

Are We There Yet? A Retrospective Look at John Donovan's *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip.*

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The year 1969 witnessed a watershed event for gays and lesbians in the United States. In June of that year a three-day period of rioting occurred in response to police harassment at the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in Greenwich Village in New York City. Since then, Stonewall has come to symbolize a kind of gay declaration of independence, an event that spurred gay rights advocates to adopt a more visible and progressive activist stance. Coincidentally, that same year saw the publication of John Donovan's *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip.*, generally acknowledged as the first young adult book to deal with the theme of homosexuality. Although the novel is not really "about" homosexuality, it does contain several homoerotic scenes between the 13-year-old narrator, Davy Ross, and his friend, Altschuler. The major theme of the novel is Davy's journey toward adulthood, as he deals with the loss of his much beloved grandmother while negotiating rocky relationships with his alcoholic mother and his distant, ineffectual father. Nevertheless, it is the homoerotic scenes that caught the attention of critics and reviewers as well as parents, librarians, and teachers, and it is those scenes for which the novel largely is remembered today. By revisiting the novel and the critical reaction it provoked at the time, by examining subsequent critical commentary, and by considering several recently published young adult novels with gay/lesbian content, we can draw some conclusions about the significance of Donovan's book, both then and now.

A Ground Breaking Novel

As the novel opens, Davy's grandmother, with whom Davy has been living since the age of five, has just died. Soon Davy and his dog, Fred, go to live with Davy's alcoholic mother in New York City, where the boy is enrolled in a private school. Davy's unstable mother has trouble adjusting to both boy and dog, and she often has trouble hiding her resentment. Davy's father and his new wife seem genuinely concerned about the boy, but they do not become a strong force in his life. Instead, Davy turns elsewhere for the affection he craves—to his dog Fred and his classmate Altschuler, who, like Davy, is an only child being raised by his mother.

The homoerotic scenes between Davy and Altschuler occur largely off-stage, and mostly involve the boys' kissing and sleeping with their arms around one another. Davy later describes these scenes as "making out" and "doing it," but the particulars are left to the reader's imagination. The inci-

dents seem relatively unimportant to Davy until one day his mother becomes hysterical after seeing the two boys sleeping on the floor with their arms around each other. Soon after this experience, Davy's dog is killed by a car, and, as a result, Davy assumes that he and Altschuler have done something wrong and that the dog's death is his punishment. Davy's guilt seems to come both from his mother's reaction and from society's homophobia, which he has internalized. More than once, he protests that he and Altschuler were not "queers." For a time, this guilt causes a rupture in the boys' friendship, but by the end of the novel, they have reconciled, deciding that they can respect each other.

The Critical Reception

Critical reaction at the time of the book's publication was mixed. Reviewers generally praised it for its honesty and artistry, but reactions to the homosexual elements varied. Many reviewers applauded Donovan for having the courage to engage in taboo-busting, something they saw, correctly, as a growing trend in young adult novels. Some of these reviewers felt that Davy and Altschuler's relationship was presented as merely a passing phase. John Weston, writing in *The New York Times Book Review*, commended Donovan on just this point: "The contribution the book makes, giving reason why it should be available wherever young people read, is that it touches, with lyricism and simplicity, upon a spontaneous sexual relationship between two adolescent boys" (8). But then he goes on to say, "[Donovan] makes it clear that the best way to counter such [homosexual] desires is to face them honestly for what they are: something beautiful at the moment, but to be replaced in the natural course of life with interest in the other sex" (8).

Other reviewers were concerned about what they considered the inappropriateness of the subject matter for young adult readers. Martha Bacon, writing for *The Atlantic Monthly*, argued that "[a] young person who has experienced a romantic encounter of the sort described by Davy Ross is probably best served by *David Copperfield* or even *The Magic Mountain*, in which such relationships are seen in the context of a larger life" (150). In fact, Bacon wondered if the book "might have the opposite effect on this age group from that which the author intended. It would not meet the needs of the initiated and might arouse in the unconcerned unnecessary interest or alarm or both" (150). Another reviewer wrote that the book "might be useful for adult counselors

and guidance directors," but should not be placed "in the hands of the young reader" (*Best Sellers*, 100).

In the 1970's, critics evinced a concern about what they perceived as the novel's potentially negative impact on both gay and straight teens. David Rees, in an article in *Children's Literature in Education*, argued that the book contained a harmful message: "[It] suggests that teenage homosexuality is so totally unacceptable, socially and psychologically, that any young homosexual is likely to have his fears and worries increased rather than reduced, and the prejudice of the heterosexual reader against homosexuals is reinforced" (86). A similar view was articulated in an article in *Wilson Library Bulletin*, in which Frances Hanckel and John Cunningham examined the four novels published since 1969 with homosexual experiences as a predominant theme: in addition to *I'll Get There*, the authors cited Isabelle Holland's *The Man Without a Face*, Lynn Hall's *Sticks and Stones*, and Sandra Scoppettone's *Trying Hard to Hear You*. All four novels were acknowledged as "pioneering efforts in dealing with a controversial theme" ("Can Young Gays Find Happiness..." 532), but were found lacking in their portrayals of the gay experience. Each of the novels either treated a gay experi-

ence as having no lasting significance or suggested that such experiences demand a "terrible price" ("Can Young Gays" 532). In the case of *I'll Get There*, both of these elements are apparent: Davy and Altschuler's physical relationship is presented as a passing phase; still, Davy believes that it costs the life of his beloved dog. Such views, according to Hanckel and Cunningham, serve neither gay nor straight adolescents very well, having the ultimate effect of reinforcing negative stereotypes. At approximately the same time, Norma Klein published an article pleading for honest and supportive portrayals of human sexuality in "children's books" (her term), including homosexuality. Although she did not mention *I'll Get There* specifically, Klein did deprecate the kind of novel that she referred to as the "and so she turned to" book:

Indeed, each decade has seen an increasing number of young adult novels with gay/lesbian content, and a number of these are both more forthright and more positive.

I'm sure you know the kind. His mother was an alcoholic and so he turned to homosexuality. . . . All of these books are setting up what to me is a false and even dangerous premise, namely that sexual activity of any kind is only something children "turn to" as a result of a negative experience. ("Growing Up Human" 82)

Not every critic, however, felt that Donovan had done his young readers a disservice. Suzy Goldman, for example, examined Donovan's theme of "self-realization" in three of his young adult novels: *Wild in the World* (1971), *Remove Protective Coating a Little at a Time* (1973), and *I'll Get There*. Goldman praised Donovan for his realistic and sensitive portrayal of adolescent development, but also criticized him for the fact that his novels contain "somewhat bizarre sexual elements" ("John Donovan: Sexuality..." 27). Goldman described *I'll Get There* as "a really fine book" (32), and noted that Davy lends the novel "a great deal of depth" with his "range and capacity for feeling" (33). She described the writing in the homoerotic scenes as "delicate and sensitive" (33),

and added that homosexuality itself is "regarded by the author and characters alike as the road not to take" (33). Goldman applauded Donovan for "trying hard not to advocate homosexuality" and "mak[ing] sure that Davy's homosexual relationship with Altschuler had ended" by the close of the novel (35).

Although several articles dealing with gay and lesbian themes in young adult literature were published in the 1980's, little was written about *I'll Get There*. Jan Goodman, in writing about the stereotypes evident in many gay and lesbian novels for young adults, cited Donovan's book as an example of the kind of novel that presents homosexual tendencies as a passing phase (Out of the Closet 14). Goodman complained that "[t]oo many books end with gay characters hoping that 'maybe tomorrow' they'll be heterosexual" (14).

In the 1990's, Donovan's novel resurfaced in several critical discussions. Allan A. Cuseo, in his book *Homosexual Characters in YA Novels: A Literary Analysis, 1969-1982*, insisted that *I'll Get There* is not, in fact, "a novel with a homosexual theme but, rather, a novel of friendship that is misconstrued as homosexual" (182). Other critics, with the luxury of hindsight, were able to view Donovan's novel within

its historical and cultural context. Jim Brogan, for example, in his essay "Gay Teens in Literature," noted that *I'll Get There* is like most of the early gay-themed novels for young adults in its portrayal of homosexual experiences as a passing phase, simply "part of a confused, lonely stage of adoles-

cence" (73). But, unlike most gay-themed YA books, Donovan's presents as its protagonist and narrator the person who has had the homosexual experience (Gay Teens 73). In a 1994 article, Michael Thomas Ford hailed the novel as the first in which "gay issues were featured in a book for young readers" ("Gay Books for Young Readers" 24). Ford lamented the fact, however, that "gays and lesbians in the world of books for young readers have progressed little since *I'll Get There*, primarily because of the aura of fear that continues to surround the subject" ("Gay Books" 24).

In two groundbreaking articles on young adult novels with gay/lesbian content, Christine Jenkins helped to put Donovan's work in perspective. Like many other critics, she identified *I'll Get There* as the first young adult novel with gay content ("YA Novels 43"); by 1997 approximately 100 such novels had been published, about half of which were published in the 1990's ("From Queer to Gay" 298, 329-330). Jenkins' schema in examining the content of these novels provides a useful framework for judging Donovan's novel within the context of what followed. Jenkins noted that most young adult novels with gay/lesbian themes focus on white, middle-class teenagers; typically the main characters are males rather than females; most of the relationships between gay teens are portrayed as short-lived; gay teens are depicted as being isolated and lonely; gay characters are often relegated to secondary roles; and gay males, especially, often die or experience gay-bashing ("YA Novels" 45-51). We may conclude, then, that *I'll Get There* is by and large typical of what came after.

In many ways, current critical wisdom surrounding Donovan's book can be summed up in Michael Cart's com-

ments in his 1997 article, "Honoring Their Stories Too: Literature for Gay and Lesbian Teens." Cart acknowledged that *I'll Get There* was a "taboo-busting" novel, but he complained that "too little . . . by today's standards, is liberated about it" (40, 41). The problem with the novel, as Cart saw it, is that it emphasizes Davy's guilt and shame over his homosexual experience with Altschuler, while at the same time implying that such tendencies are easily "corrected" if one only "makes out" with a girl ("Honoring Their Stories..." 41).

Recent Novels with Gay/Lesbian Content

So, to return to the title of this essay, how far have we come in the intervening years since the publication of Donovan's novel? Cart's reference to "today's standards" being more "liberated" suggests that more recent novels are both more open and more positive in their portrayals of gay and lesbian teens. Indeed, each decade has seen an increasing number of young adult novels with gay/lesbian content, and a number of these are both more forthright and more positive. A look at five well-regarded novels published in the 1990s provides some insight into how gay and lesbian teens are portrayed at least in the "cream-of-the-crop" books.

Cart himself has written frequently of the importance of honoring the stories of gay and lesbian young people, and his own novel, *My Father's Scar* (1996), is an eloquent contribution to the literature for and about his often overlooked audience. The novel takes place between 1964 and 1970, and it tells the story of Andy Logan and his difficult adolescence as he struggles with his homosexuality. Part of Andy's story involves his search for a father figure, for his own father is an alcoholic ex-athlete who abhors Andy's bookishness and sensitivity and who eventually throws his son out the house when he learns that he is gay. Equally tyrannical father figures are Pastor Peterson, the minister at Andy's church, and, later, Professor Hawthorne, the literature professor whom Andy idolizes. Both prove to be as bigoted and self-centered as Andy's father.

Another part of Andy's story, interwoven with his search for a father figure, of course, involves his search for love. He finds both early on in his Uncle Charles, a man who values reading and thinking, who is himself gay, and who encourages Andy in his struggles. Uncle Charles dies, however, leaving Andy feeling more isolated than ever. He does eventually find love and friendship, but the relationships are short-lived. First, he becomes close friends with an older boy, Evan Adams, who in some ways takes Uncle Charles's place, even describing himself as "Guardian Angel Man." Evan, however, gets beaten up and has to move away after announcing in church that he is homosexual. Later, when Andy is in high school, he has an affair with a star athlete (shades of his father perhaps?), but eventually ends the relationship when he realizes how different they are. The promise of true love and friendship comes at the end of the novel, when Andy is in college. There he meets Sascha Stevenson, the teaching assistant in his literature class. When Sascha confesses his love, Andy feels that his embrace is as "welcoming as ever Uncle Charles's rooms were" (*My Father's Scar* 204). After much pain and struggle, Andy appears to have found at last what he has been searching for all along: "I see it so clearly now. I sigh in contentment and marvel at how all those years of running in circles have somehow, miraculously, brought me to the right place at last" (*My Father's Scar* 204).

One of the more innovative of the recent young adult novels with gay/lesbian content is Francesca Lia Block's *Baby Be-Bop* (1995). Block employs her special brand of magical realism to tell the story of Dirk McDonald, a boy who knows that he is gay but who waits expectantly "[u]ntil the thing inside of him that was wrong and bad would change" (*Baby Be-Bop* 4). The theme of the novel is Dirk's struggle with self-acceptance, and in that sense it echoes the theme of Donovan's novel. Dirk lives with his Grandma Fifi, and she loves him unconditionally. Still, he is afraid to tell her the truth about himself—that he is gay—because he is afraid of hurting her. So he waits, hoping that one day he will become straight. This desire to change is complicated, however, when he meets Pup, an impish boy with whom Dirk falls in love. Pup loves Dirk, too, but rejects his advances, pleading, "Please don't. I can't handle it man" (*Baby Be-Bop* 31). As a result, Dirk shaves his head, all except for a shock of hair which he dyes blue. He begins going to a local nightclub, where one night he is attacked by skinheads who call him a "faggot." As they pounce upon him, Dirk sees in their eyes "the reflection of his own self-loathing" (*Baby Be-Bop* 45).

While recovering from his injuries, Dirk has a vision of his ancestors, including his parents, emerging from a magic lamp and telling their stories to him as a way of helping him heal and leading him to accept himself for who he is. He imagines the story of Duck, a boy who is looking for his soul mate, and as the novel ends, there is the hope that Dirk's and Duck's stories will converge. Dirk's self-acceptance comes only after a long, painful struggle and only with guidance from his family's stories. Block's rich prose evokes images of fairy tales as she reveals the power of narrative and memory to heal and illuminate. By the end of the novel, the reader feels that Dirk will find his soul mate now that he is finally able to love himself.

The theme of emerging self-awareness and self-acceptance is evident in Rodger Larson's beautifully controlled and understated novel, *What I Know Now* (1997). The novel, set in rural California in the 1950s, tells the story of Dave Ryan, a 14-year-old boy who moves with his mother to her old home place after she and his father have separated. Dave develops an attachment to Gene Tole, the young man hired by Dave's mother to install a garden at their new home. The story is told by Dave as a man looking back on this formative boyhood experience, and in thinking about his special relationship with Gene, he acknowledges, "I fell in love with him, but didn't know it at the time" (*What I Know Now* 3). In many ways, Gene serves as a substitute father for Dave, a replacement for his distant and estranged real father. He also serves as a kind of substitute for Dave's older brother, Brad, whom Dave rarely sees anymore because Brad has stayed behind to help their dad with the ranch. Gene becomes a friend, a mentor, and a confidant for Dave, helping to expand the boy's world in many ways. He teaches Dave the ways of gardening, he takes him on a daytrip to San Francisco, introduces him to pizza, and invites him and his mother to a choral concert.

Dave is clearly enthralled with Gene, although he really knows little about him, and, in fact, the real story of the novel is Dave's slowly growing awareness that Gene is gay (a word that is not used in the novel because it would not have been used at the time). Dave's ultimate realization occurs near the end of the novel when he goes to visit Gene and sees him dancing with a man and kissing him. At first Dave is

angry and confused: "Why would he do it? Kiss that man. Dance with him. Did he love the man with short dark hair?" (*What I Know Now* 259). But then Dave recognizes something about himself, something he has perhaps vaguely sense all along: "But then I thought, I loved Gene Tole, wanted to be with him, always, had to admit it, but that was different" (*What I Know Now* 259). But perhaps, Dave realizes, it is not so different after all. When he confesses what he has seen to his mother, she is sympathetic but says that she cannot really explain it. After reflection, though, Dave comes to accept Gene for who he is and resolves to accept himself as well: "How could I love Gene Tole? I wondered . . . Couldn't figure love out. Too crazy. But I would, I knew, I would figure love out. I'd figure love out and I'd live by the kind of love that was right for me" (*What I Know Now* 262).

A similarly quiet, understated book with the theme of self-recognition and self-acceptance is Jacqueline Woodson's *The House You Pass on the Way* (1997). The protagonist of Woodson's novel is 14-year-old Staggerlee Canan, the third child in a close-knit Southern family. The novel is remarkable for portraying the awakening sexuality of a lesbian and even more so for the fact that the protagonist is an African American, the child of a black man and a white woman. Unlike her older sister, Dotti, Staggerlee is a shy, sensitive girl with few real friends, more like her reserved mother than her avuncular father. Staggerlee's life changes, however, the summer her cousin Trout comes to visit from Baltimore. The two soon become intimate friends, both physically and spiritually. Staggerlee had kissed a girl once before, in sixth grade, but was hurt when she was later publicly rejected by the girl. Trout, therefore, is his first real love, and Trout helps her define who she is. Trout says that they are gay, but Staggerlee is not so sure: "'It sounds so final. I mean—we're only fourteen'" (*The House You Pass On the Way* 81). It is ironic, then, that Trout is the one who breaks off the relationship after going back to Baltimore. When Staggerlee does finally receive a letter from her, well into the winter, the news is that Trout now has a boyfriend. As if to symbolize their independence and developing identities, both girls had changed their names. Staggerlee's real name is "Evangeline," while Trout's real name is "Tyler." Once she begins dating a boy, Trout seems to capitulate to society's expectations, and goes back to using her original name. Staggerlee, on the other hand, retains her name, which can be taken as an indication of her resolve to develop and assert her own identity in spite of society's expectations. Yet, at the end of the novel, she recognizes that both she and Trout/Tyler have much left to learn about the world and about themselves: "They were both waiting, she knew. Waiting for this moment, this season, these years to pass. Who would they become? she wondered. Who would they become?" (*The House* 99). The deliberate open-endedness of the novel is much like that of *I'll Get There* and *What I Know Now*, with the protagonists vowing to respect themselves and their feelings.

The price of living one's life openly if one happens to be gay or lesbian is made clear in M. E. Kerr's *Deliver Us from Evie* (1994). The novel is noteworthy not only for dealing with the emerging identity and sexuality of a young lesbian in the Midwest, but also for the fact that it is narrated by the woman's younger, and straight, brother. Parr Burrman, the youngest of three children, tells the story of his sister, Evie, and her affair with Patsy, the daughter of a local banker. The skillful narrative is by turns funny and poignant, as Parr de-

scribes the shock, confusion, and anger both sets of parents feel over their daughters' sexuality. Evie is in many ways the typical tomboy, preferring to tend to the farm and work on tractors than engage in supposedly more feminine activities. Even her mother disapproves and encourages her daughter to dress more like a woman and find a boyfriend. Parr is remarkably non-judgmental for a teenager, but even he is sometimes baffled by his sister's behavior. Their father is obviously close to Evie, finding in her the farmer and heir that, ironically, he does not see in either of his boys. Mr. Burrman is therefore hurt and disappointed when Evie begins seeing Patsy and eventually acknowledges that she is a lesbian.

Mr. Burrman is not alone in his reaction. In fact, Patsy's father reacts more aggressively, going so far as to enlist the sheriff's help in keeping the girls apart. But Evie and Patsy prove too clever and too courageous, and they find a way to see each other. It is sad and ironic, though, that Evie eventually has to leave the farm that she loves so much in order to live her life as she sees fit. It is also ironic that Evie's relationship with Patsy, which brings them so much joy, is the catalyst that destroys Parr's relationship with his girlfriend. Among other things, Parr's girlfriend cannot accept Evie's and Patsy's right to be who they are. At the end of the novel, however, Evie is reconciled with her family although she and Patsy are moving to New York. The ending is bittersweet as Evie, in being true to herself, must leave behind a life she has loved.

All of these novels illustrate the fact that growing up is not easy and it is especially challenging if one is gay. While they are filled with promise for the future, they refuse to sugarcoat the reality of prejudice, ignorance, hate, and even violence toward gays and lesbians. Perhaps the most telling trait is that all portray the reality of self-loathing, isolation, and confusion that are often a part of life for the adolescent who is struggling with his or her sexuality. In light of the portrayals of gay and lesbian experiences in these well-regarded coming-of-age novels, we can more profitably re-examine the legacy of Donovan's novel and reassess his achievement.

Donovan Revisited

While critics' reactions to Donovan's book are no doubt valid, a closer look at several key elements in the novel suggests that Donovan's view may have been a bit more radical than generally has been acknowledged. One key aspect that has been overlooked by critics is the narrative stance of the novel. The narrator, after all, is not Donovan; he is Donovan's fictional construct, a thirteen-year-old boy who reflects many of the attitudes and limitations typical of his age and time. A second, and related, element that has been overlooked by critics is the degree of tolerance toward homosexuality we see in various characters. Much has been made of Davy's mother's hysterical expression of homophobia, and rightly so. However, it should be acknowledged that her attitude, while reprehensible, is certainly not unique and largely reflects the attitude of the society in which she lives. After his mother's outburst, Davy himself adopts this attitude, which becomes evident in his anger toward both Altschuler and himself. However, *before* the confrontation with his mother, Davy has been, if not more accepting, at least more tentative about his relationship with Altschuler. For example, in reference to the second time they "make out," Davy says, "Don't get me

wrong, I'm not ashamed. There was nothing wrong about it, I keep telling myself" (*I'll Get There* 126). And later, he asks the reader and himself, "There's nothing wrong with Altschuler and me, is there? I know it's not like making out with a girl. It's just something that happened. It's not dirty, or anything like that. It's all right, isn't it?" (*I'll Get There* 128). Yes, he might be accused of protesting too much here, and clearly he is conflicted. But this attitude is much different from his later hostility. When Altschuler pats him on the back to congratulate him after a baseball victory, Davy recoils and snaps, "We're going to end up a couple of queers . . . You know that, don't you?" (*I'll Get There* 148).

Other characters, however, express a more open, accepting attitude. Davy's father, in contrast to the mother, approaches the situation with calm and concern. He tells Davy, ". . . a lot of boys play around in a lot of ways when they are growing up, and I shouldn't get involved in some special way of life which will close off other ways of life to me" (*I'll Get There* 138). Then he discusses the importance of tolerance. Davy says, "[He] talks a lot about how hysterical people sometimes get when they discover that other people aren't just what they are expected to be" (*I'll Get There* 138). And Altschuler, who seems tentative about his relationship with Davy at first, later comes to accept it. When Davy asks him if fooling around upset him, Altschuler says, "Sure it did. But it didn't feel wrong," and he adds, "What happened to Fred had nothing to do with what we did . . . Go ahead and feel guilty if you want to. I don't" (157). Finally he says, "If you think it's dirty or something like that, I wouldn't do it again. If I were you" (*I'll Get There* 157). Altschuler proves to be more comfortable with himself and his behavior than does Davy.

The conversation which follows immediately upon this is significant, although few critics have touched upon it in their discussions of the novel. When Altschuler asks Davy who he wants to be like, Davy replies, "Me . . . And guys like my grandmother . . . She was real stiff by nature, but she had respect for me, and I respected her" (*I'll Get There* 158). The novel then ends with Davy and Altschuler vowing to respect each other, and by implication themselves. Does this mean that Altschuler has helped Davy to accept himself and his sexuality? Perhaps. Or perhaps it means that the two boys can respect each other in spite of their differences. At the very least, it suggests that they have accepted their relationship and that they are willing to be open-minded about what they may discover about themselves as they mature.

Why, we might ask, was Donovan so subtle, even tentative, about his theme? Again, it is important to remember the time in which the novel was written, the fact that it was the first young adult book to deal with homosexuality, and the publisher's squeamishness about the homoerotic elements. Bill Morris, a member of Harper's library marketing staff in 1969 when Donovan's novel was published, recalled that "[e]veryone on the staff was very frightened . . . In fact, we went to such great lengths to make it "acceptable" to the general public that the book got more attention for the fuss we made than for anything that was in it" (quoted in Ford,

"Gay Books for Young Readers..." 24). At the time, Donovan's approach may have been the only viable way to get such material into print. But I would argue that his approach, while subtle, was also subversive and that his message to both gay and straight teens is one of acceptance and tolerance, especially in relation to one's own self. Sadly, the book is currently out of print. This situation is unfortunate because Donovan's landmark novel still has much to offer, both because of its historical and cultural significance and because of its ultimately hopeful message to teens. In my title, I asked, "Are we there yet?" Yes, we have come a long

way in terms of the number and the quality of young adult novels with gay/lesbian themes that have been published just in the past decade. Of course, we still have a long way to go, but I would urge scholars, librarians, and teachers to reclaim an important part of the legacy by re-

visiting and re-examining Donovan's remarkable novel. I assure you: it will be worth the trip.

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