

# Transgender Books in Transgender Packages:

## The peritextual materials of young adult fiction

Emily Corbett

### ABSTRACT

The packaging of a book – its peritextual materials including front cover, blurb, acknowledgements, afterword, and author notes – provides information that can contribute to a potential reader’s decision whether or not to purchase, borrow, or read the story it encases. As such, the choices made by authors, illustrators, editors, and publishers regarding books’ peritextual features can offer important insights into the spaces books are intended to occupy within their contemporary market. This article examines the peritextual materials of a broad range of British and American transgender young adult novels published in the twenty-first century, in the context of the We Need Diverse Books movement and *Time’s* “transgender tipping point” which coincided in the mid-2010s. In doing so, it shows how the field of transgender young adult fiction has developed over the last five or so years to include more variety, intersectional diversity, and Own Voices authorship, as well as considering how the commercial packaging of various books might usefully signal the audience each is intended to attract. While a growing area of scholarship, existing research on transgender young adult novels has predominantly focused on the stories or their pedagogical function for teenage readers. Taking a different approach, this article asks how a selection of

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transgender young adult titles are pitched to potential readers and examines the way they signal that transgender characters or themes are included in their narratives in order to ascertain the types of audiences these books are intended to attract. It then considers how peritextual features are used to construct authorial identities, bringing readers' attention to authors' various knowledge, expertise, and relevant experience to write transgender characters. By examining a broad selection of peritexts, this article makes the case that transgender young adult novels are often marketed to cisgender readers at the expense of transgender and questioning adolescents who are seeking reflections of their lived experiences.

## INTRODUCTION

In *Are the Kids Alright?* (2013), B.J. Epstein analysed how, and to what effect, LGBTQ literature for young people was shelved in The Norfolk and Norwich Millennium Library, UK. Epstein was interested in the ways the paratexts of the books – a term she employs to refer to peritextual material, any stickers placed on books, and where the books are shelved – provide keys to how texts are perceived and how they are intended to be used by readers (32-39). According to her findings, LGBTQ young adult literature was located within its own section of the library with the problematic effect of 'othering' the texts shelved within it. For Epstein, this placement "implies LGBTQ topics are specialised and must be purposely sought out" whilst also keeping "LGBTQ people and subjects separate from more general ones" (34). To the same effect, the books themselves "encourage[d] the view that they are for a select group – usually those who belong to that minority but occasionally those who just want to learn more about that group" (36) by including discussion questions, names of LGBTQ organisations, and helpline numbers. The peritextual components of the books Epstein surveyed demarcate a niche audience of LGBTQ readers, or at least those who are reading with the purpose of understanding LGBTQ identities.

Epstein's study demonstrates the important role that the peritextual features play in situating a book within a field of literature. However, her conclusions need revising in light of the subsequent developments in transgender young adult fiction that are the focus of this article. First, transgender titles were subsumed into the category of LGBTQ young adult fiction in Epstein's analysis, likely because that is how the books were shelved in The Norfolk and Norwich Millennium Library. Moreover, there were only a small number of transgender young adult fiction titles published prior to Epstein's investigation and it is not clear how many of those titles were included in her paratextual analysis or indeed in the library collection itself. From the titles that were available, the majority depict the transgender character's transition narrative. The small number and range of texts available in the early years of transgender young adult fiction limited the scope of the investigation.

Since the mid-2010s, for reasons I discuss in the first section of this article, there has been a significant increase in the quantity and variety of the transgender young adult titles being published. In light of this fact, it is necessary and timely to consider the peritextual materials of a much more diverse selection of transgender young adult fiction published in the last five or so years. This is important for the publishing industry and for critics because peritexts are designed to “capture potential readers’ attention and compel them to engage with a book’s content” (Matos 85). As this article shows, a book’s packaging provides information that can both factor into a potential reader’s decision whether or not to purchase, borrow, or read the narrative, and can guide a reader’s engagement with the text.

In spite of the peritext being recognised as “a key conduit through which negotiations take place between authors, the book trade and readers” (Matthews and Moody ix), peritextual features of transgender young adult fiction have often appeared as peripheral subjects of enquiry in critical work which considers the growing body of primary texts (aside from in work which encompasses transgender texts in the broader category of LGBTQ young adult fiction). For example, Catherine Butler looks briefly at the endpapers of Louis Sacher’s *Marvin Redpost* (1992)<sup>1</sup> in her examination of the intersection of transgender discourse and feminism in books for younger readers; Barbara Pini et al. argue the cover image of Brian Katcher’s *Almost Perfect* (2009) is a further example of the text’s stereotypical portrayal of its transgender character; Megan E. Friddle refers to the author’s note of Cris Beam’s *I Am J* (2006) in a discussion about how recent young adult novels that address non-normative genders can be connected to the legacy of the tomboy in American books for girls; and Jennifer Putzi analyses the ways the author’s note of Meredith Russo’s *If I Was Your Girl* (2016) speaks to the compromises Russo made in the characterisation of her protagonist to portray transgender identity in a way which was easily comprehensible to cisgender readers. Collectively, these articles show interest in how tropes or features of the narratives are supported or problematised by the peritextual material. Each article provides valuable insights into transgender young adult fiction; however, they also demonstrate that critics have largely favoured the examination of the textual features of the corpus. Yet, as this article evidences, peritexts can be read in more detail to reveal the audience a book is targeting and the assumptions that the publishing industry makes about that audience.

The role the peritext plays as a method of communication between the publishing industry and potential readers means the peritextual materials in my research corpus are an important site for critical attention for two key reasons. First, understanding how transgender and questioning adolescent readers might be exposed to these narratives is vital for ensuring all teens are able to see their identities represented in the literature they read. Second, as Mike Cadden has suggested, the peritext “has so much to do with assumptions about the implied reader” (vii) and so assessing how these texts are packaged helps us to understand the different types of transgender representation that are available in the

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1 See C. Butler in References.

commercialised book market, where cisgender readers constitute the majority of consumers.

In this article, I show how the field of transgender young adult fiction has developed over the last five or so years to include more variety, intersectional diversity, and Own Voices authorship,<sup>2</sup> and consider how the commercial packaging of various books might usefully signal the audience each book is intended to attract. My aim is not to provide an exhaustive list of texts, but rather to investigate how the decisions regarding the peritextual features made by authors, illustrators, editors, and publishers offer important insights into the space different types of transgender narrative are intended to occupy within the growing market of twenty-first-century young adult literature. I begin by setting out the key changes that have occurred in the field of transgender young adult fiction since the mid-2010s in the context of both the We Need Diverse Books movement and the “transgender tipping point” (Steinmetz). Next, I analyse how a selection of transgender young adult titles are pitched to different potential readers using various signals that transgender characters or themes are included in their narratives, in order to interrogate the type of audience these books are intended to attract. Then, I consider how peritextual features are used to construct an identity for the author which brings readers’ attention to the author’s knowledge, expertise, and relevant experience to write transgender characters. Throughout this article, I make the case that peritextual features can usefully be read to reveal a book’s target audience because they signal that book’s approach to the representation of transgender lived experiences.

## RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN TRANSGENDER YOUNG ADULT FICTION

Since the mid-2010s, in excess of one hundred young adult novels that include one or more transgender characters have been published in the US and UK. Compared with the “woefully low” (948) number of titles that appeared in the early years of publication as discussed in Robert Bittner et al.’s 2016 critical review, the field of transgender young adult fiction has seen exponential growth in both the quantity of titles published and in the variety of works available in the latter half of the decade. While transgender characters have been included in young adult fiction since the beginning of the century,<sup>3</sup> two cultural moments occurred in the mid-2010s and fostered an environment in which fictional titles that include transgender

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2 The application of ‘Own Voices’ to transgender fiction can be problematic as it does not accommodate the diversity within the spectrum of transgender identities. For this article’s purposes, I use Own Voices to describe transgender fiction written by openly transgender authors.

3 Julie Anne Peters’ *Luna* (2004) is most often cited as the first young adult novel to include an openly transgender character, though Katherine Mason Cramer and Jill Adams have noted that Carol Plumucchi’s *What Happened to Lani Garver* (2002) is deserving of that accolade for its “thoughtful portrayal of Lani, who refuses to conform to gender expectations and doesn’t want to be put in a box” (123).

characters became more desirable acquisitions for the children's and young adult publishing industries: the increased visibility of transgender celebrities in popular culture and a proliferation in online discourse about the lack of diverse representation and authorship in literature for young people.

The June 2014 issue of *Time* magazine claimed there had been a “transgender tipping point” (Steinmetz), a phrase that has itself fuelled more public discourse about transgender identity. *Time's* assertion was not that transgender people were absent prior to the twenty-first century, but that transgender celebrities were increasingly present in popular culture. While *Time's* tipping point is indicative of a changing public attitude towards transgender individuals, it is important to acknowledge the article by no means marked a definitive shift to universal acceptance for transgender people. As Susan Stryker has argued, “this ‘tipping point’ is more like the fulcrum of a teeter-totter, tipping backwards as well as forward, than like a summit where, after a long upward climb, progress toward legal and social equality starts rolling effortlessly downhill” (196). What is clear is that the “explosion of highly visible transgender presence in the mass media” (197) has facilitated an increase in the number of transgender characters published in the mainstream book market.

Others critics have similarly noted how social changes result in a shift in the content of contemporary popular literature. For example, Ester Saxey acknowledges that “the [coming out] story sprang into print as soon as cultural changes allowed it to be spoken and heard (changes embodied by landmarks such as the decriminalisation of sex between men in 1967 in the UK, and the removal of homosexuality from the DSM [*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*] in 1973 in the US)” (2). Kimberley Reynolds similarly argues for a link between the “the epoch of sexual liberation that occurred in the years after the contraceptive pill and before AIDS” and the rise of young adult fiction in which “pubescent and adolescent readers could find books about people of their own age, with feelings they recognised doing things with their bodies that they wanted to do – or indeed were succeeding in doing” (115). To this discourse, I add that transgender young adult fiction is influenced by the socio-historical context of its publication, as well as contemporary trends in the book market to which I now turn my attention.

Campaigns such as We Need Diverse Books, alongside social media hashtags including #WeNeedDiverseBooks (from which the campaign originated), #DiverseYA and #OwnVoices, were launched in the mid-2010s to call for increased diversity in the characters, authors, and publishers of children's and young adult literature, with widespread attention and support. One article published in the *Teacher Librarian Journal* in 2015 enthusiastically recommends that “if you haven't seen or heard this demanding motto [‘we need diverse books’], it's time to get on board” because “the professional networks have been abuzz about this for the past year” (Killeen 52). While scholars including Ebony Elizabeth Thomas remind us of the long history of conversations about diversity in “a protest tradition launched decades ago by leaders in the multicultural children's movement” (4-5), the broad reach of digital

conversations allowed recent calls for diversity to gain unparalleled traction in the mid-2010s. As Melanie Ramdarshan Bold has suggested, “contemporary YA trends are in constant evolution: they develop in accordance with influences such as current affairs, global discussions, and social media” (33). In the case of transgender young adult literature, widespread online demands for diversity coincided with the increased fame of transgender individuals, such as Caitlin Jenner, Laverne Cox, and Janet Mock, heightening the marketability of transgender fiction from the mid-2010s onwards.

The influence of this cultural moment on the British and American young adult publishing industries can be seen in the way publishing houses continue to actively seek a more diverse catalogue. Ramdarshan Bold has argued that ‘diversity’ “has become a buzzword in the Anglo-American publishing industries” (45) and this is evident from language used by publishing houses to seek new acquisitions. For example, the Editorial Director for Children’s Fiction at Simon & Schuster, Jane Griffiths, is “especially keen to find new authors from different backgrounds and writing that reflects the multi-cultural and diverse world we live in” (“Corporate Information”). Whether or not publishing houses are delivering the diverse catalogue they are seeking is, however, up for debate. In March 2014, *The New York Times* published an essay by author Christopher Myers which challenged the publishing industry for its false promises: “the mission statements of major publishers are littered with intention, with their commitments to diversity, to imagination, to multiculturalism, ostensibly to create opportunities for children to learn about and understand their importance in their respective worlds [...] but there are numbers and truths that stand in stark contrast to the reassurances” (Myers). While the discussion that follows shows that the picture has improved somewhat for transgender characters and, indeed, transgender authors in the young adult book market from the mid-2010s, there is still a disconnect between the intentions set out by mainstream publishing houses and major conglomerates, and the experiences of authors trying to publish transgender young adult titles.

Ray Stoeve, author of the transgender young adult novel *Between Perfect and Real* (forthcoming, Amulet Books imprint of Scholastic Press, US, 2021),<sup>4</sup> has written an online article which considers the barriers faced by transgender authors attempting to access mainstream publishing channels including “structural oppression that exists outside of the industry; the pressure, real or perceived, to educate, within the book itself and with one’s publishing team; and transphobic reviews from trade publications” (“Trans Representation in YA Fiction Is Changing, But How Much?” n.p.). Collating the experiences of several transgender authors of transgender young adult fiction, Stoeve’s work highlights some of the challenges in getting transgender young adult fiction published. For example, Aiden

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4 I have included publication information in-text throughout this article to illustrate patterns in the market of transgender young adult fiction, and to make specific observations about which publishers are publishing the highest numbers of applicable titles.

Thomas, author of *Cemetery Boys* (Swoon Reads imprint of Macmillan, US, 2020), had initially feared that the “marginalizations [sic] were so unmarketable that it would be impossible to successfully pitch” a title with a Cuban/Mexican gay transgender protagonist (qtd. in Stoeve). Similarly, Mason Deaver, author of *I Wish You All the Best* (Push imprint of Scholastic, US, 2019), recalls they “had two agents tell me they couldn’t see a world where my little trans book was published because they didn’t see a market for it” (qtd. in Stoeve). Notwithstanding the difficulties faced by these authors, the publication of their books by mainstream publishing houses demonstrates that there is a market for transgender young adult fiction.

With the recent emphasis on Own Voices literature and the We Need Diverse Books campaign, there has, in fact, been a significant increase in the proportion of novels with a transgender protagonist written by authors who are openly transgender in the mainstream book market. I use ‘openly transgender’ in this context owing to the fact that some authors may identify as transgender without making that identity known, as was the case for Anna-Marie McLemore, many of whose novels were published before they publicly announced their nonbinary gender identity in 2019.<sup>5</sup> The first openly transgender author to have a transgender young adult fiction book published through traditional publishing channels was Rachel Gold (*Being Emily*, Bella Books, US, 2012). Four years later, Russo’s *If I Was Your Girl* was the first transgender young adult novel authored by a transgender person to be published by one of the major five publishing conglomerates (Flatiron imprint of Macmillan, US, 2016). Since 2016, the number of Own Voices transgender titles with transgender protagonists from both independent presses and the conglomerates has notably increased. Own Voices novels published by independent presses include: April Daniels’ *Nemesis* series, comprising *Dreadnought* and *Sovereign*, (Diversion Books, US, 2017); Hal Schriever’s *Out of Salem* (Triangle Square imprint of Seven Stories Press, US, 2019); and Mia Siegert’s *Somebody Told Me* (Carolrhoda imprint of Lerner, US, 2020). While outside of my British and American research scope, to my knowledge two Own Voices young adult transgender titles have also been published by independent presses in Canada: Bridget Liang’s *What Makes You Beautiful* (Lorimer, 2019) and Tash McAdam’s *Blood Sport* (Orca Books, 2020).

With regards to the five major conglomerates, Macmillan have published titles including Russo’s *Birthday* (Flatiron imprint, US, 2018); McLemore’s *When the Moon Was Ours* (Thomas Dunne imprint, US, 2016) as well as titles from them with secondary transgender characters including *Blanca & Roja* (Feiwel & Friends imprint, US, 2018) and *Dark and Deepest Red* (Feiwel & Friends imprint, US, 2020); and Thomas’ *Cemetery Boys* (Swoon Reads imprint, US, 2020). Harper Collins’ catalogue includes Kacen Callender’s *Felix Ever After* (Balzer and Bray imprint, US, 2020). Harper Collins also have a further eight Own Voices titles with transgender protagonists scheduled for 2020 and 2021. Penguin Random House have

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5 I would also like to acknowledge that recent online discourse has highlighted the pressure some authors experience to publicly identify whether or not their fiction includes Own Voices representation, thus forcing them to disclose their personal identity (see Albertalli).

published titles including Akwaeke Emezi's *Pet* (Random House Children's Book imprint, US, 2019) and Amy Rose Capetta's *The Brilliant Death* (Viking imprint, US, 2018), with Isaac Fitzsimons' *The Passing Playbook* (Dial Book imprint, US) scheduled for release in 2021. Hatchette published Juno Dawson's *Wonderland* in 2020 (Quercus Children's Books imprint, UK). To my knowledge, Simon & Schuster are yet to publish Own Voices novels with transgender protagonists, however they published two young adult memoirs by transgender people in 2014: Katie Rain Hill's *Rethinking Normal* (Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers imprint, US) and Arin Andrews' *Some Assembly Required* (Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers imprint, US). With the number of titles published or scheduled for publication from the five major conglomerates in 2020 and 2021, these years will be the first that they have published more Own Voices transgender young adult fiction than independent publishers. It is important to note that these numbers may be distorted by the fact that the publishing schedules of independent presses are less accessible than the major conglomerates and that independent presses may have been more severely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. However, whether or not the major conglomerates out-publish the independent presses, the increase in numbers from the conglomerates indicates that Own Voices transgender young adult fiction is seen to be increasingly desirable in a market that was dominated by cisgender authors only five years ago.

The field has also seen an increase in the intersectional diversity of the characters included in transgender young adult fiction since the mid-2010s by both openly transgender authors and authors who do not identify as transgender. In her investigation of LGBTQ characters in children's and young adult books (2012), Epstein argued that "the lack of [intersectional] diversity implies that it may not be possible to be [LGB]TQ and something else. One aspect of diversity seems to be enough" ("We're here, we're (not?) queer" 296). This was the case for the earlier works of transgender fiction; however the picture changed somewhat in the latter half of the decade with the publication of more books featuring transgender characters who are part of at least one other minority group. Importantly, there are a growing number of adolescent protagonists who are both transgender and a person of colour. For example, Sam, the transgender protagonist of McLemore's *When the Moon Was Ours* (2016), is of Italian-Pakistani heritage; the transgender protagonists of C.B Lee's second novel in the *Sidekick Squad* series, *Not Your Villain* (Duet Books, US, 2017), Emezi's *Pet* (2019), and Callender's *Felix Ever After* (2020) are Black; and the transgender protagonist of Sonia Patel's *Jaya and Rasa* (Cinco Punto Press, US, 2017) is part of an Indian family originally from Gujarat.

A greater proportion of titles now also include transgender character(s) who have a non-heterosexual sexual or romantic orientation, or engage in non-heterosexual relationships. For example, the transgender female protagonist of Daniels' *Nemesis Series* (2017-) is in a relationship with another female, the non-binary protagonist of Deaver's *I Wish You All the Best* (2019) is exploring their bisexuality, and there are queer transgender

characters in titles including Callender's *Felix Ever After* (2020). It is important to note that there is still a paucity of characters who are both transgender and disabled and/or neurodivergent; McLemore's *Blanca & Roja* (2018) includes both a transgender character and a disabled character, and the protagonist of Emezi's *Pet* (2019) is a transgender female with selective mutism. Notwithstanding the shortcomings of the intersectional diversity in the field of transgender young adult fiction, it is clear that a corpus in which it seemed "it may not be possible to be [LG]BTQ and something else" (Epstein "We're here" 296) only a few years ago now includes a greater proportion of characters who represent more than one marginalised identity, though there is much work still to be done by the publishing industry to present an inclusive catalogue.

Changes in the field can also be seen in the gradual increase in the spectrum of transgender identities being represented in young adult literature published by mainstream publishers. In 2016, Bittner et al. suggested "there is an empty space within publishing" for "gender nonconforming stories in which characters, like so many real youths, do not necessarily identify with a specific binary gender" (949). While there are a mix of male and female transgender characters in titles that were published prior to Bittner et al.'s study, the characters typically identify with the gender normatively understood to be opposite to their assigned gender with only a very few titles depicting non-binary identities (notably Kristin Elizabeth Clark's *Freakboy* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux imprint of Macmillan, US, 2013) and Robin Talley's *What We Left Behind* (Harlequin Teen imprint of Harper Collins, US, 2015). More recently, books with transgender protagonists and major secondary characters with an identity in the non-binary spectrum have become more prominent. For example, McLemore's *Blanca & Roja* (2018) includes a genderqueer character as the love interest of the protagonist; Linsey Miller's fantasy duology *Mask of Shadows*, comprising *Mask of Shadows* and *Ruin of Stars* (Sourcebooks Fire imprint of Sourcebooks, US, 2017 and 2018 respectively) features Sal, a genderfluid assassin, as its protagonist; Capetta's *The Lost Coast* (Candlewick Press imprint of Walker Books, US, 2019) includes a non-binary character among its cast of queer witches; Deaver's *I Wish You All the Best* (2019) includes Ben, a protagonist who comes out to his parents as nonbinary and is forced to deal with the consequences of their rejection; Schrieve's *Out of Salem* (2019) has a genderqueer protagonist who has to adjust to being a zombie after a car crash that killed members of their family; and Callender's *Felix Ever After* (2020) features a protagonist who identifies as a demiboy whose catfish revenge plot leads to a quasi-love triangle.<sup>6</sup> Since the mid-2010s, a transgender or questioning reader has been able to access an increasingly broad spectrum of transgender characters and has, therefore, more opportunities to see parts of their own identity reflected in the available literature.<sup>7</sup>

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6 'Catfish' refers to the act of creating and using one or more false online identities, particularly with the purpose of pursuing deceptive online romances.

Together, these key developments demonstrate a growing publishing appetite for transgender young adult literature which likely follows the widespread calls for diversity that gained traction in the mid-2010s. For Malinda Lo, the discourse on diversity in young adult publishing has “had a measurable impact on the number of LGBTQ YA books being published” as she can find no other explanation for the recent spike in publishing (“LGBT YA by the Numbers” n.p.). The increase of quantity, variety, intersectional diversity, and Own Voices authorship in transgender young adult fiction that the aforementioned titles evidence is undoubtedly tied to this discourse, but it is also indicative of the increased awareness of transgender identity in contemporary society and a greater freedom for transgender authors to write from their own lived experiences. This article now turns its attention to the peritextual features of a selection of those titles published during or after the mid-2010s to consider how packaging is designed to “entice consumers” (Yampbell 349) in the young adult books market.

## APPEALING PERITEXTS FOR DIFFERENT AUDIENCES

Whether scanning the catalogues of online retailers, shopping in a book shop, or perusing the shelves of a library, a potential reader’s engagement with a book as they decide whether to select it usually begins with, and is often limited to, the peritextual materials. These materials, according to Gerard Genette’s definition, are “a ‘vestibule’ that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back” (2) and consequently bear the responsibility of ensuring the book effectively appeals to its intended audience. The peritext provides an essential site for interrogation because how various elements are used to frame a book indicates which audience(s) the book is intended to attract.

The way peritexts are used by authors, editors, and publishers to signal the inclusion of transgender characters functions differently across my research corpus. Some describe or code trans-ness in subtle ways that perhaps speak more directly to a transgender or questioning reader seeking a complex mirror (or their gatekeepers);<sup>8</sup> others signal the character’s transgender identity in ways which imply its problematic nature within the narrative. Considering how these peritexts present the transgender character(s) is useful

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7 The argument that books provide windows and mirrors for readers to see themselves and others continues to dominate the strand of criticism devoted to increasing the representation of minority groups in children’s and young adult literature. Rudine Sims Bishop’s pioneering work in “Windows, Mirrors and Sliding Glass Doors” (1990) which claims that “literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience” (xi) has provided the critical language needed to call for more diversity in literature.

8 Throughout this article I use ‘trans-ness’ as the noun form of ‘transgender’ in line with Meredith Russo’s author’s note.

when deciphering the type of reader the book is intended to attract and, by association, where the book sits in relation to the young adult literature market. My research corpus demonstrates four broad approaches taken by young adult novels to signal or conceal the transgender identity of the character(s) and engage the interest of potential readers, with a limited number of books utilising multiple approaches in the various elements of their peritexts: describing one or more experience relating to trans-ness; labelling the character's transgender identity; revealing a character is transgender; and providing no explicit reference to trans-ness.

In the first method, the peritextual materials hint at the transgender identity of a character by describing lived experiences which relate to them being transgender, speaking more directly to a transgender or questioning potential reader. For example, the blurb of the in Lee's *Not Your Villain* (2017), informs potential readers that, for the protagonist, "being a shapeshifter is awesome. He can change his hair whenever he wants and, if putting on a binder for the day is too much, he's got it covered." The protagonist's binder is the only indication of transgender identity included in the out-packaging of the novel, seemingly addressing a knowing potential reader with pre-existing awareness of transgender-centred terminology and experiences. To a similar effect, the

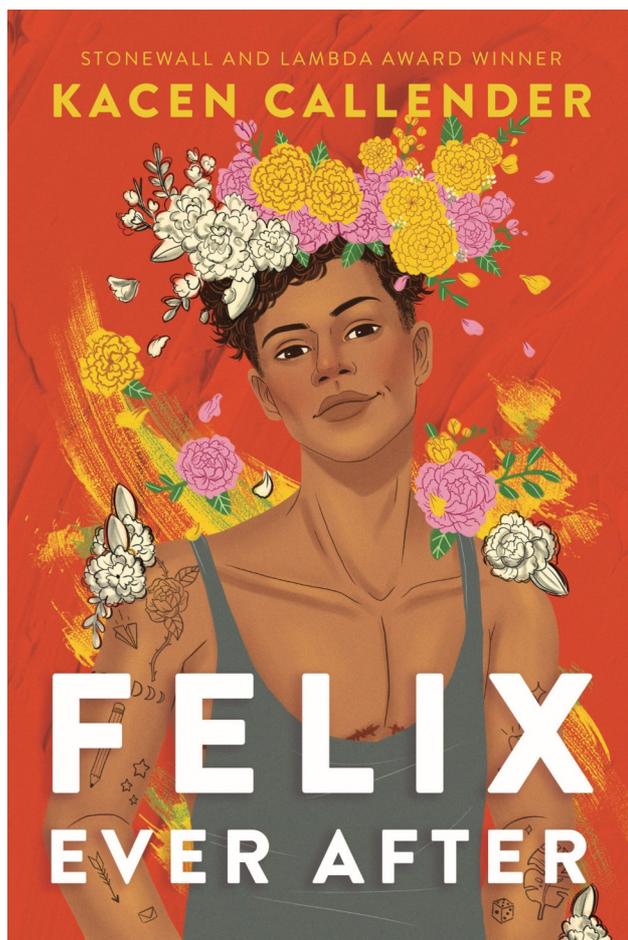


Figure 1: Front Cover of *Felix Ever After*

front cover illustration of Callender's *Felix Ever After* (2020) shows Felix with visible scarring from top surgery (Figure 1).<sup>9</sup> While the blurb included in the inside cover flap spells out Felix's identity in a way that aligns with the second approach that I discuss shortly, a potential reader's first encounter with the novel's trans-ness is likely through the lived experiences represented in the illustration. Both examples disclose the transgender identities of their protagonists by sharing their experiences to attract a reader who is already familiar with transgender issues, indicating each book's nuanced approach the portrayal of trans-ness.

9 "Top surgery" refers to the medical procedure performed to remove breast tissue.

The second and most common method used to signal a book's inclusion of transgender characters is to name the character's identity in the peritextual materials. This method is perhaps the most effective way of ensuring transgender characters are locatable within the extensive catalogue of young adult fiction published each year because it provides potential readers with an easily recognisable (and searchable) signal that transgender identity is represented in the book. As Christine A. Jenkins and Michael Cart have recently argued, "YA literature, like other media for teens, still does not represent the full range and diversity of the lived experiences of young adults in the twenty-first century" (xii). Peritexts that give a clear indication of a book's trans-ness are a useful means for connecting adolescent readers with opportunities to see transgender identities reflected in fiction. For example, both Lisa Williamson's *The Art of Being Normal*, published by David Fickling Books in the UK in 2015 (Figure 2) and the paperback edition of Russo's *If I Was Your Girl* (Figure 3) use symbolism within their cover images to signify their transgender focus. In each example, the colours of the transgender flag – pink, blue, and white – are used, in conjunction with transgender-themed graphics. On the cover of *The Art of Being Normal*, a feminine figure emerges from a masculine body, and on the cover of *If I Was Your Girl*, the masculine and feminine circles of a Venn diagram overlap with an image of the transgender flag occupying the space they create. Williamson's and Russo's covers announce the books' trans-ness with overt symbolism which, while more immediately obvious to a potential reader than Felix's scars, offers a less nuanced approach to the representation of transgender identity (though it does not necessarily follow that the narrative will be less nuanced).

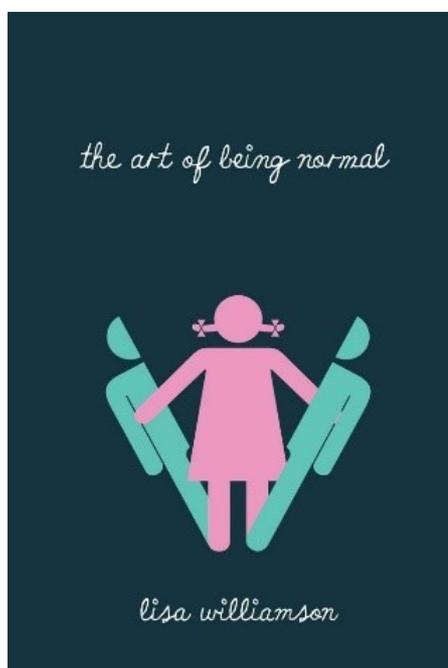


Figure 2: Front Cover of  
*The Art of Being Normal*

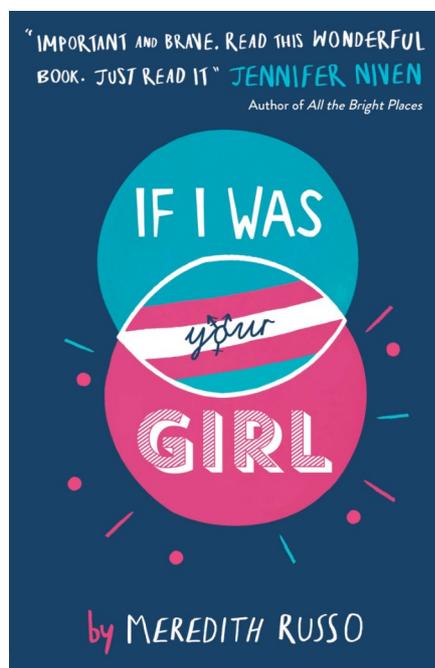


Figure 3: Front Cover of  
*If I Was Your Girl*

Notwithstanding the above examples, most books that label transgender characters and themes do so in the written elements of their peritexts, especially their blurbs, because “the blurb has the ability to provide a framing narrative for the books it represents [...], serving as both invitation and introduction” (Davis 251). For example, the blurb of Patel’s *Jaya and Rasa: A Love Story* (2017) informs a potential reader that, “Jaya is a transgender outsider with depressive tendencies and the stunningly beautiful Rasa thinks sex is her only power until a violent pimp takes over her life”; Amber Smith’s *Something Like Gravity* (Margaret K. McElderry imprint of Simon and Schuster, US, 2019) is pitched as “a romantic and sweet novel about a transgender boy who falls in love for the first time” in the blurb; and the inside flap of Miller’s fantasy novel *Mask of Shadows* (2017) explains protagonist “Sallot Leon is a thief, and a good one at that. But gender fluid Sal wants nothing more than to escape the drudgery of life as a highway robber.” Though far from a comprehensive list, these few examples illustrate the prevalent trend whereby the transgender identities of characters are made explicit in the peritextual materials, whether or not that identity is incidental to the narrative. In doing so, books announce their inclusion of transgender characters and themes to direct potential readers to the representation the books offer, or perhaps introduce a transgender character to a reader by linking the character to a potential reader’s preferred genre.

Contrastingly, some peritextual materials take a third approach whereby the transgender identity of a character is positioned as a hook or dramatic revelation which functions most effectively to capitalise on the intrigue of cisgender consumers. Revelatory signalling most frequently, though not universally, occurs in the peritexts of narratives which are written by cisgender authors who depict their transgender character(s) through the lens of a cisgender protagonist’s perspective and are thus likely intended to attract a cisgender audience. For example, from the potential reader’s first engagement with the title and cover images of both the hardback and paperback editions of John Boyne’s *My Brother’s Name is Jessica* (Puffin imprint of Penguin Random House, UK, 2019), Jessica’s transgender identity is employed as an enticing reveal (Figures 4 (hardback editions) and 5 (paperback edition)). The juxtaposition of the masculine word ‘brother’ and feminine word ‘Jessica’, in conjunction with the male and female sex symbols embedded in the lettering of ‘brother’ and ‘Jessica’ in both versions of the front cover makes a transphobic spectacle of Jessica’s identity. Furthermore, the blurb repeats the dialogue used when Jessica shares her identity with her brother Sam, the cisgender protagonist, to create a scandalous hook for a potential reader: “‘You’re the best brother in the world, Jason [Jessica’s male name], you know that.’ ‘But that’s just it Sam. I don’t think I’m your brother at all. In fact, I’m pretty sure I’m your sister.’” With a similar effect, the blurb of Brie Spangler’s *Beast* (Knopf Books for Young Readers imprint of Penguin Random House, US, 2016) explains: “there is something Dylan [the cisgender protagonist] doesn’t know about Jamie, something she shared with the [therapy] group the day he was wallowing in self-pity and not listening. Something that

shouldn't change a thing. [...] She is who she's always been – [...] a devoted friend who is also transgender." Beast's peritextual treatment of Jamie is certainly more sensitive and empathetic than *My Brother's Name is Jessica's* treatment of Jessica. Nevertheless, in both instances the transgender identity of the character is revealed as an intriguing plot twist that attempts to capture and sensationalise the coming out process, positioning the potential reader alongside the surprised cisgender character. An exception is to be found in the blurb of Russo's *If I Was Your Girl*, which, though an Own Voices novel told from the perspective of a transgender protagonist, includes the centralised and emboldened statement: "Amanda has a secret" (Figure 6). The transgender identity of the protagonist, Amanda, is deployed as an exciting reveal to "lure readers in" (Yampbell 348) as they learn that, "at her old school, she used to be called Andrew" (*If I Was Your Girl* blurb). As I will show by reading Russo's author's note in the section that follows, *If I Was Your Girl* targets a cisgender readership and so this revelatory element of its peritext is likely designed to entice cisgender consumers by dramatising transgender issues.

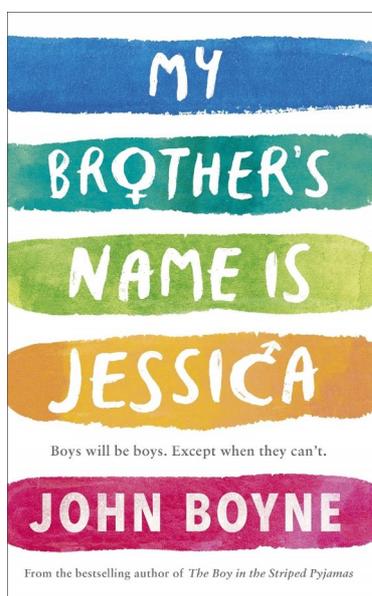


Figure 4: Front Cover of *My Brother's Name is Jessica* (Hardback)

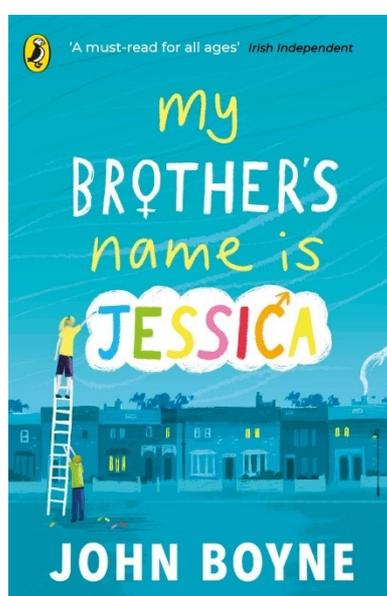


Figure 5: Front Cover of *My Brother's Name is Jessica* (Paperback)

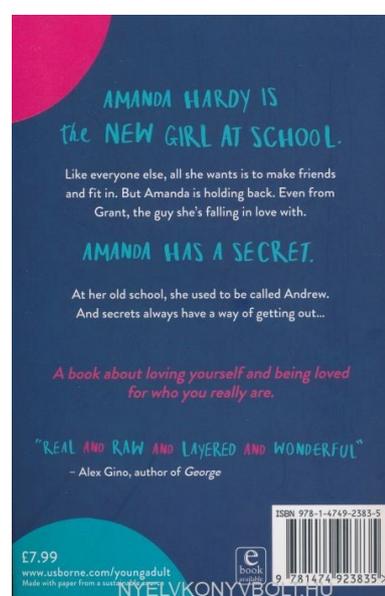


Figure 6: Back Cover of *If I Was Your Girl*

The final approach taken by authors, editors, and publishers is to not disclose the transgender identity of the text's characters or themes in the blurb (or anywhere in the peritexts). For some, signalling is simply absent where a transgender character has a minor secondary role that does not warrant inclusion in the peritext, a space that is dedicated to the main characters, themes, and events of the narrative. For example, the transgender representation in novels including Libba Bray's *Beauty Queens* (Scholastic Press, US, 2011), Dawson's *Clean* (Quercus Children's Books imprint of Hachette, UK, 2018), and McLemore's *Dark and Deepest Red* (2020) is not indicated in their peritexts. In these instances, neither the

character nor their transgender identity is featured in the peritextual materials. However, there are two more significant examples to which I want to draw attention: Simon Packham's *Only We Know* (Piccadilly Press, UK, 2015) and Akwaeke Emezi's *Pet* (2019). *Only We Know*, like *If I Was Your Girl*, uses the written elements of the peritext to entice readers with the promise of a secret to be discovered – the transgender identity of its protagonist. However, unlike *If I Was Your Girl*, the secret is not revealed until late in the narrative itself. The blurb poses a question: “what is the secret of Lauren’s past?” A potential reader learns that the protagonist is “determined to reinvent herself” when she moves to a new school and that when she receives a message alluding to a hidden past, “she has to admit that someone knows her secret” (blurb). Phillip Lejeune refers to the paratext as “the fringe of the printed text which, in reality, controls the whole reading” (qtd. in Genette 45) and, in the case of *Only We Know*, the decision to not reveal Lauren’s transgender identity in the peritext is made to preserve a plot twist for the reader to encounter as the climax of their reading experience. In this way, Packman’s reveal is reminiscent of books such as Gene Kemp’s 1977 UK children’s title *The Turbulent Term of Tyke Tiler* in which the gender identity of the protagonist is concealed to “tease readers and keep them in suspense” (Khuman and Ghosal 280). While trans-ness is not used explicitly in *Only We Know*’s peritextual material as a hook to capitalise on the intrigue of cisgender readers, the inclusion of transgender identity as a mysterious secret is demonstrative of the cisgender gaze through which the protagonist is framed in the text.

In contrast, Emezi’s *Own Voices* novel *Pet* provides no hint of the protagonist’s transgender identity in its peritextual materials, nor is trans-ness dramatized or sensationalised. If a potential reader does decide to open *Pet*, they do not learn the protagonist is transgender until a flashback explains that the protagonist shouted “Girl! Girl! Girl!” in response to being called “such a handsome little boy” (16) when she was three years old. *Pet* offers a nuanced example of the incidental diversity which Ramdarshan Bold and Phillips find to be “key to fully inclusive representation” (3). While the decision not to signal the protagonist’s transgender identity in *Pet*’s packaging has the potential to make the representation the book offers harder for a reader to seek out,<sup>10</sup> it also offers all readers – both transgender and cisgender alike – an opportunity to encounter a transgender protagonist who is fully integrated into the young adult book market.

The differences between the aforementioned descriptive and revelatory approaches taken by authors, editors, and publishers are significant. This is because the ways in which peritexts signal the inclusion of transgender characters hints at the various ideological attitudes the books adopt when portraying the lived experiences of transgender people,

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10 It is important to note that many of *Pet*’s epitextual materials – such as interviews, reviews, marketing, and publicity announcements – do signal the protagonist’s transgender identity and so a potential reader who first encounters the book through these materials will likely do so with a pre-understanding of its trans-ness. While outside the scope of this article, the epitextual materials of transgender young adult fiction certainly provide interesting possibilities for future investigations.

implicitly demarcating their primary intended audience. As Jane Wangari Wakarindi has suggested, a book's packaging "act[s] as a window through which a reader is aided to a better understanding of the book, at a glance, even before delving into the core text" (95). Where the approach is descriptive, a potential reader can expect the transgender character to appear as a subject in their own story (albeit with varying levels of sensitivity across the corpus). Where the disclosure has been revelatory, the transgender character is portrayed as an object of cisgender scrutiny who, in the same way as Tom Sandercock has argued is the case for transgender characters in a selection of mainstream television for young adults, provides a "knowable and legible curiosity, shoring up boundaries of self/other and cis/trans" (441). The peritextual materials of these revelatory examples are indicative of the fact that, to be considered marketable and financially viable by publishers, transgender young adult fiction is often pitched at the cisgender readers who constitute the majority of consumers in the young adult book market. Such commercial decisions are often to the detriment of the transgender and questioning adolescents seeking complex, authentic, and nuanced representation from the young adult book market. I now examine how peritextual features are used to construct authorial identities that bring readers' attention to the authors' various knowledge, expertise, and relevant experience to write transgender characters.

## CONSTRUCTING AUTHENTICITY

With the emphasis on diverse and Own Voices literature from the mid-2010s, ideas of cultural authenticity (or lack thereof) have attracted significant attention from readers and critics. For example, cisgender author Boyne temporarily withdrew from Twitter as a result of the large-scale negative reaction he received in response to his problematic portrayal of a transgender character (O'Connor). As the reception of *My Brother's Name is Jessica* exemplifies, authenticity is a key concern for both readers and critics of diverse literature, though there is no consensus on what authentic depictions look like or how authors may create them. According to Kathy G. Short and Dana L. Fox, literature that is 'authentic' includes "cultural facts and values and what is considered 'truth' about a particular cultural experience" (20). For Bishop, such authenticity is more likely achieved when narratives about marginalised identities are written by those who belong to the cultural group they represent: "there is a certain arrogance in assuming that one can incorporate into a work a cultural perspective that is only superficially familiar, and [...] writers who attempt to do so should understand the difficulties and risks inherent in trying" ("Reframing" 32). Bishop's belief speaks to what is arguably the biggest question in ongoing debates about diverse literature: should an author tell stories about an experience they have not had, a culture of which they are not part, and an identity they do not share?

This question is “complex and perhaps irresolvable” (Sivashankar et al. n.p.) and, while it is certainly an important question to consider in relation to transgender young adult fiction at a time when transphobic narratives in and around the publishing industry are especially prominent,<sup>11</sup> here my intention is not to argue the extent to which various authors are successful in creating authentic and accurate depictions of transgender identity. As Laura B. Smolkin and Joseph H. Suina point out, “no culture is monolithic” and therefore no single person “can be seen as able to issue a final assessment of the cultural authenticity of a text” (222).<sup>12</sup> Rather, I am investigating how peritextual materials such as author notes, acknowledgements, and afterwords construct an author persona which is designed to attract certain readers more than others and affect potential readers’ engagement with the narratives. In particular, these elements are used to imply that the fictional transgender characters provide authentic representation of transgender identity by variously bringing readers’ attention to the author’s knowledge, expertise, and relevant experience to write such characters.

Critics have already noted where peritextual elements are used to underpin authenticity for texts which portray different marginalised experiences. For example, Elwyn Jenkins’ study of South African children’s books found that the peritexts often “added credentials that emphasised (for adults?) how well-equipped the author was to write a story set in South Africa” (117). Jenkins talks about examples of books including “prefaces containing exaggerated boasts” to “persuade their stories came from personal experience” (117). Similarly, Megan Brown argues that the peritextual elements of young adult disability fiction build a narrative of authenticity, which marks “the text for the reader, both disabled and able-bodied, as having the capacity for accuracy that affords a factual reality in the ways that the information is being presented” (141). Brown uses her analysis to argue for the importance of authors having personal experiences with disability when portraying the lived experiences of disabled adolescents: “with increased experience, there is increased potential of the reality of disability being presented within the pages of the book” (141). I add that the peritexts of a selection of transgender young adult novels, written by openly transgender authors as well as authors who do not identify as transgender, are used to entice various teenage readers (or their gatekeepers) and heighten the marketability of the books in the contexts of the We Need Diverse Books movement by framing the fictional narratives with the author’s experiences or researched knowledge of being transgender. As I will demonstrate, the suggestion of an intimate understanding of transgender identity offered by authors who have a close personal connection with a transgender person, and even more so

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11 J.K Rowling’s recent online essay, “J.K. Rowling Writes about Her Reasons for Speaking out on Sex and Gender Issues” (10 June 2020), has catalysed online discussion and debate about transphobia, particularly in the publishing industry.

12 I also recognise my limitations as a cisgender scholar who has not had the transgender lived experiences depicted in these narratives.

by authors who are transgender themselves, perhaps speak to transgender or questioning readers who are seeking complex mirrors of their own identities, while the research-focused approach described in the peritextual materials of titles written by other authors might better appeal to cisgender readers looking for opportunities to read about trans-ness as a curious or sensationalised subject.

For authors who have a close personal relationship with one or more transgender people, the packaging is often used to emphasise that the author's knowledge comes from outside of their book research. For example, Kristin Elizabeth Clark's author's note for *Jess, Chunk, and the Road Trip to Infinity* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux imprint of Macmillan, US, 2016), shares information about Clark's daughter. Clark explains to potential readers: "my daughter was held up at birth and erroneously pronounced male. Many years later, when she was a young adult, she let me know her truth – an act of bravery that changed us both for the good." The peritext of *Jess, Chunk, and the Road Trip to Infinity* is unusual because it is placed immediately before (as opposed to after) the narrative. According to Jonathon Gray, paratextual elements "guide our entry to texts, setting up all sorts of meanings and strategies of interpretation, and proposing ways to make sense of what we will find 'inside' the text" (38). In this way, the atypical arrangement of *Jess, Chunk, and the Road Trip to Infinity's* peritextual materials implies that Clark's experiences with her daughter are an important framing device for the narrative by increasing the probability that a reader will encounter Clark's experiences prior to engaging with the story. The author's note for McLemore's *When the Moon Was Ours* (published in 2016; prior to them coming out as non-binary), focuses on the book's transgender character, issues, and themes in the context of McLemore's husband's transgender identity, as well as McLemore's researched knowledge of the specific cultural tradition of 'bacha posh' in which their protagonist participates prior to coming out as transgender.<sup>13</sup> As Clark's and McLemore's notes demonstrate, a number of the peritextual materials of novels by authors who have a personal relationship with a transgender person offer information regarding those relationships that can validate and authenticate the novels' fictional transgender representation by implying the characters have been written through the lens of the authors' personal experiences with their loved ones. In doing so, these peritexts are designed to appeal most to a transgender or questioning potential reader (or their gatekeepers) who is seeking nuanced and sensitive portrayals of transgender identities.

When the novels are Own Voices fiction written by openly transgender authors, the peritexts have an even greater capacity to authenticate the book's fictional portrayal of transgender identity for transgender and questioning potential readers. In these cases, peritexts frequently use autobiographical elements to frame the fictional narratives with the author's own lived experiences of being transgender in order to "compliment the story in the text, while also promoting [the story's] authenticity" (150), as Brown puts it. For Sivashankar

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13 Bacha posh is a Pakistani-Afghanistan cultural practice in which families without sons select a daughter to live and behave as male.

et al., the peritext is a space “where book creators (including authors, illustrators, and publishers) work to establish cultural authenticity and power relationships by highlighting their connections to the represented culture” (n.p.). Most commonly, the peritexts do this by drawing connections between the book and the author’s memories of exploring their own gender identity. For example, the author’s note of *Felix Ever After* (2020) focuses on the role that fictional representations of transgender identities played in Callender’s self-discovery: “Adam [from Canadian television series *Degrassi: The Next Generation*] was the first transgender character I’d ever seen who explained what his identity meant to him. [...] I’m so lucky that I discovered Adam – so lucky that he helped me understand myself and helped me realize that I could transition.” With a similar effect, Deaver’s author’s note for *I Wish You All the Best* (2019) begins: “I started writing *I Wish You All the Best* when I decided I wanted to tell the story that I needed when I was younger.” Drawing on their experiences, Callender and Deaver both use the author’s note to point out the importance of transgender and questioning young people having access to complex fictional mirrors. Callender’s hope is that “Felix can do for even just one reader what Adam did for me” (Author’s Note) and Deaver wants *I Wish You All the Best* to “help people feel less alone” by “see[ing] a piece of themselves in these words” (Author’s Note). In doing so, the peritexts of both *Felix Ever After* and *I Wish You All the Best* position transgender or questioning teens as the primary audience for their works.

Russo’s *If I Was Your Girl* (2016) provides a notable exception to the convention exemplified by Callender and Deaver because the peritext dissociates the novel’s portrayal of its transgender character from the lived experiences of its transgender author and explicitly signals cisgender people, as well as transgender people, within its target readership. Though my focus in this section thus far has been on transgender and questioning teens (and their gatekeepers), it must be acknowledged that if young adult transgender novels are to achieve commercial success then they must also appeal to the cisgender readers. With two separate reader addresses – one to transgender readers and another to cisgender readers – Russo challenges the idea that *If I Was Your Girl* offers readers authenticity because it has been written by a transgender author. Russo assures transgender readers that “it’s ok if you’re different from Amanda [the protagonist]. She isn’t real, and you are. [...]. Trust me when I say that my life story is radically different from Amanda’s” (“To my trans readers”, *If I Was Your Girl*). To the novel’s cisgender readers, Russo sets out her concern that they might interpret her fictional portrayal as truth:

I’m worried that you might take Amanda’s story as gospel, especially since it comes from a trans woman [...]. I am a storyteller, not an educator. I have taken liberties with what I know reality to be. I have fictionalised things to make them work in my story. I have, in some ways, cleaved to stereotypes and even bent rules to make Amanda’s [the

protagonist's] trans-ness as unchallenging to normative assumptions as possible. ("To my cisgender readers", *If I Was Your Girl*)

Russo's address acknowledges and undermines the notion that Own Voices stories necessarily offer more authentic portrayals of marginalised identities by pointing out that she has favoured storytelling over accuracy.

As the first Own Voices transgender young adult fiction title to be published by one of the five major conglomerates (Macmillan), Russo's dual author's note offers interesting insights into the demands on authors of transgender young adult fiction to cater for both transgender readers and the cisgender readers who account for the majority of consumers in the young adult market. According to Markus Appel and Barbara Malečkar, "paratextual cues can inform recipients about norms and conventions that guided the production of a text" (462). In the case of *If I Was Your Girl*, the dual author's note points to how the novel's portrayal of transgender identity is shaped around the publisher's understanding of the expectations of the majority cisgender consumers, with the aim to increase the mainstream appeal of the book: Russo offers "want[ing] you [cisgender readers] to have no possible barrier to understanding Amanda as a teenage girl" ("To my cisgender readers") as her reason for constructing a binary transgender character who is heterosexual, easily passes as female, and has had gender affirming surgery. For Putzi, "Russo's admission of the narrative compromises that she had to make as an author in order to make Amanda understandable to her readers is a fascinating commentary on what is currently acceptable within the young adult market" (439). As such, Russo's author's note also usefully signals what the publishing industry considers to be desirable transgender representation for cisgender readers in the young adult book market.

For transgender young adult titles written by authors who have no personal experience or connection with transgender identity, the target reader signalled in the peritext is most often cisgender. The peritext provides a space where authors, editors, and publishers can show a potential reader that the portrayal of transgender identity is well-researched, as well as justify the author's reason for writing a transgender character because, as Friddle has pointed out, "the politics of representation" is an issue that "plagues" transgender books written by cisgender authors (127). For example, Boyne's afterword for *My Brother's Name is Jessica* (2019) assures the reader that he was "talking to young transgender people while writing this novel." Similarly, Eric Devine's acknowledgements in *Look Past* (Running Press Kids imprint of Running Press, US, 2016) refer to his "hours of reading through blog posts and message boards, mining the everyday battles as well as the heart of the struggle through words left on the Internet," which he credits as "some of the most enlightening moments." The approaches that Boyne and Devine describe in these materials target cisgender readers by presenting the narratives as opportunities to learn about transgender people from a position outside of the transgender community. For Boyne:

The worst piece of advice anyone can give a writer is to write about what they know. Who wants to do something so limiting? One of the reasons I write is because I want to explore the lives of other people. I find it both interesting and challenging to write about what I don't know and to use my writing to learn about a subject, to understand it and to represent it as authentically as possible in order to help others make sense of it too. (Afterword, *My Brother's Name is Jessica*)

The emphasis on learning and understanding in the afterword of *My Brother's Name is Jessica* positions the novel's transgender character as a well-researched depiction of a curious subject. With a similar effect, the acknowledgements of *Look Past* justify Devine's interest in trans-ness with the following explanation: "I have boundless interest in humanity. I am intrigued by all facets of life, especially for contemporary teens, who live in a world that would shock and amaze Darwin" (Acknowledgements, *Look Past*). The pseudo-anthropological language in both Boyne's and Devine's peritexts frames the transgender subject matter of the novel through the cisgender gaze, a term used to refer to "how transgender and other nonbinary individuals are scrutinized for pleasure and consumption by cisgender individuals" (V.E. Thomas 5). Framing their transgender characters as objects of interest, the peritextual materials of recent transgender novels by authors without lived experiences of being transgender often (mis)use trans-ness to attract an inquisitive cisgender readership by seemingly offering the opportunity to read about a marginalised culture of which they are not part.

Over the last five or so years, the increased public interest in transgender topics around the so-called 'transgender tipping point' has contributed to a young adult book market in which the peritexts of transgender titles do not necessarily "encourage the view that they are for a select group – usually those who belong to that minority," as Epstein found to be the case in 2013 (*Are the Kids Alright?* 36). As we have seen, both transgender and cisgender readers are in fact addressed in the peritextual materials – whether implicitly or explicitly – as the target market of a number of transgender young adult titles.

## CONCLUSION

As this article has demonstrated, the packaging of various transgender young adult novels "create[s] an identity for the book and author, which helps the reader place it within a field of literature" (Ramdarshan Bold 24). While alerting potential readers to the growing quantity and variety of transgender representation in a field dominated by cisgender characters, various peritextual elements including covers, blurbs, afterwords, author notes, and acknowledgements offer clues about how transgender experiences will be portrayed which implicitly demarcate the book's intended readership and signal its position in the young

adult book market. The books considered in this article are only a sample of the field of transgender young adult fiction, which is slowly remedying what Ramdarshan Bold and Phillips have deemed the “implicit refus[al] to acknowledge difference through the sheer weight of omission” (1). Though there is still much to be done to promote inclusivity in the publishing industry, readers have access to a greater proportion intersectional diversity, Own Voices authorship, and transgender representation in books which portray the lived experiences of transgender adolescence with sensitivity and nuance, starting from their packaging. However, this article has also shown that, counter to Epstein’s findings in her investigation of LGBTQ literature in The Norfolk and Norwich Millennium Library, transgender and questioning readers are not always the audience most catered for in the peritextual materials of recent transgender titles. Transgender subjects are also often marketed to cisgender readers through the use of pseudo-anthropological language, curiosity, and sensationalism, to the detriment of the transgender and questioning adolescents who are seeking “the community on the page” (Jenkins and Cart xiii) that these books may provide.

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