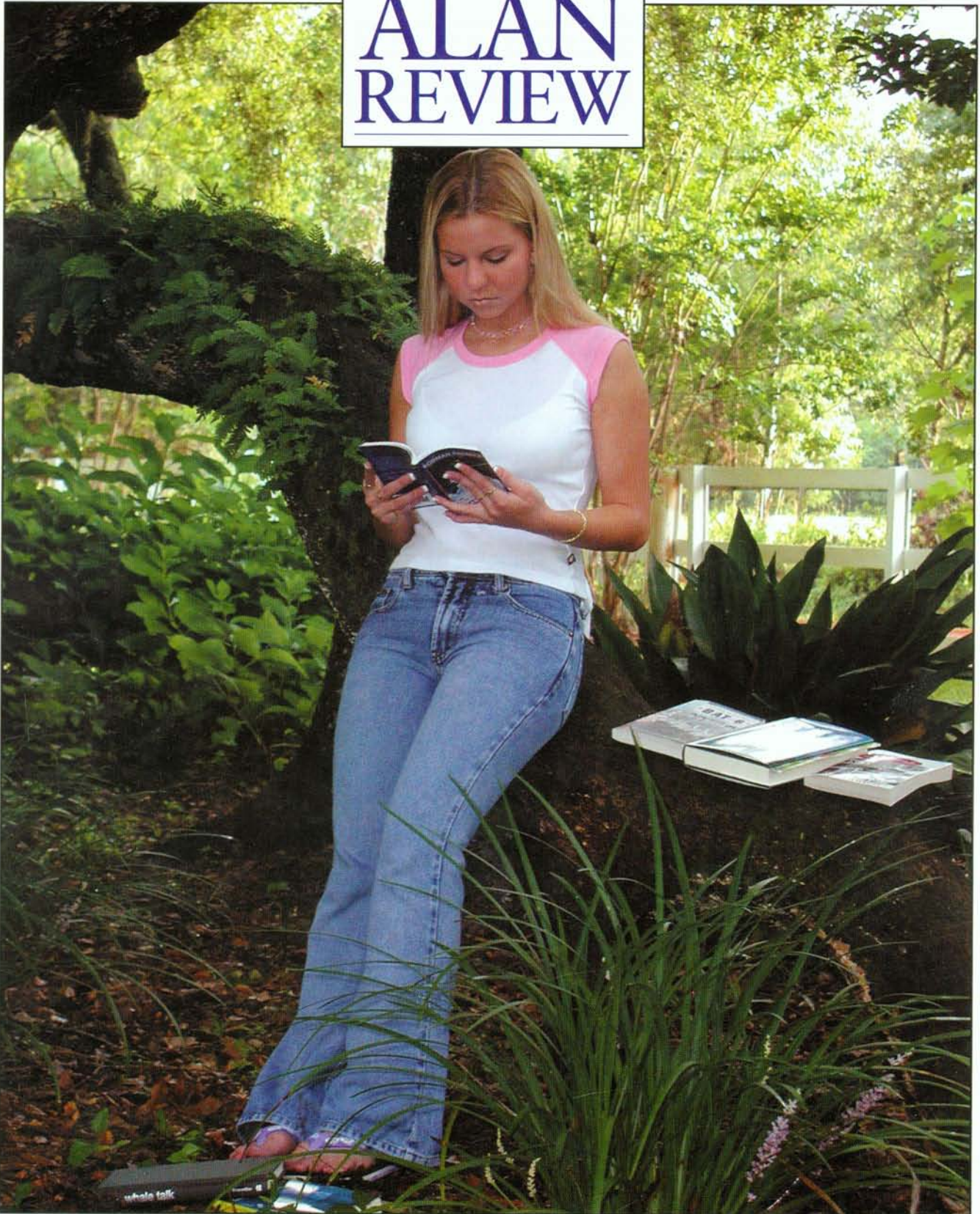


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REVIEW



*Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English*



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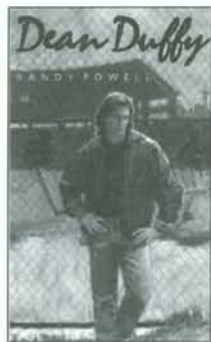
—Starred, *Publishers Weekly*

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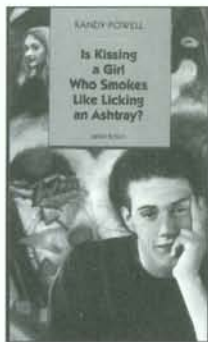
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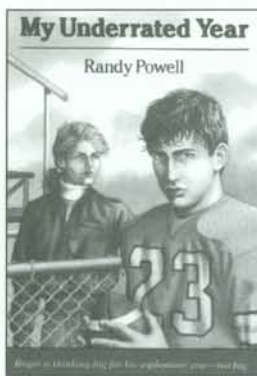
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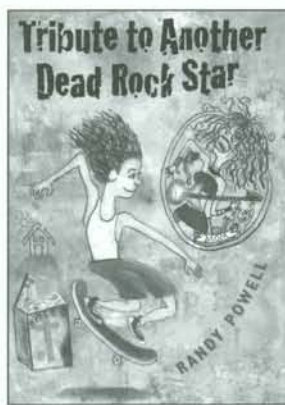
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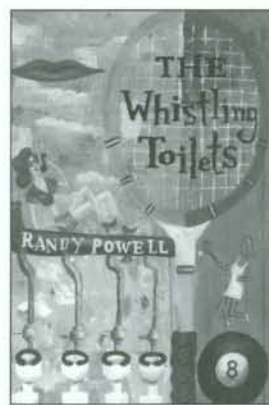
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## INSTRUCTIONS FOR AUTHORS

**ABOUT THE ALAN REVIEW.** The ALAN Review is a peer-reviewed (refereed) journal published by the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English. It is devoted solely to the field of literature for adolescents. It is published three times per academic year (fall, winter, and spring) and is sent to all members, individual and institutional, of ALAN (The Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of NCTE). Members of ALAN need not be members of NCTE.

**THE ALAN REVIEW** publishes reviews of and articles on literature for adolescents and the teaching of that literature: research studies, papers presented at professional meetings, surveys of the literature, critiques of the literature, articles about authors, comparative studies across genre and/or cultures, articles on ways to teach the literature to adolescents, and interviews of authors.

**AUDIENCE.** Many of the individual members of ALAN are classroom teachers of English in middle, junior, and senior high schools. Other readers include university faculty members in English and/or Education programs, researchers in the field of adolescent literature, librarians, authors, publishers, reading teachers and teachers of other related content areas. ALAN has members in all 50 states and a number of foreign countries.

**PREFERRED STYLE.** Manuscripts should usually be no longer than fifteen double spaced, typed pages. A manuscript submitted for consideration should deal specifically with literature for adolescents and/or the teaching of that literature. It should have a **clearly defined topic** and be scholarly in content, as well as **practical and useful** to people working with and/or studying adolescents and their literature. Research studies and papers should be treated as **articles rather than formal reports**. Stereotyping on the basis of sex, race, age, etc., should be avoided, as should gender specific terms such as "chairman."

**MANUSCRIPT FORMAT.** Manuscripts should be **double spaced** throughout, including quotations and bibliographies. A **title page** with author's name, affiliation, address, and a short professional biographical sketch should be included. The author's name should not appear on the manuscript pages; however, pages should be numbered. Short quotations, as permitted under "fair use" in the copyright law, must be carefully documented **within the manuscript** and in the bibliography. Longer quotations and complete poems or short stories must be accompanied by **written permission** of the author and/or publisher.

Author interviews should be accompanied by **written permission of the interviewed author** to publish the interview in *The ALAN Review*. Interviewers should indicate to authors that publication is subject to review of an editorial board. The title of *The ALAN Review* should not be used to gain an interview.

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**Include a self-addressed stamped envelope to which return stamps are clipped.** The manuscript cannot be returned if the envelope and stamps are not included. Articles submitted only by facsimile or e-mail cannot be considered, except when sent from overseas.

**REVIEW PROCESS.** Each manuscript will receive a blind review by the editor and at least two members of the editorial review board, unless the length, style, or content makes it inappropriate for publication. Usually, authors should expect to hear the results within eight weeks.

Manuscripts are judged for the contribution they make to the field of adolescent literature, clarity and cohesiveness, timeliness, and freshness of approach. Selection also depends on the manuscript's contribution to the overall balance of the journal.

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Manuscripts that are accepted may be edited for clarity, accuracy, readability, and publication style. Upon publication, the author will receive two copies of *The ALAN Review* in which the article appears. Publication usually occurs within 18 months of acceptance.

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SPRING ISSUE Deadline:    MARCH 15

Please note that the journal will be organized to reflect the following focus in each issue, but that the focus will not restrict attention to other issues:

**Fall Issue:** Authors, Issues, and Concerns in YA Literature for High School Readers  
**Winter Issue:** Authors, Issues, and Concerns in YA Literature for Middle School Readers  
**Spring Issue:** Authors, Issues, and Concerns in Using YA Literature for Interdisciplinary Instruction

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## A Note from the Editor

Many friends with whom I have spoken since the morning of September 11, 2001, have expressed the feeling that much of what we spend our time doing seems like insignificant fluff in light of the heft of the national tragedy. Many of us have asked ourselves if it is worthwhile to spend time with young adult books, when we cannot even assure our children or our students that they are absolutely safe. Surely we all feel a little more helpless than we ever have before.

And yet, unless we are among the thousands whose lives have been directly violated by the tragedies, we have had to get back to careers, roles, banal daily affairs. And we have to look for significance in the ways we live and the lives we touch. For many of us, that means continuing to reach out to adolescents through the medium of young adult books. It means continuing to show them that we are eager to listen to their responses to books, and to the questions and concerns raised by books or their themes and topics. It means continuing to put the best literature for young people into the hands of adolescents, and letting them talk with us, and with each other, about how it speaks to them. It means recognizing, as Gordon Pradl explains in *Literature for Democracy* (Boynton/Cook Heinemann, 1996) that reading is a social act, and therefore spending time with literature is worth our time as teachers, media specialists, and others who interact with adolescents. We need to heal, and yet with a scar, so that we never forget how quickly our lives can change. And so we go on.

In this issue of *The ALAN Review*, we have the opportunity to learn more about how to connect with adolescents through the words of three featured authors. Don Gallo interviews Randy Powell, who discusses his practice of writing from his heart about ordinary people in normal circumstances. Ann Angel, a writer and teacher, uses Norma Fox Mazer's books when teaching high school students. She interviews Norma Fox Mazer, who discusses the ways that her life and the practice of her art have, for years, become intertwined. CJ Bott, a teacher of high school English, convincingly demonstrates how powerful Mazer's *Out of Control* can be when she describes using the novel

to teach students about the responsibilities of leadership. T.A. Barron, a writer popular among young readers for his fantasy novels and respected among adults for his nature writing, shares responses to my interview questions; his words encourage us to pay attention to the truth of good fiction, and the magic of the natural world.

Christine Sanderson provides us with an archetypal lens through which we can re-read works of the secondary canon and complementary young adult novels. Ann Wilder and Alan Teasley present terrific resources for middle and high school teachers and media specialists in their always-popular High School Connections column.

Tom Phillion focuses our attention on the subtle treatment of the Viet Nam War in Chris Crutcher's *Chinese Handcuffs*, and, with ironic timing, raises questions about the ways that we record and remember history. Elaine

O'Quinn discusses the strength and support that Laurie Halse Anderson offers voiceless female readers in *Speak*. Don Latham also examines the ways that silenced voices are heard in his careful retrospective look at John Donovan's *I'll Get There. It Better be Worth the Trip*, one of the first young adult books to include the theme of homosexuality. Deborah W. Overstreet reminds us of the need to read history carefully in her overview of YA books that portray laborers. John S. Simmons offers an historical lens for considering early sports novels. In the midst of this literary wealth, editor Jeff Kaplan and his team of reviewers introduce us to recently published young adult books.

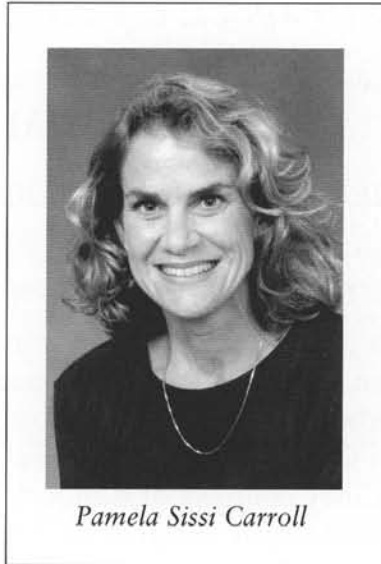
And so, with respect for the innocent who have died, and with prayers of hope for our future, we go on.

Walt Whitman offers hope, it seems to me, in these lines from *Leaves of Grass*:

Roaming in Thought (After Reading Hegel)

Roaming in thought over the universe, I saw the little that is Good  
Steadily hastening towards immortality,  
And the vast all that is call'd Evil I saw hastening to merge itself  
And become lost and dead. (from Book XX, 1891)

Perhaps the best young adult literature offers us a way to reach adolescents so that we can talk with them about Good, and listen as they share their visions of the Good with us.



Pamela Sissi Carroll

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# An Interview with Randy Powell

by Don Gallo

*Editor's Note: The following interview has been excerpted and adapted from the Authors4Teens.com Website with the permission of Don Gallo, Randy Powell, and Greenwood Publishing Company.* —psc

If you want to be a writer, Randy Powell says, "Don't talk about it, just do it. And keep doing it. Work, work, work." And that's exactly what he does, writing in the early morning hours before heading off to his full-time day job as a technical writer for the Boeing Company in Seattle. Randy Powell has published several novels about teenagers who are finding their way through unsettled lives.

DG: What exactly does a technical writer do at Boeing?

RP: I mainly rewrite stuff written by the engineers. I've been here about 12 years. There's a huge amount of documentation that goes into building an airplane—the amount of documentation is probably three times the weight of an airplane.

DG: Wow. That's a lot of paper. Having a full-time job writing technical stuff, when do you find—or I should say make—time to write? You said in an interview published in VOYA (June 2000) that you get up at 3:30 in the morning. Really?

RP: Yeah, I still get up early to write. It's my favorite time of the day, actually. It's funny how many times I get asked, "Well, if you get up that early, what time do you go to bed?" I really get tired of that question! I've said this before and I'll say it again. Sleep, work, money, health, exercise, leisure time, etc.—you never really have enough. Enough is relative. You grab what you can. Robert Frost, when he was still a full time farmer, was asked how he had the time to write, to be a poet. He replied, "Like a thief I steal some of it, like a man I seize some of it, and I have a little in my tin cup to begin with." I honestly try not to talk too much anymore about actual working hours, or writing process, because I found myself becoming pretty self-conscious. And I found that while you may be curious about someone else's work habits, sleep habits, eating habits, and writing process, you have to find your own and not pay much attention to anyone else's, because it's not going to do you much good.

I do write every day, on my computer. When I travel, I print up the manuscript and bring it with me, but also try to get a lot of reading done. Lately, sometimes when I'm in the middle of writing, I'll pick up a book and start reading it.

DG: You are right, of course, about every individual finding his/her own best way to write. But I find it interesting to

know how other people do their thing, if only to learn that, hey, I do it that way too! Or, gee, I'm not so weird after all. So I hesitate to ask this because of what you said earlier, but what are you willing to tell us about how you actually go about writing?

RP: It really isn't all that unique. As Kurt Vonnegut says, there are two types of writer: the swooper and the basher. The basher is like Paul Fleischman, where a good day's work is one page. The swooper is like me. I can type two or three thousand words in an hour, and sometimes write ten thousand words in a day. Often it will be ten thousand words of nothing but stream of consciousness or maybe walking

through a scene, trying to get the setting right. Some of it might be talking to myself. The manuscript I'm currently writing is 130,000 words. I will whittle it down to maybe 50,000, go through several drafts of expanding, cutting, expanding, cutting. All the while, I'm trying

to figure out what the story is about, what the heart of the story is. I usually have a lot of characters—like maybe 10 or 12—and I have to cut them or merge them. My wife is my first reader, and I'll give her a draft and have her read it and tell me what she thinks it's about. I tend to focus on the particulars, on the details, and on the scenes. Finding the Big Picture is the main challenge for me.

This process is the same for every writer: inspiration, development, revision. Some writers do much of it in their head; some writers don't know what they want to say, or what they think, until they start writing it.

I think sometimes it's good to write sloppy first drafts. A lot of stuff gets into sloppy first drafts that surprises you.

Just the act of fast and furious typing can sometimes lead to discoveries. For example, typos can lead to interesting words. Like instead of saying "sense of humor" a character might say "sneeze of humor"—because it was originally a typo. (That's a poor example but the only one I can think of at the moment.)

DG: Thank you for those insights. I appreciate that.

RP: Here are some additional thoughts. For the past 25 years I've been reading books on writing, looking at process, trying to analyze how a novel gets written. And I don't think it ever happens the same way twice. At least not for me.

Where I work at Boeing, it's all about process. You have a process for, say, putting tags on drawings that have been rejected by Quality Control or something. The whole idea is to find the best way to do something, document it, and then do it that way every time.

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*I think it would be the kiss of death if I spent a lot of time around young people and then tried somehow to write my books to "appeal" to them.*

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With writing, that just isn't the way it works. It may sound pretentious, but with writing a novel, you're bringing something alive into the world, and you don't always know what it is or what it means, and it has to germinate and grow in its own way. I think the story will tell you how it wants to be written. Then you can always go back and add little tricks and techniques—for instance, the element of delay, to add suspense; or vivid details that appeal to the senses—that kind of stuff you can definitely learn. The story pretty much has to grow organically.

**DG:** The comparison between writing and working at Boeing helps a great deal. You do school and library visits. Of what value are they to your writing?

**RP:** I don't do very many. In fact, last year I think I did about three. I really enjoy the kids, but, based on my limited experience so far with school visits, I don't know if they would be all that much value to my writing. You know, I see teenagers, young people—at a baseball game or the mall or somewhere—and I can't imagine that they actually read my books, and it scares me to think that they are my "audience" because I don't know them. I think it would be the kiss of death if I spent a lot of time around young people and then tried somehow to write my books to "appeal" to them. Just as it would be the kiss of death to hang around librarians and try to write a novel that I think they would like. I can't hang around shopping malls with a pad and pencil, recording the latest teen lingo or fashion. I can't go into classrooms and say, "What would you like me to write?"

So then who am I writing for? I've asked myself this question many times. I'm not writing for one ideal reader. I don't even know if I'm actually writing for myself. In some ways, I think I'm writing for the reader I used to be when I was a young person. In many ways that reader is a better reader than I am now as an adult. Kids have this capacity to throw themselves into a book and experience it with all their heart and imagination, and I think this capacity grows dimmer as we become adults.

But more than anything, I'm writing not for myself or someone else but for the story itself. I'm trying to make the best possible story I can. When you're writing a novel, you're too worried about the mechanics of telling a story to worry about who's actually going to be reading it. I'm kind of lucky because, actually, I can rely on people like you—teachers and librarians—to do the worrying about who's going to read it. Does that make sense?

If a guy makes furniture, he's just trying to make the most beautiful piece of furniture he can, that's all he's worried about; he's completely into the aesthetics of the object, and he's not too worried about who's going to use it. Granted, there are a few concessions you have to make. If you write a book, you do want to be read. You don't want to be unread. So you focus on how can I make this readable—pacing, suspense, richness of details, motivation, on and on and on. These are the things you focus on when you're writing. And most importantly, on telling the truth that's in your heart.

**DG:** Yes, that makes a lot of sense.

**RP:** In writing, there are so many paradoxes. For example, which comes first, action or character? How can you know what the action is unless you first know and love your character? How can you love your character without knowing him? How can you really know him without knowing what his actions are that propel the plot forward? Should I worry about my plot or should I just focus on the individual scenes? How can I spend time polishing a scene without knowing

how it fits into the big picture? There are so many questions, you see, so many. There isn't time to think about the reader. Also, every time I've told myself something like, "I'm going to leave this in because this will really add a lot of suspense in the reader's mind"—my wife and/or my editor catch it, and they say, "That's false." The false things that get into your writing are the ones that don't come from your heart—they're the artificial things.

I could go on and on about writing. As I said, it's what I've thought about for 25 years. I keep a journal/notebook and in it I often talk to myself about these issues. Millions of words, ramblings. But I'm still an apprentice writer. And every time I write a novel, it's a new experience, and I have to ask myself one very important question: Why am I doing this?

**DG:** So, why are you writing books about teenagers? Why not write for adults ... or little kids? And why do you write about the things you do?

**RP:** Well, at the risk of sounding overly mystical, I really believe that when you write from the heart, you don't necessarily have any choice about the themes and stories you write. They choose you as much as you choose them. I wouldn't mind writing in different genres, for different age groups. I would welcome it. But I also believe in staying with your niche and working at that as well as you can.

The themes that I choose—or that choose me—are those related to growing up, breaking free of your parents, maturing, finding your identity and purpose. For me and for many people those teenage years are the most memorable, painful, exhilarating. That's the time of questioning, searching, trying to figure out what the purpose of your life is, whether there is any purpose to life, whether it's all an accident subject to luck, or whether there's such a thing as destiny. Relationships get more complex. There's a huge gray area. Coming of age, rites of passage. Getting your driver's license. Driving equals freedom. Not a whole lot of responsibility—but a lot of responsibilities and choices looming just ahead. As I've said before, when I think back to high school, sometimes I burn with regret and embarrassment, sometimes I'm nostalgic, sometimes I laugh, sometimes I'm sentimental. Those experiences make for good raw material. I suppose all of us maybe have, oh, say, 10 or 20 major turning points in our life—some of them good, some of them bad. We write about those peak events, turning points, and epiphanies over and over. A lot of them come during our teenage years.

Maybe a better answer to that question is that I often think



*Photo of Randy Powell*



and write and start a novel with a certain voice—and that voice seems always to be about 15, 16, 17, somewhere in that territory.

I've tried to write with a younger protagonist, but he ends up sounding 15. Gardner in *Run If you Dare* was originally based on a seventh grader. Based on some of my memories from 7th grade. But my editor told me he sounded 15 or 16, and she was right.

DG: He does to me, too. What's your greatest fear as a writer?

RP: We all want to have our work valued and taken seriously. By now I'm used to people not understanding what YA fiction is. What scares me is when I talk to so-called reading teachers and experts who still shake their heads and say things like, "Kids love reading when they're in K-6, but when they get into middle school, the interest level drops, and they don't read anymore for enjoyment, and those few who do still enjoy reading go straight to adult books." By now I'm used to it when parents tell me, "Oh, my little Johnny is such a good reader that he skipped right past YA books and went straight to Grisham and King." What scares me is when reading teachers and librarians say that exact same thing, as though all YA books are simply "stepping stone" books to "real" literature like Grisham or JA Jance or Mary Higgins Clark! What scares me is people who are in the reading profession who have a bleak outlook on the state of books and reading. I went to the IRA in New Orleans a couple weeks ago, and 99 percent of it is inspiring, when I see all the dedication and knowledge and understanding and effort. But then I run into that one percent who complain about how kids don't read anymore, and I want to tell them to get another job.

DG: I'm with you on that. So your fear is what?

RP: I fear that the audience (the one that I claim I don't target) will diminish. But most of the time, I'm very optimistic about this literacy issue. I think just the opposite is happening, thanks to dedicated teachers, librarians, etc. I know that in my kids' elementary school—Seattle Public School System—there is a huge emphasis on reading, on "read to succeed" programs, book sales, book clubs, etc. It is "in" to be a reader, to be a book worm—even for boys. My ten year old is probably a pretty average reader, but he's read many, many more books, of better quality, than I ever did at his age. Does this emphasis still taper off as they get older? Maybe. But I think the quality of children's books is improving steadily, and that goes for the YA genre as well. And I see that the parents and teachers who are so involved on the elementary school level are gradually, slowly but surely, moving into the middle schools and making a huge influence.

DG: I'm seeing that, too. It's very encouraging.

RP: Anyway, another of my fears is that my books won't be taken seriously because they don't deal so much with Traumatic & Sensationalistic Issues. As if the only way a book can really be Important is only if it deals with some big trau-

matic issue, preferably one that a teacher can "use" in some curriculum unit on X—X being rape, child abuse, racism, or whatever. These issues are important, but I don't think they're the main purpose of fiction. I think these issue-oriented books become dated pretty quickly. I'm also tired of the term "edgy." What was "edgy" in 1990 is now comically dated.

I like books about people, not about issues. Those are the books I care about writing. I like to write about issues that are timeless. I hate books that have a message. Hate hate hate hate hate them. Is it just my imagination, or do there seem to be more of these in YA literature than any other genre? I don't know how many YA books I have picked up, read the first chapter, smelled a message coming, and put it down. (Maybe the people who wrote those books have been spending too much time doing school visits.)

But this whole question of the YA genre, that's sort of an underlying problem/fear. Will it ever be clarified and understood? Will places like Barnes & Noble ever figure it out? It is the least understood genre. It sometimes seems that every other genre—from picture books to sci-fi to whodunits to true

crime—gets more respect than YA fiction. It sort of makes me mad—which is maybe the flip side of fear, I don't know.

Every time I'm between books, I spend a lot of time asking myself, Why am I doing this? What's the point? Do we really need another book? I mean, why am I spending this time away from my family, sitting on my butt, drinking coffee, enclosed in my room, when I should be doing something with my wife and kids or working on the house, or exercising, or volunteering in the community, etc., etc. Maybe my greatest fear is that one day I won't be able to answer that question: why am I doing this? Maybe one day I simply won't care anymore about making a book. Or maybe I'll look back on it all and think, what a waste. I doubt that'll happen, though. And really, I guess my nature is to not worry too much about those things.

DG: And so you continue to write because . . . ?

RP: I think we write because we love books and want to pay homage to that love of books by making our own book. And we love the process, the work itself. That's usually the answer that keeps me going. Love of books, love of the work. I think the values and rewards of writing are mostly intrinsic.

*Don Gallo notes: You can read more of this interview by going to [Authors4Teens.com](http://Authors4Teens.com) on the World Wide Web, where you will also find interviews with a number of other notable authors, including Chris Crutcher, Joan Bauer, Robert Lipsyte, Laurie Halse Anderson, Jerry Spinelli, Nancy Garden, William Sleator, and Sarah Dessen.*

*Although access to the site is by subscription only, a 30-day free trial offer is available.*

Books by Randy Powell, each published by Farrar Straus & Giroux:

*Run if You Dare*, 2001.

*Is Kissing a Girl Who Smokes Like Licking an Ashtray?* 1992,  
an ALA Best Books for Young Adults book

*Dean Duffy*, 1998, an ALA Best Books for Young Adults  
book

*Tribute to Another Dead Rock Star*, 1999, an ALA Best Books  
for Young Adults book

Published by Sunburst:

*The Whistling Toilet*, 2001.

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Readers can contact Powell at his Website,  
[www.randypowell.com](http://www.randypowell.com).





## E-Interview: Norma Fox Mazer

with Ann Angel

Norma Fox Mazer says that, from the time she taught herself to read at four, she has been enthralled with words and stories. At thirteen, the idea of becoming a writer “seized” her. Marrying another would-be writer, Harry Mazer, whom eventually authored three books with Norma, certainly helped ensure that she would achieve her long held dream.

Still, it’s amazing to hear Norma tell of how she and Harry, whom she married when she was 18 years old, became fulltime writers. A young couple raising four children under the age of ten, with only enough savings to last them three months, they simply decided at a certain point that it was now or never. They took the plunge to become fulltime writers. For eight years, seven days a week, the Mazers supported their children and honed their skills by writing pulp fiction. Both Norma and Harry turned to novel writing, which they had dreamed of doing, after an agent told them that the children’s market was “hungry.” Since then, Norma has published thirty books, including *After The Rain*, a Newbery Honor Book, *Taking Teri Mueller*, winner of the Edgar Award for Best Juvenile Mystery, *Dear Bill*, *Remember Me*, which won a Christopher Award, and *A Figure of Speech*, a National Book Award nominee. Many more of her novels have won other awards, including ALA Best Book for Young Adult awards.

In Don Gallo’s *Authors’ Insights: Turning Teenagers into Readers & Writers*, Norma, using a swimming metaphor, once described what she hopes to achieve with her writing: “I want my reader to fall into what I’ve written like falling into water, to go down and down and down, to enter that underwater universe, to be transformed, to breathe like a sea creature, effortlessly slipping and sliding and swimming, a fish among fish.” Readers have learned to expect this type of careful metaphor from Norma, who often relies on developing symbolic meaning in her work by drawing on details of setting, much like a screenwriter would rely upon well-placed props.

In addition to her writing, Norma, who lives with Harry in New York, is a member of the Vermont College faculty where she currently chairs the MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults program. Following is a conversation that we engaged in over email:

**AA:** You have a reputation for writing realistic novels that talk about important issues. These have included sexual abuse, death, war, poverty and physical abuse at the hands of an older sister. What motivates you to write about those topics?

**NFM:** I’m drawn to stories for different reasons, but rarely for the “topic.” I want to write about individuals, people at a point of change or in some kind of crisis, and how they manage, the choices they make, the blunders and mistakes that go along with being young, but mostly with being human. The stories that I’ve written have all come to me in different ways. I never intended to write about the Holocaust, for instance, although I had read a great deal about it for years. Then, I was asked if I knew the WWII history of Oswego, NY. No, I didn’t, although I’d lived rather close by that town for years. My ignorance of this history, plus Oswego’s resemblance to the town where my maternal grandparents had settled and where I grew up [Glens Falls, New York] piqued my interest. The result was *Goodnight, Maman*. A letter from a friend about a pajama party her daughter had attended started me writing *Silver*. The seeds of stories have come from memories, dreams, newspapers, chance conversations, but never from a desire to write about an “important issue.”

**AA:** When you get ideas for stories, what comes to you first, a voice, a character, a plot problem?

**NFM:** I never know what’s going to trigger a story or what will come to me first. The imagination is a mysterious thing: it sometimes seems to have a life of its own. I have learned to trust that something that catches my attention does so for a reason, even if I don’t know the reason at the moment. A sentence overheard on a street in New York City started an imaginative sequence which will probably end up as a short story. A memory from childhood or a dream from last night can end as a layer of a story, a detail, or the focus of the story, the heart of it, the core. A story I want to write began with a newspaper photo of a young girl standing on the steps of a courthouse. I saw that photo in the Syracuse newspapers perhaps five years ago and couldn’t forget it.

Another way to answer this question is to say that, for me, voice, character and structure in the novel are so intricately woven together that one hardly exists without the others.

**AA:** Are you a writer who relies upon character sketches and story outlines to develop your characters, or do you write to find out how the story ends?

**NFM:** I don’t have a rigid method for writing a novel. When I was new to the craft and very anxious, I did labor over outlines, but in time I learned to trust myself, and I never outline now. I do ask myself many, many, many questions

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*I never know what’s going to trigger a story or what will come to me first.*

*The imagination is a mysterious thing: it sometimes seems to have a life of its own.*

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and continue to do that throughout the writing: questions about where the character is going [literally, psychologically and emotionally], what she wants, how she's going to get it, and what stands in her way. These are basic plot or story questions, and they intersect so closely with character and event, are so entwined, that I can hardly consider any one without the others.

A novel is so much a process for me, a kind of layering in of all the elements and goes on through so many revisions, that it would be total hubris for me to suggest I know very much before I begin. I think about the story as much as I'm able to before the actual writing, but I rarely know the full dimensions of what I'm doing until I've put down that first rough draft—or even the second or third draft. Sometimes, early on, scenes, narrative bits, and pieces of dialogue come to me, and I consider these as gifts.

AA: You've said that, to get through a first written draft, you sit at your computer with a fedora that you wear pulled down over your eyes. Could you describe how the inability to see the words on the page helps you through this process?

NFM: Well, this habit developed because I'm the sort of person who needs order in my world. [When our house was full of kids, to find time for writing I had to learn to put bed making and dish washing low on the must-do list, and I could do it only because the writing meant so much to me.] I need and crave order and neatness, but writing a first draft is a messy, messy process, literally and figuratively. My aim is to get down what's in my mind, the scenes I see there, the words I hear. I want my imagination to have free rein, to go wherever it leads me, and I want to do this without doubting and questioning myself. [What? You're going to write that? Are you crazy!] I type as fast as I can—no stopping, no questioning, no thinking, just getting the story down, however roughly. Writing this way, I inevitably misspell words, punctuate either not at all or badly, and in general make a mess of the page. If I see this mess, I know I'll feel compelled to stop and clean it up, and doing that will turn off the creative part of my mind, send me right out of my story. Does that make sense to you? That I cover my eyes, to avoid seeing the mess and to keep my focus in on my imagination? Anyway, it works for me.

After writing about five pages as rapidly as possible, without seeing anything I've written, I let myself go back and clean up the mess, do the spelling and punctuation and so on. That's satisfying not just because I [obviously, I guess] like making order out of a mess, but because in making that order, what almost always happens is that I begin at once to rewrite, re-imagine, expand on and refine those rough pages. Gradually, too, as I work this way my intentions for the story, the things I've sensed but not yet articulated, start to become clearer to me.

So that's the way I go—hat on, eyes covered, rapid typing, another mess, clean it up, and so on I go until I get to the end of what I call a first draft. By then, though, I've written everything over at least two or three times—and now the real work and the real delight begins. Revisions.

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*So that's the way I go—hat on, eyes covered, rapid typing, another mess, clean it up, and so on I go until I get to the end of what I call a first draft.*

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AA: When working with student writers, you've said, "Readers want to feel they're inside a character, that they're living the story with her." You succeed in co-mingling the world of the reader and main character from the first pages in *Girlhearts* when Sarabeth Silver and her mother stand together beneath a rain cloud at the point that separates rain from dryness. We're right there with Sarabeth when she learns her mother has become ill, and then again, when her mother dies. There isn't a moment when the reader moves outside of Sarabeth's world. What elements do you look for during revision to ensure this reader experience?

NFM: I'm not quite sure how to answer this question. There's no formula or secret here. I try to live inside the character while I'm writing the story, which for me means to be truthful to the character's experience and not impose my own thoughts or desires, which, in turn, means that I am receptive to surprises, and that I do not manipulate the character or events to achieve a pre-conceived idea. And I should add that it means, also, a lot of work—that is, rewriting and revising.

AA: Do you often achieve this reader/character experience on a first draft?

NFM: Would that I could! I did get pretty close to the characters in both *Out of Control* and *After the Rain* on the first drafts. But those stories had fairly long incubation periods, which probably helped. Most often, it takes work, which is just another word for process. It's work that I love, but it is work. It's writing and revising and rewriting and writing again and going through the manuscript time after time. In the case of *Girlhearts*, I wrote what I thought of as the opening chapters at least 15 times, each time attacking the story from another angle, and I was stuck there in those 25 or so pages for a very long time. Finally, I realized what I had to do to break out, after which I wrote the first chapter that's in the book now. As soon as I wrote those pages, I had what I needed for the story to go forward, and I was able to get on to the end of the draft.

AA: What specific technical challenges does writing to make the reader experience the character's story present in your own writing process?

NFM: The only way I can answer that is to say that, for me, I must somehow enter the spirit of the character. I know that sounds mysterious and mystical, and maybe it is. I don't have any secrets to pass on as to how to do this. I had to learn how to break through a certain place in myself, that place where you take the easy route. For some reason, which may not make too much metaphoric sense, I envision it as breaking through ice. [And then what—drowning? No, swimming.]

Let me try again—the ability to make a character live on the page results not only from the real work of writing, but arises from freeing the imagination, from allowing the spirit of the character you're creating to inhabit you. I think I said before that I wanted to inhabit the character, but the character must also live in the writer. To put it more practically, it's a matter of getting to know the character thoroughly, so well, in fact [which happens as I go through draft after draft] that



if I didn't feel like a fool saying it, I'd say that eventually, I'm channeling the character's voice, mind and spirit. At the same time, I should say that of course the writer is also always *there*, present somewhere in the character of the character.

AA: You've said that there are rare cases in which "pure" voice occurs, where the character's internal and external voices are so "in-the-moment" and close that there is no difference in language and time. It's the point when the experience unfolds before the reader as though the main character is telling it and understanding the story's significance for the first time. Can you explain how this purity of voice and viewpoint occurs and why writers strive for this?

NFM: I don't know if every writer strives for purity of voice, although it's one of my goals, nor do I know how to explain how this purity happens, other than what I've already said. I'll try to say it a bit differently. Writing a story, whether a short story or a novel, is an intricate balance of character, event, and voice. A good story is a product of the imagination, which must be allowed the freedom to find images to convey the events of the story, and words to express those images—images, which, in the best of all possible fictional words, are not contrived or hackneyed. I doubt this really makes anything clearer! I don't do well with generalizations.

AA: You captured purity of voice in *When She Was Good*, giving readers an intimate and immediate view of Em's isolation and yearning to connect with people in her community. Can you give examples of one or two other novels that accomplish this purity?

NFM: The two examples that spring immediately to mind are Carolyn Coman's *Many Stones* and Brock Cole's *The Facts Speak for Themselves*. When I read each of those novels, I was struck by the voice of the character as "pure" in the sense that I heard only the character and was never aware of the author's voice directing or intruding. Both novels delivered the experiences of the characters within the worlds they inhabited in a direct, true way without anything artificial or forced. I think of both novels as exemplary and wonderful achievements.

AA: You've said it is important that, when readers finish the last page of a book, the story stays with them, the emotions of the story resonate in their minds. That's exactly what happens with many of your stories. Long after readers finish reading *When She Was Good*, they worry about Em and if she's managed to move more completely away from her isolation. With Sarabeth, in *Girlhearts*, readers finish the book and imagine what it would be to form a family of the bits and pieces left if they'd lost the last real family member in their lives. When you're working with your novels, how, and at what point, do you judge if you've created an ending that's an easy out or one that resonates?

NFM: All along the way I'm working for the ending, thinking about it, trying to understand what I'm doing below the surface of the story. I don't usually know even the parameters of the plot when I begin—that is what, specifically, is going to happen to the characters, how the events of the story will affect them and their decisions. I do, however, usually

have a general idea of where the story is going—that is, the direction or trajectory of events, but I learn as I write how things will actually play out. At some point in the process, sometimes when I'm in despair, sometimes only when I'm fairly sure I've got a grip on the story, I read it out loud to my husband. Occasionally there's the added presence of one of my daughters and/or one of my sisters. For some reason, an out loud reading is a kind of acid test of the story for me. I can tell when it's going off the track, when something is false or uninteresting. It becomes actually painful for me to read a section that I am recognizing as incomplete or failing—and that's the best evidence I have that I haven't yet finished my work.

AA: In *From Romance to Realism: Fifty Years of Growth and Change in Young Adult Literature*, Michael Cart says that the young adult novel must be "unsparingly honest, even brutally candid, if necessary, both in the choice of subjects it risks addressing and in the openness with which it treats the material." You've written candidly about abuse, poverty and death. In doing so, you've most often written about the extraordinary turning points in ordinary lives. Was this a purposeful goal in your own work?

NFM: When I began writing seriously, I wasn't very purposeful about anything except my desire to write and tell stories. After a while, I realized that I *was* writing mostly about "ordinary" people going through various crises. Part of that was simply attention to what makes a story interesting and even, one hopes, riveting. [Happy, satisfied characters tend to be boring in books, if not in life.] I suppose the characters I feel at ease with and write about reflect something about my own life and background, my sense of my parents and aunts and uncles as people who worked hard and struggled to make their lives good and worthwhile. They were "ordinary," but not dull!

AA: You've mentioned in a number of interviews that you and your husband, Harry, have

written at least three novels together. You've also mentioned that you let Harry read and critique your work. Could you describe the give and take of the critique process between you and Harry?

NFM: I don't "let" Harry read and critique, I *require* that he does it. I need him, his not-easily-satisfied eye. We've worked closely together for many years and long ago agreed we had to be honest with each other about our writing, or what was the point. We sometimes discuss our stories before writing, but not always. We do, however, always read one another's drafts. I trust him to read work that I wouldn't have the courage to give anyone else—too raw, too messy.

Once he's read the draft, we sit down and talk about the story, what I've done, where I'm going, what works, and what's it all mean, anyway? I always want to know if the story is working on the basic storytelling level and if the characters are convincing. Is the writing fresh? Are there surprises for the reader that are believable? What doesn't work, where'd I get lost or lose the reader?

It's not an easy thing to subject my work to this kind of scrutiny, but if we skipped this, I'd have to put the draft away

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*Writing a story, whether a short story or a novel, is an intricate balance of character, event, and voice.*

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for months before I could look at it objectively and try to figure out what I needed to do and where I needed to go.

**AA:** How do you handle those moments when Harry tells you that something needs more work?

**NFM:** So often, there's a kind of *click* of recognition when he points out something, then a little chagrin that I didn't get it myself, but at the same time relief that I'm getting it now, all mixed in with eagerness to get back to work on the story. And of course I go through this all over again with my editors when they read the manuscript. In short, I'm nothing but grateful for the input.

**AA:** In addition to writing novels, you've written many short stories. Which genre do you enjoy most and why?

**NFM:** Impossible to choose. I love writing novels, creating a world and then living in that world for a year or sometimes longer. I also love the satisfaction of writing a story in a month or six weeks, seeing it done.

**AA:** Which writers do you read in order to learn more about techniques and craft in your own writing?

**NFM:** Nobody, for that reason. I read, as I always have, for pleasure, for the intense satisfaction of entering another life or another world. Why read a novel for any other reason? That said, when I read something that especially impresses me, of course I think about it and try to fathom how the writer achieved the effects I admire.

**AA:** What are you working on now?

**NFM:** Nothing. One of my daughters died in May, and I haven't yet recovered my desire to write. It's a very strange, sad, and disorienting world for me without Susan in it. For the first time in my life, since I was 12 years old, I no longer think of writing as something I must do and can't live without doing. Her death changed my perspective. What I'm trying to do is learn to live without her, with only the memory of her and what she left behind—her presence and her paintings. I have a very great deal of love and joy in my life—my husband, my three other children, my grandkids—but losing Susan has been a blow from which I haven't yet recovered. I don't think I ever will, not fully. I do hope, though, at some point, to get back to writing.

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*Ann Angel, a young adult writer and writing teacher at Mount Mary College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, worked with Norma Fox Mazer, who was her advisor while Angel was pursuing her MFA from the writing program at Vermont College.*

**Recent books by Norma Fox Mazer:**

*Girlhearts* Harpercollins Juvenile Books, 2001

*Good Night, Maman* Harcourt Brace, 1999

*Crazy Fish* Econo-Clad Books, 1998

*When She was Good* Scholastic Trade, 1997



# Creating Imaginative Worlds: Unique Detail and Structure in Norma Fox Mazer's Young Adult Fiction

Ann Angel

W e turn the page of a novel because, from the very first word, we're drawn into a world that fills our senses, reflecting the emotions and values in our culture. It doesn't matter whether the world on those pages reflects the reality of our own world or the magic of fantasy, science fiction, history or a magic reality somewhere in between. We continue to read because the world within a book's covers becomes imaginatively ours, so much ours that we take the subtleties of that world's culture with us long after we've turned the last page. Writer Norma Fox Mazer has helped many readers make this leap between reality and imagination simply in the way she handles details in the lives of her characters.

Mazer, who writes in classic realistic style, admits she writes about teen stereotypes to allow unique character traits to rise to the surface and encourage sympathy and emotional bonding between her characters and readers. "When I write," she says, "one of the things I want to do is make the strange knowable and the knowable strange" ("Breathing Life Into Your Story" 1998). Indeed, Mazer draws from middle class stereotypes that mirror contemporary culture. And she uses traditional novel-writing strategies to organize stories that rely upon traditional problems.

Mazer says that despite relying on stereotypes to begin, "I don't EVER think of myself as writing 'problem novels,' and I don't believe I do." She defines the problem novel as one that concentrates "on story and plot ... to the detriment of character" (Letter 1998). To Mazer, "The best YA novels are individual, unique." She defines the complex nature of character and story in her own writing when she says, "Developing and probing character is key to writing a satisfying novel, although I don't believe that character can exist in isolation, i.e., without story. Story and character are intertwined to an extent that probably defies separation" (Letter).

Two of Mazer's works, *After the Rain*, a Newbery Honor book, and *When She Was Good*, a National Book Award nominee, contain multi-dimensional characters who face real problems, characters who change and grow as they see their way through these problems. Unlike many young adult problem novels, Mazer allows parents or authority figures to remain a focus in her teen characters' lives, and she allows her teens to deal with parent issues.

Mazer says that when she wrote *After the Rain*, she "was seeing a girl sitting at a table seeing herself sitting at a table writing about her parents" ("Breathing..."). With that scene, she wrote a novel which immediately captured the voice and tone of an insightful, introspective young woman who makes sense of her world by studying its details. The novel opens at home, where the protagonist, Rachel, is responding to her mother's worry that Izzy, Rachel's grandfather, has had blood drawn for tests. Rachel is currently unconcerned about this development; instead, she is focused on her relationship with her mother. Rachel's feelings are told through detailed observations of her own life in this third person, limited point of view novel. Rachel writes in her journal, "Shirley [her mother] is wearing her at-home clothes: baggy, faded blue sweatshirt, rumped denim jeans. Her behind is enormous ....She snorts through her long, thin nostrils" (*After the Rain* 6). She continues her journal writing exercise with a description of her father, and concludes with an editorializing comment: "if her father is in the whale family, then her mother is in the moose family" (*Rain* 6-7). Rachel's embarrassment is tempered by her need to almost-parent her own mother.

True to the character Mazer has developed, Rachel is no less critical of her own looks: "In the mirror she sees the merciless truth. She sees a pair of large, slightly bulging green eyes; a peaky little face; and wiry, impossible hair, which this morning she had braided six times. Now she has six ratty-looking plaits, leaking wires of hair in every direction" (*Rain* 25-26).

Mazer tells Rachel's innermost feelings through the devices of Rachel's writing. Rachel keeps a journal and writes letters to a brother. In letters to Jeremy and in the journal, she tries, but has never succeeded, to complete short stories about her family, although she openly vents her feelings. These devices allow Mazer to show the reader a protagonist who analyzes things constantly, and one who looks at the world with a slightly cynical view. But we are also allowed to feel sympathy for Rachel. We see that although she states her views honestly, she feels slightly guilty about her jaundiced attitude. "I don't want to be this way," she writes to her brother about her parents, whom she has just snapped at and made to feel bad, "Only sometimes they seem to get so much under my skin....Sometimes, I think — oh God, I hate saying it, but it's true — *If only they weren't so old*" (*Rain* 11).

### Making Everygirl Unique

Clearly Rachel is the stereotype of Everygirl at fifteen — she's self-absorbed, worried about typical teen things like how to survive the embarrassment of parents, boyfriends, best friends, school — but she's also uniquely Rachel. One of the devices Mazer uses to allow Rachel her unique characteristics is to give Rachel the clarity of insight to see the contrasts in her world. Rachel therefore can describe big and little things in her life the way they are and the way she wishes they were. For instance, in an early scene, as Rachel is trying once again to write, she notices a boy staring at her. She writes a character sketch of the librarian who also serves as study hall monitor: "She glances keenly at each subject who enters her domain. But Rachel's concentration is ruined. Lewis Olswanger has ruined it" (*Rain* 25).

Rachel, who helps out her mother by walking daily with her sick grandfather Izzy, confronts physical proof of her grandfather's cancer. The contrasts she sees help readers feel the impact of the reality Rachel must face: "There, on those lungs, are the spots that will destroy his life. Life and death lying side by side, as close as two kittens in a litter" (*Rain* 66).

Although it would be easy to center on the cancer and its effects on Rachel's life, Mazer never lets this story become a stereotypical problem novel. She allows her character to grow and develop, to unfold in a steady, well-paced manner, as Rachel shares the little details that make up a full and individual personality. Early on we learn that nervousness makes Rachel "talk too much" (*Rain* 30). We learn she's not an athlete. In fact, "She has never really understood people who do all these healthy, beneficial, cold things" (*Rain* 31). The same pace is used to reveal Rachel's love interest, Lewis, and to uncover the novel's overwhelming problem. Rachel's grandfather is dying; the family has been told, but he's been led to believe he has a simple virus. And Rachel will make choices to help him even when they interfere with her relationship with him.

Mazer says "much of my writing isn't planned, but a kind of instinctive response to the character I'm inhabiting — or who is inhabiting me," so that she doesn't recall consciously planning the balance between light and dark or happiness and sadness in her novels. About composing *After the Rain*, she says, "I had to deal with intertwining dual stories in which Rachel is involved. It wasn't just a matter of picking up one strand, dropping it, and picking up the other, and then doing it again. I had to be conscious all the time of the emotional effects that were being created, and conscious of the reader, of keeping the reader's interest" (Letter ).

Mazer explains that she needs to "pick out the details" that make a story and character rise above a stereotype and become unique. "Details," she says, "are not a thing in themselves; they are a tool to use and they do work....everywhere in your story.... they work with the elements to create mood, to reflect the sensibility of the scene, they can reflect the tone" ("Details" 1997).

Through the use of detail in *After The Rain*, Mazer masterfully allows the reader to see the inherent irony of the way Rachel's mind works. Though Rachel is not always con-

sciously ironic, the reader sees the paradox in her thinking and how it helps Rachel develop self-protection in relationships. For example, when she learns that her best friend, Helena, has been encouraging the staring Lewis to take an interest in Rachel, Rachel tries to make this less of a big deal by thinking, "Oh forget it.... Lewis Olswanger is nothing to her [Rachel]. Less than nothing" (*Rain* 35). Surely she protests enough so that the reader knows Lewis is much more than she admits to herself.

The ironic tone of Lewis and Rachel's relationship continues in high form when they literally run into each other in the school hall. Rachel's inner voice agonizes over how this is as romantic as the best novels, but she's not feeling that love spark. Finally she feels something. "But it's not the wave of electricity she feels smashing into her belly like a fist, it's a wave of nausea" (*Rain* 45).

In the most intense moments, Mazer combines irony and contrasting details in order to portray the depth of relationships between characters. Perhaps the most compelling juxtaposition of these devices occurs in a two-chapter section in

which Rachel's emotions are pitched one against the other as she considers how she sways between thinking about the sadness of Izzy's plight and the sweetness of anticipating her first kiss. Mazer uses Rachel's own keen observations to move her readers "away from the thoughts of

him [Izzy]. Slipping and sliding away from sickness thoughts and death thoughts to Lewis thoughts" (*Rain* 83). Irony is again employed shortly after this scene to develop the relationship between Rachel and Izzy when she discovers that her grandfather still has the same kinds of feelings in the presence of an attractive older woman. "Rachel looks at her grandfather in astonishment. Unless she's very mistaken, Izzy is flirting" (*Rain* 92). Recognition of this response helps Rachel to build a true relationship with her grandfather, one in which she can hear each subtle change in his voice and know the true meaning of what lies behind his words.

In spite of the fact that she can't always see the irony in her life, Rachel's attentive way of analyzing the details of life gives her insight about the people around her. And not only do these abilities allow growth in her relationships, but ultimately they help her to recognize that Izzy knows more about his terminal diagnosis than others have told him. Still Rachel doesn't recognize the significance of what is quickly evident to the reader. So when the narrator says, "If she didn't know Izzy better, she might almost think he's afraid" (*Rain* 48), the reader knows that although Rachel never denies that her grandfather is dying, she chooses not to recognize that Izzy knows how sick he is, even when the evidence is before her.

Meanwhile, Rachel's mother, whom she loves despite her embarrassment, can't seem to cope with her own father's impending death. Again, Rachel's understanding of her mother's difficulty is told in simple detail. When Shirley takes off her glasses, Rachel sees, "Her eyes look naked" (*Rain* 61). Rachel takes her first steps toward change and growth when she makes the adult decision to help out. When Shirley exhibits fear and hesitation about talking to the doctor, Rachel takes off an afternoon of school to go along with her mother.

This complex response to her surroundings keeps Rachel

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*Through the use of detail in After The Rain, Mazer masterfully allows the reader to see the inherent irony of the way Rachel's mind works.*

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guessing and alert and the reader interested. And her ability to almost guess at what's going on inside Izzy initially gives Rachel the compassion and desire to help him, in spite of both his ornery nature and the fact that her own friends want her to hang out with them after school. Mazer's protagonists consistently demonstrate complex personalities, and it is evident that the characters' problems will change them in the end.

For Rachel, these changes come when she begins to wonder about Izzy even when she isn't just walking with him, and she becomes angered by his constant refusal to allow her to help more than go with him on his daily walks. At first, she thinks, "She hates *this*. If he were healthy, she wouldn't choose to walk with him — she *wouldn't* walk with him" (*Rain* 108). A single paragraph shortly after this scene clarifies the give and take of their relationship. Rachel stands at the elevator and says, "I'll go with you." Izzy responds, "No, you won't." The elevator creaks open. He steps in. The door closes and he's gone. Maybe he's a dying man, but he's still Izzy" (*Rain* 119).

Shortly after this scene, Rachel angrily races up the stairs to tell her grandfather that she's sick of being treated as if the only thing she can do for him is take a walk. When she finds him at his apartment door, puffing and panting, congratulating himself that he made it on another walk, encouraging himself to keep trying, she leaves before he can see her.

### Communicating With Detail

Communication seems to be a key theme in all of Mazer's work. This is evident in *After the Rain*, which requires communication as well as understanding of what Rachel and Izzy *don't* say in order for the relationships between Izzy and Rachel and Rachel and Lewis to take root. *When She Was Good*, which explores the aftershock of an abusive relationship between a young girl named Em and her mentally ill, older sister Pamela, also investigates the role communication plays to rise past despair. Contrasting almost insignificant glimpses of Em's hope against the stark and ugly reality of her bruised body and shattered ego, Mazer creates a novel that demonstrates the value of communication for survival. The central theme of communication helps readers to understand how someone can stay in an abusive situation and even love the abuser. But it is, first, a moment of communicated joy that bonds these two sisters as Em shows Pamela a sunrise: "I pointed to show her where the sun was going to come up, and as I stretched out my arm, the red rim slid up from the earth." Pamela responds with awe and readers glimpse a moment of rare beauty, one that all appreciate. "'Hey!' Pamela said. 'Hey!' I held my hand steady, finger pointing, claiming the magic, and the sun obediently slid up and up and up. 'Hey,' she breathed again, and tucked her arm around my waist" (*Good* 46).

The novel, written in first person from Em's point of view, opens at a time when Em's sister, who beat her and insulted her constantly, has died. We learn quickly that the two sisters had only each other, and had relied upon each other, for four years. Em explains how she has survived her bleak existence so far:

As a little girl, I would often chant and sing two words, which I had decided were magic words. These words were *happy home*, and how I came by them I don't know, but I believed if I said and sang them often enough, it would change things —

take away Mother's sadness and make Pamela nice and even turn Father cheerful. And then I would be happy. (*Good* 4)

As the novel unfolds, the reader discovers that when Mother died, her father remarried, and his new wife doesn't want the girls around. Em and Pamela left their trailer home and found an apartment in the city; there, their lives became even bleaker. Pamela became more abusive and paranoid. She took her fears out by hitting and controlling Em. When she discovered Em keeping a journal, she told Em to stop and screamed, "I hate crap like this. All this secret writing stuff. You shouldn't have secrets from me. I'm your sister." Pamela destroyed the journal, effectively censoring even Em's thoughts. Life becomes so unmanageable that the two finally relied upon Pamela's disability to survive because Pamela became fearful of letting Em out of her sight.

Just as *happy home* gives Em a point on which to focus hope, her journal symbolizes the power that communicating beyond her isolated existence will have to save her. Em, whose voice was censored by Pamela, has internalized Pamela's voice — which drowns out her own. But Em must break out of her isolation and communicate with *others* in order to ascend beyond the desperate lifestyle that was created while Pamela lived and continues beyond Pamela's death because of the fear she has instilled in Em. As Em says, "Thoughts were always a problem. There were too many times she walked into my head and stood there and saw what I was thinking. My solution was not to think anything, if possible" (*Good* 10). Em's conflict is that her mother made her believe that she was being a good girl when she protected Pamela.

Em is left with the contrast between moments of hope and moments of despair. Mazer uses the technique of allowing the reader to see the world through Em's eyes to help the reader see these contrasts. Em helps us see the despair of Pamela's illness: "Without Mother, she was Pamela intensified, the rocketing planet, the exploding star in free fall" (*Good* 94). Mentally ill, abusive and angry, Pamela takes out her rage and frustration on Em, who realistically knows what's coming but holds out hope by focusing on the good:

The nights she laughed were the good nights. The nights that weren't so good were when she chewed hard on her food and nothing I said was funny.

There was no way to know how those nights would end. No way to know if, in the morning, I would move slowly and carefully, and cover myself with long sleeves, makeup, and sunglasses. (*Good*122)

Just as in *After The Rain*, Mazer uses contrasting detail on several levels not only to help readers see the reality of Em's existence but also to help readers understand the tenuous hold Em maintains on her hope. Further contrasting details serve to delineate these complex characters as they try to deal with a complex and all too real situation. Em, as the protagonist, remains believable because she trusts in the magic of words to recall the memory of singular moments of happiness and dreams that connect Em to her sister and to earlier happy times with her mother. She dreams of her mother, a device which Mazer uses to make the relationship between Em and her mother feel real to the reader while playing on the threads of human connection that make Em believe in the magic of hope. Em absorbs the beauty of her mother in dreams and the memory of her mother's love. "Look how pretty all this is!" Em says in her dream as she and her mother

relax in a railroad dining car, and she observes “a pink cloth,” “a small vase with a frilled pink flower in the middle of the table” (*Good* 85). The memories of love that the dream ignites give Em enough hope to avoid falling into total despair, and in the end, they help her to connect to community.

In *When She Was Good*, Mazer again uses detail to allow us into Em’s mind. But in this novel, she also incorporates other language devices such as personification and simile, extended metaphor. We see how strong Pamela’s power over Em has become when we see Em reacts to a cloth Monica doll that Pamela has made. “She [Pamela] talked about it as if it were alive. She perched her [the doll] on the back of the couch and warned me not to pick her up. ‘She doesn’t like anyone but me to touch her.’” (*Good* 118). Mazer doesn’t just rely on personification to have Em believe in the power of the dolls; she gives her character, Pamela, the ability to make the dolls appear as if they are alive.

Mazer uses simile and dream imagery to create an aura of fear for Em. After Pamela’s death, Em dreams of mislaying her sister (*Good* 144), and seeing “rotting bodies of giant mice heaped in a room. The smell is disgusting” (*Good* 145). Em recalls her sister’s physical characteristics — “A hand like meat” (*Good* 145), “heavy arms crossed over her chest” (*Good* 210) and, finally, toward the end of the novel, Mazer allows the reader to glimpse Pamela as the queen of terror:

She sits forward on her chair, tapping her fingers against the iron frying pan, the one in which I’ll make her an omelette as soon as I get the TV working. *Bitch you’re trying to make me feel crazy get it fixed or I don’t what I’ll do I’m telling you my head* — she bites her lip, moans. Blood runs down her chin.

I’m doing it, Pamela, doing it, honestly, hold on. *Don’t tell me to hold on don’t say that to me not me damn damn.* She sobs and slams the pan against her leg.

Pamela, don’t do that —

She throws the pan at me. (*Good* 224)

### Experimenting with Structure

Mazer relies upon a traditional novel format for *After The Rain*, but enjoys a complex format for *When She Was Good*. Here, she breaks the novel up into chapters that are actually small vignettes, each able to stand alone and, at the same time, serve to tell the story of a moment in Em’s life. Like beads strung together, these combine a life of pain and hope. Mazer also divides *When She Was Good* into three sections: part I, called “Earthly Comfort,” deals with Em’s immediate responses to Pamela’s death; part II, called “In the Reign of Terror,” told completely in flashbacks, tells the tales of Pamela’s growing insanity and control over Em; and Part III, “The Doubled Moon,” tells the stories of Em’s healing. Here, the doubled moon, an image that Em once saw as she stood beside a lake, symbolizes Em’s ability to find hope and salvation in simple beauty. She calls it “a sight so pure I almost staggered.” This vision helps her to find what has been miss-

ing in her life, and she thinks, “I wondered how I had lived without knowing such calm was possible, that such pure peace existed” (*Good* 162).

Mazer says she arrived at the decision to create the complex novel structure for *When She Was Good* after considering structure “over a long period of time.... I didn’t have the structure of the three parts for a long time, although I knew I had to deal with the present and the past, but somehow it never felt right to start with the past and go forward chronologically. She adds, “It was only when I got the first line of the book that I understood the whole structure.... And when I hit it, it was a result of a lot of things, of thinking, musing, being in the story for such a long time, of knowing the story and the bits and parts of it inside out” (Letter).

Although Mazer refuses to rely on the traditional problem novel format, which as described by Marion Dane Bauer, consists of establishing the

problem, and having the character work to overcome it by surviving three obstacles (*What’s Your Story...* 48-56), Mazer comes close to this format in *After The Rain*. In fact, she says of traditional structure, “I am very much committed to the classic *story* form, that which divides into three basic parts: the beginning, the middle, the ending. And I believe in the character working out her/his own destiny and working for it, as part of the classic story form” (Letter). Yet even here, Mazer, perhaps because she tends toward writing character-driven novels, deviates from this classic form toward the end of *After the Rain* by refusing to give Rachel an easy out. She doesn’t solve the problem of Izzy’s impending death; rather, he dies. More important, Rachel doesn’t resolve her problems with her cantankerous grandfather. She simply admits that she loves him despite his faults. In stating this realization, she makes a connection to her brother Jeremy, who points out, “Time has run out for me and Grandpa” (*Rain* 239). But even here, Mazer maintains her dedication to realism, for she refuses to force the issue of hope by allowing Rachel and Jeremy’s connection to unrealistically become more than has been promised. Rachel tells Jeremy that she’ll continue to write and hopes that he will offer to write back to her. He doesn’t. And Mazer says of this complex resolution, “If you did find the expected ending, I would feel that I had failed” (Letter).

Mazer also deviates from a straight traditional novel format in *After the Rain* when she varies point of view between chapters. By alternating first person journal entries and letters to Rachel’s brother, she compresses periods of time, time in which little happens but feelings are analyzed. The letters and journals are spliced between chapters that are set in real time and, using a third person, limited point of view, show us the world through Rachel’s eyes.

### Playing with Time in Crucial Scenes

Mazer slows down language in order to stop time in crucial scenes. She relies upon her exceptional ability to draw out expansive detail and couple the detail with her main character’s inner dialogue. This is especially apparent in the

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*Mazer slows down language in order to stop time in crucial scenes.*

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second elevator scene between Rachel and Izzy, in which Rachel races angrily up the stairs to confront Izzy with what she perceives to be rudeness:

She runs up the stairs, making a speech in her head.

Would it be too much to ask that you at least say good-bye to me? It's rude not to, but it's more than that. I have this weird unfinished feeling when you leave me like that. And tell me this, why didn't you let me help you carry the groceries? And what's wrong with my going up in the elevator with you?

She discovers then, in a slowed time moment, the strength of Izzy's character, his fierce pride and independence:

She arrives on the third floor just as Izzy is getting out of the elevator. He doesn't see her coming from the stairs. He's talking — she thinks to someone in one of the apartments, but there's no one around, no one else in the hall. He's talking to himself.

"Yeah," he says. "Yeah, that's good, Izzy....Good...good.... You did it." He laughs briefly, "Passed the test."

From the stairs, she watches him unlock his door, go inside. Then she goes back down the stairs. (Rain 136-137)

The device that slows time is also used when Rachel blurts out the question, "Are you afraid to die?" Rather than cutting right to Izzy's response, Mazer lingers on Rachel's own reaction: "Her stomach dives. She didn't know she was going to say that. Why did she say it. *Are you afraid of dying?* There's no taking back the words — they're out, they won't go away, they lie there between her and Izzy, like blocks of wood she's thrown down with a careless thump" (Rain 136-137).

Mazer also compresses time by using chapters of brief journal entries that focus on important but brief moments pinpointing Izzy's declining health. The short entries comment on how Izzy's ability to walk hills is diminishing. He's getting tired more quickly, needs to sit more frequently.

These brief chapters are followed by happier chapters set in real time. Contrasts between Rachel's life with her friends and her life with Izzy are presented in traditional format. These chapters also allow readers to see into Rachel's mind where they can observe Rachel's reactions to Izzy's friendship with Alice Farnum, an elderly woman who found Izzy when he fell walking alone, and Rachel's responses to her own growing relationship with Lewis. Throughout the entire book, Mazer makes sure that her characters always come back to the underlying issue of Izzy's impending death and Rachel's response to it.

## Conclusion

Many of the contrasting details, especially in the novel *After the Rain*, are in the personalities of the characters themselves. But as Mazer points out when she discusses the contrasts to be found in *When She Was Good*, "It would be unbearable to read only of despair and abuse. The heart of the reader couldn't take it, nor could the heart of the writer. So there must be something better, sweeter, more tender, even if only in memory" (Letter). So Em, who has had a life that could make the heartiest soul despair, remembers making elderberry jam with her mother, and, as Mazer explains, "this is meant both as a literal memory, a sugar sweet memory, and as a metaphor for life. Elderberry without sugar is mouth puckering; add a little sugar and everything changes..." (Letter).

In *After the Rain*, it is the juxtaposition of the grandfather and granddaughter's evolving relationships that makes it logically acceptable that Izzy asks Rachel what is really wrong with him. The reader accepts that Rachel respects him enough to tell him that he is dying. And we're not surprised when Rachel tells him, "she sits there and cries, and he pats her hand" (Rain 152).

As Mazer says, "Character is revealed through action and contrast.... Detail can reflect and open up and heighten the tensions and conflict of a scene" (Letter). It is that detail and the ways in which detail unfolds that makes the story imaginatively ours, because through structuring detail each character becomes intimately known to us.

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1<sup>st</sup> Time Contributor to  
THE ALAN REVIEW

# Using Norma Fox Mazer's *Out of Control* to Reach Kids Where They Hide

C J Bott

Leaders and followers become the main topic of discussion in my sophomore class every year. Fortunately, literature is filled with an abundance of leaders and followers. We start out the year with *A Different Drummer*, by William Melvin Kelly, a very good start for talking about leaders and followers. Other core literature is *Othello*, *Oedipus*, *Antigone*, *The Catcher in the Rye*—full of leaders and followers. But probably the book that helps them with this lesson most personally is Norma Fox Mazer's *Out of Control*. After we finish that book, leaders and followers are not only clearly defined in the “teen” vocabulary, but each student can pick out examples in his/her daily life. Such is the magic of YA literature. It finds them where they are hiding. Our early discussions examine two types of leaders and two types of followers. There are wise leaders and ignorant leaders, and there are wise followers and ignorant followers. After they have defined each type, I ask my students which of the four is most important in a community, whether in a school or a town or a country, and then I sit back and listen to their thoughts and watch as they struggle through some adult reasoning. They usually start our choosing the wise leader as most important. “So,” I ask, “how many leaders can we have?” “Oh, that’s true.” And how is a wise leader chosen? By the followers. Okay, what kind of followers?

There is responsibility in following. Most of their lives, my students have heard, “Be a leader! Don’t be a follower!” and have felt guilty when it wasn’t as easily done as ordered. Ignorant followers choose blindly, irresponsibly, and are swayed by hype and packaging. It’s hit-or-miss randomness. Ignorant leaders make their decisions based on narrow reasoning, not considering the over all situation and the long term effects of these decisions. We talk about how wise leaders have to make choices, decisions based on thought and knowledge; so do wise followers.

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*While we are reading the book, each student keeps a reader’s journal with quotations from the text and personal responses. This book does not need worksheets.*

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Rollo Wingate, in *Out of Control*, has been an ignorant follower and now must pay the consequences. Rollo introduces himself:

“I don’t know what to call it. It wasn’t what my father said. It wasn’t an assault. We didn’t beat her up or rape her or anything. It wasn’t like that. It was just. . . it was something we did and, like Candy said, it got a little out of hand.”  
(*Out of Control* 2)

Rollo loves being part of the “Lethal Threesome” made up of himself and Julian Briggers, AKA Brig, and Kevin Candrella, AKA Candy. They are the stars of the Junior Class. The school newspaper refers to them as Mr. Stomp of the Football Team (Rollo), Mr. Star Pitcher and Mr. Prez of Honor Society (Brig), and Mr. Prez of Student Senate (Candy).

They are privileged males who are rarely challenged. Life is a good old time. Rollo loves hanging out with these two; they are his best friends, his buddies. Their unity gives him the security of belonging. He lets Brig and Candy make the decisions—Rollo is along for the ride; his favorite word is

“whatever”: “I love the word. You can just . . . say it. . . . You don’t have to think about anything. You don’t have to think about . . . her. You don’t have to figure out is what you did was right or wrong. You can just sort of blank your mind and go . . . whatever” (*Control* 7).

Rollo would never call himself a follower—or a leader. He would just say he was one of the guys. In the cafeteria, the guys play a stare-down game. They choose a target, a girl, usually a pretty one, and then bet on how she will react to their staring at her. It’s a form of intimidation, a bully tactic. They purposely make a person feel uncomfortable. Rollo doesn’t think about if it is right or wrong, he is just one of the threesome doing what they do. Interestingly, he never targets the girl he has a crush on.

This is where I start a discussion about bullying. I use that term rather than “harassment” because the language is less sensitive and I don’t want to lose anyone yet. Every one of my students has a bully story. In fact, as a whole class, they share a few common memories: When they were in elementary school, there was a boy that was always picked on—they give names and retell incidents and all their heads nod in agreement. After a particularly bad day, that boy decided to run away. He was hit by a truck and died. Everyone remembers and everyone carries a little bruise of guilt, even though some of these events happened six or seven years ago. In her book, Norma Fox Mazer has opened a door that allows my students, with their sophomore maturity, to revisit past behaviors. I pull from Allan L. Beane’s book, *The Bully Free Classroom*, and we talk about the myths around bullying. We look at the recent shootings in schools around our country and the evidence that 2/3 of these were done by kids who were alienated because they were different. We look at our school’s “Acceptance Not Harassment” poster and it becomes something more than just words on the bulletin board. Suddenly a stare-down game played by three guys during lunch does not look so innocent.

One day the Lethal Threesome picks on the wrong girl and she fights back. Valerie Michon is not in their clique. She’s a serious art student and focuses her whole being on art instead of on trying to fit in. She doesn’t dress in the accepted styles, though she lives on the wealthier side of town; she tutors and has a secret crush on Mark, a guy from the “other side of town.” Valerie does not shy away from the Lethal Threesome. When they target her in the cafeteria, she marches up to them and calls them “Morons”—something none of them had bet on or even imagined. When Brig pretends to grab at her breasts in the hallway and Rollo and Candy snicker, Valerie calls Brig at home and tells him to leave her alone (a dangerous move, as we are no longer in a time when confronting the bully is a good idea). Brig is not used to being challenged, and transfers to Valerie the frustration he has from breaking up with his girlfriend. That harassment escalates and one day, while the rest of the student body is watching a Christmas play in the auditorium, the three boys follow Valerie up to the third floor art rooms. No one else is around. The boys’ six hands grab at Valerie and her clothes, grope her body and push her to the floor, where Brig climbs on her back. The bell rings (I really like Mazer’s timing, it is as if she is saying, “Go back to your corner!”). Then they “walk down the hall tucking in their shirts.” The attitude in that line particularly irritates my students. The boys WALK. They don’t run or sneak or slither away, they simply walk and tuck in their shirts. Again, I just sit back and listen to my students debate that scene. Mazer has given the reader just enough. Some of the students are not sure it was such a big deal—like Rollo they want to believe “things just got a little out of hand.” Others want to know if Valerie was raped. The passage is read again, inspected word by word, and they are hooked. If they haven’t read one page before, they start reading at that point.

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The book was written in 1993, at the beginning of the decade when schools started awakening to sexual harassment and school liabilities. Some systems are still in slumber. The principal in the book bungles the job and again my “aware” students get angry. How can Mr. Ferrante only give the boys TWO WEEKS SUSPENSION? It must be because they were the privileged upper clique in the schools, their fathers were important in the community—one was a senator. How could Mr. Ferrante suggest Valerie transfer to another school? Isn’t that punishing the victim? The discussion goes on and my students share tales of such happening in our school, as there are similar stories in all schools. (Mazer explained in an interview how she got the idea for *Out of Control*. “I was in a school talking to kids when three boys grabbed and sexually assaulted a girl. I didn’t know anything about it until the librarian told me at the end of the day. I was upset hearing it, in the way one is after hearing bad stuff, but I had no intention of writing a book. Then, after talking for some time

about her concerns around this, the librarian said, ‘And you know, it all happened in less than thirty seconds.’ That statement sent a shock through me. I immediately took my pad out of my pocket and wrote ‘30 seconds that changed the world.’ It was the idea of the swiftness with

which people’s lives can change through an act of stupidity or carelessness or thoughtlessness or viciousness that fascinated me. Which was why I created Rollo as a good hearted follower. He never meant to do harm, but he did” (Gallo interview, [www.Authors4Teens.com](http://www.Authors4Teens.com)).

While we are reading the book, each student keeps a reader’s journal with quotations from the text and personal responses. This book does not need worksheets. For some, the reader’s journal is done because it must be; for others it is a disclosure of similar incidents, personally experienced. Sometimes a student needs a private conference; sometimes appropriate referrals are needed. This is a book that can uncover buried memories (which will scare away some teachers).

As the book continues, both Valerie and Rollo search for answers. Valerie has to heal from the experience and deal with the attitudes at school. Slowly, other girls who have had similar experiences seek her out and an informal support group is formed. One of the best things about the book is that Valerie does recover. She is a success story. It certainly isn’t easy; there are flashbacks, nightmares, blaming accusations, snide remarks and blatant insensitivities. She is robbed of “. . . her sense of safety in the world.”

Rollo, a “whatever” kind of follower, does some heavy soul searching. The other two boys are whisked off for family holidays until the whole thing blows over, but Rollo’s father is appalled. When he confronts Rollo and asks for the truth, Rollo uses some of Brig’s words. “We didn’t attack her. It wasn’t like that. . . . We just sort of, we sort of shoved, we . . . It was no big deal, I don’t know what everybody’s getting their knickers in such a twist about” (135). Rollo’s father goes appropriately ballistic. But in Rollo’s head, he



wants to tell, "... about being with his friends and how good it feels and how you never want that good feeling to stop and how that's why you do things sometimes that maybe aren't so smart" (137). Every student in my classes would agree with Rollo. Mazer has made Rollo incredibly human.

Here is the other important theme in the book: being part of something, that peer pressure we all accept when we follow our friends. Rollo's family has suffered: his mother was killed by a drunk driver, his older sister has Down's syndrome, his father is a hardworking accountant doing the best he can but he isn't always accessible to his son. With Brig and Candy, Rollo feels accepted, important and complete. Isn't that good?

That is the dilemma everyone has to face. Each of my students understands or craves the feelings Rollo has when he is with his two best friends. Each one thinks that if he or she could just be in the popular clique, all would be right with the world. Those are the kids who never seem to have problems. Everything falls into place for them, doesn't it? Rollo, they realize, is proof to the contrary.

In an attempt to deal with his guilt, Rollo tries to talk with Valerie. He wants to explain, but most of all he wants her to accept his explanation. She meets him for a cup of hot chocolate. Wanting to apologize but unable to speak the words, Rollo asks Valerie if she wants to hear his story. Not surprisingly, she refuses, incredulous that he even thinks he has a story. She does ask him why he did it. Lamely he starts, but "... he can't say what he's thinking. Not to her face ... Can he say that he followed Brig without thinking ... and that he loved following him? Can he say that she was nothing to him but a pain-in-the-ass girl who was getting on their nerves?" (*Control* 170). When he stays silent, Valerie asks him what he would do if it happened to him, if he was surrounded by too many to fight back, too many who could do what they wanted to him, to humiliate him. All Rollo can say is that he'd fight. "He doesn't want to answer. He doesn't want to think about being helpless. But she's forcing him to think about it. Forcing him to think how humiliated he'd be, how his cheeks would burn and his heart pound a mile a minute" (*Control* 180). Perhaps he now understands what they did to Valerie. Then one of the female students will ask the guys in our class what they would do in a powerless situation. Just like Rollo, they have trouble seeing that they could be so vulnerable, so much a victim. Our culture has not allowed women a similar luxury.

Rollo starts his recovery. He and his dad have several serious talks and Rollo starts to think about his choices and his past behaviors. "One thought he has is that he was a go-along. A follower. Someone who didn't ask questions or think for himself. It's kind of scary to have that thought; the only good part about it is that he has another thought: I'll never be a go-along again" (200).

In choosing to no longer be an ignorant follower, Rollo is ready to accept some responsibility and decision making. As the book ends, we get the impression that Rollo will be a loner—at least for awhile. Maybe his new maturity will be recognized by others and give him the confidence he needs to be a leader, hopefully a wise leader. Maybe he will be what the world needs most, a wise follower who chooses carefully whom to support, who chooses wise leaders and who holds both himself and that leader accountable.

*Out of Control* can work with middle school and early high school kids. The reading is accessible, the content appropriate, the message essential. One sophomore boy told me it was the best book he'd ever read in his life. Angelia wrote "... [this is] a subject most teachers avoid talking about." Evieana thought, "It showed how harassment in school is really handled ... the principal really didn't do much to punish the boys." Greg noted, "It was believable and showed how people become followers." Terryl summed it up when he said, "It dealt with real problems in school life." Again, that magic of YA literature, brought to us this time by Norma Fox Mazer, sensitive observer, gifted writer, and wise magician.

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## E-(I)nterview: Author T.A. Barron in Conversation

with Sissi Carroll

*Editor's note: Along with the 300 or so participants in attendance, I sat mesmerized as Tom Barron discussed his art and his outlook on life at last year's ALAN Workshop. When I asked the author if he would agree to an interview, he was gracious enough to give me an enthusiastic, "Yes!" We corresponded over email in the summer, 2001, and the following is the electronic interview that resulted. I hope you enjoy reading it as much I enjoyed being involved in it. Please see a review of *Tree Girl* in our Spring/Summer 2001 issue. I encourage you to check out Tom's Web site, [tabarron.com](http://tabarron.com), for more information, as well.* —psc



### About your career as a writer:

SC: In the late 1980s, after graduating from Princeton, fulfilling a Rhodes Scholarship, and spending a year hiking in Asia and Africa, you left New York City and your position as president of a venture capital firm and moved home, to Colorado, to pursue writing as a career.

Did you know, then, that you'd be happy as a writer? Have you experienced any major surprises about writing—or about yourself as a writer, in the years since you decided to write full time?

TAB: When I made my decision to leave my business and try to write full time, I knew nothing about the

future except that my passion for writing was strong enough that I simply had to give it a try. My business partners all thought I was crazy—after all, who in his right mind would leave a successful business to try to write books in some attic in Colorado? Well, I guess I just wasn't in my right mind. All I knew was that life is too short not to follow your passions, whatever the risks. And from that perspective, the risk of trying to write and failing completely—a real possibility—was far less frightening than the risk of growing old and never following my dream of being a writer.

Since that big decision, I haven't had one single millisecond of regret. Now, that's not to say it's been easy! For example, I have discovered that writing books is the hardest work I've ever done. It's harder than running a business,

harder than building a log cabin, harder than leading a wilderness trek up some mountain. But at the same time, it's also the most joyous labor I've ever done. It's truly a thrill to bring characters to life, and to illuminate some of life's big questions through metaphor and story. It is also a constantly humbling job, since no matter how much you learn about the craft of writing, you can always get better.

In the end, though, I feel triply blessed: I get to follow my passion and do something I love; my job gives me a chance to go deeper into myself and to work with language and all its magical powers to enrich our lives; and I am surrounded by wonderful young people, my readers, who continually inspire me. I am very lucky!

SC: I remember that you lovingly mentioned that your wife was home with all five children while you were speaking at the 2000 ALAN workshop in Milwaukee.

Does your role as husband and father influence your work habits, and the kinds of writing you do?

TAB: Definitely. For starters, my wife Currie is my best friend, and we both believe strongly that raising our kids is the most important thing we'll ever do. And we're blessed with five big-spirited, energetic, creative kids. Our house is full of pandemonium, laughter, and tears—all the makings of a great family life. As a writer, I get to be a much more present father than I would have been if I had stayed in my business job.

My work hours are much more flexible. So I can adjust my schedule, when I'm not on a book tour or speaking to some conference, to fit the needs of our family. I'm also never completely out of touch: One time last year I was in the middle of a book signing in Ohio when I was told there was an emergency call from home. It was my six-year-old son, who was calling to tell me that his pet ant had died! In sum, I just love being a dad. It's really a privilege to be so close to those five wonderful spirits for these years.

One more point: Being around kids keeps you honest. They say what they think. It also keeps me in touch with my

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*Good fiction is, indeed, true.*

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own sense of humor and childlike sense of wonder. In other words, being around my kids makes me a better writer. And a better person!

**SC:** It's clear that your family has a positive influence on your art. I'm curious: What kinds of information and insights have you gleaned from your readers' comments?

**TAB:** During the school year, I sometimes get more than 100 emails a day from kids and adults who are reading the books. And I learn a lot from them. Most recently, I have been struck by how many kids have been inspired by the heroic young people in my books—Kate in *Heartlight* and *The Ancient One*, and Merlin in his *Lost Years* books. They have also been asking me what heroic things they might get to do in their own lives, or whether that is just something for imaginary characters.

Well, all those letters have caused me to write a new book, called *The Hero's Trek*—which will come out in 2002—about what it really means to be a hero. And how any one of us, no matter how insignificant we may feel, has the capacity to do heroic things. To make a real difference in the world. In the book, which is nonfiction, I will describe dozens of remarkable young people who have done and are doing amazing things. So in a way, I view this book as the best answer I can give to all those people who wrote to me.

**SC:** Sounds like a great book for kids and adults! I wonder: The three *Heartlight* books and the five books of *The Lost Years of Merlin* series are complete now, and *Tree Girl* is being released this fall. Will you continue to use fantasy as the genre with which you spin your stories? Are you planning another series?

**TAB:** After *The Hero's Trek*, I have no idea what comes next. We shall see!

#### About your connection to the natural world:

**SC:** Teachers who know you as a writer of fantasy novels for adolescent readers might be surprised to know that the early influences on your reading and writing were not novelists, but non-fiction writers such as Rachel Carson, Henry David Thoreau, John Muir (and I wonder if you read John McPhee—a Princeton connection?).

Can you discuss how your deep interest and extensive experience exploring the natural world informs your creation of imaginative fantasy worlds and characters? What aspects of your environmental philosophy will readers find incorporated into your fantasy novels?

**TAB:** Absolutely. My

youth was spent in two beautiful and compelling natural landscapes: an apple orchard in New England, and a ranch in Colorado. How could I not feel the power of nature's marvels, the patterns of the seasons, the wonder of a songbird at dawn? I still remember, when I was seven or eight, finding a monarch butterfly emerging from its cocoon: What a miracle!

On top of those experiences, I was lucky enough to have a mother who was (and still is) deeply curious about the natural world and its mysteries. She even went back to college in her sixties—forty years after studying French at Smith College—to learn about geology. Her passion to understand “how to read the book of those mountains out our window” led her to study at Colorado College and later to start a nature museum at the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind. So she was not only a great inspiration to me and my six brothers and sisters, she was

also a great teacher. Because of her, all of us have spent much of our lives in nature and in education.

**SC:** Sounds as though you inherited a love of nature. Are there particular nature writers you'd recommend to adolescent readers who are interested in the environment?

**TAB:** I would especially recommend the writings of John Muir (*Travels In Alaska* is my favorite of his journals); Rachel Carson (*A Sense of Wonder* is great reading for both kids and adults); Henry David Thoreau (*Walden*, of course...but my favorite is his short essay called “Walking”); John McPhee (*Coming Into the Country*); Aldo Leopold (*A Sand County Almanac* is one of the first ecological essays); T. H. Watkins (author of numerous books about our vanishing wilderness); Terry Tempest Williams (her book *Refuge* is really remarkable); and Ann Zwinger (whatever she writes is beautiful).

#### About your work as a writer of fantasy:

**SC:** You've stated, on your Website, that you believe that the key to writing fiction “is making it true.”

Can you elaborate on how you address that seeming contradiction as a writer of fiction?

**TAB:** Good fiction is, indeed, true. I know that sounds contradictory, but here is what I mean: The best fiction is true on many levels: First, on the level of our senses, we must really believe we are there, right beside the main character. Part of this process is making the place feel true—more like a character itself, richly described in all its details. My own background as a nature writer helps in this regard, since that helps me to make even imaginary places feel real. Second, on the level of our emotions, good fiction feels true, down in our hearts.

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*Every one of us, I believe, has a remarkable, gifted person inside of ourselves. We may feel lost at times, even washed ashore, but we still carry that potential to do positive things with our lives.*

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That requires making characters and situations really come alive, so that the reader feels everything that he or she would feel in real life. It means paying close attention to the characters' motivations, dreams, and fears—as well as their highest aspirations. Third, on the level of the spirit, the best fiction allows us to feel connected to the great realm of human experience.

No matter who we are, what culture we come from, good fiction feels true at this most fundamental level. And the very best books—the ones that stand the test of time—are true on all three of these levels at once.

SC: Ah. Speaking of truth in fiction: You've noted, in an Amazon.com interview, that the Merlin of your *The Lost Years of Merlin* series has special qualities that allow him to see the capacity for change even within himself, to cross boundaries, and to combine both darkness and light in his wisdom.

Are these qualities that you hope adolescent readers see in Merlin, and perhaps aspire to in their own lives? (Have readers' responses to your fantasy books provided any information regarding whether or not they are reading the character this way?)

(I know that the pair of questions above assume that you aim to provide lessons through your fiction; please forgive me if I am wrong in making that assumption, but there is such a strong moral thread throughout your books that I just can't get away from the connection.)

TAB: Sissi, you are right in finding a moral thread in my books. It is important, I believe, to write books that are both entertaining and thoughtful—that are great fun to read but also convey an underlying idea.

Books that really stand the test of time are built around a compelling idea or question, something that is important about being alive and human. That having been said, I never "preach" to my readers. Rather, I pose questions and moral dilemmas, and show how my own characters deal with them. Then it's up to the reader to come to his or her own conclusions about the moral implications.

Merlin's growth—from a half-drowned boy who washes ashore on a strange coast to become the greatest wizard of all times—is a metaphor for us all. Every one of us, I believe, has a remarkable, gifted person inside of ourselves. We may feel lost at times, even washed ashore, but we still carry that potential to do positive things with our lives.

SC: I agree, and know that kids need to see evidence of their potential, too. A friend of mine enjoys reading your books with her 11-year-old son because, as she says, "the values are clear and strong and positive" and the books "kick his imagination into high gear."

How might you respond to that comment?

TAB: More power to your friend! First of all, I love it when a parent and a child read my books together as a shared experience. And second, if my books provide a bit of positive inspiration and encourage readers to use their own imaginations, that makes me very, very glad.

SC: Has the popularity of that other young wizard of literature (Harry Potter) had a discernible impact on young readers' and/or parents' teachers' and media specialists' interest in your books?

TAB: All of us who write books for young people are grateful to Harry Potter. He has reminded a lot of people, of all

ages, just how much fun reading books can be! So I am very happy for J. K. Rowling's success. At the same time... I still like another young wizard even better. Merlin has an incredible depth and richness as a character, which is why people have been weaving yarns about him for over 1,500 years.

SC: Which writers of fantasy would you put on your list of all-time favorites? Which would you recommend to today's adolescent readers? And are your own children fans of T.A. Barron's books?

TAB: The best writers of fantasy—the ones who make their worlds and their characters so true that we can really believe them—give us a good time as well as a chance to ask some of life's big questions. Their books stay with us over time, inviting us to return and discover something new, mysterious, and insightful. Who would I name in that group? Madeleine L'Engle (*A Wrinkle In Time; A Swiftly Tilting Planet*), J.R.R. Tolkien (*Lord of the Rings*), and Lloyd Alexander (*The High King*) top the list. My personal number one favorite is T. H. White's classic, *The Once And Future King*. And let's not forget Gail Carson Levine (*Ella Enchanted*), Robert Siegel (*Whalesong*), and Norton Juster (*The Phantom Tollbooth*).

Are my own kids fans of my books? You'd have to ask them. But I can tell you that some of my most special moments, both as a dad and a writer, have been when I have been able to read my books aloud to them! A memorable time for us all!

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*My youth was spent in two beautiful and compelling natural landscapes: an apple orchard in New England, and a ranch in Colorado. How could I not feel the power of nature's marvels, the patterns of the seasons, the wonder of a songbird at dawn? I still remember, when I was seven or eight, finding a monarch butterfly emerging from its cocoon: What a miracle!*

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**TA Barron's Books for Adolescents:  
Lost Years of Merlin Series:**

*The Lost Years of Merlin* (Book 1) Philomel Books, 1996

*The Seven Songs of Merlin* (Book 2) Berkley Publishing Group, 1997

*The Fires of Merlin* (Book 3) Philomel Books, 1998

*The Mirror of Merlin* (Book 4) Philomel Books, 1999

*The Wings of Merlin* (Book 5) Philomel Books, 2000

**Other books:**

*Heartlight* Philomel Books, 1990

*The Ancient One* Philomel Books, 1992

*The Merlin Effect* Econo-Clad Books, 1999

# Birth/Death/Rebirth: Pairing Young Adult and Classic Novels To Teach Situational Archetypes

Christine Sanderson

The archetype, as defined by Carl Jung, is “a figure . . . that constantly recurs in the course of history and appears wherever creative fantasy is freely expressed” (817). Because archetypal pairings can be made between novels which on the surface seem to have little in common, a study of archetypes helps students realize that analysis of literature goes beyond the basic elements of plot and character. The use of YA literature to introduce the complex literary concept of the archetype is ideally suited to teachers of gifted students in high school classrooms. Once students understand the concept of archetypes in literature, they can begin to make deeper connections among all of the literary works that they read. (Please see Appendix A: Three Resources that Suggest Ways to Bring YA Books to Gifted Students.)

One of the most basic of these archetypes is the situational archetype of Birth/Death/Rebirth. The pattern of birth, death and rebirth in literature involves a struggle that leads to a new realization of self (Herz and Gallo 65). Characters are spiritually reborn as a result of the trials they endure. Given the predominance of this pattern in the classic literature which makes up the high school curriculum and the fact that it is often a means by which this literature is discussed, an understanding of the archetype is imperative. In addition, since one of the basic elements of all YA literature, according to Richard Peck, is that it ends with a beginning (Reed 117), this archetypal pattern is one which occurs frequently in YA novels. The presence of this pattern in YA novels which are developmentally appropriate for most students makes these novels useful as an introduction to the archetype. Therefore, YA novels can then be paired with classic novels that develop the archetype through similar situations.

Four novels often considered staples of the high school curriculum are Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. One of the ways each of these novels can be discussed is by using the archetype of birth, death and rebirth. By pairing each of these novels with a YA title which can be discussed using the same situational archetype, students can begin to make important literary connections. Four YA novels that pair well

with these classic titles on the basis of situational archetype are, respectively, Margaret Mahy's *Memory* (1988), Cynthia Rylant's *I Had Seen Castles* (1999), Aidan Chambers' *Dance on My Grave* (1982), and Suzanne Fisher Staples' *Haveli* (1993). In each case, the YA novel is a work which can stand on its own literary merits, but which can also serve as a bridge to a deeper understanding of these canonical novels.

## *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Memory*

In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the archetype of birth, death and rebirth is clearly developed. Having been forced to live with his alcoholic father in an isolated cabin, Huck must stage his own death in order to escape. The remainder of the novel chronicles Huck's rebirth and search for identity. Huck is guided on his search by Jim, a runaway slave. Witnessing Jim's treatment by society helps Huck to form his own opinions about prejudice and to eventually take action to help Jim escape. This novel can be introduced to students by pairing it with Margaret Mahy's novel, *Memory*.

In *Memory*, Jonny Dart is haunted by the death of his sister. His own drinking and fighting have caused his alienation from society. When he meets Sophie, a bag lady, and witnesses the way she lives and how others treat her, he tries to help. In doing so, Jonny is reborn. In this novel, a scene on the roof in the rain provides a baptism ritual. “OK—come on!” He said to the tap. “Baptize me while you have the chance. Make me all new . . . I dare you” (*Memory* 246). Jonny emerges from his experiences with Sophie with the strength to face his enemies and his sister's death. “Jonny felt very powerful. He felt as if he had died, and had then been born again . . .” (*Memory* 276).

## Theme Connector:

Huck and Jonny are both isolated from society. Each befriends an outcast and learns about the way society treats these people. Huck comes to understand Jim as a human being with feelings and emotions. “I didn't do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn't done that one if I'd 'a' knowed it would make him feel that way (*Huck Finn* 110). Jonny realizes Sophie's humanity and comes to despise those who

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*Once students understand the concept of archetypes in literature, they can begin to make deeper connections among all of the literary works that they read.*

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exploit her. "Surely there must be someone he could go to, someone who could tell him just whose job it was to look after Sophie" (*Memory* 135). Each character encounters villains and must find ways to outwit or overpower them. Huck faces the king and the duke, who are willing to sell Jim for a profit. Jonny must face the bullies who have tormented him throughout school and who are now stealing from Sophie. When Huck completes his journey, he decides that he does not want to return to society. He chooses, instead, to remain on the outside; "But I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can't stand it" (Huck Finn 372). When Jonny's rebirth is complete, he is finally able to come to grips with the tragedy in his life, and he plans to eventually return to society, although at the end of the novel he is still with Sophie. "I'll go out when I want to . . . I'm not planning to be a nurse. Just be around" (*Memory* 272). Both of these novels feature protagonists who must remove themselves from society in order to discover who they really are. Each does so with the help of an unlikely guide. At the end of these novels, both Huck and Jonny have just begun to find themselves.

#### *A Farewell to Arms and I Had Seen Castles*

In *A Farewell to Arms*, the death, birth, and rebirth archetype is set against the backdrop of war. Frederick Henry, an American citizen, enlists in the Italian army during World War I. Isolated from his family in the United States and from his fellow soldiers, to whom he is a foreigner, he falls in love with a British nurse, Catherine Barkley. The relationship deepens while he is recuperating from injuries which he suffers during a mortar attack. When their affair is discovered, he returns to his unit. Here, he begins to realize the horror and futility of the war. He is on the verge of execution by his own troops when he escapes by jumping into a nearby river. He emerges from the river cleansed of his former identity. "Anger was washed away in the river along with any obligation. I was through" (*Farewell* 232). He assumes a new identity apart from the war, reunites with Catherine, and attempts to live a life as a civilian. Tragedy intervenes, forcing Frederick to begin his life yet again. In what seems to be another symbolic baptism, he walks out alone into the rain after Catherine's death at the end of the novel. This novel has much in common with Cynthia Rylant's novel, *I Had Seen Castles*.

*I Had Seen Castles* is also a war story. This is the story of John Dante. He is seventeen when the Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor and change his life. As the focus on World War II begins to dominate everything, his father leaves for California, his mother goes to work in a local factory, and he and his sister are left to fend for themselves, at least emotionally. As John waits for his birthday and enlistment, he meets Ginny. Due to the war, their relationship moves quickly despite the fact that John can not share Ginny's pacifism. When John is sent to Europe, the horrors of the war forever alter his life. He is reborn. After the war he returns home, now able to understand Ginny's pacifism, but unable to bring himself to search for Ginny or to function in post-war America.

#### Theme Connector:

The obvious connection between these novels is that they are both war stories. Each treats war realistically. In *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway writes, "I knew I was hit and leaned

over and put my hand on my knee. My knee wasn't there. My hand went in and my knee was down on my shin" (55). The violence in them is graphic, as in Rylant's description of a mortar attack: "Then mortar shells began to land in that meadow, and the sheep were hit and lay bloody, half-alive, their bowels spilling among the meadow flowers, and we were all in it. We were all in the Second World War" (71). Both leave the reader with a sense of the tragedy, horror, and futility of war. In both, survival becomes the motivating factor and the only justification which the protagonists can find for the killing. Each features a protagonist who survives on the battlefield, but who dies and is reborn as he experiences the war. Frederick Henry begins the novel as a soldier with no ties to anyone and no feelings about the war that he is fighting. As he falls in love with Catherine, he develops emotionally. "God knows I had not wanted to fall in love with her. I had not wanted to fall in love with any one. But God knows I had . . ." (*Farewell* 93). John Dante is motivated to enlist by patriotism, but he is not passionate about it. "I was a mess of emotion. Thrilled at the prospect of wearing a uniform and scared out of my mind I might die in it" (*Castles* 57). As he fights in the war, the death of his innocence will no longer allow his patriotism to justify what he sees around him. At the end of the war, he returns home an emotionally shattered man. "The day the sheep were bloodied in the meadow was the last day I knew the boy in that home" (76). Both novels are also love stories, but they do not end "happily ever after." Frederick does return to Catherine, but he eventually ends up alone at the end of the novel when she dies in childbirth along with their baby. John never returns to Ginny and spends the rest of his life alone. Finally, both of these novels are flashbacks, and it is clear that for these characters, though time has passed, their rebirth remains a painful experience.

#### *The Great Gatsby and Dance on My Grave*

In *The Great Gatsby*, the characters themselves manipulate the archetype of birth, death and rebirth. The novel is the story of Jay Gatsby. It is told by Nick Carraway, who comes to know Gatsby one summer on Long Island. Jay Gatsby began life as James Gatz, but at seventeen he was taken in by Dan Cody, who was yachting on Lake Superior. From Cody, James Gatz learned the ways of the wealthy. His rebirth as the rich and mysterious Jay Gatsby had begun. Several years later, still penniless, he entered the army during World War I and met Daisy Buchanan. With his uniform as a great equalizer, he passes himself off as someone wealthy enough to be worthy of Daisy's affection. After the war, he gets the money to complete his transformation into Jay Gatsby and returns for Daisy. While Gatsby does manage to renew his affair with her, he is blinded by the ideal image of her that he has created. In reality, she is insincere and swayed only by Gatsby's wealth. His attempt to recreate himself and his past with her ends tragically with his death. This particular analysis of *The Great Gatsby* pairs up very well with Adian Chambers' novel, *Dance on My Grave*.

Like *The Great Gatsby*, *Dance on My Grave* explores the notion of characters recreating themselves. This novel is the story of Hal Robinson. After a sailing accident, he is pulled from the Thames River by Barry Gorman. This signals a rebirth of sorts for Hal. He falls in love with Barry, who he sees as "his boy with magic beans," a complement to himself



for which he has been searching. Slowly Barry begins to transform Hal, changing his clothes, his hairstyle, and his life. In his mind, Hal also transforms Barry by creating an ideal image of who Barry should be. When Hal must deal with the real Barry and his infidelity, the result is an argument which ends in Barry's death. Hal must face a second rebirth as he struggles to deal with his loss and with finding his true identity.

#### Theme Connector:

At first these two novels seem very different. However, the quote from Kurt Vonnegut used as an epigram in *Dance on My Grave*, "We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful what we pretend to be" (8), can be applied to both of these books. They both explore the notion of transforming oneself into someone worthy of an ideal love. James Gatz falls in love with Daisy and feels he must become Gatsby to be loved by her. Hal Robinson willingly lets himself be remade in Barry's own image so that Barry will love him. The novels also look at the result of idealizing one's lover and falling in love with that ideal. The young girl whom Gatsby fell in love with five years before exists only in Gatsby's mind. When he wants Daisy to deny her past, she can not: "Oh you want too much!" she cried to Gatsby. "I love you now — isn't that enough?" (*Gatsby* 140-141). Blinded to whom she really is, he can not foresee the tragic consequences their relationship will have when he sacrifices himself for her. Hal, too, has fallen in love with an ideal. As his friend, Kari, explains, the boy Hal was in love with never actually existed. "I think the truth is, Hal, that you fell for a face and a body and then put the person inside you wanted to find there" (*Dance* 246). Hal's devastation in discovering Barry's infidelity is the result of his blindness to whom Barry really is. In *The Great Gatsby*, it is Nick Carraway, not Gatsby, who survives the entire episode, reflects on it, and attempts to move beyond it. "... I wanted no more riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart" (*Gatsby* 6). In *Dance on My Grave*, Hal, like Nick, is given the chance to reflect and grow. It is a very painful process, but Hal is once again reborn. Gatsby dies convinced that one can repeat the past, "Can't repeat the past? He cried incredulously. Why of course you can!" (116), and Nick's final words echo this sentiment, "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne ceaselessly into the past" (189). In contrast, Hal chooses to begin his life again, certain that what matters is escaping the past, not repeating it, "The only important thing is that somehow we all escape our history" (*Dance* 252).

#### *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Haveli*

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the archetype of birth, death and rebirth is woven into a story about the struggles of a female protagonist. Janie Crawford is being raised by her grandmother. When she is sixteen, her grandmother sees her kiss a boy and fears that she will give herself to "no count" Johnny Taylor. To prevent this, she marries Janie off to an older man, Logan Killicks. For her, this marriage is a type of

death, the death of her youth. Her idealized notion of love guarantees that she will never come to love her husband. "Ah wants things sweet wid mah marriage lak when you sit under a pear tree and think" (*Their Eyes* 22). Eventually Janie leaves Logan for Jody Starks. Jody is also older than Janie. What he wants is a wife who is a trophy. He becomes mayor, and Janie spends twenty years "on a pedestal," longing to be accepted for herself rather than as the wife of the mayor. When Jody dies, Janie goes south with Tea Cake, a much younger man who loves Janie for the person she is. Though tragedy ends their relationship, during her time with Tea Cake, Janie is reborn and eventually returns home at peace. This is similar to Suzanne Fisher Staples' novel, *Haveli*.

In *Haveli*, the protagonist is also female. Shabanu, the daughter of a nomad family living in the Pakistani desert, has been given in marriage to an older man, Rahim. While Rahim adores her, she must face the intrigues of his other wives and children as she struggles to protect her own daughter, Mumtaz. Her marriage has signaled the death of her innocence, and she is reborn into a world of wealth, power, and duty. She must battle her own will in order to conform to the role of a woman in her culture. She must also struggle against her own passions as she falls in love with her husband's nephew, Omar. When her husband is assassinated by his brother, Shabanu must "die" in order to survive. As the novel ends, she is a widow, separated from her family, hiding at the haveli, and on the verge of another rebirth.

#### Theme Connector:

There are some clear similarities between these two novels. Both are the stories of young women who experience a type of death as their childhood ends quickly with a marriage to an older man. Both of them are strong willed in societies where this is not always a welcome trait for women. Both Janie and Shabanu are discriminated against because of their backgrounds. Janie is biracial, the child of her black mother's rape by a white schoolteacher. Consequently, she is not fully accepted in either community. Shabanu is a child of the desert and is ostracized by the wealthy, highborn members of Rahim's household. In Janie's second marriage to Jody and Shabanu's marriage to Rahim, each woman is the wife of a powerful man who is obsessed with duty above all else. Eventually the women are widowed, but while Shabanu feels genuine regret for her husband's death, "She spent some time thinking about how good Rahim had been to her" (*Haveli* 230), Janie can only give the appearance of grief, "Then she starched and ironed her face, forming it into just what people wanted to see . . ." (*Their Eyes* 83). Both Janie and Shabanu fall in love with another man. Janie has a passionate relationship with Tea Cake. Shabanu can only imagine a life with Omar. It appears that he will fulfill his duty and marry his cousin, Leyla. In their conclusions, these novels differ because Shabanu and Janie have reached different stages in their lives. At the end of *Haveli*, in order to escape her husband's enemies, Shabanu must let everyone think she is dead. Another rebirth is about to begin. "And Shahzada

and his sister left Shabanu to mourn her only friend until it was time to decide how she would live her life as a ghost" (*Haveli* 247). In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, although Janie is forced to kill Tea Cake because he has rabies, she realizes that their love will go on. Her searching has come to an end. "Ah done been to de horizon and back and now Ah kin set in mah house and live by comparisons" (*Their Eyes* 182). At the end of each novel, the women return home, Janie to her house in the Florida panhandle and Shabanu to the haveli. Janie keeps the memories of the past in her heart, "Here was peace. She pulled in her horizon like a great fishnet. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder" (*Their Eyes* 184). Shabanu imagines what the future might hold for her and her daughter, Mumtaz: "She lived with hope . . . But now, Shabanu thought, Omar is my heart; and Mumtaz, Mumtaz is my freedom" (*Haveli* 259).

Given the literary complexity of the YA novels used in these pairings and their value as a means of introducing situational archetypes, a strong case can be made for the inclusion of YA literature in high school English courses. These novels do not represent a watering down of the traditional curriculum, but rather a means of enhancing it. As an introduction to situational archetypes, they serve to deepen the students' understanding and appreciation of the classic novels with which they are paired. More importantly, they provide a foundation on which a deeper understanding of all literature can be built.

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#### Appendix A: Three Resources that Suggest Ways to Bring YA Books to Gifted Students

John Bushman and Kay P. Bushman (Haas) in their book *Using Young Adult Literature in the English Classroom* (1997), suggest that "some teachers and many more parents feel that young people who are labeled *gifted* should read only the best literature, and the best translates into reading the classics" (21). The authors point out that the problem with this notion is that while "intellectually gifted students can read the words, phrases, and sentences very well," (21) responding to literature is more complicated. "Success in reading relates strongly to the life experiences the reader brings to the literature" (21).

Joan Kaywell, editor of *Adolescent Literature as a Complement to the Classics* (volume 4, 2000), states that the "classics are often too distant from our students' experiences" (ix), and provides, in the chapters of the four volumes of her series, pairings of young adult titles with works from the school canon.

Sarah K. Herz and Don Gallo, in their book, *From Hinton to Hamlet: Building Bridges Between Young Adult Literature and the Classics* (1996), note that one finds in YA books "the same elements as those in adult novels: a consistent point of view, a significant setting, a well-delineated although relatively simple plot, vivid characterization, realistic and lively dialogue, and an attractive style" (8). They pair young adult with classic texts to illuminate ways of teaching both.

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## HIGH SCHOOL CONNECTIONS

by Ann Wilder and Alan B. Teasley  
Editors, *High School Connections*

### If You Want Resources About YA Literature, This is Your Shopping List (A Resource List for High School Teachers and Librarians)

In our previous annual columns we have focused on recommended YA literature for high school students and on some strategies for incorporating YA books in the high school English classroom. In this column we turn our attention to resources for teachers.

Typically, English teachers have no trouble locating resources about classic (or at least more “canonical”) books and authors, but until relatively recently there was not much available as secondary sources for the study of YA literature. Happily, that situation is changing. In this column, we suggest resources—organizations, Web sites, and print materials—that high school teachers might find useful. All would be appropriate for a high school media center; some of them teachers may want to own. In the case of Web sites, we realize that by the time you read this, the site may be gone. Still, an increasing amount of information is out there—we make no pretense of having done an exhaustive search.

#### First Stop: Join this Organization!

Of course the premiere organization for scholars, mavens, and fans of YA literature is ALAN. You knew we would say that, right? You’re already reading the journal, so you probably agree. Even so, we honestly believe that belonging to the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents/NCTE is still the best way to “get connected” to what’s happening in this often-mercurial corner of our profession. Membership (still only \$15 a year) includes three issues per year of *The ALAN Review*, a helpful journal that contains interviews with authors, both analytical and “how-to” articles by teachers, and dozens of book reviews. And, as they say, if you like the journal, you’ll LOVE the annual workshop held the Monday and Tuesday after NCTE’s fall convention. We admit that we are ALAN Workshop groupies! We love learning about new books, meeting authors, learning from colleagues about their successful teaching strategies, and reveling in a community that doesn’t think we’re weird for reading kids’ books on our own time. There is also a brand new Web site for ALAN (<http://www.alan-ya.org>) and another site (<http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ALAN/>) where many past issues of *The ALAN Review* are available.

One valuable publication that attempts to capture the excitement in this organization is *Two Decades of The ALAN Review* (NCTE, 1999), a compendium of pieces that have appeared in that journal over the years. In the first section of this book, editors Pat Kelly and Bob Small have included in-

terviews with, and articles about, eight key YA authors, including Robert Cormier, Sue Ellen Bridgers, Paul Zindel, and Virginia Hamilton. Part two contains sixteen articles by teachers and scholars about the treatment of various themes and issues in YA literature. The third section contains a history of ALAN by Ted Hipple and reflections by previous editors Alleen Pace Nilsen, W. Geiger Ellis, Arthea Reed, and Leila Christenbury.

#### Heinemann’s Young Adult Literature Series

Under the editorship of Virginia Monseau, Boynton Cook Publishers (Heinemann) has released a series of eight books since 1996 under the heading “Young Adult Literature Series.” In the interest of full disclosure, we note that our own book *Reel Conversations: Reading Films with Young Adults* (1997) is a part of that series, and we modestly offer it as a resource for high school teachers. The final chapters identify “YA films” in five different themes—coming of age, families, romance, belonging, and dreams—and suggest ways to connect these films to YA literature exploring the same theme. Other books in the series that are of particular usefulness to high school teachers include the following.

Isaac, Megan Lynn. (2000). *Heirs to Shakespeare: Reinventing the Bard in Young Adult Literature*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Heinemann.

The two stated purposes of Isaac’s book are to show how the plays of Shakespeare inform many recent YA books and to demonstrate the power of reading the contemporary and classic texts together. As she states in the introduction, “Each may be a good story by itself, but knowing both texts makes them even better. Every new piece of literature has the potential to transform all the art that preceded it” (*Heirs* xi). The first three chapters deal with adaptations and editions of Shakespeare (including picture books) as well as YA books set during the Renaissance. Each of the next six chapters takes a particular Shakespeare play and shows how YA authors have borrowed or adapted certain elements—for example, *Hamlet* and Paterson’s *Bridge to Terabithia*, and *The Tempest* and L’Engle’s *A Wrinkle in Time*. Two final chapters deal with controversial issues in Shakespeare’s *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*, and the Bard’s “lesser taught” comedies and histories. Our prediction is that reading this book will send you back both to the plays and to the YA novels for a fresh look.



Monseau, Virginia. (1996). *Responding to Young Adult Literature*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Heinemann.

Monseau's book speaks directly to those high school teachers who want to teach young adult literature, but don't know exactly what to do with it once their students have read the book. Monseau presents a passionate rationale for using young adult literature in the high school classroom and then demonstrates ways to use young adult novels with high school students in basic level classes as well as in Advanced Placement classes. She describes a variety of assignments and provides sample student responses.

Monseau, Virginia R., and Gary M. Salvner. (2000). *Reading Their World: The Young Adult Novel in the Classroom*, Second Edition. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Heinemann.

*Reading Their World* is a collection of essays for teachers, both experienced and pre-service teachers, on the rationale for and the use of young adult literature in the high school classroom. Selections include essays from authors M.E. Kerr, Will Hobbs, and Sue Ellen Bridgers on why and how they write for young adults. Teachers will find particularly useful the variety of methods for incorporating YA books into the English curriculum—from connecting YA literature with the classics, to shaping classroom discussion, to finding time to include YA literature. Other chapters include information on gender and multicultural issues, sports books, teaching television, and handling censorship issues. This book comes with a CD-ROM containing a searchable database of over 1,700 reviews of YA novels.

#### Works on Individual Authors

Twayne Publishing Company, noted for its United States Author Series, has for several years published book-length critical studies of YA authors, including Robert Cormier, Mildred Taylor, and Virginia Hamilton. Many of these are still in print; other such works are recently published and forthcoming from Scarecrow Press, under the editorship of Patty Campbell.

#### Books for You

NCTE's *Books for You* Series is an important resource from NCTE which appears every three years and lists current titles of fiction and non fiction books recommended for high school students. The latest edition of the series is *Books for You: An Annotated Booklist for Senior High*, (NCTE 2001). This edition provides an annotated list of over 1,000 books for young adults published during the years 1997, 1998, or 1999. Categories such as "Fantasy," "Family Relationships," "Poetry," and "War and the Holocaust" aid teachers and students in locating books for class study or pleasure reading. The appendices also are a great resource for teachers as they give lists of award-winning YA books for 1997-1999 and URLs for awards and booklists. Teachers looking for multicultural books will want to consult the list of titles in Appendix C, where books are listed by author and then cross-referenced by category and culture, race, or geographic area.

#### Other Books

Atwell, Nancie. (1998). *In the Middle: New Understandings About Writing, Reading, and Learning*. Second Edition. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Heinemann.

Don't let the title fool you. Nancie Atwell's ideas are equally applicable to high school teaching as to middle school. If you're teaching one of the "big" English courses (I-IV, AP, etc.), you may not have the time to devote to reading workshop that you would prefer. Still, there is no more compelling image than Atwell's vision of a classroom designed to support students' development as readers. Also, check out Appendix L, in which her students recommend hundreds of books that run the gamut from Francesca Lia Block's *Weetzie Bat* to Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Bodart, Joni Richards. *The World's Best Thin Books*. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2000.

The subtitle of this book, *What to Read When Your Book Report is Due Tomorrow*, gives no doubt as to the intended audience for this book. Teachers, however, will find this a handy reference volume; in fact, the author suggests ways teachers and librarians can use the book. In this volume books are divided into three categories: thinnest, thinner, and thin. No book listed has more than 200 pages. Beginning teachers and teachers who are looking to learn more about young adult literature will want to add *The World's Best Thin Books* to their libraries. The majority of the books listed were published prior to 1990, but an appendix lists titles of more recent books. Other appendices give students tips for writing book reports and give teachers suggestions for preparing book talks.

Gallo, Donald R.(Editor). (1990). *Speaking for Ourselves: Autobiographical Sketches by Notable Authors of Books for Young Adults*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

\_\_\_\_\_. (1993). *Speaking for Ourselves, Too: More Autobiographical Sketches by Notable Authors of Books for Young Adults*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

These two volumes contain a total of 176 autobiographical sketches by noted YA authors. Each is two or three pages long and includes a photograph and a list of all books written up to the date of publication. The authors generally describe their early lives, their beginnings as writers, and what they like to read. If your students display curiosity about the lives of the authors they read, these sketches are a great starting point for them.

Kaywell, Joan F. (Editor). (1993). *Adolescent Literature as a Complement to the Classics*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon.

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*In this column, we suggest resources—organizations, Web sites, and print materials—that high school teachers might find useful.*

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\_\_\_\_\_. (2000). *Adolescent Literature as a Complement to the Classics, Volume 4*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, Inc.

As the proliferation of volumes in this series indicates, these books are popular with teachers! In each chapter, a noted teacher/scholar of YA literature presents a unit plan that integrates the study of at least one "classic" title (such as *Oliver Twist*, *My Antonia*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *Our Town*, or *Pride and Prejudice*—to name just a few in Volume 4) with related YA novels. The connection may be one of theme ("Search for the American Dream"), subject matter ("Young and Black in America"), or genre ("Biographies in the Classroom"). The lessons themselves are models of integration—not just of classic and contemporary literature, but also of literature study and composition, of English and other content areas, and of direct instruction and collaborative learning. Appendices include separate bibliographies for the classic and YA works as well as a topic and title index. It's very easy for a teacher to approach these books and find lessons related to particular themes, titles, or literary elements.

Trelease, Jim. (2001). *The Read-Aloud Handbook*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition. New York: Penguin Books.

The audience for this bestseller is both parents and educators. For teachers who read aloud to their students or who would like to read aloud to their students, *The Read-Aloud Handbook* is an essential reference work. Trelease provides a rationale for reading aloud to young people and gives powerful statistics on the results of reading and not reading to children. For the uninitiated, he outlines a program for reading aloud and offers tips for reading aloud successfully. The annotated bibliography contains hundreds of titles of poems and books that make good read-alouds. The majority of the books listed are more appropriate for elementary and middle school students than for high school students, but the book, taken as a whole, is the best guide we have found on reading aloud to students of all ages.

#### Internet Resources

##### Amazon.com ([www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com))

For teens, teachers, or anyone who reads young adult literature, Amazon.com's teen section is a treasure. To access this page, select "Search Books" then on the next page that appears, click on "Teens" in the left-hand column. Here readers will find links to lists of favorite teen books from Amazon.com's editors, links to prize-winning books, and lists of top sellers. As with its adult pages, Amazon.com provides editorial and reader reviews of books and offers readers suggestions for other titles by listing books that "Customers who bought this book also bought . . ." Under "Listmania!" Amazon.com also includes lists of certain customers' favorite books, invites teens to add their lists to the site, and provides specific directions for building and submitting lists. You can also subscribe to a monthly e-mail newsletter specifically about teen books. Whether you buy or just browse, Amazon.com is arguably the most up-to-date resource for finding YA books.

##### Children's Literature Comprehensive Database (CLCD) ([www.clcd.odyssey.com/welcome.html](http://www.clcd.odyssey.com/welcome.html) or [www.childrenslit.com](http://www.childrenslit.com))

This resource, available after a 30-day free trial by subscription, provides 600,000 catalog records of children's and adolescent literature. Users can easily search the database for over 50,000 reviews of children's and adolescent books, including reviews found in *The ALAN Review*, *VOYA*, *Kirkus Review*, and *KLIATT*. Approximately 1,000 reviews are added monthly.

##### NoveList (EBSCO Publishing)

This Internet-based resource, available to school libraries by subscription, gives teachers, librarians, and students access to a database of over 75,000 novels. Students access book titles by choosing one or more of four levels—adult, young adult, children's, or easy—and then searching the database by matching a "favorite author" or "favorite title." Those interested in a certain type of book choose "Describe a plot," "Browse subjects," or "Explore fiction." NoveList also provides reviews or descriptions for approximately half of the books listed. Other features include resources and activities for high school English teachers, help in preparing book talks, interviews with authors, and notes for book discussion leaders. The Fall 2001 release has been revised by Michael Cart, young adult literature scholar and teacher at UCLA. For a free trial, contact EBSCO Publishing at 1-800-653-2726, and ask to speak to a sales representative.

##### YABooks.about.com (<http://yabooks.about.com>)

This site features interviews with authors, reader reviews, a chat room, and "Mini-Webs" that provide in-depth information on YA authors, excerpts from new novels, and examples of television show and movie/book tie-ins. Links send readers to lists of award-winning books, banned books, and genres of books as well as provide information for librarians, teachers, parents, and writers. Contests give participants the opportunity to win copies of books and other prizes. The audience for the site is young adults, but any fans of YA literature will find something to love about this web site.

##### YABO: Young Adult Books Online

(<http://yabonline.com> or <http://yabo.thinkforge.net>)

In addition to selling books, YABO provides interviews with authors and reviews of YA books. Visitors to the site are given the opportunity both to join YABO and receive periodic e-mail messages as well as to write reviews and to vote on "best" YA books. The site also provides visitors with news about the YA community. For example, information about the NCTE Annual Convention and ALAN Workshop, complete with a preview of YA authors at both the convention and workshop can be accessed at YABO.

##### Authors4Teens ([www.authors4teens.com](http://www.authors4teens.com))

This by-subscription site is Greenwood Publishing Group's entry into the Web market. Editor Don Gallo talks with popular YA authors about their art and their lives, and provides photographs and other memorabilia from the interviewed

authors' lives. The tone is conversational and intimate, the information engaging. See a partial authors4teens interview that Gallo conducts with YA author Randy Powell excerpted in this issue of *The ALAN Review*.

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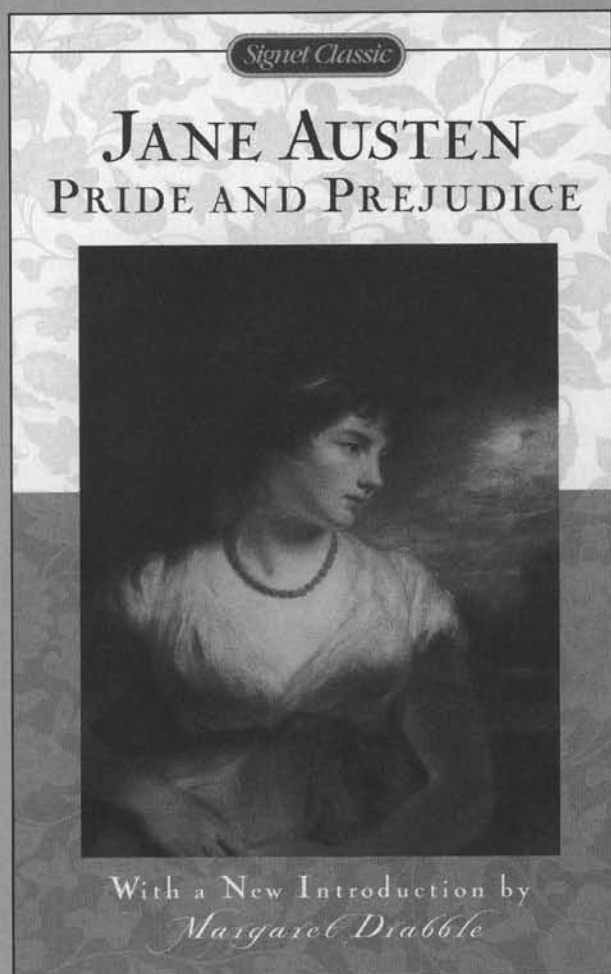


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*Spellbound* by Janet McDonald  
Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2001, 144 pp., \$16.00

Teenage Marriage/Dropouts  
ISBN: 0-374-37140-7

In this short, moving, fast-paced and often humorous story, 16-year-old Raven Jefferson, an unwed teenage mother and high school dropout “existing” in the housing projects of Brooklyn, is bored with her daily routine and fears the prospect of facing low-paying, dead-end jobs. Encouraged by her college-graduate sister, her mother—herself an unwed mother—and her likeable, loud-mouthed best friend, Aisha—who is expecting her second child and has no real future—Raven enters the “Spelt Success” program.

Before dropping out of high school in her senior year, Raven was a good student—even a bookish one—who planned to attend college herself. Winning the program’s spelling bee is her way of out the projects, since the prize is an eight-week college preparatory course and four-year college scholarship.

Readers will admire and sympathize with determined Raven, laughing and cringing at Aisha’s antics, and wondering if Raven and the well-meaning and guilt-ridden boy who fathered her child will have a future together. However, most of all, readers will be left with hope!

Bill Mollineaux  
Granby, Connecticut

*Zazoo* by Richard Mosher  
Clarion Books, 2001, 256 pp., \$16.00

Vietnam War/Family Relationships  
ISBN: 0-618-13534-0

Almost 14 years old, *Zazoo* is really “French on the inside” and “Vietnamese on the outside.” Adopted by an older WWII French war hero after a land mine killed her natural parents, *Zazoo* has never questioned anything about her life with her new father, Grand Pierre. She knows that her father fought in WWII, but not in Vietnam. Suddenly, a strange boy riding a bicycle into her village one morning asks a question that causes her to change her views of the people she’s known all her life. As *Zazoo* struggles to reconcile the actions of her friends and family during WWII, the Vietnam War, and their life now, she reveals three love stories at differing stages, one of them her very own.

Woven in and around the story is the healing property of nature and art. *Zazoo* and Grand Pierre’s shared affinity for water and poetry pulls them together to form a tight and loving bond that enables her to cope with her father’s eventual advancing age and memory loss. This book’s tender strength rests in how the author, Richard Mosher, manages to take seemingly unconnected incidents and interweave them into one meaningful and beautiful whole. As *Zazoo* discovers, the past is never over; it simply informs and colors the present and the future.

Mariana Van Meter  
Scottsdale, Arizona

*Til Tomorrow* by John Donahue  
Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2001, 165 pp., \$16.00

Growing-up/Historical Fiction  
ISBN: 0-374-37580-1

The son of an army officer, 12-year-old Terrence “O.B.” O’Brien has logged a lot of miles in his young life. The family’s latest move has taken them to 1961 France, where they must begin to build a brand new life.

O. B. is a self-conscious adolescent who longs for the support of a peer group. In his quest for meaningful friendships, O. B. finds himself caught between many worlds—that of the army base and the surrounding village, and between a very popular set of local boys, and a faithful, but unconventional companion, whom he fears may tarnish his unblemished reputation.

Set against the backdrop of the building of the Berlin Wall just after the close of WW II, *Til Tomorrow* situates O. B.’s personal struggles within the context of an ever-evolving and often frightening world situation. Readers will relate to O. B.’s struggles, as well as those of the other well-developed characters in this engaging read.

Patricia Crawford  
Orlando, Florida

Young Adult Books  
In Review  
Recently Published Titles  
Jeff Kaplan, Editor  
3x5 inches to “Clip & File”

T • H • E  
ALAN  
REVIEW

<p><i>Don't Think Twice</i> by Ruth Pennebaker Henry Holt, 2001, 262 pp., \$6.95</p> <p>Coming-of-age/Teenage Mother ISBN: 0-80950-6729-9</p> <p>In 1967, Anne Harper, a cynical yet sensitive 17-year-old, spends the last months of her pregnancy in a Midwest home for unwed mothers. Through her first person narrative, we see Anne come to care very deeply about the baby that she once regarded as a "growth," or more bluntly, a malignancy. Along the way, she teases out anguished stories of girls like Grace, who was raped by her father, and Cheryl, who was seduced by her pastor, and then disowned by her family for her "sin." The survival and coping instincts of the young mothers elevate this novel from overwrought melodrama to serious drama.</p> <p>Set in the 1960s, <i>Don't Think Twice</i> reflects a shift in attitude toward unwed, adolescent pregnancy, including the exacting prohibitions against the use of alcohol and tobacco. Anne's narrative of her journey towards self-discovery and maturity is packed with powerful, incisive, and perceptive descriptions of who she is, and what she wants to eventually become. Moreover, the author takes great pains to show the reactions of all the unwed teenage mothers in this novel as they slowly begin to realize that the burden and responsibility for their pregnancy are ultimately theirs to bear. Truly, this novel is not a romantic picture of the truth. Instead, <i>Don't Think Twice</i> provides an unvarnished version of the truth and a great forum for class discussion.</p> <p>Margaret J. Ford Campbell, Ohio</p>	<p><i>Private Captain: A Story of Gettysburg</i> by Marty Crisp Philomel Books, 2001, 293 pp., \$18.99</p> <p>Historical Fiction/Civil War ISBN: 0-399-23577-9</p> <p><i>Private Captain</i> is a captivating but brutally realistic story of famous Civil War battle of Gettysburg. The novel follows 12-year-old Ben Reynolds and his faithful dog, Captain, as they search for Ben's older brother, who is fighting for the Union Army in Pennsylvania. Author Marty Crisp has included many historical facts about the America's most famous battle, including authentic period language, and minute details about dress, food, and daily activities.</p> <p><i>Private Captain</i> explores family relationships as they endure the hardships of war and destruction. Seen through the eyes of a young and impressionable boy, this haunting story examines the inevitable futility of conflict that results in battle and the loss of human life.</p> <p>Beautifully written, this can be a most effective work to be used in conjunction with a study of the Civil War.</p> <p>Patricia Cleary Peninsula, Ohio</p>
<p><i>Of Sound Mind</i> by Jean Ferris Farrar, Straus, &amp; Giroux, 2001, 215 pp., \$16.00</p> <p>Realistic Fiction/Deafness ISBN: 0-374-35580-0</p> <p>Theo, the hearing son of deaf parents and the big brother of Jeremy who is also deaf, feels the strain of responsibility as his family's main link to the hearing world. Theo's mother, Palma, is a famous sculptor who demands Theo act as a pseudo-parent for Jeremy. As a high school senior, Theo pines for the freedom and stimulation of college, but is torn by his seemingly indispensable family role.</p> <p>Author Jean Ferris allows readers to discover the psychological underpinnings of family dynamics as Theo confronts his growing resentment towards his family. The pressure on Theo reaches insurmountable proportions when his dad becomes ill, and his mother retreats to her artist's studio. Ultimately, his new-found friend, Ivy, helps him negotiate shifting family roles. Although this book offers many explicitly stated lessons that can feel didactic, the themes related to family roles, deafness, and nurturing are so intricate that readers will welcome the complexity and inspiration within.</p> <p>Sherron Killingsworth Roberts Orlando, Florida</p>	<p><i>The Time Warp Trio: See You Later, Alligator</i> by Jon Scieszka The Penguin Group, 2000, 87 pp., \$14.99</p> <p>Fantasy/Adventure ISBN: 0-670-89340-4</p> <p>This is the next book in a series about three time traveling boys—Joe, Sam, and Fred—who find adventure by falling into a magic "Book." This story transports this trio to ancient Rome where the boys find themselves enrolled in a gladiator school.</p> <p>While trying to stay out of fights with various gladiators, the young trio is desperately trying to find the "Book," which will also transport them back home. When the boys enlist the help of a professor, the boys are, unfortunately, promptly captured. Soon, the boys and the professor are scheduled to fight, but the time warp trio cons the Emperor into letting them perform a wrestling match instead, which meets the approval of the ancient Roman spectators.</p> <p>Finally, the boys sneak away from the gladiator arena and hide in the Temple of Vesta to avoid the gladiators who are searching for them. In time, an ancient Roman priestess finds them, and returns their "Book," and the famed trio returns safely home. As Roman tradition says, it was foretold that time travelers would return to claim their missing volume on the first day of the ancient Roman games – and so it happens. Scieszka has written another of one his satirical children's stories – one appreciated by students of all ages.</p> <p>Barbara Wilcox Merritt Island, Florida</p>



<p><i>The Ghost and Mrs. Hobbs</i> by Cynthia De Felice Farrar, Straus, &amp; Giroux, 2001, 180 pp., \$16.00</p> <p>Supernatural/Friendship ISBN: 0-374-38046-5</p> <p>Fresh off the case of <i>The Ghost of Fossil Glen</i>, 12-year-old Allie Nichols finds herself summoned again to come to the aid of a ghost. When Allie's teacher assigns an interview for Elders' Day, she is compelled by a handsome ghost to talk with Mrs. Hobbs - the scarred, shriveled and obviously evil cafeteria lady. During the interview, Allie catches a glimpse of compassion emanating from this strange woman, but is interrupted when suddenly, her reporter's notepad spontaneously combusts and the school is evacuated. As more unexpected and unexplained fires result in public panic, Allie and Mrs. Hobbs are plunged into a sea of trouble.</p> <p>Amidst this turmoil, Allie's relationship with her old friend Dub becomes more complicated as she struggles with feelings of jealousy. With Dub's help, and then with the help of her father and her little brother, Allie learns that appearances can often be deceiving and that ghosts cannot always be trusted.</p> <p>Cynthia DeFelice makes frequent references to the prequel <i>The Ghost of Fossil Glen</i>, so readers might enjoy reading that book first. Nonetheless, DeFelice's characters are warm, thoughtful, and courageous, and her language simply and easily understood, conveying a sense of suspense that will leave young readers eager to follow Allie on any adventure.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Moncia McEnery Vergennes, Vermont</p>	<p><i>All the Way Home</i> by Patricia Reilly Griff Delacorte, 2001, 169 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Friendship/Loss ISBN: 0-385-32209-7</p> <p>Mariel, a sixth grader, works hard at not letting her polio-deformed leg define her. She lives happily in Brooklyn with her adoptive mother, although she yearns to know the whereabouts of her biological mother. Suddenly, though, Brick, the son of a family friend, is living with Mariel and her family, because Brick's parents can no longer support themselves on their family farm. At first, Mariel fears Brick but is gradually surprised, and pleased when Brick doesn't consider her different because of her "damaged" leg. In turn, Mariel sees the sadness and embarrassment beneath Brick's pretend bravado and indifference to his parents' poverty.</p> <p>Brick's demeanor belies his loneliness, and soon, he announces he must return to his home, Windy Hill, to help his parents and elderly neighbors harvest their apple crop. Coincidentally, Mariel wants to return to Windy Hill where as a child she was hospitalized when she contracted polio. There, she hopes to locate her mother.</p> <p>Mariel's determination helps both her and Brick get what they want as together, they learn the power of strength and love to come from unexpected places. <i>All the Way Home</i> is a gentle story of the unfolding of a special friendship, the building of trust, and the sharing of vulnerabilities.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Diana Mitchell Williamston, Michigan</p>
<p><i>Tender</i> by Valerie Hobbs Frances Foster Books, 2001, 245 pp., \$18.00</p> <p>Overcoming Fears ISBN: 0-374-37397-3</p> <p>Young adult readers will enjoy following Liv from New York to California as she moves from a life with Grandmother to one with a father she has never known. Author Hobbs tells of Liv's "growth to awareness" story beginning with a description of "life with Gran."</p> <p>When Liv was born, her mother died and her father gave her to her grandmother. The readers meet Liv just as her grandmother dies. Suddenly, Liv realizes that her father, Mark Tapert, is the only family she now has, and she knows she must now go to California and live with him and his new girlfriend, Samantha. During the story, Liv and Samantha form a friendship, but her father remains very distant. And above all, Liv can't forgive him for abandoning her when her mother died. Then, one day, life comes full circle when she finds herself literally with her father's life in her hands.</p> <p>Hobbs creates a realistic memory for her readers as they watch Liv determine her father's fate. It is an engaging read for adolescents who are struggling with their own tenuous family relationships.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Jeanne Gerlach Arlington, Texas</p>	<p><i>A Face First</i> by Priscilla Cummings Dutton Children's Books, 2001, 137 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Physical Disabilities ISBN: 0-525-46522-7</p> <p>When Kelley Brennan awakens in the hospital burn center, unable to feel her fingers on her face, she knows that her life has been changed forever. In <i>A Face First</i>, Cummings describes the physical rehabilitation Kelley endures, culminating with her leaving the hospital wearing a plastic mask.</p> <p>The novel also portrays Kelley's emotional turmoil - from seeing herself in the mirror, to accepting the mask, to forgiving her mother for running the red light and causing the accident that cost Kelley several fingers and half her face. Through the weeks of skin grafts, dressing changes, physical therapy, visits, letters, and phone calls from family and friends, Kelley grows to accept herself, realizing she's still Kelley on the inside.</p> <p>This is a well-told story about a very real-to-life trauma; it reminds us that all of us, no matter how strong and full of life, are only a moment away from losing everything. Young readers will enjoy the strong emphasis on the power of family and friends to rescue those in need.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Lisa Winkler South Orange, New Jersey</p>

<p><i>A Group of One</i> by Rachna Gilmore Henry Holt, 2001, 184 pp., Unspecified price</p> <p>Family/Cultural Differences ISBN: 0-8050-6475-3</p> <p>Tara Mehta is made to feel an outcast in her social studies class when her teacher, Mr. Tolly, asks what her native language is. Tara was born and reared in Canada and resents the implication that she is somehow "foreign." The intensity of these feelings increases when Tara's grandmother comes to visit from India. As Tara begins to learn about her grandmother's youth and adolescence, she gains not only an understanding of her cultural heritage as an child of India, but she becomes even more determined to confront the implied racism of her teacher and some of her classmates.</p> <p><i>A Group of One</i> explores a culture not often represented in young adult literature. The information about the Quit India Movement and other historical references make this book a natural tie into world history classes. Readers will appreciate how the issues are confronted with brutal honesty. Above all, they will enjoy reading Tara's up and down experiences of adolescence, from first love, to embarrassing parents, and more.</p> <p>Teri Lesesne Huntsville, Texas</p>	<p><i>A Question of Will</i> by Lynne Kositsky Roussan Publishers, 2000, 141 pp., \$5.95</p> <p>Historical Fiction/Shakespeare ISBN: 1-896184-66-9</p> <p>The premise that Edward de Vere, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford, wrote the works of William Shakespeare is demonstrated through the adventures of modern day teen Perin Willoughby. During a class trip to the Globe Theater, she loses her way, and suddenly travels through time and enters Elizabethan England. Unconcerned and unfazed, Perin finds herself auditioning at the original Globe, becoming an Elizabethan actress, and surprisingly, delivering de Vere's plays to Shakespeare, himself, who subsequently pens in his name on those now famous plays.</p> <p>Although historically implausible, younger readers will enjoy Perin's intrepid escapades and her ribald impressions of her surroundings. Yet, Perin is a narrator, rather than a character, and the Elizabethan era and its people are depicted solely by her slangy, less than sophisticated attitude.</p> <p>Nevertheless, when Perin returns to contemporary time, and discovers that her textbooks have credited de Vere's writings, she realizes the hidden purpose to her fanciful adventure. In conclusion, an author's note asserts the validity of de Vere's authorship, but as Perin's experiences fail to conclude credible and objective sources, readers have scant reason to believe that anyone but Shakespeare wrote the great plays.</p> <p>Lisa Hazlett Vermillion, South Dakota</p>
<p><i>One True Friend</i> by Joyce Hanson Clarion Books, 2001, 160 pp., \$14.00</p> <p>Family/Relationships ISBN: 0-395-84983-7</p> <p>After his mother and father die, Amir is placed in many different foster homes. But now he has landed in a good place. Grace and Alvin Smith are good foster parents, but Amir has trouble opening up to them. In addition, he is living with his younger brother Ronald.</p> <p>Still, Amir is troubled because he cannot find his other brothers and sisters. Luckily, in the end, Amir finds someone to whom he can truly open his heart: Doris, a friend who lives in his old Bronx neighborhood.</p> <p>Much of <i>One True Friend</i> is the exchange of letters between Amir and Doris, sharing all of their feelings and concerns about their respective environments. Eventually, Amir and her foster parents, the Smiths, are successful in locating the rest of the family, thus providing another problem for Amir: with whom should he live?</p> <p>Novelist Jane Hanson provides strong characters and a letter writing format that is carried out effectively. Above all, the plot moves because the reader becomes engrossed in the characters' revealing and engaging letters. This is a companion book to <i>The Gift-Giver</i> and <i>Yellow Bird and Me</i>, and it is best suited to the younger student in the young adult range.</p> <p>John Bushman Overland Park, Kansas</p>	<p><i>Anne Frank and Me</i> by Cherie Bennett and Jeff Gottesfeld G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2001, 291 pp., \$18.99</p> <p>Holocaust ISBN: 0-399-23329-6</p> <p>Boy-crazy and blasé about school, tenth grader Nicole Burns doesn't finish her assigned reading of <i>The Diary of Anne Frank</i>, and only half listens to her English class's guest speaker, a Holocaust survivor. Then, on a tour of a Holocaust exhibit, Nicole falls and suffers a concussion, which sends her back in time so she becomes Nicole Bernhardt, a Jewish girl living in Paris in 1942. With familiar-looking people from her 21<sup>st</sup> Century life taking on the roles of family and friends, a confused Nicole suffers the atrocities of the Holocaust with anti-Semitic laws, arrests, physical abuse, concentration camps, and the gas chamber – plus a personal encounter with Anne Frank herself. Was this real-life experience only a dream?</p> <p>Although some serious readers of the Holocaust may find this story too contrived and trifling, other young adults may be hooked by the present and past connection between the lives of today's students and those teenagers who had lived and died during this tragic event.</p> <p>Kay Park Haas Ottawa, Kansas</p>



<p><i>The Wish</i> by Gail Carson Levine HarperCollins, 2000, 197 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Popularity/Friendship ISBN: 0- 06-027900-1</p> <p>Wilma Sturtz, an eighth grader, feels rejected and ignored after her two friends move. She has trouble making new friends, until one day she gives an unusual elderly woman her seat on the subway. Impressed by Wilma's manners, the old woman asks young Wilma "if she could have anything, what would she want?" And then, just as suddenly, she grants Wilma her wish: to be the most popular kid at Claverford, her exclusive, private school. Instantly, Wilma is the center of attention. Every girl wants to be her friend, and every boy wants to take her the graduation night dance. Wilma, though, dreads graduation, because that is day this wonderful "wish" ends. In the end, though, Wilma learns to accept herself for who she is, and not because of the 'magic spell.'</p> <p>Preteens will enjoy this story, which explores the real meaning of popularity, and makes it clear that friendship can never be forced. Above all, it taps into the deep-seated desire of every preteen to be liked and accepted.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Deena Wilma Newman Rockledge, Florida</p>	<p><i>Beatnik Rutabgas From Beyond the Stars</i> by Quentin Dodd Farrar, Straus, &amp; Giroux, 2001, 216 pp., \$17.00</p> <p>Science Fiction/Humor ISBN: 0-374-30515-3</p> <p>Walter Nutria, bored with high school, enters the spaceship that suddenly has mysteriously dropped to Earth. Little does he know, though, that he has been sought out by the Lirgonians, aliens dressed like middle-aged men in footie pajamas, to be their commander in a war against the Wotwots, who look like rutabagas.</p> <p>The Wotwots have had the same idea, however, and recruit Walter's friend Yselle Meridien as their commander.</p> <p>Neither wins. Instead, the two warring alien parties, the Lirgonians and the Wotwots, end up with their spaceships stuck together, and they have to go for help. As Walter and Yselle try to convince the space aliens they have no need to fight, the Space Mice from Galaxy Nine steal the stuck spaceships, and the Wotwots and the Lirgonians have to team up together to get them back.</p> <p>This book won't appeal to the general reader, but the sophisticated, lighthearted reader who enjoys science fiction – of all sorts – will enjoy the humor in this crazy, fanciful story.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Connie Russell Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin</p>
<p><i>A Diamond in the Dust</i> by Carla Johnson Dial Books, 2001, 197 pp., \$17.90</p> <p>History/Coming of Age ISBN:0-8037-2511-6</p> <p>The coal mines kill, and Katy's father, brother, and boyfriend are all deep in the mines everyday. Yet, 16-year-old Katy wants more, and her teacher, Miss Maplewhite, and her brother, Tim, see her potential to be an educated and successful woman. In the early 1900s in Illinois, though, women, including Katy's mother, married young, had children, and waited every day in fear of the siren that cuts through the sky, shrieking death of their coal miner husbands.</p> <p>Katy inspires readers as she struggles to break away from traditional expectations to achieve new dreams. Teenage readers especially will connect with Katy as they themselves search for ways to become who they want to be in the face of expectations from society, their family, and their friends.</p> <p>The characters in this book – from Katy's stoic mother to the young, arrogant boss at the coal mine – are vivid and believable in their honest struggles with a changing world.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Susanne Nobles Fredericksburg, Virginia</p>	<p><i>What Became of Her</i> by M. E. Kerr HarperCollins, 2000, 244 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Interpersonal Relationships ISBN: 0-06-028435-8</p> <p>Serenity is a small town where everyone knows each other. Rosalind Slaymaster, a wealthy eccentric, returns to Serenity with her leather doll companion Peale and her teenage niece Julie to get revenge on those that wronged her in the past.</p> <p>As a teenager, young Rose was taunted for her stutter, her innocence, her work at the Dare funeral home, and her mentally handicapped father. As the returning Rosalind Slaymaster, she is tough and demanding – even taunting her teenage daughter, Julie, someone she has adopted to keep her life-size doll company.</p> <p>Once in town, a Edgar Tobbit befriends Julie when his mother is asked by Mrs. Slaymaster to do the astrology chart. Through Edgar, Julie is introduced to Neal Craft. Together, the three of them have a close and special relationship. Soon, Edgar realizes a connection between Neal's family and Mrs. Slaymaster. The result is Julie's desire for revenge on her mean-spirited adoptive mother.</p> <p>Fans of Kerr will recognize the familiar themes in the struggles between the haves and the have-nots, the interwoven stories of two generations, and the cruelty of teens to their peers.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Michelle Rich Oviedo, Florida</p>



<p><i>Racing the Past</i> by Sis Deans Henry Holt &amp; Company, 2001, 151 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Family/Violence ISBN: 0-8050-6635-7</p> <p>Although it's been two months since their father's fatal car accident, Ricky Gordon and his little brother, Matt, are still haunted by memories of violent beatings and loud, hurtful rants. And it doesn't help that the kids at school, as well as the whole town, will not let Ricky forget that the Gordon name is bad news. To avoid all the taunting and fighting after school and on the bus, Ricky takes to the road as a distance runner each morning and afternoon.</p> <p>Although Ricky realizes he cannot run away from his past, the strength he finds within himself, during his long treks, helps him understand the he need not live his life under the his father's dark shadow. The disturbing flashback scenes of family violence are tempered with riveting accounts of long distance running through the Maine countryside. Finally, the author's beautifully crafted descriptions of character and setting make up for some less than authentic sounding dialogue.</p> <p>Rob Linne Garden City, New York</p>	<p><i>A Long Way Home</i> by Nancy Price Graff Clarion Books, 2001, 208 pp., \$15.00</p> <p>Vietnam War/Family Relationships ISBN: 0-618-12042-4</p> <p>Riley, Kate, Stan, Mary, Clair, Sam, and Sharon – are all the main characters except Sharon. That's because Sharon is Sharon, Vermont, where the 4<sup>th</sup> of July parade takes 15 minutes to go the three blocks through town. The town where Riley and his widowed mom move to live in his grandfather's old and falling down home. It also the town that has NOTHING except a drunken war hero, Stan, and a vegetarian conscientious objector, Sam, an old high school friend of his mother's.</p> <p>Riley is resentful of Sam, especially when he finds out that Sam is a pacifist who refused to fight in the Vietnam War. Sam has a hard time accepting Riley's resentment. Riley is pulled against understanding why Sam, the draft dodger, is as he is, and tolerated by the village folk, while gentle Stan, the town drunk, is shunned. In fact, everything in this nothing place seems to go against Riley, even his Civil War hero great, great, great grandfather who was on the wrong side at Gettysburg. Eventually, Reilly develops an avid interest in the Vietnam War, and begrudgingly develops a relationship with Sam, though he cannot accept what Sam did.</p> <p>This is a coming-of-age story with the characters living through and beyond the Vietnam War, and its ensuing years of political unrest.</p> <p>C. Anne Webb St. Louis, Missouri</p>
<p><i>Raising the Shades</i> by Doug Wilhelm Farrar, Straus, &amp; Giroux, 2001, 181 pp., \$16.00</p> <p>Alcoholism/Family Relationships ISBN: 0-374-36178-9</p> <p>Casey Butterfield is 13 years old, in seventh grade, and his life is going rapidly downhill. His parents are divorced, and his mother and sister have moved to another state. His father comes home at night, and drinks himself into either a rage, or just plain stupor.</p> <p>To help matters, Casey finds solace in his good friends Oscar and Tara, but his father's ugly and drunken behavior is terribly threatening to his friendships. To his rescue comes his Aunt Jolie, who wants to arrange an intervention to confront Casey's troubled father with his destructive behavior. Casey isn't sure that's the right thing to do.</p> <p>Above all, Casey feels trapped, and he sees no viable way to deal with his problems. With the adults around him offering conflicting advice, Casey has to find his own path though his difficulties.</p> <p>This is a book that deals with alcoholism and dysfunctional family relationships in a clear, strong, and realistic way. <i>Raising the Shades</i> is not only readable and entertaining in its own right, but it also offers bibliotherapeutic value for trained teachers and counselors.</p> <p>June Harris Sierra Vista, Arizona</p>	<p><i>Equinox</i> by Monte Killingsworth Henry Holt &amp; Company, 2001, 128 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Coming of Age/Family Relationships ISBN: 0-8050-6153-3</p> <p>Autumn believes she has the perfect life on small Douglas Island, where her intimate relationships with the weather, the landscape and the island's few inhabitants are deftly described by novelist Monte Killingsworth. Although her mother works on a larger nearby island, and is only home on weekends, she and her father are very close.</p> <p>Now, that she is 14 years old, Autumn's father decides they should all move to the larger island, presumably so she can have more educational opportunities. As Autumn fights to stay on Douglas Island and keep her world intact, she discovers a devastating secret about her mother, and the real reason her father wants to move. Soon, she begins to question all that had seemed certain in life. However, in time, Autumn discovers that she can move on through difficult times and changes in life, and still remain close to the people she loves.</p> <p>Killingsworth artfully shows that honesty between parents and children is essential. Though Autumn, readers see that often the only choice we have in difficult situations is how we choose to deal with unchangeable circumstances.</p> <p>Susanne L. Johnston Menomonie, Wisconsin</p>

*Down the Yukon* by Will Hobbs  
HarperCollins, 2001, 193 pp., \$15.95

Adventure/Historical Fiction  
ISBN: 0-688-17472-8

In this sequel to *Jason's Gold*, the Hawthorn brothers are now successful lumber mill owners/operators in Dawson City, Canada. Ethan, Jason's brother, is tricked into boxing the former British champion. In a brutal fight, Ethan wins, but his new notoriety changes his attitude. Ethan eventually loses the lumber mill by drunkenly signing a document which gives up his rightful ownership.

Jason and his love, Jamie, decide to participate in a great race down the Yukon, the prize money to be used to buy back the mill. Their adventurous trip is full of danger from nature's forces, the river, and Donner, a contestant in the race who is the man who tricked Ethan into signing away the lumber mill.

This is a wonderful romantic story, supported by Hobb's careful historical and background research. *Down the Yukon* depicts an accurate portrayal of this time in history, one to be enjoyed by readers of historical fiction.

Edgar H. Thompson  
Emory, Virginia

*Hurry Freedom: African-Americans in Gold Rush California* by Jerry Stanley  
Crown Publishers, 2000, 86 pp., \$18.95

Biography  
ISBN 0-517-800894-2

In the heart of Gold Rush, California, African-American entrepreneur Mifflin Gibbs established a successful commercial business. In this biography, we experience through Gibbs' eyes the struggle to succeed in an area known to have been prejudiced against African-Americans, and, along the way, see in vivid detail elements of Gibbs' day-to-day life. We accompany him in his interactions, from employers to fellow merchants to those he helped through his philanthropy and his role in promoting civil rights.

Gibbs' story—he went on to earn a law degree and be elected as a City Judge in Little Rock, Arkansas, and serve as a United States Ambassador to Madagascar—is well-told. With rich narrative and historical photographs and illustrations, the author paints a portrait of the Gold Rush Era, of race and relations during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and especially of Gibbs, whose frustrations and triumphs will touch all who read about his life and times.

Kristen Sternberg  
DeLand, Florida

*This Side of Paradise* by Steven L. Layne  
North Star Books, 2001, 215 pp., Unpriced

ISBN: 0-9712336-9-1

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Jeffrey S. Kaplan  
Orlando, Florida

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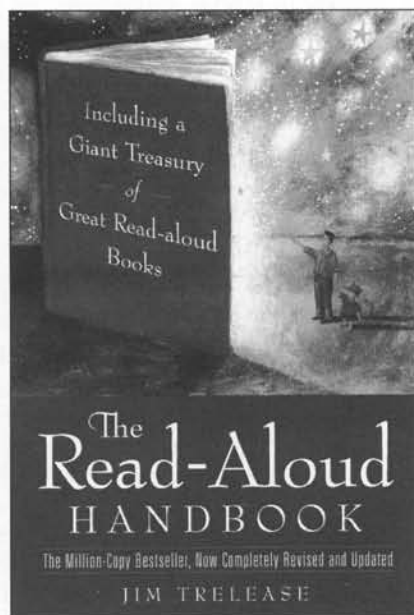
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## Are We There Yet? A Retrospective Look at John Donovan's *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip.*

Don Latham

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":

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*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.*

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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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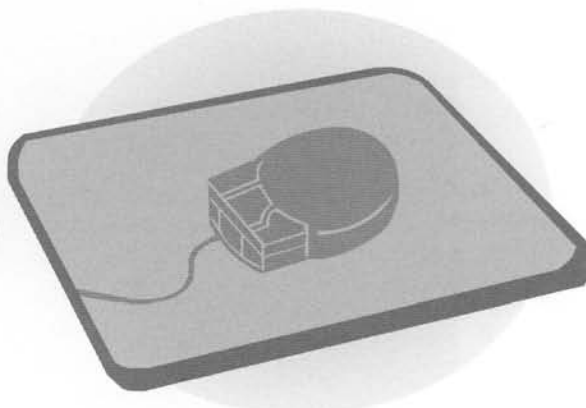
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You don't know me

at all. You don't know

about me. You don't know

what I look like. You

over me. What do you

like? Skinny? Freckles?

glasses over brown eyes

think so. Better look again

like a kaleidoscope,

one minute I'm short, the

tall, one minute I'm

minute studly, my shape

changes, and the only thing that stays

constant is my brown eyes. Watching

you. That's right, I'm watching you

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# Caulder's Story: *Chinese Handcuffs* and The Untold Story of the Vietnam War

Thomas Phillion

For most people, the Vietnam War is a distant memory. Living now over twenty five years after the end of the conflict, it is easy to forget the significant impact that this war had on American society and the lives of the people who were most involved in it. Contemporary films and books occasionally remind us of this impact, as do the occasional forays of the United States government and military into conflicts in other parts of the world, but for the most part the Vietnam War—like war in general—has remained largely out of sight and mind. People are more aware of conflicts in athletic arenas and in their own homes and workplaces than they are of the Vietnam War.

This distance is particularly true of adolescents. Increasingly, teenagers are being raised by parents who have no direct recollection of the Vietnam War, and who have been educated about it—like their children—only through film and television. Like most teenagers throughout history, today's teenagers are more attentive to peer relationships, fashion, sports, and popular culture than they are to history and political matters. Although they are curious about the Vietnam War and other events from the 1960's, today's teenagers are likely to view this era as an historical artifact with no substantial connection to their own lives and interests.

Given these circumstances, high school teachers need to be especially creative in introducing the Vietnam War to their students. In this essay, I will examine a heretofore unappreciated resource that English and history teachers might use for this endeavor. The resource of which I speak is the young adult novel *Chinese Handcuffs* (1989), by Chris Crutcher. Although *Chinese Handcuffs* has been broadly recognized by critics, writers, and teachers for its therapeutic value, the quality of its storytelling, and its powerful connection to contemporary teenage and adult voices and concerns (Spencer, 1989; Bushman, 1992; Sheffer, 1997; Davis, 1997), I will suggest that an additional value of Crutcher's novel is that it opens up opportunities for teenagers to use their understanding of sports psychology, peer relationships, and contemporary adolescent issues and problems to build bridges to the culture and events of the Vietnam War. More to the point, I will argue that Crutcher embeds a figurative narrative about the Vietnam War within the sports/suspense/problem novel that he weaves. By incorporating *Chinese*

*Handcuffs* into high school English and history curriculums, and by pairing it up with other texts about the Vietnam War such as Walter Dean Myers's *Fallen Angels* (1988), high school English and history teachers might encourage teenage readers to identify more closely with the experiences of soldiers who fought in Vietnam, and to re-think their assumptions about the disconnection between their own contemporary world and the events of this era.

## Plot Synopsis

The plot of *Chinese Handcuffs* is likely familiar to many readers of this journal. Through first person letters and third person vignettes, Crutcher creates a multifaceted narrative about three teenagers who are grappling with painful issues in their homes and lives in contemporary America.

The protagonist of *Chinese Handcuffs* is Dillon Hemingway, a star high school athlete who, readers learn at the beginning of the novel, has characteristically rebelled against his football coach, quit the team, and dedicated himself to managing the girls' basketball team and to triathlon training. Even though he is only a junior in high school, Dillon has endured a great deal of pain in his very short life.

At the very beginning of the novel, readers learn that Dillon's mother and father are divorced; more significantly, Dillon reveals that his brother Preston committed suicide. Dillon attempts to make sense of his brother's suicide through private letters that he writes to his brother; in addition, through third person vignettes, readers learn about the exact events that contributed to Preston's death. Readers learn, for example, that Preston experimented with drugs and alcohol, and later became a member of a motorcycle gang—a decision that eventually resulted in the loss of his legs, his descent into heavy narcotics use and gun trafficking, and his participation in a gang rape. Dillon is torn up over the suicide of his brother because he feels that he somehow could have prevented it (Preston shot himself in the head on a Saturday morning, in Dillon's presence). Furthermore, Dillon feels guilty because of his own success in sports and school, his insensitivity to the depth of his brother's depression, and because he still has strong romantic feelings for Preston's girlfriend, Stacy.

Although Stacy is a minor character in *Chinese Handcuffs*, she is important because of her influence upon Dillon and

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*... Crutcher embeds a figurative narrative about the Vietnam War within the sports/suspense/problem novel that he weaves.*

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because she grapples with her own difficult issues and problems. Like Dillon, Stacy feels a great deal of guilt as a result of Preston's suicide. More importantly, Stacy has to decide, over the duration of the novel, whether or not she wants to reveal the fact that she has given birth to a child that Preston fathered. Initially, Stacy is reluctant to reveal this secret. However, through talk and reflection, Stacy eventually moves toward an alternative perspective.

The third adolescent character whom Crutcher spotlights in *Chinese Handcuffs* is Jennifer Lawless. Like Dillon, Jennifer is a star athlete; however, she is not a rebel. Jennifer is the dominant player on the girls' basketball team at Chief Joseph High School, and she is a National Merit Scholar finalist who never lets anything rattle her visibly. The secret or problem that Jennifer is dealing with is that she is a long-time victim of sexual abuse in her home. Up to the point that Dillon encounters her, Jennifer has never revealed her abuse to anyone, and she has perfected methods of covering up her pain. As Jennifer and Dillon become increasingly involved, though, she no longer is able to maintain the control that she heretofore has manifested. One evening, Jennifer too attempts suicide.

Dillon cannot again bear to see someone whom he loves go this route, and so he intervenes and stops her. Over the remainder of *Chinese Handcuffs*, Dillon must find a way to resolve his own sexual feelings for Jennifer and stop the abuse that Jennifer is receiving from her stepfather, T.B.

#### *Chinese Handcuffs* and the Untold Story of the Vietnam War

On the surface, this complicated fictional account of the lives of three contemporary American teenagers has absolutely nothing to do with the Vietnam War. However, embedded within this complex narrative are several direct and indirect references to it. A critical examination of these references reveals another story of physical pain and emotional abuse that is never directly articulated over the duration of the novel: the story of Dillon's father, Caulder Hemingway.

#### *Dog Soldiers*

In the Prologue to *Chinese Handcuffs*, Dillon competes in a triathlon race. This scene introduces Dillon to readers and helps them to develop an understanding of some of his core characteristics. Crutcher writes that Dillon uses a technique drawn from the novel *Dog Soldiers* (1973) to endure the pain that he feels as he completes his race: "he envisions a perfect triangle in the back of his skull, then scans his body for pain, visually placing it within the borders of the triangle to make it tolerable" (*Chinese Handcuffs* 2). The novel *Dog Soldiers* received the National Book Award in 1975 and discusses, among other things, the influence of the Vietnam War on American life; in it, one of the key characters, a former Marine, uses this same technique (learned in the military) to endure horrible pain. Although this reference to *Dog Soldiers* is quick and minor, it is an initial clue that Dillon, in a sense, is a soldier who has developed some useful short-term strategies for displacing the terrible physical and emotional pain that he feels.

#### Charlie the Cat

A more significant reference to the Vietnam War is a key scene at the very beginning of the novel involving Charlie the Cat. In his suicide note, Preston tells Dillon: "The time with the cat. Don't ever forget" (*Handcuffs* 7). Although Dillon is skeptical about the connection between this episode and Preston's suicide, Crutcher's placement of it at the very beginning of the novel indicates the weight that it carries not only as a commentary upon Preston's suicide, but also upon the novel as a whole.

In the Charlie the Cat scene, Preston and Dillon team up to kill a three-legged cat named Charlie. Charlie the Cat is a highly unattractive creature, a "three-legged alley tom with a face like a dried-up creek bed and the temperament of a freeway sniper" (*Handcuffs* 10). One day, Charlie gets a hold of Preston and Dillon's dog Blitz (short for Blitzkrieg)

and slices him across the nose. Although the boys are outraged (they are ten and eight, respectively), Charlie's owner, Mrs. Crummet, is merely amused and warns the boys to keep their dog out of her yard. Not surprisingly, the boys decide to take matters into their own hands. Later that evening, Preston and Dillon lure Charlie into their garage, and wrap him up in a gunny-

sack and begin to abuse him. But Charlie breaks through the sack and slashes Preston's hand. Outraged, Preston beats the sack wildly against the ground, and orders Dillon to grab a tire iron. Dillon obeys, and several swings later, the cat and the bag stop moving. The boys bury Charlie in the dirt next to their garage, and swear never to tell anyone what happened.

On the one hand, this episode helps readers to appreciate Preston's capacity for violence, his lack of self-control, and his inability to forgive himself for poor decision-making. Correspondingly, readers perceive Dillon's more balanced perspective. On the other hand, this scene can be read figuratively as a metaphor for events such as those that occurred at My Lai during the Vietnam War. "Charlie" was a well-known nickname for the North Vietnamese guerrillas who fought against U.S. soldiers; the physical and psychological attributes that Crutcher gives to Charlie, Mrs. Crummet, and the boys are broadly consistent with popular perceptions of Vietnamese and American forces. Through the Charlie the Cat episode, readers obtain further insight into the "war" experiences of the "dog soldiers" Dillon and Preston. They learn that in social conditions infested with distrust, violence, fear, arrogance, and lack of communication, it is very easy for atrocities to occur.

#### *Chinese Handcuffs*

Immediately after the Charlie the Cat episode, Dillon recalls another incident involving Preston's girlfriend, Stacy. The incident is the one from which the novel derives its name: at a carnival, Stacy surprises Dillon and invites him to put his finger in "Chinese handcuffs," or a trick straw from which Dillon and Stacy can only release themselves by not pulling away from one another (*Handcuffs* 49-52). On the one hand, this scene represents the complicated nature of Dillon's relationship to Stacy, and by extension to Preston and Jennifer; simultaneously, it symbolizes the acts of "letting go" of se-

crets and trusting others that all of the adolescent characters in this novel need to experience in order for healing to occur. However, this scene and the title of the novel also evoke the Vietnam War. Over the duration of the war, a fear of China and communism led the United States to search for violent and self-defeating ways of obtaining the security that it desired. Just as all of the adolescent characters in *Chinese Handcuffs* have to let go of the insecurities that dominate and stifle their existences, so too the American government had to relinquish itself of the unproductive mindsets and behaviors that caused so much death, trauma, and tragedy.

#### Preston's Suicide

At the core of *Chinese Handcuffs* are two singular acts of violence: Preston's suicide and the abuse of Jennifer Lawless. Immediately after reflecting upon Stacy and the Chinese handcuffs, Dillon explores the events related to Preston's suicide (*Handcuffs* 55-65). In a third person account sandwiched between Dillon's reflections, readers learn how Preston arrived home at 6:30 AM on a Saturday morning, invited Dillon to shoot tin cans in the Three Forks cemetery, and used his grandfather's WWII German luger to toy with Dillon and to shoot himself in the head. Furthermore, in subsequent sections, readers learn that Preston became a quadriplegic as a result of a motorcycle accident, that he joined a motorcycle gang called the Warlocks and began abusing drugs and selling guns, and that he participated in a gang rape of a young woman the night before his suicide. Readers also learn that Dillon poured Preston's cremated remains into the engines of the Warlocks' motorcycles immediately after Preston's funeral, and that the Warlocks came looking for Dillon at Chief Joseph High School before finally chasing him down and threatening him with the loss of his life should he ever go near their gang again.

Once again, these events can be read literally and figuratively. Literally, they drive the narrative action, and account for the psychological conflicts that Dillon writes about over the duration of the novel. Figuratively, they develop the embedded narrative about the Vietnam War. Perhaps coincidentally, Preston's suicide echoes the suicide in *Coming Home*, a popular film from the 1970's that starred Jane Fonda and Jon Voight. In this film, a Vietnam veteran commits suicide after apprehending the romantic relationship between his wife and a quadriplegic Vietnam veteran. More significantly, through Preston's suicide and related events both before and after it, readers see how guns, violence, and lack of communication are an intrinsic feature of everyday life in Three Forks and, by extension, the United States. The biker gang, the guns, the rape, the references to Chief Joseph and a WWII luger (as well as the dog Blitzkrieg and the Hemingway name)—all of these serve to place Preston's suicide and the Vietnam War (as expressed through the Charlie the Cat scene) within a larger cultural context that values aggression and individual achievement more than non-violence and the development of community. Like many Vietnam War veterans

(including the tragic veteran depicted in *Coming Home*), Preston is unable to reconcile the conflicting ideals and commitments engrained in his environment, and so he is unable to create a productive identity for himself once he loses his legs and therefore his identity as a "soldier."

#### Jennifer Lawless

The abuse of Jennifer Lawless is as important an act of violence in *Chinese Handcuffs* as Preston's suicide. Through the story of Jennifer Lawless and her step-father T.B., readers are held in suspense until the end of the novel, and they acquire a powerful understanding of the physical and psychological trauma that the Vietnam War—and war in general—inflicts upon soldiers and innocent civilians.

Throughout *Chinese Handcuffs*, Crutcher inscribes many scenes of Jennifer's sexual abuse. Although all of these scenes are sensitively constructed, and convey powerfully the constant tension that circumscribes Jennifer's existence (a tension comparable to the tension

soldiers in Vietnam felt as they waited in anticipation of the arrival of their enemies), the one that I will focus on here occurs at the end of the novel when Dillon uses an infrared camera to record and then watch T.B. sexually abuse his daughter (*Handcuffs* 204-208). Although some readers may perceive this plot development as implausible, the use of an infrared device is entirely consistent with other narratives about the Vietnam

War (see Walter Dean Myers's *Fallen Angels*, and Tim O'Brien's *If I Die In A Combat Zone*, for example). In addition, Dillon's description of the effect that watching this video has on him evokes descriptions of night patrol recorded by many Vietnam War novelists (see, for example, the chapter "Night Life" in Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*). Metaphorically, Dillon's second-hand observation of T.B.'s abuse of Jennifer enables insight into all of the "bad dreams" (*The Things They Carried*, 220) that Vietnam veterans and innocent civilians carry around with them as a result of their war experiences.

#### Caulder Hemingway

Ultimately, *Chinese Handcuffs* is a novel that encourages teenagers and other readers to use written and oral language to resolve or at least to negotiate difficult and painful issues and experiences. Through the examples of Dillon, Jennifer, and Stacy, Crutcher models how critical discussion of life problems can temporarily heal pain and provide a springboard for the achievement of a better life.

Aside from Preston, the one character in *Chinese Handcuffs* whom Crutcher does not have speak or write about his painful teenage experiences is Caulder Hemingway, the father of Preston and Dillon Hemingway. Early in *Chinese Handcuffs*, readers are told that Caulder Hemingway is a Vietnam veteran and amateur historian (9), and toward the end of the novel Caulder explains that "there's been a rule in this house since 1971 that I don't talk about the [Vietnam] war" (195). Even though Caulder does briefly discuss his war experiences with Dillon at the end of the novel, he does not go into detail. Hidden from readers is the full story about

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*On the surface, this complicated fictional account of the lives of three contemporary American teenagers has absolutely nothing to do with the Vietnam War. However, embedded within this complex narrative are several direct and indirect references to it.*

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Caulder's war experiences, his return home, and his subsequent divorce.

One possible explanation for this silence—beyond the explanation that Caulder is an adult and therefore his story is not relevant to the narrative (an explanation that I reject because Crutcher is on record repeatedly as saying that he writes for both adults and youth)—is that Crutcher is attempting to provide his readers with an indirect means of making sense of a story that has a very important relationship to the other teenage stories in this narrative. By telling Caulder's story about his experiences in the Vietnam War through figurative language, Crutcher does not overemphasize this adult story; instead, he provides his teenage readers with the independence and freedom to read what they like into his narrative. In addition, he creates a situation wherein teenager readers might use their empathy for Dillon, Jennifer, and Stacy to make connections to the issues and problems experienced by a previous generation. Crutcher shows, in other words, how the language of personal trauma and violence can be used to tell a broader historical narrative about war, tragedy, and reconciliation or renewal.

### Instructional Strategies

By unearthing the Vietnam War narrative embedded in *Chinese Handcuffs*, I mean to call attention to an important instructional resource that high school English and history teachers can use to engage their students in critical thinking about the Vietnam War. On the one hand, teachers might invite their students to imagine what they would have done in situations like those represented in *Fallen Angels* and other realistic accounts of the Vietnam War, and to discuss what decisions they would make if presented with similar situations today. On the other hand, the above figurative reading of *Chinese Handcuffs* suggests that teachers might also ask their students to explore conflicts and issues that they face in their own contemporary world, and to examine how their responses to these conflicts and issues mirror those of teenagers who lived during the 1960's and who found themselves inevitably entangled in the conflict in Vietnam. Although the first instructional approach is very effective, the second is attractive because research has shown that when students use their schemas and personal experiences to make sense of educational materials, they remember their lessons for a longer period of time and develop more powerful insights into instructional materials and themes (Rosenblatt, 1983; Marshall, Smagorinsky, and Smith, 1995; Langer, 1995).

Teachers who choose the second route face a number of obstacles. Figurative reading is hard for adults and teenagers alike, and so discussion of *Chinese Handcuffs* needs to be undertaken very carefully. Teachers cannot push too hard the figurative reading that I have outlined here, but they ought not to let a figurative reading of *Chinese Handcuffs* go unsaid. My suggestion is to invite students to read *Chinese Handcuffs* at the end of a unit on the Vietnam War or a theme that would allow for the reading of a realistic Vietnam novel such as *Fallen Angels*. Only at the very end of such a unit, after students have had a chance to discuss *Chinese Handcuffs* and explore it in relation to more obvious themes (com-

ing of age, heroism, social conflicts, decision-making) would I ask students to try to make connections between *Chinese Handcuffs* and historical or fictional material about the Vietnam War.

Listed below are some of my best suggestions for undertaking the sort of post-reading critical examination of *Chinese Handcuffs* that I am advocating here. A good text to consult for other instructional ideas and strategies is Larry Johannessen's *Illumination Rounds: Teaching The Literature of the Vietnam War* (1992). Johannessen's book is an invaluable resource for any teacher who wants to explore the Vietnam War through literature.

### Some Ideas for Helping Teenagers to Make Connections between *Chinese Handcuffs* and the Vietnam War

1. Ask students to re-read the section of *Fallen Angels* where Perry kills for the first time; alternatively, have them read soldiers' diaries or review transcriptions of testimony about what happened at My Lai. Invite students to explore in writing the connections they see between these accounts of brutal behavior and Dillon and Preston's behavior in the Charlie the Cat scene. Invite them to reflect upon their own experiences with social conflict and acts of violence.
2. If students are reading *Fallen Angels*, ask them to re-read the section at the end of the novel just before and after the successful mission to save Monaco, and especially the paragraph in which Perry reflects: "I looked around. Nothing. What the hell was wrong with this damn war. You never saw anything. There was never anything there until it was on top of your ass, and you were screaming and shooting and too scared to figure out anything." Compare Perry in this situation to Jen in *Chinese Handcuffs*—How are their situations similar? Who is more like Jen, Monaco or Perry?
3. If students see or understand the above psychological connections between the Vietnam War and *Chinese Handcuffs*, ask them to search for other references in *Chinese Handcuffs* to soldiering, the Vietnam War, and other conflicts in US history. Ask students to reflect upon the connection between the title of Crutcher's novel and what they know about the history of the Vietnam War from their study of *Fallen Angels* or historical texts. In what ways was the US "handcuffed" by the Chinese during this conflict? To what extent is oppression and social conflict an engrained feature of American society?
4. Ask students to speculate as to why Crutcher included so many indirect references to the Vietnam War. Ask students to make a chart representing the different stories of individual characters in *Chinese Handcuffs*—Whose stories get told? What stories remain unspoken?
5. Ask students to reflect upon the advantages and disadvantages of the different approaches to storytelling that Myers and Crutcher use in their novels (or substitute another author for Myers). In what ways is realistic historical fiction powerful and compelling? What are its limitations? What potential or advantage lies in figurative language? What disadvantages?



### Conclusion: Integrating *Chinese Handcuffs* into High School English and History Classrooms

In high school English and history classrooms, *Chinese Handcuffs* is rarely read and appreciated. Like other Crutcher fiction, *Chinese Handcuffs* is provocative in nature because of language issues and its strikingly dramatic content. That *Chinese Handcuffs* is a "sports" and "suspense" novel also limits its appeal for some teachers. Teachers are reluctant to teach a text that contests prevailing notions of literary quality and merit and that has the potential to catalyze questions from parents.

Implicit in the above examination of *Chinese Handcuffs*, however, is the argument that this is a novel that deserves serious re-consideration. Throughout his career, Crutcher has been a strong advocate of the notion that young adult literature is literature that anyone—adults, as well as teens—can appreciate and learn from (Monseau, *Responding to Young Adult Literature*). In *Chinese Handcuffs*, Crutcher is most successful in writing in ways that integrate adolescent and adult concerns and storytelling.

In several years of teaching *Chinese Handcuffs* to prospective and practicing English teachers, I have not once encountered a reader who has volunteered the above figurative reading; yet, when I present the ideas that I have outlined here, my students—undergraduate and graduate—almost always are persuaded by this interpretation. This response tells me that *Chinese Handcuffs* is a unique young adult novel in that it has the ability to "surprise" adult readers with readings that stretch beyond the literal. Like some of the finest classic works in world literature, *Chinese Handcuffs* possesses a complexity that challenges readers and enhances enjoyment.

For these reasons alone, *Chinese Handcuffs* ought to be more often taught in high school English classrooms. But the fact is that *Chinese Handcuffs* has not been given the critical attention that it deserves, and so it is unlikely to become as popular a choice in high school curriculums as, say, *Fallen Angels*. Given this unfortunate state of affairs, perhaps a more productive use of *Chinese Handcuffs* might be to use it to call attention to the blinders that adults and many teenagers often bring to their readings of young adult novels. While *Chinese Handcuffs* may not ever become required reading in American literature courses, it does have the potential to push readers who typically do not read young adult literature to take a second look at this genre and to ask themselves what else they have been missing.

Within the context of high school history classrooms, the goal can be conceived along the same lines. *Chinese Handcuffs* can teach adolescents that there is more than one way to render history, that realistic accounts of war and violence have their limitations, and that the emotional and psycho-

logical effects of history are as important as the economic and political. Or, to quote a popular bumper sticker, teens can learn that the personal is political, and the political is personal.

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# Between Voice and Voicelessness: Transacting Silence in Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*

Elaine J. O'Quinn

"What are the words you do not yet have? What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence?"  
—Audre Lorde

The defining events of youth are often affairs that go unnamed, but years later they continue to shape us in deep ways. In remembering those one time silent spaces it is common to also recount the inner journeys taken in creating the self we have become. Finally able to say aloud that which was once stilled makes the naming of these instances all the more significant. As a young girl, I remember my own silent agony of feeling as though I were the only person in the world dealing with the hard punches life seemed to throw. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know who to talk to or what to say. And even though sheer naiveté was responsible for some of my silence, not being properly invited to speak about my inner world burned across the surface of my young life like a strangling toxic fire. It wasn't until college that anyone communicated the message that I did have the power to move beyond circumstance, a message that helped me usurp the troubling events of my own growing up and allow the suffocating smog of voicelessness to finally lift. As a teacher of young women, I am constantly aware of the profundity of this whole experience.

The truth is that my own youth was probably not very different from that of many young girls. In talking with friends, it seems very few of us had much indication from the adults around us that, as young women, we could talk about the disturbing ordeals of our lives. If there was any message at all, it was the unspoken but well-modeled gender rule that said nice girls keep the matters of self and family private. Like many others, I discovered early that I was expected to pay much closer attention to the proprieties of my supposedly ideal feminine roles than I was to the mysterious nature of my evolving self. The signals the world sent were confusing and contradictory at best, and I had no secure sense of

how to decode them. Certainly, it never occurred to me that anything offered up in school as "edifying" held any relief from or understanding of the experiences I was processing, and life outside of school fell equally short in helping me take measure. Quiet and composed on the outside, I recall the whirlwind of fear and uncertainty that pulsed within.

Yet, despite the anxiety that bubbled beneath the surface, I intuitively knew there was something else astir, some concept of self that, for all its outside appearances of docility, was as vigilant as it was vulnerable, as sheltering as it was unprotected. Silence, as I was coming to understand it, was a condition to either abandon myself to or learn to befriend. I could surrender to its imposing armor of loneliness and retreat, always fearful lest someone find me out and turn what

I hid against me, or I could use stillness as a vehicle of observation and deliberation, a refuge of thoughtful consideration of events past and present. Too young and unsophisticated in the ways of the world for any cognizant engagement of active agency, I did sense that the way

I chose to listen to myself and, consequently, present myself would seriously impact how I was perceived by the world. Though I knew my silence would probably not protect me, I understood that the way I used it would, eventually, in some way name me. Conscious or not, I was exploring the differences between being silent and being silenced.

At the time, I had no way of knowing that cultural and societal discourse, as much as familial and personal chaos, had forced me into a metaphorical site of suppression and restraint, a place I would later see identified by Gilbert and Guber (1979) as feminine "aphasia", an arena of "speechlessness" that has historically censored, if not totally silenced, the lives of many women. My reluctance to talk about the issues that haunted me was compounded by the very public message that identity lay somewhere outside of and beyond personal experience anyway; all I had to do was find it, embrace it, and the safety net of the world would fall into place. Validation for the happenings of my own veiled life was non-existent. I was a daughter, a sister, an adolescent, and a girl

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on the verge of becoming a young woman; there was no place in the scheme of relations for the uneasiness personal experience had visited upon me. Certainly, there was no place for the unpleasantness that would arise if I were to vocalize to others the personal impact of those events. Life for a young woman was supposed to be happy and wholesome; what I had to tell would more than challenge such popular notions.

Laurie Halse Anderson's insightful novel, *Speak* (1999), has reminded me anew of the distance women have come in identifying the oppressive and unhealthy behavior of the silences that so often betray them, as well as the strategic brokering they have always done to keep those same silent behaviors from becoming destructive forces. It is an important book in its exploration of the kind of agency involved when women endeavor to overcome personal violation and cultural authority with feminine sensibilities intact. The fact that Anderson writes this story for young women rather than about them, a notion of storytelling that is quite different from the one with which many of us grew up, is an important aspect of the book. Allowing readers to experience for themselves the capable rather than neutralized persona of main character, Melinda

Sordino, as she deals with her own rape, is enabling at both ends. As Melinda refuses to become a victim of the violent force that threatens her, but is instead emancipated by it, so too is the reader. Had such a story been available to me when I was Melinda's age, I'm certain my understanding of how we create ourselves in an unpredictable world would have been changed considerably. A character offered as a realistic model of what girls can do to maintain control of their own lives, even while wrestling with the undeniably difficult givens of it, would have been a welcome relief in a world of female characters who were always either essentialized, valorized, or criticized in the male tradition of femininity.

When as teachers we determine which women's stories we will teach our adolescents and how we will teach them, it is important that we find examples of works that enable students to see female characters as active agents in the troubling situations of their lives and not mere victims. We want them to understand that even though the victimization of women is not going to go away, the ways women are victimized can and should be challenged rather than simply described. We want our students to recognize that external silencing does not necessarily mean a silenced internal dialogue. In stories such as *Speak* traditional understandings of a woman's reason for silence are dispelled. As teachers we are able to use such a text to advocate against the history of silence as self-abnegation that is so common, working instead for an understanding that reinforces the more actualizing notion that succumbing to victimization through silence only reinforces powerlessness. Anderson's character is thoughtful, caring, and most of all resilient. She is not a compliant victim, and in the end finds the necessary inner resources to regain control of her feminine self as *she* defines it. Melinda Sordino stands as a strong model of the circumstances girls can overcome and not merely survive when they learn how to transact the harmful effects of private silences into the public domain.

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*I was exploring the differences between being silent and being silenced.*

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Thinking back to the nature of my own adolescent experiences with silence compels me to make some important comparisons with Melinda's. Her story prompts me to better understand that many women, who at one level do appear rendered "voiceless" by circumstance and experience, actually use that silent space at another level in defiant acts of reflective passage. Fighting a naturally protective urge to pull back and become a mere spectator to the traumatic events of her life, Melinda, by story's end, refuses the frequently implied directive which says women must silently adjust their behavior rather than strengthen their presence to fit the crisis of experience. Instead of stoically embracing the misfortune of her predicament, Melinda moves through the impasse and is able to more authentically and positively recreate rather than reproduce a way of being in the world. The irony of *Speak* is, of course, the detestable situation it forces upon Melinda, one which insists she lose what she knows of herself in order to gain any new understandings. As a sympathetic reader, my initial reaction to her story is to focus on

the pain of the experience and the source of the inflicted silence; however, as a feminist reader, I am intrigued by the strength of character that al-

lows Melinda to employ that same silence as a means of dealing with circumstances that have no place in her world, but have nonetheless arrived there uninvited. I am taken by the fact that her voice is never internally stilled, even while externally lost. The ensuing inner tempest is intriguing as well as telling; forced silencing transacted into a self-determined, creative silence becomes an ally for Melinda rather than an adversary. Within the boundaries of one, she learns to free herself for the other.

"I am not only a casualty, I am also a warrior," says Audre Lorde (1997) of her own battle with silence, a battle which in the end she decides is always a transformative, if dangerous, act of self-reflection (204). Similarly, in *Speak*, Melinda also refuses to sit contemplating only her victimization, as may initially appear to be the case. Within her silences Melinda too is working through the measures required to not only reclaim her voice but also reexamine and eventually recreate what it means. As part of her refusal to be objectified, she maintains an on-going internal dialogue dependent on sense of humor, witty discernment of the world around her, and emotional resourcefulness, three life affirming attributes that help her through some truly dark times. Melinda's ballooning silence is about processing as much as it is about resolution. She resists succumbing to the trauma of what has happened to her as much as she tries to move beyond it. Behind the "S" of stupid, scared, silly, and most of all shame (*Speak* 101) that she attributes to herself, stands the "S" of strength, sanity, and self that Melinda continually embraces, albeit not without great difficulty. Rather than allowing herself to be defined by others, she determines to be driven by a more willful, creative understanding, a condition we know is imperative to growth.

Melinda's ability to eventually speak out about her condition is the direct result of the inner dialogue that belies her external silence. In a self-reflective search for authentic resolution, she is able to use the silence inflicted on her to dis-



cover the scope of needs and desires necessary for personal agency. Though the inward turn is initially a reaction to the isolation Melinda feels in her situation, it is also a pivotal point of active response. Carol Gilligan (1982) calls this juncture of recognizing the discriminating force of experience the "*Bildungsroman* that separates the invulnerability of childhood innocence from the responsibility of adult participation and choice" (132). Throughout *Speak* there is evidence of Melinda's desire to make good choices about what feelings, meanings, and values to assign the events she experiences, beginning with her call to the police from the party where the rape takes place. Even though we learn that fear prevents her from staying to tell the police what has happened, it is clear that she becomes increasingly more aware of what is required of her in order to navigate through the feelings with which she must contend if she is to come to meaningful action.

Given the other circumstances she must cope with as a new high school student who has lost all of her friends because she called the police to their party, and being the only child of parents who are as absent emotionally as they are physically, Melinda remains encouragingly flexible even in recognition of her situation. "I am prepared," she says about her first Halloween without her friends. "I refuse to spend the night moping in my room or listening to my parents argue. I checked out a book from the library, *Dracula* by Bram Stoker. Cool name. I settle into my nest with a bag of candy corn and the blood-sucking monster" (*Speak* 41). This brief statement is growing evidence of the conflict raging between the girl who would take control of her situation and the girl who three pages earlier believes that if she tries hard enough to "pull my lower lip all the way between my teeth" she can maybe "gobble my whole self" (39). Even in the exploration of her struggle, she is able to temper it; she is willing to recognize her nightmare experience, even if she is not quite ready to name it.

By the second section of *Speak*, Melinda is finally able to articulate to herself that she has been trying to bury the memory of the rape, "to make it go away" (82). In the same breath she realizes that it won't. "I want to confess everything," she says, "hand over the guilt and mistake and anger to someone else. There is a beast in my gut, I can hear it scraping away at the inside of my ribs. Even if I dump the memory, it will stay with me, staining me" (51). In this section she also allows herself to give a name to the monster: "Andy. Andy Evans. Short stabby name" (90). In the struggle to either simply endure her ordeal or, more triumphantly, overcome it, Melinda alternates between revealing to the reader bits and pieces of what actually happened to her the summer before school started and describing the shelters she has since had to find for momentary protection. Both articulations are consequential if she is to succeed in finally recreating the self that experience has forced her to become.

To persevere, Melinda acquiesces to false friendship with

Heather, a new girl at school, and allows herself a distant interest in the activist causes of her lab partner, David Petrakis, a male character who stands in strong contrast with Melinda in that he is rewarded rather than punished for his silences. In a more deliberate move toward personal agency, Melinda situates herself in an abandoned janitor closet at school and claims it for her own. Under the watchful eye of a Maya Angelou poster, a writer herself once silenced by rape, she stocks her emotional fortress. Though it remains difficult to talk and she finds herself sputtering, freezing up, and waking some mornings with jaws "clenched so tight I have a headache" (50), Melinda recognizes that the closet provides a necessary "quiet place that helps me hold these thoughts inside my head where no one can hear them" (51). A strategic retreat is not a surrender, and it is within the silent space of the closet that Melinda eventually finds her voice.

If superficial friendship, careful regard from afar of a fellow student who shows efficacy in the act of speaking up, and a colonized closet are the limited, but significant means of survival for Melinda, the sanctuary of her art class is the literal and metaphorical site of her passage and self-recreation. While the surrounding culture of events, institutions, adolescence, and people hold Melinda's silence in place, Mr. Freeman's art class encourages her to dislodge it. Ultimately,

art becomes a form of restoration for Melinda. It is a vehicle of expression that allows her to creatively process the horror of both her internal and external experience. As she moves through the process of recovery, she finds herself "Seeing beyond what is on the surface" (119) of the created world to that which moves inside. Though her literal project in art is to find a way to bring a tree to life on paper, that tree is but an

emblem of the life Melinda seeks to refresh in herself. Freeman, in acknowledging the difficulty of such a task, helps ease the way: "Breathe life into it. Make it bend-trees are flexible, so they don't snap. Scar it, give it a twisted branch-perfect trees don't exist" (153). In suggesting there is no such thing as perfection in nature, he enables Melinda to see that her own life is no less meaningful for its unforeseen imperfections.

Mr. Freeman, a male character the author allows to function with feminist insight, fully supports Melinda in her effort to release and relocate the memories of her trauma to a place where they can be safely but genuinely expressed. "Welcome to the only class that will teach you to survive," says Mr. Freeman, "...where you can find your soul...touch that part of you that you've never dared look at before" (10). On more than one occasion, he acknowledges Melinda's pain and her need for space without making her feel guilty for it; more importantly, he encourages her "voice" by providing her an alternative way of articulating it. Freeman enables Melinda to disclose something of herself in the safe presence of others. Her turkey-bone carcass complete with silenced Barbie head is a good example of this. Without words, Melinda expresses a degree of how she feels. Art allows her to reflect on

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the nature of what already exists in the hopes of understanding how to create something new to value. It becomes a springboard for a renewed vision of self and relationship with the world.

The way Mr. Freeman responds to Melinda's silence is in direct opposition to the way the other adult characters in the story react to her. He encourages expression; they attempt to colonize it. From parents, to teachers, to principal, Melinda feels "It is easier not to say anything. Shut your trap, button your lip, can it" (9). In contrast to Freeman, the other adults in Melinda's world seem to know very little about communication. Her parents converse by notes on the refrigerator, both to her and to each other. When they do consider her silence, it is in an accusatory way, with irritated wranglings of "What is wrong with you?" and "Do you think this is cute?" (87). "I don't have time for this, Melinda," (90) says her exasperated mother, while her father blames her crumbling world on a "slacker attitude" (116). On the other hand, Melinda's teachers are only adept at growling, grandstanding, and pontificating, while the principal prefers to tell a student his estimation of a problem rather than invite honest dialogue about it: "We all agree we are here to help," he says to Melinda in a feeble attempt to get to the source of her silence, "Let's start with these grades" (114).

It is little wonder that Melinda initially engages in silence as a form of self-erasure: "I wash my face in the sink until there is nothing left of it, no eyes, no nose, no mouth. A slick nothing" (45)." She truly has no intimate adult relationships to sustain or validate her—something, we can be sure, that happens to many adolescents. But despite her lack of viable resources, Melinda possesses some important impressions of how to act when the question of her moral obligation to others is at stake. This is a significant point in understanding how she comes to her own agency, for if she does not maintain her ability to care for others in positive, meaningful, and effective ways, she can never completely recover her ability to take the best care of herself. That care involves the import of self-realization every bit as much as it does the censoring required for self-protection. The obvious example of this is seen in how Melinda handles the situation she finds herself in with her ex-best friend, Rachel. Though Rachel hasn't acted at all as a friend might be expected to, Melinda never hesitates to concern herself for Rachel's well being. When she learns that Rachel is about to start dating Andy Evans, Melinda finds herself at a moral junction. Now she must navigate not only through the ordeal of her own rape, but must also consider Rachel's precarious position. What has been an isolated, private dilemma suddenly attains a community dimension.

Gilligan ascertains that in the transition of a crisis of experience women will either retreat into themselves, thinking only about the precautions necessary to insure their own safety, or they will reflect more broadly on who else the experience affects, exhibiting an active ethics of care and consideration for others who may also be impacted by the situation (*Voice* 123). She calls the "retreat from care to concern with survival" a "nihilistic position", one concerned only with an "ultimate self-protection stance" (*Voice* 126). In Melinda's situation many, perhaps most, would only be concerned with protecting themselves from future pain at the

hands of Andy Evans; indeed, sympathetic readers would never actively fault her for doing so. I say "actively" because I can't help but believe that for many readers there would remain a nagging sense of moral neglect if Melinda were to be so caught up in safe-guarding herself, that she would leave Rachel to her own fate. She certainly has every reason to do so. When her first two attempts to warn Rachel about Andy fail, Melinda risks whatever reserve of friendship she has left with Rachel to say that Andy is dangerous and will hurt her. Rachel's response is brutally harsh and stinging: "Liar!....I can't believe you. You're jealous. You're a twisted little freak and you're jealous that I'm popular and I'm going to the prom and so you lie to me like this.... You are so sick" (Anderson 184).

In *Women and Evil*, Nel Noddings (1989) makes an interesting observation about this type of response, one that certainly seems to apply in the case of Rachel's unwillingness to believe Melinda. "Women who have attempted to speak on moral matters," says Noddings, "have often been effectively silenced by the accusation that speaking and thinking on such things automatically separates them from the feminine principle" (*Women* 5). In the context of Melinda's story, girlfriends are expected to support each other in snagging the older, cuter, jock-type guy; to insist that this kind of guy "is not what he pretends to be" (*Speak* 152), is heresy. Friends, as much as family and teachers, are not supportive of Melinda when she is not playing along with the feminine role assigned to her. Though she has longed to speak out about the rape over the course of the book, none of her friends ever provide any real opportunity to do so. How can they when they too are tethered to their own ascribed roles? Only Ivy, who, it should be noted, is doing her own growing in art class along with Melinda, is able to offer any genuine lifeline. "You're better than you think you are," she says (146), an affirmation that Melinda internalizes and is eventually able to act on.

Despite Rachel's ungracious reaction to the news about Andy, Melinda's overture of care is a breakthrough point for her. That she is still able to express care for others and recognize she is right in doing so frees her to care for herself in nurturing rather than destructive ways. The very next day she returns to the site of the rape and allows herself to take back some of what was stolen from her. "I have survived," she concedes (188). But she has done more than that. Exhausted, yet strengthened by her long ordeal, Melinda knows the very core of self has resurfaced: "A small, clean part of me waits to warm and burst through the surface. Some quiet Melindagirl I haven't seen in months. That is the seed I will care for" (188-9). The seed Melinda tends is one that has been growing both in conscious and unconscious thought. In social studies class she reports on the suffragettes, recognizing that "Before [they] came along, women were treated like dogs . . . They were dolls, with no thoughts, or opinions, or voices of their own" (154). At home she works the spring soil, raking out the decaying and rotting leaves of fall, mulching the green shoots hidden under the bushes, and readying the ground for planting. As the calluses toughen on her hands, Melinda becomes strong enough to "arm-wrestle some demons" (180). The icy pain that has kept her frozen and rigid, that has isolated her from her own evolving life, starts to

melt and crack, like the winter clay beneath her feet. "I don't feel like hiding anymore" (192), Melinda admits to herself. "I can grow" (198).

As teachers, it is essential we think about the messages in the texts we offer our students. If we are to provide a means for them to understand their lives in ways that help them process it while experiencing it, we must give them examples of characters their own age who do just that. We must also recall our own adolescence, what we feared, what we needed, what we misunderstood about our capabilities and evolving selves. Young adult texts can help. In my own adolescence I never once thought the reading I did was meant to teach me anything immediate about myself or my world, nor even that it could. Most of the texts put before me held interesting and sometimes puzzling information about the world, but never came close to the personal experience I carried inside. My affinity for what I was told to read in school was purely aesthetic. The characters bore little relationship to anyone in my own life, and at the most, they only engaged me with adult ideas I couldn't totally understand, but which fit my image of a cruel and unrelenting universe. Books such as *Speak* can free our students from such limited reading experiences. They can enhance an understanding of the power of self-creation by providing a knowledge of the world that opens up possibilities even while admitting adversity and hapless circumstance. By adding such books to school libraries and to lists of optional classroom texts, teachers can provide public spaces that support healthy inner dialogues.

In our society women are often conditioned to bear their griefs, burdens, and fears in a legacy of silence. They have been socialized to believe that to speak out is to risk betrayal of what amounts to nothing more than a patriarchal construct of femininity. Anderson helps young readers recognize that there are healthier feminine alternatives requiring a strength that keeps the lifelines of communication and connection with one's self and others open. She demonstrates that if women are to enact consistently a life of their own

choosing, they must overcome the silences that girdle them least those silences squeeze out the very breath of life. As a woman, I am thankful that writing such as Anderson's provides our young women knowledge of the world that helps them respond and not simply react to their circumstances. The oppression of silence which generations of women have stoically accepted is now being challenged publicly and becoming better understood privately as well. It is a forward-looking revelation that seeks to make certain that another generation of young women is not quietly left behind.

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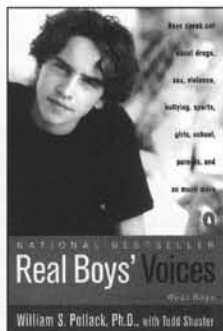
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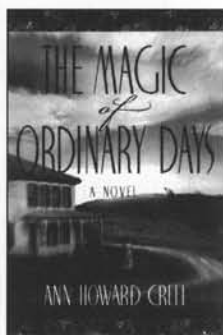
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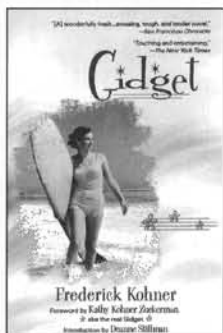
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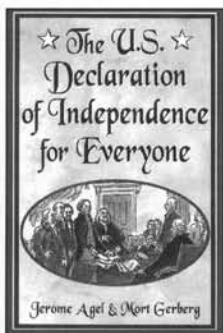
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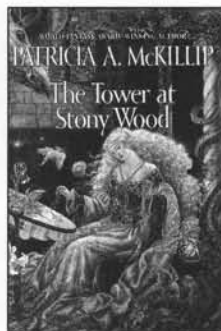
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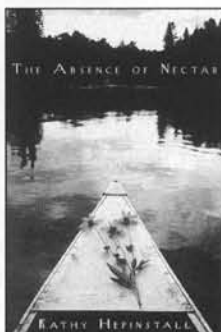
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## A Look at Labor History in Young Adult Books

Deborah Wilson Overstreet

As a teacher and amateur historian, I have always been intrigued and inspired by early labor history. Mother Jones, Eugene Debs, and Big Bill Haywood were some of my historical heroes. Maybe that's because I have labor union roots. One grandfather was a newspaper printer and belonged to the Newspaper Guild. My other grandfather and many uncles were coal miners—members of the United Mine Workers. Other uncles worked for General Motors and belonged to the United Auto Workers. My parents didn't work in mines or factories and we didn't spend much time "talking union" at home. And yet, I grew up with a sense of the importance of unions and the courage of those who started and belonged to them.

When I decided to explore how labor history has been written in books for young readers, I realized that my deep respect and admiration for those workers who braved violence and blacklisting to create and maintain unions was hardly shared by friends or colleagues. They scoffed and hoped that I planned to explore rampant union corruption. Even knowing that I was most interested in the beginnings of the labor movement, predominantly between the Civil War and WWI, they were convinced that labor was always corrupt, unions were always unnecessary, and union membership was always indicative of greed and laziness. It's crucially important that young people understand, as my friends did not, that everyone today benefits from sacrifices that union organizers and members made and how things we take for granted are a direct result of organized labor, e.g., child labor laws, 8-hour days, 40-hour weeks, minimum wage, and safety regulations.

Our historical beliefs inform our interpretations of our present day world (Benson, Brier, Rosenzweig xvii). We're likely to form those particular beliefs through a combination of textbooks, teachers, novels, movies, and nonfiction. In a major study of labor history in American high school history textbooks, Anyon found an alarming representation of the

struggle of early labor—not only in the constant favoring of capital over labor, but even in which labor organizations were mentioned:

...textbook characterizations of labor history are strikingly narrow and unsympathetic to the more radical segment of the union movement. ...Most strikes are not even mentioned, and although there were more than 30,000 [between the mid-1800s and early 1900s], the texts describe only a few. Fourteen of the seventeen books chose among the same three strikes, ones that were especially violent and were failures from labor's point of view. (*Ideology and United States History Textbooks*, 373)

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When students are taught using textbooks with such information, their beliefs are swayed. History textbooks, like all histories, legitimize only certain aspects of the whole possible story—usually those parts of the story that benefit and enhance the most powerful groups in society. Very narrow information is presented as an objective and complete account—never as the sliver that it actually is. This selective tradition is perpetuated in textbook conceptions of labor history.

The history of labor is a story of the people, but ironically Anyon found that stories of actual laborers are virtually ignored in the texts. Even within organized labor, Anyon found that the AFL—a more conservative and exclusionary group of trade unions—was most frequently emphasized. The far more radical and potentially powerful IWW is marginalized through its constant absence. The textbooks grudgingly abide only traditional trade "unions that have accepted the legitimacy of, and been empowered by, the US business establishment" (*Ideology* 379).

Most startling is that Anyon's landmark 1979 study is the most recent examination of labor in school history texts. A diligent search of education databases yields nothing more current. This in itself demonstrates an amazing neglect of this crucially important part of our nation's past. But ulti-

mately, this study isn't about textbooks—they just serve to provide background.

It is no wonder that people who have had little or no experience with unions can have such virulently negative attitudes toward them. Reproduction theorists believe that schools and school curricula are structured in such a way as to reproduce and legitimate the dominant culture and existing power relationships (Weiler 6). Those who control the means of production are certainly served by having potential workers convinced of the evils and futility of organized labor. School history textbooks fall squarely within this tradition.

Fortunately, students are not exclusively products of their historical education. Production theorists are concerned with the ways that both individuals and groups refuse to accept the influences of the ideological forces of a culture—textbooks, for example. Teachers and students can resist, assert alternate interpretations of history, and create their own meanings (Weiler 11). Historical fiction can become part of that resistance—especially when it contradicts textbooks, provides a different perspective, or gives voice to those not represented in conventional history. In some very real ways, these twelve labor history novels do serve in this capacity.

To this day, America has the least developed and most opposed labor movement of any industrialized nation. While this sad fact is not entirely the result of the vilification of organized labor in textbooks and popular culture, it is surely a factor. Anyon found that the textbooks “promote the idea that there is no working class in the US and contribute to the myth that workers are middle class” (*Ideology* 383). The virtual absence of the laboring class or union workers on television and in movies contributes to their marginalization. When American workers cling to the popular culture-fed delusion that they are middle class, perhaps their desire for union affiliation is muted.

## The Novels

Given how sparsely labor is mentioned in textbooks, I was surprised to quickly find many novels and even more nonfiction books about various aspects of labor history. Because of limited space, I chose twelve novels dealing with mill workers, shirtwaist workers, and miners. Mill and shirtwaist novels exclusively involve female workers; mine novels feature male workers. I was especially interested in novels set from the mid-1800s to the early 1900s because this is a period in which some of the most important changes in American labor occurred.

Three overarching questions drove this research. The first is pre-union: What were working conditions? The second involves attitudes: What do laborers, bosses, owners, police, and others say or think about unions? Finally: What were the unions' goals? What were the unions like? What did they accomplish?

**Mill Novels** The two earliest books are set in the mill town of Lowell, Massachusetts in 1836 and 1845. Even though the young women protagonists are already laborers, they're barely adolescents. In *A Spirit to Ride the Whirlwind*, based on true events in 1836, we meet Binnie Howe, whose mother runs a company boardinghouse. The mills control every aspect of the women workers' lives. They're required

to live in company-approved quarters and to attend church. There is rampant bigotry against the Irish workers who are largely denied jobs in the mills.

In *Spirit*, mill bosses set the clocks back so that women are required to work extra time each day. A “premium” system is instituted wherein bosses, but not workers, are rewarded for increasing the women's pace. When the mills are closed for repair or bad weather, the women are not paid. Conditions worsen as workers are required to tend more machines and to work more quickly for no increase in pay. Women can be fired on a whim for any complaint or for questioning a boss. If workers are fired or leave the mill, they are blacklisted in all other mills.

When talk of a union begins, some women are wary but intrigued, but many are horrified, describing unions as “improper, if not immoral, for women to engage in” (*Spirit* 168). The newspapers call unions dishonest. Despite this, enough women organize and hold a “turn-out.” As women from each mill leave, they hold a rally where a woman speaks to the crowd:

In Union there is power. And we must have, we *will* have the power to press for and win a decent wage. If we organize ourselves to stand fast...if we hold out...together, we will prevail. To participate in public protest is not enough. We must organize. (*Spirit* 175)

Eventually, the mills must close for lack of workers. Some minor union demands are met. Some workers are allowed to return to their jobs, although union organizers are fired.

*Lyddie* is probably the best-known young adult book in this study. The working conditions in the mill are described in frightening detail and the unfair management practices are nine years later, but parallel to those in *Spirit*. Also present is the vitriolic racism of the workers toward the Irish, who are assumed to be willing to work for even lower wages than the women. Lyddie thinks that Irish immigrants are waiting to prey upon her position. She “could not fall behind..., else her pay would drop and...one of these...papists would have her job” (*Lyddie* 100).

Lyddie becomes friends with Diana, another laborer who is known as a radical for her union beliefs. In the evening, the women talk in their boardinghouses about the intolerable conditions. They compare themselves to “black slaves” and consider signing a petition to decrease the work day to 10 hours. As in *Spirit*, the women have differing opinions on the petition and unions.

“It does no good to rebel against authority.”

“Well, it does me good. I'm sick of being a sniveling wage slave.”

“I mean it's...it's unladylike and...and against the Scriptures.”

“Against the Bible to fight injustice?” (*Lyddie* 92)

Lyddie takes no part in the discussion. She wants only to earn money and isn't interested in working to better her situation. As conditions worsen, Lyddie stays out of all discussion of organizing. The work turns her into a mindless drone and eventually she leaves the mill. Through Diana, the Female Labor Reform Association that operated in Lowell is mentioned, but *Lyddie* is mostly focused on the misery of the workers. The 10-hour movement isn't successful in the novel and even though Lyddie is treated atrociously, the idea of a union still holds no appeal for her. The author, Katherine Paterson, refuses to take a stand on unions. They are posi-



tively represented, but she allows Lyddie, through her own apathy, to dismiss them as worthless.

**Shirtwaist Novels** The three novels about shirtwaist sweatshop workers are all set on the Lower East Side of Manhattan between 1908 and 1911. Each features a Russian Jewish immigrant family struggling to assimilate and to survive in grinding poverty. The protagonist is the younger family member of the shirtwaist worker and has often briefly worked in the sweatshop herself. The first two novels involve many of the same historical events. *Call Me Ruth* and *East Side Story* both tell of the famous shirtwaist factory workers' strike of 1909. The characters' immigrant status is a major component in these stories. When unions become an option, many immigrant workers are reluctant to join because of the perception that unions are anti-American.

Wretched working conditions and unfair labor practices are described in heartrending detail. Workers are paid by the piece, work 12 (or more) hour days, provide their own supplies, get no breaks, work in intolerable temperatures in locked rooms, and are classified as "learners" for years so as to be paid at a lower rate. Sexual harassment by bosses is as feared and common in the shirtwaist factories as TB and fires. In *Call Me Ruth*, we meet Fannie, a young widow working to support her family. She is caught up in the labor movement as more and more women join the ILGWU and win minor victories. A pivotal scene is based on an actual historical event. At the Cooper Union Hall, an enormous group of women gather to hear union speakers. The Triangle Shirtwaist factory was already on strike and the leaders wanted to call for a general shirtwaist strike. Clara Lemlich, a very young woman and an actual historical figure, leapt to the stage interrupting the droning male speakers who were urging caution, and demanded that the women take action. The crowd was so moved that a general strike was called. Fannie's daughter is shamed when her teacher rails against the strikers in class:

...the pickets were a disgrace to this country and to God. [Miss Baxter] read us an article in the paper which told how [a judge sentencing a striker said], "You are on strike against God and Nature whose law it is that man shall earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. You are on strike against God.

She said it was a disgrace how thousands of young women betrayed their own sex by acting in such an immoral fashion. It was bad enough . . . when men took to the streets and promoted violence, but for women to behave like wild animals was a sign of the wickedness of the times. She warned us that unless people exercised self-control and showed obedience to authority, this country and all it stood for would be destroyed. (*Call Me Ruth* 107)

Miss Baxter's attitude was a common one. As the women picket, they are harassed and assaulted by the police and hired thugs. They are regularly arrested and imprisoned. The strikers receive some minimal financial support from a group of rich women who formed the Women's Trade Union League. After many arrests, Fanny becomes a union leader and the strike is resolved with the women gaining a few benefits. Unfortunately, *Call Me Ruth* doesn't mention that the all-male leadership of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union were completely opposed to the strike, wouldn't

help organize, and wouldn't supply strike relief or legal aid (Dash 50).

Less accurately, *East Side Story* recalls some of the same events. Leah works at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory and is a union organizer. When she and sister, Rachel, arrive at Triangle one morning, the workers are picketing. Management tells the women that there is now less work and they are all promptly fired, but Rachel suspects the firing is a result of Leah's union work. This makes no sense. It was then a common and legal practice to fire workers for having any union affiliation. Firings were very public in order to frighten others away from unions, so Triangle would never have kept this motivation secret.

Without much detail, the strike ends, although Triangle workers' demands aren't largely met. But the women still believe that they have accomplished something.

"How can you go back to work if you have lost?" Rachel asked Leah. "The owners are still going to lock the doors, and the fire escapes still don't work. And they haven't agreed to give us fair pay or shorter working hours."

"It's true, Rachel. We lost," Leah said. "But we worked hard, and a lot of other people won. Besides, this was the first time that women really spoke out and were heard."

"I still don't understand," Rachel said. "Was it worth the trouble?"

... "Yes, Rachel. We convinced workers in other factories to go on strike, too. And a lot of them got what they asked for. We haven't given up hope here yet. One day we'll get what we want." (*East Side Story* 60)

Of course, the shirtwaist factory strike in 1909-1910 was very significant in labor history, but it was not "the first time that women really spoke out and were heard." Female-only unions had been striking since the early 1800s. The Lowell workers struck as early as 1834 (Zinn 115).

*Fire! The Beginnings of the Labor Movement* about the famous Triangle Factory fire suffers from an overstated title—the labor movement began long before the fire in 1911. Rosie works in the factory. A union is mentioned, along with the safety demands that it should make—fire escapes, unlocked doors, a sprinkler system (never mind that these weren't in use at the time).

Papa thinks that Freyda and Rosie should just be grateful that they even have jobs and that no matter how bad working conditions are here, they're better than life in Russia. The Saturday morning fire is described only vaguely. There is a mention of burned bodies on the sidewalk, but nothing of the many women who jumped to their death rather than burn (Dash 140). After 146 women die, the Jewish male characters blame the deaths on the fact that the women were working on the Sabbath, rather than on the unsafe working conditions.

"If only [she] had listened to me," said Uncle George. "If only she hadn't gone to work on the Sabbath." . . .

"That's not it," [Rosie] blurted out. "Didn't you hear Freyda? Ida? . . . The doors were locked. The windows stuck. Scraps all over the floor. Oil-soaked scraps. Hundreds of sewing machines packed into one room. Fires in the stairway. Only one fire escape, and it didn't even reach the ground." (*Fire!* 45)

The story ends in a bizarre ILGWU meeting to commemorate the dead. The male union speaker tells the women that their “future lies in unions. If you organize yourselves, you gain strength and get better working conditions” (*Fire* 49). However, the major shirtwaist strike had already happened—unsupported and even denounced by the ILGWU. Many of the women were union members at this point and had been for years (Dash 12).

There is little mention in these three books that the majority of shirtwaist workers were recent Italian or Russian Jewish immigrants. These two groups, who seldom spoke English, were often pitted against each other by the bosses who played on the immigrants’ fear and racism. Workers of different ethnic backgrounds were frequently seated beside each other so that they could not communicate—having no common language. This also prevented them from organizing or from seeing themselves as allies (Dash 5).

**Mine novels** The history of miners’ attempts to organize and resist exploitation is long and bloody. Some of the worst violence against laborers was committed by companies resisting the unionization of miners (Zinn 354). Mine workers in all seven novels register the same grievances: the working conditions were gravely dangerous, the pay was minimal and in scrip, the mine bosses regularly cheated miners paid by the ton by underweighing coal. Reminiscent of the mill workers in Lowell, mine owners controlled every aspect of the miners’ lives. Because of mine locations, miners were forced to live in “company towns” where the mine owners also owned all houses, stores, churches, newspapers, and schools. The miners had to purchase everything at the company store—often on account which was settled with their pay. Rent, supplies, etc. were also deducted. Miners barely broke even.

The first five novels are set in the anthracite coal mines in Pennsylvania between 1897 and 1902. In *The Candle and the Mirror* set in 1897, Emily is a suffragist and labor organizer working in the coal fields organizing Italian and Slovak miners and their wives. Just as in the shirtwaist factories, mine bosses consistently pitted these groups with no common language against one another. As long as miners fought among themselves, they hadn’t time to fight their true oppressor. The union organizers, Emily, Paolo, and Jan, speak to the miners in their own languages, although we are never told which union they represent. The United Mine Workers (UMW) and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) both organized miners in Pennsylvania. The IWW was the most radical of all unions, and despite its enormous influence on the history of labor, is never mentioned by name in any of the novels. Emily writes to a local newspaper about the miners’ desperation:

The owners don’t believe we’ll strike. They don’t realize how little the miners have to lose. Do you know that when the owners recently found out—through their company banks—

that the miners were managing to save money to bring their families over from Hungary and Italy, they slashed wages. They figured the miners were more controllable if they had no savings! (*The Candle and the Mirror* 123)

Eventually Emily convinces the miners’ wives to occupy the company store and destroy “the Book” of accounts, where the miners are regularly overcharged and cheated.

There is a brief mention of breakers—this was how boys as old as six or seven began their mine work. Their job was to separate coal from rock and slate and to sort the coal lumps as the mass of coal and rock tumbled down long chutes. The job was dangerous and back-breaking, and paid seventy-five cents for a 60-hour week.

*A Coal Miner’s Bride*, also set in 1897, culminates in the Lattimer Massacre where 19 striking and unarmed miners were killed and at least 50 were wounded when their march was fired upon by the local sheriff and other “deputized” men. Focusing largely on Polish immigrant miners, we are again shown bosses who encourage segregation of different ethnic communities as a way to prevent labor solidarity—this time coupled with anti-immigrant bigotry. Immigrant characters are skeptical of joining an “American” union, although this isn’t historically accurate. The UMW, of all unions, always welcomed all races and ethnicities understanding that unions wouldn’t otherwise be effective. When conditions finally become unbearable, the immigrant miners strike. Their demands included raises for men who work underground, a reduction of blasting powder prices (miners paid for their own supplies), and a restoration of recently lowered wages.

Unfortunately, we aren’t given any information about how the strike was resolved. If nothing else, the Lattimer Massacre did greatly increase union membership in the mines.

*Trouble at the Mines* is based on a 1899 strike in Arnot, Pennsylvania. The story is told by Rosie, the daughter and niece of miners. After miners are killed in a cave-in, the men begin to organize to demand more safety measures. They worry about the backlash experienced by other miners who tried to unionize. “...Those miners demanded their pay not be cut, the first thing the company did was fire the ringleaders to scare the others. And when that didn’t work, they evicted people from their homes” (*Trouble at the Mines* 6). These were common tactics early in any strike or effort to organize.

Rosie’s father and uncle are fired for trying to form a union, but the families hadn’t yet been evicted. The mine owners claim that there isn’t money for improved safety or raises (miners were paid sixty-five cents per ton of coal they mined). When the owners threaten to close the mine if the miners won’t return to work, many want to return—even if it means that none of their demands have been met. This rips apart many families.

The famous labor organizer Mother Jones, often called “the most dangerous woman in America,” who actually worked with miners in Arnot, appears in *Trouble at the Mines*.

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She encourages the miners to stick together and organizes the women to prevent scabs from going back to work. The women use pots, pans, and brooms to prevent any man from entering the mine. Mother Jones finds food for miners who have been on strike for months. Largely through her encouragement and the women preventing scabbing, the miners hold out for eight months and are eventually given a small raise and some safety improvements. She also encourages the miners and their families to forgive those who scabbed and to accept them into the union:

Dear friends, they were frightened. Frightened by hunger, frightened by sickness, they betrayed their brothers and sisters . . . But we fought for them anyway, and we have won for them too. And now that we're victorious...we must be as generous in victory as we have been faithful and brave in battle. We must forgive those who lost courage and fell by the wayside. (Trouble at the Mines 79)

The Arnot strike was marginally successful and less violent than others to come.

*Breaker*, set in 1902, is told by Pat McFarlane, a breaker boy. The story begins with a cave-in where all the trapped miners are killed, including Pat's father. After reminiscing about mine stories his father told him, Pat realizes that the mine owners are only willing to make changes after a disaster and this angers him. Pat can't understand why his father would never support a miners' union, which he incorrectly refers to as a *trade* union instead of an *industrial* union. This distinction may sound slight, but its implications were enormous for organized labor. No novel in the sample ever discusses the differences. *Trade* or *craft* unions (usually only for skilled, white, male workers) organized across industries, e.g., all electricians, all welders, etc. AFL unions were trade unions. *Industrial* unions organized within an industry, e.g., all railroad workers, all miners, etc. The IWW was an industrial union and its main legacy is creating a momentum for industrial unionism (Zinn 330). Trade unions made strikes virtually impossible. If railroad workers wanted to strike, then all the trade unions involved must agree and be coordinated and willing to support "unskilled" workers. This seldom happened and also left "unskilled" workers unrepresented. The miners' unions (UMW, WFM, etc.) were all industrial unions.

Throughout *Breaker*, tensions between Irish, Welsh, Slovak, and American miners are encouraged by mine owners. Interestingly, a new teacher arrives at the local school. The previous teacher "had drilled into her pupils that they should be grateful to the company for providing jobs and housing, a doctor and a school" (*Breaker* 63). The new teacher sends a different message:

You miners work longer hours and at greater peril than most other men. If you are paid by the car, the cars get bigger, if you are paid by the ton, the tons get heavier. If you are hurt or die in an accident, there is seldom any compensation. If you complain about poor working conditions, you will likely lose your job. If you refuse to buy overpriced goods at the store, you may be threatened or fired. Join the union and you are suspect, strike and you may be cut down by the Coal and Iron police. Your families suffer as you do. A few operators and rich railroad magnates control thousands of lives. (*Breaker* 62)

The teacher explains that workers were in such dire straits because they refused to organize on a large scale. As long as one mine was open, a strike at another made little difference.

The men decide to strike and John Mitchell, the UMW president who was invariably anti-strike, grudgingly supports them. The owners bring in armed guards to "protect mine property." The union leaders warned the workers not to "provoke the Coal & Iron police. Operators want the outside world to believe that strikers are dangerous, in order to get public opinion on their side" (*Breaker* 96). George Baer, the owner of the Reading Railroad, writes a letter to the newspaper to condemn the strike and the union:

The rights and interests of the laboring man will be protected and cared for—not by labor agitators, but by Christian men to whom God in His infinite wisdom has given control of the property interests of the country . . .

(*Breaker* 136)

This social Darwinism elevated to divine right was a frequent attitude of industry's owners.

Violence finally erupts. Sheriffs protecting scabs brought in by the owners were killed in a scuffle. Even though miners are innocent, they're correctly convinced they'll be blamed. In a common move, the governor sends in the National Guard to protect mine property and scabs. Never a neutral force, National Guard and federal troops were often used by mine owners to break strikes and to kill strikers. The strikers return to work and Clarence Darrow represents the miners in national hearings. Even so, they only win a 10% raise. None of their other demands are met.

*Theodore Roosevelt: Letters from a Young Coal Miner* is a bizarre and fictional exchange of letters between a 13-year-old miner and President Roosevelt regarding the same events as *Breaker*. Roosevelt appears sympathetic, but unwilling to help laborers. His sympathies are likely overstated given his well-documented apathy toward child labor and workers in general (Colman 40). This novel, like *Breaker*, concludes with the hearings after the anthracite coal strike in 1902. One of the miners' grievances had been that the weighing agents regularly underweighed the coal of miners who were paid by the ton. Roosevelt's commission decreed that if miners wanted coal weighed fairly that they must pay for the weighing agents themselves. This was a defeat for miners, yet Armstrong has her characters pleased with the decision. In actual history, Mother Jones, who worked as a UMW organizer, felt that Mitchell had "caved in to the demands of the mine owners because he was flattered by the attention he got from [Roosevelt]" (Kraft 43).

The final mine novels take place in Colorado. Set in 1911, Sebostyn's *On Fire* tells the story of Yankee, whose union brother was killed in a strike, and Sammy, whose brother is a scab. The story starts shortly after a strike has already begun. This novel paints everyone involved in the strike—miners, union members, scabs, owners, families, and townspeople—as violent thugs unmotivated by principle and only interested in how much destruction they can cause.

Even though miners have a multitude of legitimate grievances, Yankee wishes she could force the owners and the miners to "come to an agreement and stop this craziness" (*On Fire* 91). Throughout the book, senseless violence is committed on both sides. Even though we're never told the



strikers' demands, we're told they're not met. The book ends as the strike ends and one character cynically says, "Mr. Ekert can tell his boys he won them a little something and they ought to get back to work. And Mr. Stoker can tell his bosses they didn't lose a thing, and ought to get back to their partying. I guess that's called ending" (*On Fire* 202). *On Fire*, a truly mediocre book, takes no real stand on unions or labor issues. The author seems to sympathize with the inhuman conditions, but then presents union members and leaders as thugs.

Jones's *Frankie* tells the story of the famous Ludlow Massacre in 1914. The novel begins as the miners' families have been evicted from their company houses because of an impending strike. Luke's father delivers milk to the miners' camp as they await the arrival of tents and blankets from the UMW. The situation escalates when some Greek miners return to their homes to retrieve personal possessions and are killed by the local sheriff after being arrested for trespassing.

Scabs are brought in from out of state. Mother Jones arrives to support the strikers and delivers her famous line "you've got to pray for the dead, but fight like hell for the living!" (*Frankie* 45). She tells the union men to encourage the scabs to join the union. After several months of the strike, Baldwin-Felts guards are brought in to intimidate the strikers. There is constant minor violence until the guards finally kill several miners and the miners retaliate.

The governor of Colorado calls in the state militia to keep the peace, although in actuality, the militias were never an impartial presence and were used as mine guards to protect the interests of the owners and punish the strikers (Zinn 355). Mother Jones is arrested. Escalating over the months that the miners and their families freeze in their tent communities, tensions come to a head. The Baldwin-Felts guards and the militia open fire on the tent communities and the few armed miners fire back. After spending an entire day shooting into every tent and at unarmed miners and families, the guards douse the whole area with kerosene and lit it afire. Many trapped families burned to death. Eventually 33 miners and their families were killed and hundreds were wounded. Even after this, the strike was not settled in favor of the miners.

While not as nihilistic as *On Fire*, the main point of *Frankie* seems to be that these are not black and white issues (although they certainly seem very straightforward both in history and in this novel)—they're too complicated to understand fully and that there is good and bad in both labor and management. This may be more accurate today, but was a gross oversimplification at that time.

### Conclusions

Despite the fact that these books can be applauded for examining the experiences of ordinary people as opposed to famous ones, it is unfortunate that the focus remains so tightly on the characters instead of the broader historical and economic context in which the novels were ostensibly situated. What picture of collective action is presented? Generally, young readers are shown individuals—not groups working in concert. Novels do traditionally focus on individuals, but authors could have chosen to focus on individuals and/in the collective. Even when the workers are part of the union, they are still separate from the group.

While all of the novels focused on the monstrous working conditions, the miserable grinding poverty of the workers, and the callous apathy of the bosses, they all also deftly avoided any meaningful discussion of the inherent injustices of capitalism, class structure, and the belief in social and economic Darwinism. None of these novels makes any meaningful attempt to situate their narrative within any larger historical, political, or economic picture. The novels seldom examine in any detail the accomplishments or purposes of organized labor and they all miss the opportunity to examine the long-term impact that unions may have had on the laborers' lives. The only famous union organizer who appears is Mother Jones. Where is Eugene Debs? Bill Haywood?

The authors of these twelve books seem largely to be pro-labor although their specific beliefs aren't always clear. Therefore, none of the books are as informative as they might have been. But even with these drawbacks and their widely varying quality and appeal, these labor movement novels still serve an important purpose and should be used in conjunction with labor nonfiction. They can help teachers to humanize this facet of our history and to provide a different perspective than is likely to be found in history textbooks.

Perhaps students might compare labor novels with both history texts and primary source documentation. This would be a perfect opportunity for critical reading and thinking. Students would be able to act as historians and scholars of literature as well. Even though these novels are far from perfect, and even the best novels should never be used uncritically in a social studies curriculum, they offer a starting place for considering the perspectives of those whose voices are seldom heard. Or as Green suggests, students can use these novels to begin to examine why US companies "have insisted on such total control of the workplace and of the people in their employ and why private and state forces intervened so often against workers and their unions" ("Why Teach Labor History?" 5). Allowing laborers' voices to be heard can also serve to teach young readers that ordinary people working together can effect great change—even if it is often a slow process.

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# John R. Tunis and the Sports Novels for Adolescents: A Little Ahead of His Time

John S. Simmons

Over the past thirty-five or so years, readers have witnessed two trends in young adult novels: improved literary quality and the increasingly realistic treatment of adolescence. During that period, themes of the growing up process have expanded significantly, including several which were taboo before the late 1960's. Furthermore, these credible themes were to be inferred from a widening range of topics found in the YA texts: minority neighborhoods, gang activities, violence in suburbia, intimate boy-girl and same-sex involvements, teenage pregnancy, premarital sex, single parentage, drop-out life, addiction to alcohol and drugs, parent/offspring violence and many more. Such issues were seldom raised in earlier young adult fiction. Interestingly, the novels written during this period have rarely been focused on sports—a widespread preoccupation of U.S. teenagers, especially males, over the past two centuries.

Dorothy Pettit's comprehensive survey/analysis of well-written YA novels (1960) provided a list of 25 novels which she identified and then evaluated for their literary quality. None of these popular, stylistically mature, credible texts dealt with athletic topics. Some 23 years later (1973), Alfred Muller's follow-up dissertation, using the Pettit method of identification/analysis, produced another 25-novel list. None of those texts dealt with sports and young people either.

Alleen Pace Nilsen and Kenneth L. Donelson provide an "Honors Sampling" in the Appendices of their extensive treatment of YA literature, *Literature for Today's Young Adults* (six editions appearing in 1971-2001). The "Sampling" begins with novels published in 1971 and includes a brief statement of their subject matter. The Nilsen/Donelson (or, in some editions, the Donelson/Nilsen) text is now in its sixth edition, thus covering novels written over the past quarter century. It was not until their fourth edition (1995) that any literary works on the topic of sports appear. Finally, in his ongoing periodic review of "Best Written YA Novels", Ted Hipple has identified only one sports text thus far, Chris

Crutcher's *Iron Man* (1995).

It is, therefore, only in recent years—the late 1980's to date—that YA authors have begun to use the backdrop of adolescents' athletic activity for the themes they propound. In the "Book Review" section of *ALAN Review*, books about the sports topic can be found with increasing regularity. Today, a reader or investigator of YA texts would find the names of Chris Crutcher, Walter Dean Myers, Matt Christopher, Chris Lynch, Randy Powell, Rich Wallace, and Adrian Fogelin, among others. The Fogelin text, *Crossing Jordan* (2000) reflects another recent dimension of YA sports fiction: the focus of *female* athletes in both amateur and professional ranks. Donald Gallo's excellent short story collection, *Ultimate Sports* (1995) provides recent examples of the topic in that

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*Whether these novels are set in Brooklyn, New York, or a small Midwestern town, they almost always feature an example of the theme of the search by young persons for self-definition—the central issue in all of the YA novels found on both the Pettit and Muller lists.*

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genre. It should also be noted that Robert Lipsyte, a well-known syndicated sports journalist of this half-century, wrote a YA novel (his first) titled *The Contender* in 1967, about the trials and tribulations of an African American teenage drop-out from Harlem who approaches self-identify as an amateur boxer. Recently, after an extended hiatus, Lipsyte has published additional YA novels on the subject of sports.

In the late 1930's and following, however, a novelist named John R.

Tunis began publishing a long series of books about various athletic situations and issues of his day. A Harvard-educated, Eastern establishment, upper middle class, white male journalist/editor, Tunis wrote during the era 1938-1973. His death in 1975 punctuated a literary career which featured a preoccupation with U.S. athletics, both amateur and professional and, in a thematic sense, transcended the sports-for-sports sake pulp fiction of that era.

The recency of serious YA writers' preoccupation with the athletic activity of adolescents, described previously, is one more reflection of contemporary authors' attempts to present the "real world" of the teenager in an arresting and sophisticated manner. The era in which Tunis wrote, however, was one in which the Zane Greys, the Edgar Rice Burroughs, the Carolyn Keanes, and the Grace Livingston Hills were producing their Super Boy/Super Girl novels, works which were ex-



tremely popular but almost totally devoid of literary quality. It was also one of narrow, melodramatic social perspectives, one in which Hairbreadth Harry, the WASP, spotless warrior, always hit the game winning homer in the last of the ninth, always waving to the handicapped kid in the grandstand as he crossed home plate. All in all, that pre-World War II period was still immersed in the residue of the Horatio Alger spirit, one that dominated the books-for-young-people scene for three-quarters of a century.

Tunis, however, did not fit that mold and, in a clearly limited manner, provided a series of YA novels which reached beyond the ambiance of the Algeresque sports books. Several of these novels explored the social contexts in which games were played and probed the fears, anxieties, and egos of young male athletes who were the headliners of their times. A number of Tunis texts dealt primarily with sports as struggle and didn't venture far beyond those confines. That group was almost exclusively concerned with the fate of the old Brooklyn Dodgers and reflected their author's die-hard commitment to that colorful Boys-of-Summer team of yore. In fact, Tunis' final Dodger novel, *Schoolboy Johnson*, was published in 1958, the year after Walter O'Malley decided to break all those Flatbush hearts by moving the team to Los Angeles.

Major league rookies face rites of passage quite similar to those of senior high athletes. What follows is a cryptically annotated list of those novels in which such searches go on. It should also be stated that a number of these critical narratives are interlaced with social conflicts faced by communities of Tunis' times. It will quickly become obvious that they are almost identical to several being faced by YA's at the outset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as well as the communities in which they reside. In order of publication, they are:

1. *Champion's Choice* (1940) - a young, highly talented female tennis player succumbs to the wishes of her family and gives up the opportunity to become an international competitor in order to marry a longtime boy friend.
2. *All American* (1942) - a star YA athlete leaves his prep school because of peers' racial, ethnic, and social prejudices and enrolls in a high school where he meets initial hostility.
3. *Keystone Kids* (1943) - two outstanding young brothers move up to the Brooklyn Dodgers where they meet with inter-squad antagonisms and virulent anti-Semitism.
4. *Yea! Wildcats!* (1944) - a young, Indiana high school basketball coach leads his small town team into the state finals while encountering adult interference and extreme racial bigotry.
5. *A City for Lincoln* (1945) - the protagonist noted in #3 above gives up his coaching position, runs successfully for public office, and confronts civic corruption with mixed results.
6. *Rookie of the Year* (1946) - a rookie Dodger pitching ace battles alcohol addiction and the manipulations of a devious, self-serving, front-office club employee.
7. *Highpockets* (1948) - another Dodger rookie, a self-centered slugger from a small North Carolina town, changes his behavior as he deals with a child whom he has seriously injured.

8. *Young Razzle* (1949) - yet another Dodger rookie, an all-around infield star, struggles with his teammates' jealousy as well as attempts to overcome his hatred of his father who is by now an over-the-hill, drunken Dodger pitcher.

9. *The Other Side of the Fence* (1951) - an upper middle class prep school graduate hitchhikes his way across the USA, golf clubs on his shoulder, learning about life through a series of humbling experiences.

10. *Go, Team, Go* (1954) - a talented small-town high school basketball team is nearly destroyed by the delinquent, often criminal behavior of certain players. Some survive the experience; others don't.

In order to provide a closer look at this author's attempt to demonstrate where sports sometimes touch contemporary social issues, three texts will be explicated below:

1. *All-American* Ronny Perry is a standout athlete at The Academy, a typical private preparatory school. During the game with their traditional rival, Abraham Lincoln High, Ronny and a long-time teammate seriously injure a key opponent, putting him out of the game and preserving a hard-fought victory. The injured player, Meyer Goldman, is hospitalized, and Ronny initiates a series of visits with him, a courtesy his teammates eschew. As their relationship deepens, Ronny learns about the anti-Semitism Meyer has had to endure:

"Uhuh, Y'see, Ronald, it's like this. A Jewish boy, now, he's behind the 8-ball all the time. It isn't enough to be better than the other guy, he's gotta be a whole lot better."

"Has he? How you mean, Meyer?"

"Well, I mean like this. Is he after a job, he's gotta be twice as smart as the other boy, else he don't land that job. Get me?"

Ronald got him.

"Like, now, is he trying to get a scholarship to college. His marks must be lots higher than the other boy or the boy grabs off the dough. See?"

Ronald saw. The other boy. Why, that's me! That's Keith! That's Tommy Gilmore. It's some of the kids in Abraham Lincoln, even. Ronald saw. What he saw he did not like.

"Well, yes, I suppose you're right."

"Now me, for instance. I want to be a doctor. I want to, understand. I'm set. My old man says sure, he'll help me. He'll give me dough. I get my marks; I'm set. Will I get into Medical School? Maybe so, maybe not."

"Why not, Meyer?"

"Why not! 'Cause I'm Jewish. Lots of the Medical Schools don't want me. They don't say so, out loud, that is. But they don't and I know they don't." His face looking straight ahead was stern. (All American, 72-73)

Ronny also learns how the incident has affected his close prep school friends. Their indifference and even hostility to minority group members of the Lincoln High team lead to a confrontation subsequent to one of the hospital visits. A class mate says:

"You know, Ronny, they have no right to play Negroes on their team." He pronounced the word as if it were spelt Nigrows.

Ronald flared up. "Whad'ya mean they got no right? It's a free country, isn't it?"

"Oh, sure. It's a free country all right. Sure, they got a right, they got a right. Point is they hadn't oughta. Now down south we have separate schools and colleges for Negroes with their own teams and leagues and schedules and everything.

Ronald was stopped. He'd never heard of that. Nor had any of the others. They looked at Tommy on the window-seat with some interest.

"Certain. We give 'em their own teams and all, and they like it. Why, they'd much rather play with themselves."

"How do you know, Tommy?" Ronald was stung by the other's assurance.

"Oh, oh, I know. Down south we understand how to treat Negroes. Up here, you-all spoil 'em." He paused. "Leastways, *we* think. Now we don't have any trouble; we love our Negroes. They're our friends, yes, sir. They are..."

"Well, the way you got to LeRoy's shins and ankles that afternoon didn't look to me like you loved Negroes much, Tommy!"

The other sat up angrily. "Yeah. OK! And I'll give him worse next year, too," he said with emphasis. "Him and that clunk, that boy friend of yours, Goldman, and the rest of those lugs. . ."

"Me too."

"Same here. When you're playing with a gang of thugs like that you can't be fancy. They think every year we're a bunch of softies; well, they found out this time."

"They found out—what?" Ronald was on his feet. Now he knew. He disliked them. Once they had been schoolmates, teammates, friends. Now they were there, over there, across that river, going away from him. He kept calling to them but they moved farther and farther away. "They found out—what? That we wanted to win the worst way, that what the Duke always said in chapel about playing the game was a lot of beeswax, that all Baldy's talk about clean, hard football was tripe once we got on the field and saw we had a chance to trim 'em. They found out a lot of things. That we talked about sportsmanship but kicked LeRoy in the shins whenever we could, and ganged up on Goldman..."

"Yeah! What about them? Maybe they didn't all gang up on you whenever you tried to throw a pass?"

"And maybe they didn't go for your shoulder, that guy Stacey, their end. And Fronzak, always cracking Roger on his bum ankle in the scrimmages, and Mancini..."

"Why, those lugs, those meatballs," said Tommy, "they couldn't play clean if they tried. Those peasants..."  
(*All American*, 39-41)

Appalled by his friends' attitudes, Ronny quits school and enrolls at Lincoln High where he is greeted with athletes' reactions which range from cold indifference to ill-disguised hostility. After being hospitalized as a result of a fistfight with his chief antagonist, Ronny gains acceptance and eventually admiration from his former opponents.

Issues of prejudice, however, are resurrected during the ensuing football season. This time the high school scores a

come-from-behind victory over The Academy. The star of the win is the African-American end, Ned LeRoy, and that success leads to an invitation to play in a post-season game against a Southern opponent in Miami's Orange Bowl. Ronny and his teammates learn, however, that Ned will not be allowed to participate. Unwilling to accept that decision, Ronny leads a crusade to rectify the injustice. This time, he runs into a "kinder, gentler" opposition from the community's movers and shakers. His first obstacle is his coach:

"'Cause I think we oughtn't to go to Miami without Ned."

"You mean to say you'd...you mean to stand there and look me in the face and tell me you'd wreck...you'd ruin our chances against Miami...now look here, get one thing clear. What you propose doing is insubordination. Insubordination to school discipline. We're going down to play Miami. If you don't care to go along, that's your affair. I'll slap Jack Train in your place. We don't need you, we don't need to win, we've never needed victory so much we had to go back on our principles in this school. Just fix that in your mind."

(*All American* 216)

Ronny is not deterred, however, and through his leadership the team votes to boycott the game unless Ned plays. That vote leads to an angry meeting between team representatives and several tribal elders:

"Last year we outfitted the band completely. We're proud of this school. We think it's the best high school in the State. We're proud of the team. Naturally you wouldn't want to do anything to hurt the town, would you? Of course not." He smiled a fishy kind of smile. Ronald disliked him. He looked at Meyer and Jim and could see they disliked him also. Well, he thought, we're sticking together.

Mr. Latham continued his argument. "I said just now it was a question of disappointing one colored boy or forty thousand people in town. Maybe I should have said a hundred and sixty thousand folks here in the County who want to see you go down there and clean up those Southern crackers."  
(*All American* 223)

But Mr. Curry, the school principal, enters the dialogue:

"I wonder...I wonder whether we are being quite straight with these boys." The soft-voiced man behind the desk, who so far hadn't said a word, spoke up.

"What do you mean, straight?" Mr. Latham was angry now. He was almost snarling. "The game's been scheduled. All arrangements have been made with the Central Railroad, all the tickets have been sold. We have to consider the Miami people, you know. We can't put them in a hold; we have responsibilities toward them"

"That's right," echoed Mr. Swift with enthusiasm in his voice. "We have a great responsibility toward our opponents. Fair play. Give the other man a chance. That's one of the elements of sportsmanship. Sportsmanship; must be good sports, you know." He looked around for approval.

"True." The tone was quiet, almost monotonous. "True, but isn't our first responsibility toward these boys here?" Ronald was amazed at the little man's persistence. That mild figure behind the desk changed in his eyes; he really had what it takes; he was a fighter after all. And he was for them, on

their side, not against them as some principals would have been in his place. (All American 224)

The players refuse to back down, and the whole community erupts into heated conflict. This episode reflects one of Tunis' recurrent themes: the exploitation of amateur athletes by well-healed, well-connected, devious community leaders.

As is so often the case with YA novels of that era, the team does the right, self-sacrificing thing and rejects the Miami opportunity. It is, however, invited to play a suburban Chicago high school team in a post-season, intersectional game, as voiced in the final sentence, which implies that "the whole team" is going to Chicago.

Considering the pre-civil rights temper of the times, Tunis' novel gets *this* writer's nod as pretty gutsy. And one further postscript before moving on to a second text: the fact that Mr. Curry, the principal, stood with the team members in opposition to the will of the Big Chiefs merits several hosannas. Wish we in 2001 could clone that guy!

**2. Keystone Kids** Spike and Bob Russell are introduced as a young, small town shortstop-second base tandem playing for the Nashville minor league team. Toward the end of their season, the Brooklyn Dodgers, who are involved in a down-to-the-wire pennant race, purchase their contracts. While the two youngsters, especially the older brother Spike, shine in their brief tenure, the Dodgers lose out partly because of disharmony among some of the stars. This intersquad antagonism re-emerges early in the following season. The frugal, dutiful, perseverant brothers are amazed—and disgusted—by the behavior and attitudes of several outstanding Dodgers: overpaid, self-centered, hyper-critical of "rival" teammates. (Incidentally, in this aspect of professional athletes, Tunis is *way* ahead of his times; c.f. Roger Clemens, Gary Sheffield, Ken Griffey, Jr., *at al.*)

As the squabbles among prima donnas escalate and the team sinks in the League standings, the volatile manager loses his job, and Spike Russell becomes the new field boss. When Spike sets out to control his self-absorbed luminaries, he has a modicum of success. He must deal with another problem, however: the rejection by several team members of a new Jewish player, one Jocko Klein. Even his brother and long-time soulmate Bob joins the more prejudiced Dodgers. Bob expresses his sentiments in a Boston hotel room:

"Yeah, but this Klein's a Jewish boy."

The elder Russell, seated on his bed in the act of removing his shoes and socks from tired feet, looked up quickly. Had his brother been listening to other and older men on the team?

"Oh? He's Jewish, is he?"

"Sure, didn't you know that?" Then after a moment Bob added with authority, "Won't last."

Now Spike knew. It was the same record, the same words and music. He replied quickly, "Why won't he last?"

"'Cause he's Jewish, that's why. Man, the bench jockey'll get him. They'll ride that baby to death, you see if they don't. The pitchers'll dust him off, too. Besides, those Jewish boys can't take it."

His brother's tone and his words irritated Spike. That phrase, he recalled, had jarred on him when Swanson first spoke it. Now it rankled. "What makes you think so, Bobby? How

'bout Newman on the Travelers and Stern with the Crackers and..."

"Aw, they're yellow. No guts," announced his brother with the finality of a radio announcer reading a commercial. It was the same line, the same expression, the same verdict Spike had heard previously. "Everyone know it," continued the younger Russell. (Keystone Kids 111-112)

One of the worst of the bigots, Karl Case, singles out Klein for intense abuse:

To be sure, everyone on the club addressed the rookie catcher as Buglenose. That was his nickname, his name on the bench and in the clubhouse, just as Fat Stuff and Spike and Rats were nicknames. There was comradeship in it, affection almost. After the card game on the train, however, there was a note in Karl's voice which made the young catcher look up flushing when the swarthy outfielder spoke to him. Naturally Case didn't miss this sign. (Keystone Kids 138)

Out of frustration, manager Russell confronts his confused, fearful, anxiety-ridden catcher. Jocko responds:

It came when I was...le's see...I must have been eight or nine years old. We lived with my grandfather, me and my cousins, a bunch of us kids, so naturally we always played together and stuck together. We never got to know other kids very well. Then one day I was playing alone in the street, and another boy from down the road came by and said, 'Hey, are you a kike? Are you a kike?'"

The words poured out. Klein had no trouble talking now as he told the story of himself which was the story of his people. "'Are you a kike?' And I said, 'Am I a kike? Of course I'm not a kike.' 'Ha,' he said, 'I guess you don't know what a kike is.' So I went inside and found my mother. 'Ma,' I said, 'what's a kike, what is it?' My mother, she looked at me a long, long while.

"Finally she told me. She told me lots, what was behind us Jews, back, way, way back, Spike, back so far you wouldn't understand, back thousands of years. 'Son,' she said, 'you've got to know some time; you might as well know right now. This is what we're up against, all of us, what we've been up against, what we've had to fight since the start of things.' And she told me, told me everything, a lot you wouldn't hardly realize, a lot I couldn't explain. How my grandfather Klein escaped from Vienna, and his grandfather was chased out of Poland, and...and..."

(Keystone Kids 155-156)

The overwrought player becomes almost frenzied in his outpouring of reaction to a life of anti-Semitic treatment. Spike finally calms him down throughout a mixture of authoritative, sympathetic, and rational rhetoric. Jocko then develops the inner resolve first to face down his nemesis Case and then some abusive, threatening members of rival teams. In the literary *zeitgeist* of earlier YA works, he gains the admiration, respect, and acceptance of his fellow Bums. The fortuitous mid-season trading of Karl Case to the Cubs doesn't hurt Jocko's cause, either.

At the novel's conclusion, the Dodgers are unified as a team and are making an impressive comeback after their disastrous start. The author isn't through with his cultural



message, however. In describing Spike Russell's personal appraisal of his Dodger players, Tunis wanders off in a digression about the ethnic roots of several key Brooklyn individuals. In doing so, he provides a primer of diversity in American that is truly a harbinger of the multi-cultural emphasis which preoccupies many United States citizens today:

These were some of the things Spike did not know about his team, the team that was lost and found itself. For now they were a team, all of them. Thin and not so thin, tall and short, strong and not so strong, solemn and excitable, Calvinist and Covenanter, Catholic and Lutheran, Puritan and Jew, these were the elements that, fighting, clashing and jarring at first, then slowly mixing, blending, refining, made up a team. Made up America. (Keystone Kids 198)

It can, therefore, be stated conclusively that *Keystone Kids* is much more than just a baseball yarn. One of its salient features is the cultural make-up, conflicts, and unresolved issues of the United States, circa 2001.

3. *Yea! Wildcats!* Published one year after *Keystone Kids*, this novel deals with social concerns of people living in a very different setting. Most of Tunis' protagonists (all male, minus one) come from small towns. In this novel, and its sequel, *A City for Lincoln*, a small, rural, largely lower middle class Indiana town boasts an outstanding high school basketball team. Under the tutelage of a young, dedicated coach, this team fights its way from obscurity to the Indiana state finals.

In this text, Tunis returns to one of his recurrent themes: the deleterious effects of meddling by affluent adults into schoolboy athletic programs within the community. Sociologists over many decades have analyzed the impact of the "Power Structure" on the direction followed by communities both large and small. In *Yea! Wildcats!*, the youthful coach Don Henderson is greatly admired by the town's big shots while his team is winning. These individuals, however, become antagonistic when the coach makes the following *faux pas* during a private, carefully orchestrated dinner at the home of the head honcho, one J. Frank Shaw:

Their deferential attitude made Don uncomfortable. Why, they act like I knew more about things than they do! He was confused. Because he was confused he spoke the first words that came into his head. They were words he had heard from an older man. "I reckon Springfield [sic] is the same as everywhere else. The kids are O.K.; the kids are wonderful. You can always depend on them to come through. It's us older folks who...who are...who make trouble."

Something warned him to stop. An unpleasant quietness filled the room. There was a queer look in their glances. The subject was changed, quickly. (*Yea! Wildcats!* (1944); reprinted as *An Odyssey Classic* (1989) 99).

In creating this episode, the author has provided an excellent example of Things to Come. Later in the playoffs, as the Wildcats move up to the next competitive level, these civic leaders come up with a plan which, they believe, will

bring the team the state titles on the proverbial silver platter: they will lure to Springfield the father of a star player from another town, using a better job as the bait. When they excitedly present the idea to the coach, he expresses opposition. The argument heats up until:

"Don, listen, boy. You want to sin the State; every coach does. You've lived for it, struggled for it, dreamed about it ever since you started to work with kids. Now with Kates in there we're a sure bet to win. This is our year."

"Mr. Morgan, I don't want a team that buys players. I'd rather take our chances. Lemme tell you they're better'n most folks think, these boys."

J. Frank Shaw interrupted. "Don, you're talking to an old varsity basketball player. For that Piper's slot, Kates is the answer to a coach's prayer. Anyhow, you think this over; just think things over until Tuesday."

"Frank, look. I picked these five kids last season when they were juniors and sophs, not one with a big name; they played the last part of the year and absorbed plenty of lickings. Now they're a unit; at last they're becoming a team; they're starting to roll. They took the punishment last year and earned their spurs, and I'd like to see 'em come through. It won't build up character to shove an outsider in there now; they'll be plenty sore."

"Character, hell! It's the State Tournament we want," said Harry Green. (Yea! 118-119)

The coach prevails, the big dogs are put off, and the team suffers its heartbreaking loss. Don first quits as coach, then is persuaded to return as the story ends. A further issue, however, unfolds during the course of the season. The team has its first playoff success led by an African American player, Jackson Piper. At that time, there is no community reaction to his presence on an otherwise all-white team. One townsman is conscious of the possible future ramifications of Jackson's status: the seedy, diminutive but feisty editor of the town newspaper, one "Peedad" Wilson. One evening he invites himself to sit at the coach's table in a local restaurant. After Peedad makes a few derogatory comments about J. Frank Shaw, the following dialogue takes place:

He (Wilson) laid down his knife and fork on the edge of his plate and, leaning over, looked at the young coach. "You let colored boys play on your teams?"

"They're Americans, aren't they?" His voice was cool.

"Good! Fine! That's the kind of talk I like. Now let me ask you another. Suppose you had five boys, the best basketball players in town, no question about it. They're all colored. Would you play 'em?"

He didn't answer offhand; he thought. For Don Henderson knew the State in which he had been born and raised. He knew this wasn't a question to be answered without thought. So he thought some time before replying. Finally he said quietly, "Mr. Wilson, I believe I would."

"Even if the Chamber of Commerce objected? If Rotary came to you and objected?"

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*The upbeat, too-good-to-be-true ending of Yea! Wildcats! is representative of most of Tunis' novels. During his lifetime, this was the temper of the times in fiction written for young adults.*

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"If they came to me, I'd listen to 'em because I'm a public servant. But I'd play those boys."

"Even if the School Board intimated to you off the record that if you did they wouldn't be able to renew your contract?"

This time his answer was not long coming. "Seems like I would, Mr. Wilson."

"Fine! Now that brings us back to the municipal swimming pool. You think colored boys are Americans. O.K., d'you think they should be allowed to swim in the pool?"

Don wasn't to be trapped so easily. "Well...yes...I mean...that's different. Now you take swimming..."

"I see. You'll go along just so far. Like everyone else in this town."

The tone made him uncomfortable again. He was annoyed. "See here, Mr. Wilson, I don't mind swimming with colored boys myself. But there's lots of folks in this town that do. They might be right; they might be wrong; anyhow, that's how they feel. In this country the majority rules; they're in the majority here in Springfield."

"Exactly, I'm coming to that. You'd admit, no doubt, that if the colored boys can't swim in the big pool in they park, they should have one of their own."

"Why, yes, I suppose so." (Yea! 75-77)

This racist attitude becomes dramatically evident in the hours immediately following the Wildcats' harrowing loss in the state final. Back in Springfield, deeply disappointed citizens, many who have lost big bucks on the team, others who are showing the effects of listening to the game at local taverns, take to the street. Their intense disappointment takes the following form:

"Frank Shaw's right. He sure knows his basketball, Frank does." "This fella's too young." "He should never have let that colored boy play. It all started back then." "First thing you know, we'll have a colored team representing this town." "A colored team representing Springfield!" "Yeah, ain't that so, Elmer? Ain't that so, Joe? Why, the first thing you know, this fella..."

"Yessir, that's correct. Throwing off one of our good boys for a nigger." "Who is this man, Henderson? Why does he think he is?" "Thinks he's running this town." "Well, he isn't running this town. Nor the colored folks, neither. They're getting mighty uppity lately, you noticed that? They don't know their places like they usta." "Let's do something about it."

"Let's do something." "What'll we do? "How 'bout that colored boy, the boy who held up two-three women in town last month, snatched their purses, remember? He's out on bail. Ain't no justice in this-man's town." "Let's us get the blighter..." (Yea! 283-284)

Coach Henderson, however, is warned on the telephone by Peedad (a clear *deus ex machina*), leaves the team at a restaurant, speeds to the scene, and faces down the angry crowd.

The upbeat, too-good-to-be-true ending of *Yea! Wildcats!* is representative of most of Tunis' novels. During his lifetime, this was the temper of the times in fiction written for young adults. In spite of his persistently happy endings and his occasional use of melodrama, John R. Tunis is an author whose themes foreshadow those in today's young adult novels which feature teenagers, have sports, and deal with certain sensitive, still-unresolved social issues spilling over into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In his attempt to link sports with the communities in which they are played, he broached some highly significant issues in the literature written for and about America's youth.

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**Novels By John R. Tunis**  
(each was published by Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York)

*All American*, 1942.  
*Champion's Choice*, 1940.  
*Keystone Kids*, 1943.  
*Yea! Wildcats!*, 1944.  
*A City for Lincoln*, 1945.  
*Rookie of the Year*, 1946.  
*Highpockets*, 1948.  
*Young Razzle*, 1949.  
*The Other Side of the Fence*, 1951.  
*Go, Team, Go*, 1954.

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