,” in her view. Indeed, she finds the narrative preoccupied with social divisions: in this cancer narrative, the division between the sick and the healthy is the obvious one, but this division overlaps such distinctions as those between “the young and old, between those with vast incomes and those in permanent indebtedness.” The question posed by this novel and other dystopian YA narratives like it, she suggests, is whether any successful interventions can be imagined in “a world with no future for its narrators.”

Reading one’s age, Graham’s prescription for adult readers, takes on a different meaning in Smith’s and Richards’s reflections on the cultural significance of the current popularity of YA narratives. For A. O. Scott, writing in *The New York Times Magazine*, the phenomenon is also a mark of our particular epoch but one with deep roots in history. Scott speculates that “all American fiction is young-adult fiction” in the sense that the nation that produced it was formed “in revolt against the authority of King George III, a corrupt, unreasonable and abusive father figure.” “From the start,” he observes, “American culture was notably resistant to the claims of parental authority and the imperatives of adulthood.” Citing Leslie A. Fiedler’s “magisterial” mid-century study of the

American novel, in which Fiedler observes that “the great works of American fiction [many of them boys’ adventure stories and sentimental domestic fictions for girls] are notoriously at home in the children’s section of the library,” Scott implies that, in the context of the United States, the category of young adult fiction is always unstable. Any argument that seeks to steer adult readers away from young adult fiction, therefore, is doomed from the start. The particular intensity of the debate now can be attributed to the cultural force of feminism: Scott concedes that “misogyny is a stubborn fact of life” in “the world of politics, work and family,” but notes that, “in the universe of thoughts and words, there is more conviction and intelligence in the critique of male privilege than in its defense.” He speculates, however, that, “in doing away with patriarchal authority, we have also, perhaps unwittingly, killed off all the grown-ups,” male and female.

Scott elaborates on this possibility by pointing to the passing of traditional adulthood as it manifested in “the formerly tried-and-true genres of the urban cop show, the living-room or workplace sitcom and the prime-time soap opera.” In his opinion as an experienced film critic, we have now entered an age in which the entertainment industries “advance an essentially juvenile vision of the world”: “Comic-book movies, family-friendly animated adventures, tales of adolescent heroism and comedies of arrested development do not only make up the commercial

center of 21st-century Hollywood. They are its artistic heart.” The question for him, then, is not why adults in the United States are reading (usually American) young adult fiction, but whether we should mourn or celebrate the death of adulthood. Scott’s ultimate answer to this question is ambivalent. On the one hand, he acknowledges that he feels vaguely “the loss of something here.” On the other hand, he observes that “to be an American adult has always been to be a symbolic figure in someone else’s coming-of-age story,” and “that’s no way to live.” All in all, then, the best response to the current “crisis of authority” might be to enjoy the “playground” of a world in which “no one is in charge and no one necessarily knows what’s going on, where identities are in perpetual flux.”

Scott acknowledges that his argument is circumscribed by the geopolitical, cultural, and national location of the United States, unlike most of the other commentators who assume this context silently. In *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature*, her foundational scholarly study of the genre of adolescent literature, Roberta Seelinger Trites also focuses on American texts, but she identifies an international context and a different historical period for the development of YA literature—“teenagers’ increased economic resources and social autonomy in the robust economic years following World War II”—and observes that adolescent literature developed during these decades in other

countries, too (9). The YA narrative is a postmodern genre, Trites argues, in that its necessary precondition is the widespread acceptance of the definition of people “as socially constructed subjects rather than as self-contained individuals bound by their identities” (16). As Scott intimates in his descriptions of the “perpetual flux” of identities in a contemporary American culture dominated by adolescence, YA literature proceeds from the assumption that identity is not given or fixed but negotiable. Trites’s many examples demonstrate that this negotiation is not simply “self-invention,” as Scott suggests, but a power struggle at several levels:

Power is a force that operates within the subject and upon the subject in adolescent literature; teenagers are repressed as well as liberated by their own power and by the power of the social forces that surround them in these books. Much of the genre is thus dedicated to depicting how potentially out-of-control adolescents can learn to exist within institutional structures. (7)

Trites situates adolescent literature itself as an “institutional discourse”: far from being escapist, YA texts are part of an institution that “participates in the power and repression dynamic that socializes adolescents into their cultural positions” (54). In other words, if the endings of YA fiction assert themselves as “satisfying,” as Graham charges, then critical readers might consider

what work of socialization and repression the narratives have undertaken successfully. As Trites explains, “characters created by adult writers test the limits of their power within the context of multiple institutions,” while readers benefit by experiencing “this dynamic vicariously” (54).

Trites’s reminder that it is “adult writers” who create the adolescent characters and set the terms of their struggles is worth underlining, for, throughout the debate that has raged in the wake of Graham’s imperative to read one’s age, the question of who *writes* young adult fiction (and why) has been largely ignored. With few exceptions, of course, these writers—like the editors, publishers, marketers, distributors, reviewers, and other gatekeepers of YA texts—are adults. One way of answering the question of who writes YA is to pay attention to the biographical, classed, raced, gendered, educational, and political contexts of particular writers who choose the form; another and a potentially complementary approach is to ask what the form permits writers to see and to say. C. S. Lewis famously observes in his 1946 essay “On Three Ways of Writing for Children,” for example, that “the neat sorting-out of books into age-groups, so dear to publishers, has only a very sketchy relation with the habits of any real readers” (36), and that he writes “for children” only if and when “a children’s story is the best art-form for something [he has] to say” (32). Christopher Beha makes a similar point about YA stories in his contribution to

the YA debate in *The New Yorker*: “If we assume that subject matter is what defines a book as ‘young adult,’ it doesn’t make much sense to discourage adults from reading a book with that label.” Genre theorists note that generic texts share an organizing principle—in the case of YA texts, if we follow Trites’s argument, this is the contestation of institutional power—that is meaningful to “senders” and “receivers” in particular situations. Furthermore, texts within a genre repeat interdependent patterns of characters, situations, themes, resolutions, rhetorical strategies, and forms that participate in and contribute to a shared view of the world, its organization, operations, meanings, and limits (Foss 226). Genre writers also, however, regularly extend, revise, or work against the common patterns. Indeed, writing within a genre is an effective way for a writer to challenge or to revise an established view of the world exactly because experienced readers of the genre know what to expect and are likely to take note when those expectations are not met. As Fredric Jameson puts it in his chapter on genre criticism in *The Political Unconscious*, all genres are “social contracts between a writer and a specific public” and, in this sense, “essentially literary institutions” (106), a point Trites also makes.

Jameson, however, is most interested in the deviations of texts from generic narrative models: he understands such deviations to raise “dialectical and historical” issues for critical readers (126), including the consideration of what historical changes in the


cultural, economic, and political situation work to block the full replication of the generic pattern; the search for “substitute textual formations that appear in its wake” and for the “historical ground . . . in which the original structure was meaningful”; and the definition of the “constitutive relationship of forms and texts to their historical preconditions” (146). Many of the commentators on Graham’s article can be understood to be engaged in pondering just such issues. Notably, in the current discussion, the deviations in generic pattern are not in the first instance formal or thematic but rather changes in the enunciative situation itself, in the relation between sender or writer and receiver or reader. The social contract of YA fiction now is not necessarily between adult writer and young adult reader but also potentially between adult writer and adult reader. Has the public conversation merely revealed the gap that always exists between putative readers and actual readers, a gap that usually is masked by what Lewis calls the “sorting-out” habits of literary gatekeepers? If so, is it possible that the cultural authority of gatekeepers increasingly is either ineffectual or disregarded? This assumption seems to underlie the protestations by Graham’s readers that they ought to be able to read—and to read proudly—whatever they want to read. Regardless of the impetus of their comments, it seems fitting that it is the readers of YA, a genre that is organized by the question of the efficacy of institutional power, who appear to be challenging such authority.

Or does the shift in enunciation suggest that a new genre is in the process of formation? If so, what is the “perception of conditions” in the present situation that has “call[ed] forth” this rhetorical response (Foss 226)?


If we use the terms that genre theorists provide for critical readers, we can understand Smith, Richards, and Scott to be addressing this last question. Smith and Richards explore the possibility that adolescents, putative readers of YA, are failing to make the expected transition to full adulthood because of current economic and social conditions and structures, and so they continue to find the genre meaningful to them as they move out of the age range typically associated with young adulthood, perhaps because, as Richards suggests, the form invites readers to consider whether any successful interventions can be imagined in the world it (re)produces. Scott suggests, rather, that it is the writers, (American) adults, who are performing a historical national script in refusing the symbolic obligations of authoritative adulthood. It is also possible to extend the speculations of these three commentators into a more general explanation. Perhaps writers *and* readers of YA texts have abandoned the long-standing premise that adulthood is or ought to be a stable condition of knowledge, identity, or authority. This certainly has been the case among queer theorists of youth. Judith Halberstam, for example, argues that “the adult/youth binary” is inherently heteronormative and needs to be rethought “in relation to an ‘epistemology

of youth’ that disrupts conventional accounts of youth culture, adulthood, and maturity”; she goes on to observe that queer subcultures already are producing “alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience—namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death” (*Queer Time* 2). If adulthood itself no longer is what it was or what it was thought to be, then perhaps it cannot serve to mark a further age and stage into which a young adult can move nor constitute a symbolic condition to embrace or refuse.

Halberstam’s descriptions of conventional and alternative ways of thinking about young people are a reminder that such categories as adulthood, adolescence, and childhood are cultural constructions, formed under particular social, political, and economic pressures and designed to permit or to impose particular ways of thinking. The same is true for the various categories of readers. That a concept such as “adolescent reader” is itself a convenient fiction becomes obvious when the current debate is set into historical context. There is a well-known precedent for intense public conversations about the relation of adolescent readers to narrative texts. Arguably, in fact, the very notion of serious (complex, adult, ambiguous) fiction was built upon the exclusion of adolescent readers from the ranks of its putative readers. Sometimes referred to as the romance–realism debates that



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occurred at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries, one strand of the dispute is identified with the publication of a sequence of articles by Henry James and by Robert Louis Stevenson, some of them in direct response to one another. In these articles, the two novelists consider the prevailing social contracts between writers and readers of fiction and the ways in which those contracts are changing in their time and place: England during the 1880s.

In 1884, James published “The Art of Fiction,” an essay that is often described as his manifesto for the novel as a serious form of fine art, like music, painting, poetry, or architecture. His claim is based on the assertion that “[t]he only reason for the existence of a novel” is that it “attempt[s] to represent life” (5), but his view of what later in the essay he calls the realism of the novel is a complex one. It includes the writer’s “personal,” intense, and “direct impression of life” (9), which he must be free to record without any prescriptions or proscriptions of style or content: “the province of art is all life, all feeling, all observation, all vision . . . all experience” (20), and the novel, in particular, participates in the “large, free character of an immense and exquisite correspondence with life” (23). Stevenson’s response to James defines different criteria for judging the “reality” of a novel. In “A Humble Remonstrance,” also published in 1884, Stevenson takes James’s description of *Treasure Island* as an example of a “delightful” novel that does not, however, meet the test of the kind of realism James is describing (James 23) as the opportunity to argue that “no art . . . can successfully ‘compete with life’” (Stevenson 256). Stevenson insists that it is more accurate to say that novelists, like other artists, “half-shut [their] eyes against the dazzle and confusion of reality”: “Our art is occupied, and bound to be occupied, not so much in making stories true as in making them typical” (258). If the novel is immeasurably different from life, in that it

“is designed and significant,” then it seems obvious to Stevenson that an artist must select “a point of attack” depending on the particular subjects he selects (259). This observation leads Stevenson to a discussion of different classes or genres of novels that respond to different readerly interests: the novel of adventure, the novel of character, and the dramatic novel. Writing as he does principally in the mode of the novel of adventure, he seeks readers whom he defines in an earlier essay, “A Gossip on Romance,” as understanding reading as “absorbing and voluptuous,” readers who are willing to be “rapt clean out of [themselves],” readers whose model he takes to be readers of “the bright, troubled period of boyhood” (220). But this is not the only kind of reading or type of reader. In “A Humble Remonstrance,” he insists that recognizing the class of novel a writer has chosen for a story is important to understanding the extent of the writer’s achievement, since writers can be excellent in various classes of writing. The “root of the whole matter,” for Stevenson, is that fiction is “not a transcript of life, to be judged by its exactitude; but a simplification of some side or point of life, to stand or fall by its significant simplicity” (265).

Stevenson’s intervention, however, does not quite address what is at stake in James’s definition of realism as the “exquisite correspondence with life.” At the end of “The Art of Fiction,” James remarks that the novel of his time suffers from a kind of “diffidence” because it is “addressed in a large degree to ‘young

people’” (25), a diffidence that he identifies in an 1899 essay, “The Future of the Novel,” as “a mistrust of any but the most guarded treatment of the great relation between men and women” (39). James’s insistence that the novelist should be free to write about sex, however, is a metonym for a much larger artistic project, according to Allon White. Along with such other early modernist novelists as George Meredith and Joseph Conrad, White observes, James resisted the obligation of writers to uphold the existing social contract between Victorian writers and the “common” readers of the novel, a contract that included what they saw as the obligation to strive “for referential fixity and clarity of representation” (2). They wished rather to notice and record partial positions (17), to tolerate or produce obscurity (24), to eclipse boundaries “between unconscious desires and conscious intention and between cultural norms and subjective need” (25), to explore private fantasies (45), and to address themselves to readers who do not require narrative certainty, a certainty that they understood as a “grotesque act of bad faith” (28). Because Victorian reviewers of novels almost invariably raised and spoke to the question of whether the book under review could be judged to be suitable for young readers (Hughes 543), young people became the obvious representatives of the common reader who wants narrative certainty. In fact, however, this class—or, perhaps, more accurately, this mass—of readers included not only young people but also the many

working-class men and women who joined the ranks of readers after the implementation of the Education Act of 1870. These were readers to whom the group of educated, elite, male, “new” novelists of the period did not wish to be responsible and by whom they did not wish to be readable. As novelist George Moore put it in 1885, “We must . . . give up once and for ever asking that most silly of all silly questions, ‘Can my daughter of eighteen read this book?’ Let us renounce the effort to reconcile those two irreconcilable things—art and young girls” (21). Moore has no objection to providing young people “with a literature suited to their age and taste,” but he refuses decisively the obligation of serious novelists “to write with a view of helping parents and guardians to bring up their charges in all the traditional beliefs” (21). James and the other writers who stand at the beginning of the modernist tradition of the novel had no wish to claim stable knowledge, secure identity, or adult authority for their own enterprises, but, at the same time, they preserved this possibility by relegating it to writers who wrote for the young and for the masses, “for whom taste is but an obscure, confused, immediate instinct” (James 32).

Felicity A. Hughes, writing about the James–Stevenson exchange in 1978, observes that “[t]he consequence of this *de facto* segregation of children’s literature from the rest can be seen in general aesthetic theory, in literary theory, in the theory and criticism of children’s literature and in the literature itself”

(548). The critical and theoretical situation of texts for young people has become more complicated since Hughes wrote, but some of the consequences of the sequestration of adolescent readers and the texts designed for them from what is coded as serious fiction for mature readers survive in the assumptions and reasoning revealed in the current debate. James is invoked by two of the correspondents—Scott and Beha—as representing a standard for complicated, serious fiction against which to measure YA fiction, an indication of the continuing importance of James’s accounts of and experiments in the novel form. There continues, too, to be a widespread assumption that “referential fixity and clarity of representation” are simpler forms of illusion for readers to master than partial views or private fantasies are as well as a general conviction that readers progress from requiring certainty to tolerating ambiguity as they gain experience. Yet, if either Stevenson’s description of reality as “dazzle and confusion” or James’s description of reality as having “a myriad forms” (12) is taken as a good account of the shared human experience of the world, then recognizing “significant simplicity” might be more of an achievement than tolerating ambiguity. There also seems to be a lurking sense in the debate that someone ought to be holding in place or keeping a place for such “traditional beliefs” as fixity and clarity even if the (adult) writer or reader does not need or value these qualities personally.



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Ironically, the novel at the centre of the debate started by Graham’s column questions many of these assumptions. Indeed, Green’s *The Fault in Our Stars* could be said to thematize and to problematize age-appropriate reading. Seventeen-year-old Hazel is obsessed with a novel that runs to more than six hundred pages. Entitled *An Imperial Affliction*, about a young girl who suffers from cancer, the novel, narrated in the first person by the young girl, ends in mid-sentence, presumably as a way of signalling the death of its narrator. The sheer size of the novel suggests that it probably was not designed as young adult fiction. Yet clearly Hazel has both the knowledge and the willingness to pay attention to the details of the narrative in a way that her father, who also reads the novel in the course of *The Fault in Our Stars*, does not: he finds the novel “good” but “[a] little over my head” (222) and, in the course of his conversation about his reading with Hazel, remarks that “I thought being an adult meant knowing what you believe, but that has not been my experience” (223). Hazel’s love interest, Augustus, is immersed in what is arguably the most conventional of texts for young readers, a popular series that has proliferated into at least nine books, the first of which is *The Price of Dawn*, based on a video game of the same title. To read it is to “live . . . in an infinite fiction,” Hazel muses as she considers the pleasures of this kind of text after she and Gus exchange their favourite books with one another (46). The status of *The Price of Dawn* as a conventional text for young people is troubled, however, by its resemblance to real-world series fictions that target a broad readership. Hazel recognizes that *The Price of Dawn* is similar to the series fiction she read as a child, yet the description of *The Price of Dawn* also recalls the series of novels that were produced following the 2001 success of the military science-fiction video game Halo. Chronicling the heroic exploits of Master Chief John-117, the Halo novelizations are characterized by their investment in

a violent hypermasculinity. The *Price of Dawn* texts exploit similar scenarios, stereotypes that Hazel and Augustus mock even as they enjoy their explorations of the “infinite fiction” of the textual universe of the franchise. The shameless pleasure they take in what is and what is not a conventional series for young people can be seen to speak to the complexity of both young adult and adult reading practices.

Both *An Imperial Affliction* and *The Price of Dawn* are fictional fictions within a fictional cancer narrative that is critical of the conventions and overused clichés of cancer narratives. Hazel and Augustus’s relationship in Green’s narrative unfolds through their conversations about books and narrative more generally. Hazel decides eventually to tolerate the uncertain ending of *An Imperial Affliction* even though Augustus locates the reclusive author during the novel and persuades him to tell Hazel the “real” ending. Likewise, she rejects the use of narrative to remember Augustus. Tellingly, she stops taking photographs of him before the cancer begins to write itself on his body in a way that foreshadows the certainty of his ending. In contrast to some of the young adults in the novels that Trites analyzes in her study, Hazel does not want to use photographs to “own” Augustus, to hold him “captive,” or “to prove that her perception of him is different from everyone else’s” (Trites 126). She remains satisfied with the fragments that she has archived on her phone in the form of photographs, texts, and social media posts. *The*

Fault in Our Stars, finally, could be said to be about how one identifies, lives in, and uses stories.

Part of using stories is choosing one’s genre and, therefore, knowing one’s audience, as Hazel recognizes through the two eulogies for Augustus she prepares, the private one, performed at a “prefuneral” (261) for Augustus and his closest friend Isaac, who is blind as a consequence of his struggle with a rare form of eye cancer, and the public one, performed for those who attend his proper funeral. The eulogy that Hazel performs for Augustus is designed for him, a variation on the situational conditions of the genre of the eulogy, which typically involves the public praise of someone who has died recently. Augustus is alive when he hears Hazel’s and Isaac’s eulogies and even helps to edit them. For example, in a line that was omitted from the film adaptation of the novel, Augustus advises Isaac to “cut the bit about seeing through girls’ shirts” (259). The line points to the often unspoken terms of the contract between text and audience: while Isaac’s comment is humorous to the audience of three friends who have gathered at the “prefuneral,” undoubtedly it would be offensive if it were delivered at Augustus’s public funeral. Augustus’s parents, extended family, and acquaintances expect the elevated rhetoric about the departed that is conventional in a eulogy: that is, a celebration of Augustus’s strength and stoicism in the face of death, precisely those features of the cancer narrative that Hazel and Augustus deplore and know

to be a lie. Apparently, only Peter van Houten sees through the clichés that provoke Hazel to emit a sigh of disgust at the funeral. From the row behind Hazel, he mutters for her benefit, “What a load of horse crap, eh, kid?” (271). Hazel does not applaud his subversion of the funeral, however, acknowledging instead the comfort that the reassuring familiarity of a generic text can provide. Augustus’s funeral ends up looking like “any other funeral” (273) in much the same way as one cancer narrative ends up looking like any other. Hazel herself takes as little comfort in the empty rituals that surround Augustus’s burial as she does in the typical cancer narrative, but she knows enough to deliver a conventional eulogy: “Funerals, I had decided, are for the living” (273). Hazel, in other words, chooses ultimately to keep a place for some of the traditional beliefs she herself does not need or value: the ironic twist in this narrative is that this is a case of a young adult writer protecting the adults around her.

YA narratives in print and in screen forms are the common topic of the scholarly essays in this issue of *Jeunesse*. In “Zygmunt Bauman, Postmodern Ethics, and Utopia as Process in Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games*,” Brian Jansen begins from Trites’s definition of YA narrative as a postmodern genre to consider the ethics of Collins’s trilogy. Borrowing Bauman’s interpretation of Emmanuel Levinas’s theory of “being-for” the Other, Jansen argues that Katniss journeys

toward an articulation of ethics without morality. Chris Richards considers a recent film in the context of the genre of rape-revenge narratives in “*Hard Candy*, Revenge, and the ‘Aftermath’ of Feminism,” asking what the film suggests about the contemporary understanding of second-wave and third-wave feminism assumed by filmmakers working in and against this genre. In “Dodging and Embracing Young Adulthood in Kevin Major’s *Hold Fast* and Justin Simms’s Film Adaptation,” Katherine Bell reads a recent film of a 1970s Canadian YA novel to explore the continuities and changes evident in the representation of region and the understanding of genre in the two texts. Working with Trites’s argument that YA narratives necessarily are imbricated with capitalism, Bell emphasizes the tensions between the ideals of progress within neo-liberal economic systems and the realities of the underdevelopment of Newfoundland evident in the two texts and queries the extent of the agency of the young protagonists within these contexts.

Kristen B. Proehl considers a novel that predates the texts usually identified as standing at the beginning of the YA genre in her essay “Tomboyism and Familial Belonging in Carson McCullers’s *The Member of the Wedding*.” Using the lens of queer-theoretical scholarship to consider this 1946 Southern Gothic text, Proehl demonstrates that McCullers critiques heteronormative institutions and rituals through her explorations of the intersections of race, girlhood, and

the sentimental idea of the family. In “Toward a Theory of Adolescence: Queer Disruptions in Representations of Adolescent Reading,” Gabrielle Owen describes adolescence as a cultural category that organizes the temporality of a subject, keeping childhood fixed in the past and adulthood a stable future condition. She considers a number of scenes of reading within YA narratives from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twenty-first century, considering whether there are opportunities within these narratives for a critical reader to unravel the cultural scripts assigned to the adolescent reader and to open what she terms “queer ways of being and knowing” (115).

The reviews in this issue all engage questions of scripting and being scripted. Lian Beveridge’s review of Cherie Allan’s *Playing with Picturebooks: Postmodernism and the Postmodernesque* and selected picture books that can be classified as “postmodern” considers, in addition to the operations of such modes as metafiction and metalepsis, how picture books negotiate heteronormative scripts and suggest queer resistances to them. Drawing on Halberstam’s *The Queer Art of Failure*, Beveridge suggests that some of them do so through their failures. Nyala Ali, in her review of Mariko Tamaki’s YA novel (*You*) *Set Me on Fire* and her graphic novel *This One Summer* (illustrated by Jillian Tamaki), looks at how scripts of “girlness” impact female personhood by considering the Tamakis’ depictions of girls who are for one reason or another

outsiders. The ways in which whiteness permeates normative scripts of nationhood are the topic of Andrea Zerebeski’s review of four books in the Dear Canada and I Am Canada series: Carol Matas’s *Footsteps in the Snow: The Red River Diary of Isobel Scott, Rupert’s Land, 1815* as well as three books by Maxine Trottier, *Blood upon Our Land: The North West Resistance Diary of Josephine Bouvier, Batoche, District of Saskatchewan, 1885*; *The Death of My Country: The Plains of Abraham Diary of Geneviève Aubuchon, Quebec, New France, 1759*; and *Storm the Fortress: The Siege of Quebec; William Jenkins, New France, 1759*. For Nelly Duvicq, who reviews seven books published by the award-winning Iqaluit and Toronto-based publishing house Inhabit Media, countering such scripts necessitates clearing a space for the voices of Inuit and Nunavut peoples. Finally, as Debra Dudek’s review of Jane M. Gangi’s *Genocide in Contemporary Children’s and Young Adult Literature: Cambodia to Darfur* makes clear, many children’s books about genocide set out consciously to identify for young people the master scripts that have supported and in many cases made possible attempts to wipe out entire groups of people. All of the reviews elaborate on various ways in which texts by and for young people interpellate them as sexed, gendered, classed, raced, and increasingly global citizens.

Gangi’s textbook for teachers comes out of her work with post-secondary students but analyzes texts

directed to children and adolescents, emphasizing, as Dudek intimates in her review, the need to teach critical literacy to young people at all of the ages on the spectrum that can be indicated by that broad category. The current public debates about what it means to read one's age not only demonstrate the limitations of assuming a close correlation between age and experience or age and power but also point to the many areas of concern that are common to human beings of

all ages. It might be time to ask what possibilities open if adults return to reading (and viewing and playing) texts beside young people. In the globalizing world in which questions of belonging and meaning are no more settled for most adults than they are for most young people, it might be significant to begin from the acknowledgement that adults not only share a world with the young but also share the experience of unknowingness with them.

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