

Editorial

Alison Waller

In preparing this issue, I was reminded that nearly twenty years ago I attended the UK's first national conference on YA fiction. The event was called "Turning Point", and one of the topics of discussion was how YA was "the least economically significant area of children's books [...] because the audience predominantly borrows rather than buys its books" (Belbin 140). The commercial turn in YA since 2002 may have transformed this landscape, but thinking about YA as a market, as well as a body of literary work, is what has always made our scholarship so exciting. Many of us are interested in the way that texts flow between authors, publishers, and readers, enriched by the contributions made by translators, adaptors, booksellers, commentators, fans, and educators. Taking account of the material and economic conditions that shape YA is a crucial enterprise, as is taking the producers and consumers of this literature *to* account, in the way that several of the authors of our articles do. Criticism can undertake valuable work in drawing our gaze towards the gaps and omissions in our field, and the distorted representations that might be on offer to young readers. This second issue of *IJYAL* pays attention to these relationships, scrutinising the productive, sometimes problematic, dynamics that have emerged in the YA market in the twenty-first century.

IJYAL Issue Two opens with Melanie Ramdarshan Bold's new report on YA authorship in the UK, in which she focuses on the number of works published by authors of colour in the period 2017-2019. The results reveal some improvement from the "eight percent problem", which defined the state of affairs for Ramdarshan Bold between 2006 and 2016; but she argues that publishers still need to do more to reward authors of colour with the same contract terms as their White counterparts, and offer them the space to tell stories about "different facets of British youth culture" (29), not just tales of inequality and racism. Our regular roundtable discussion feature, "Ploughing the Field" also tackles ways that the YA market might reinvigorate itself. Bringing together five translators of YA from different parts

of the world, this fascinating conversation highlights the practice and purpose of translated YA, while at the same time exposing the challenges faced in promoting these works to publishers and readers. The participants also share their concerns about the continuing dominance of European languages and approaches in bringing new voices to the market. Touching on similar themes, Adriana De Persia Colón's review of *Side by Side: US Empire, Puerto Rico, and the Roots of Youth Literature and Culture* (2021) celebrates Marilisa Jiménez García's efforts to take conversations beyond Anglo-American YA.

In the two articles that follow, Kelly Beestone and Jennifer Gouck explore two further aspects of a contemporary YA market: the influence that the YA community can have on publishing trends and reader behaviour; and the transmediation of a popular-culture trope across film and literature. In "‘There's No Such Thing as Too Many Books’: How Exclusive Editions of Books Cause FOMO in the YA Community", Beestone lays out the mechanisms at work in the production and consumption of exclusive YA editions. She provides a detailed account of how book subscription boxes and Advanced Reader Copies deployed by publishers circulate amongst YA fans, particularly book collectors and 'BookTube' content creators. The gains that might emerge in creating a vibrant and active fandom are balanced against the barriers to joining this community and the 'Fear of Missing Out' (FOMO) that therefore shapes many disadvantaged readers' experiences of YA. In "The Manic Pixie Dream Girl in US YA Fiction: Introducing a Narrative Model", Gouck shows how this whimsical figure has been enthusiastically adopted from film and TV by YA authors over the last twenty years. She argues that the 'Manic Pixie Dream Girl YA' novel reproduces dominant discourse of White, cisgender, heterosexual, middle-class femininity in service of a male protagonist, even when the Pixie is positioned in a narrative that seems to want to subvert the trope. Dainy Bernstein's review of *Adaptation in Young Adult Novels: Critically Engaging Past and Present* (2020), edited by Dana E. Lawrence and Amy L. Montz, brings attention to the edited collection's examination of adaptation as a means of engaging and challenging canonical texts. In doing so, she demonstrates the scholarly importance of paying attention to inclusive young adult adaptations that centre marginalised voices.

The next article is a study of authorship in a very precise sense, dealing with a British text published twenty years before the *Turning Point* conference. Andrea Davidson's "Recognition Plots and Intercultural Encounters in Aidan Chambers' *Dance on My Grave* (1982)" uses archival materials from Seven Stories, the National Centre for Children's Books based in Newcastle in the UK, to trace Aidan Chambers' plotting of his 1982 novel. Davidson uses this method of literary genetic analysis to examine how the problematic relationship between the two male characters – specifically the protagonist's lack of understanding about his lover's Jewish background – was constructed and complicated during the drafting and editing process. Catherine Butler's review of Chambers' *The Age Between: Personal Reflections on Youth Fiction* (2020) complements Davidson's study of *Dance on My Grave* with

insights into how Chambers' "multifaceted place within children's and young adult literature" (1) offers a unique perspective on the theory and practice of youth fiction.

The second part of this *IJYAL* issue presents recent research into questions of sex and sexuality in YA fiction. Alex Henderson's "Playing with Genre and Queer Narrative in the Novels of Malinda Lo" offers up Lo's work as a case study of "queer narrative play" (1), arguing that her novels both draw on, and defy, genre expectations in creating stories about LGBTQ characters. Patricia Kennon's "Asexuality and the Potential of Young Adult Literature for Disrupting Allonormativity" takes a broader approach in surveying the portrayal of ace and acespec characters in recent YA and noticing emergent possibilities for the affirmation of what is often an overlooked sexual orientation. Both articles state the importance of contemporary YA as a potentially radical space for challenging entrenched assumptions. Sarah Pyke's and Robert Bittner's reviews of Gabrielle Owen's *A Queer History of Adolescence: Developmental Pasts, Relational Futures* (2020) and Derritt Mason's *Queer Anxieties of Young Adult Literature and Culture* (2020) respectively also address recent developments in queer YA studies, specifically in its scholarship. The former commends Owen's contribution to recent work that "productively deconstructs adolescence to reveal its role both as a disciplinary mechanism of the self and as a scapegoat for a variety of social ills" (Pyke 1). The latter reiterates the importance of "embrac[ing] the anxious nature of queer YA and mov[ing] beyond simplistic conceptualisations of its didactic possibilities" (Bittner 4).

It is important to place these arguments in a wider context. The articles in Issue Two of *IJYAL* mostly focus on the present and future, but our final piece by Kimberley Reynolds glances backwards. Drawing on social history, archival material, and her own experiences, in "The Literary Sweet Spot: Sex in US and UK YA Fiction from the 1960s to the 1980s", Reynolds shows how the development of YA literature can be plotted against political and educational movements to understand why the taboo around sexual content in books for young readers persisted for so long. This is a version of a keynote talk given at the *Let's Talk About Sex in YA* symposium held in Cambridge, UK, in May 2021¹; and it acts as a useful taster for our next issue, which will have a special section guest edited by the *Let's Talk About Sex in YA* team.

1 *Let's Talk About Sex in YA*, organised by Nic Hilton, Gabriel Duckels, and Lisa Kazianka, is among a number of YA-focused conferences and symposia that have been run by doctoral candidates and early career researchers in the UK over the past few years. Anthony Stepniak organised the *YA Identities* symposium at the University of Northampton in 2017; Sean Donnelly organised the *Reading YA* symposium at the University of Birmingham in 2018; and Emily Corbett organised the *Being Human in YA Literatures* symposium at the University of Roehampton in 2019.

REFERENCES

- Belbin, David. "What is Young Adult Fiction?" *English in Education*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2011, pp. 132-145.
- Ramdarshan Bold, Melanie. "The Eight Percent Problem: Authors of Colour in the British Young Adult Market (2006–2016)." *Publishing Research Quarterly*, vol. 34, 2018, pp. 385-406.