



From the Guest Editor

Editors' Note: When we proposed the idea of having a themed issue on digital media in the world of young adult literature, James Bucky Carter, an assistant professor at the University of Texas at El Paso, immediately came to our minds as a guest editor. We all had read *Building Literacy Connections with Graphic Novels: Page by Page, Panel by Panel* (2007), a text that looks closely at the incorporation of graphic novels into the classroom, and Jackie immediately devoted a week to graphic novels in her university adolescent literature course. As author of the blog EN/SANE World, Bucky reviews recent graphic novels, reports on the news in this field, and examines teaching resources for those interested in using this genre with their students. We are pleased to have him introduce this issue and share his thoughts on the unique spaces graphic novels occupy.

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Transmediation, multiliteracy, bloggage, managerialism, emoticons, technoscience, vooks, digi-novels, graphic novels, graphic narrative, documentaries, affinity spaces, "convergence culture"—these are key words or concepts from the articles in this issue of *The Alan Review*, which focuses on film, new media, digital technologies, and the role of the image as they relate to young adult literature. It seems that keeping up with young adult literature and its place in education echoes what Steven, Jacqueline, and Melanie said in the introduction to the last issue of *TAR* (Bickmore, Bach, & Hundley, 2010): "There are only so many days." New terms, new theories, new modes, along

with repurposed ways of viewing and using older ones seem to barrage the scholar and teacher. Henry Jenkins (2006) may be right to purport a "convergence culture," and we may be right to embrace it, but let us not forget that convergence, defined as the act of coming together, is also what happens when an SUV swerves out of its lane and into oncoming traffic. How does one stay current without crashing? How many forms and genres does one have to love/pretend to stomach to keep up appearances these days? How are our students engaging, consuming, and interacting with these new forms? Young adult literature in the 21st century can be a dizzying experience, one in which the participant may swoon in the vertigo of reality and hyperreality, in the spaces between the real, the unreal, and something beyond or between both.

Describing the hyperreal, Jean Baudrillard (2000) asserts, "Everywhere we see a paradoxical logic: the idea is destroyed by its own realization. By its own excess. And in this way history itself comes to an end . . . history presents itself as if it were advancing and continuing, when it is actually collapsing" (2000, pp. 46–49). Iain Thomson, who has applied Baudrillard's theory to the graphic novel *Watchmen*, clarifies that hyperreality often takes the given, the known, the real, and moves it to its extreme, thereby allowing for the possibility of its disintegration at hyper-speed. Pornography destroys sex because it is "more sexual than sex"; obesity destroys the body because it is fatter than fat"; *Watchmen* destroys the hero with the superhero, "who is more heroic than any hero, but whose extreme 'heroics' are no longer recognizable as

heroics” (2005, p. 106). David Macey writes that Umberto Eco’s study of hyperrealism in visual arts and other forms suggests “the reality of such works is so real that they proclaim their own artificiality” (Macey, 2000, p. 193).

Readers and defenders of young adult literature are actually quite skilled at pondering the hyperreal, as efforts to get the texts accepted as worthy literature are ongoing in the face of those who see such literature as fake, or lesser than “more established” texts. An application of this, rooted in traditional cultural

literacy, might consider conventional print and the new modalities of accessing and creating it as the real vs. the hyperreal.

While the use of the visual as illustration or imagetext is actually *not* new, we are being told that we are becoming a more visual culture. Does this suggest that we are moving lightning quick to the kitsch or to fraud forms that “pass” for text? Are young adult titles and mediums indica-

tive of this? Blogs, gaming, and hypertextual interfaces might be viewed as “hyper” in the same sense as “hyperreality”—beyond the real, new, and thereby fake. “Now I have to pretend to like graphic novels too?” quips a *New Yorker* cartoon. “What the hell do I call *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, and how can I discuss it if I don’t know how to label it?” “*The Storm in the Barn* won that award?” “How can they even call those things novels?”—I am sure all of us have heard peers utter similar sentiments.

While many of us are excited about the plurality in form and substance of young adult literature, there are those who may see this plurality as an affront. In truth, the hyperreal may be an *illusion* of decadence and decay and the faux, rooted more in the subjective mind of those who consider themselves cultural and textual gatekeepers than in the forms and genres they wish to suppress or leave unexamined. This, of course, suggests that the plurality found in contemporary adolescent literature may be moving toward something that doesn’t even exist!

So what is one to do? One answer from Steve, Jacqueline, and Melanie is to find reasonable ways of focusing on the *best*. They referred to the best young adult *books*, but the advice can apply to visual and hybrid forms as well. The implication is to embrace the plurality, but to understand that the bulk of anything produced in any form or medium will constitute the mediocre. Of course, one danger of hyperreality is that important exemplars of forms can move from relevant to kitsch, from important to only important in that they trope the real. I am not expert enough to say all the graphic novels, traditional print novels, Web interfaces, and films mentioned in this issue constitute “bests,” but I am certain that these articles will inform, expand, and challenge your conceptualizations of what is known, what is becoming knowledge, what is yet to come in reading and young adult literature, and what value new forms hold for us and the young people with whom we interact.

Sean Kottke immediately challenges the traditionalist’s sense of the academic article with “RSVPs to Reading: Gendered Responses to the Permeable Curriculum.” Crafted in comics style, Kottke integrates symbolic images and signified letters to detail his findings of the reading selections of sixth-grade girls and boys. Is his guest speaker, none other than John Dewey, real or hyperreal? As Kottke’s appropriated interpretation of the man’s image and words, Dewey connects the study to theories established and recent, and will challenge the reader to remember that he is, in actuality, an absent presence.

Meghan M. Sweeney’s “Rethinking Ugliness: Lynda Barry in the Classroom” focuses upon students’ responses to *The Good Times Are Killing Me*, a text she labels an illustrated novel. Sweeney examines student resistance to the “bleak,” which may be defined as the hyperreal of sadness, and explores how peritext can become meta-text (a text more real than text?) and traditional text. Jill Olthouse explores the tensions between schooling’s perceived realities and students’ lived realities regarding writing in “Blended Books: An Emerging Genre Blends Online and Traditional Formats.” Olthouse further examines the different realities of those favoring only cultural literacy perspectives and those attuned to multiliteracies before treating books—*ChaseR*, *serafina67 *urgently requires life**, *tmi, are u 4 real?*, *Click Here (To Find Out How I Survived Seventh Grade)*, *ttyl*, and *Entr@pment: A*

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High School Comedy in Chat as cases, revealing how she sees each text as a blended book, one that is printed traditionally but melds hypertext, “textese,” and other digital forms into its borders and pages.

If blended books move us toward student realities while retaining binding and publishing qualities grounded in the real, tangible world, other young adult texts move us further beyond it. In “Young Adult Literature Goes Digital: Will Teen Reading Ever Be the Same?”, Susan L. Groenke and Joellen Maples make an important distinction between recent young adult books that have the *look* of “techno-text” worlds and those that actually engage them. The title suggests transformation, a move from the printed page to the screen, from text-to-self reader response to something akin to massive multi-reader response. However, as the authors draw our attention to the exciting elements of teens interacting in virtual communities built up around digital texts, they also reveal that the worries associated with their doing so are often the same as with traditional young adult literature: unchecked consumerism, equity issues, a lack of diverse voices, etc.

Elaine O’Quinn and Heather Atwell address the “So now I have to like x” attitude in “Familiar Aliens: Science Fiction as Social Commentary,” exploring books such as *The House of the Scorpion* and *Feed* alongside films such as *Avatar* and *Wall-E*. If good literature is supposed to challenge precepts from readers’ worlds, they argue, science fiction is a rich genre. Likewise, if readers focus too much on one genre or form, they run the risk of narrowing their realities. Perhaps a narrow focus is a good way to avoid hyper-realism, of course, but the authors (and I) feel this is not a desired solution.

Nathan C. Phillips and Alan B. Teasley argue for certain documentary films to be considered Young Adult texts in “Reading Reel Nonfiction: Documentary Films for Young Adults.” Phillips and Teasley’s approach is new and exciting, like so much in this issue, so it might make some readers do a double-take: “Are we really considering film as young adult literature now? And documentaries, too???” Phillips and Teasley offer well-cited, practical suggestions for teaching documentaries and, despite warning quite correctly that their article should be read as more than a list of suggested titles, provide an impressive list of films that might fit their category. With Michael Moore’s so-

called documentary films so engrained in culture that recent films and television shows have spoofed his techniques and possible agendas and, in the process, called him out for what may be highly politicized portrayals of reality, might Phillips and Teasley be setting the stage for discussion of a *hyper-reel* reading of young adult documentary film?

Columnists Stergios Botzakis, Sean P. Connors, and Gretchen Schwarz all write on graphic novels. Botzakis explores the recent Gene Yang and Derik Kirk Kim triptych *The Eternal Smile*, while advocating for the form in the classroom, with its shining exemplars that allow for serious,

multilayered reading experiences. Connors measures graphic novels as appropriate for more than just remedial readers, though some still believe this to be true, despite multiple articles and books revealing their use for multiple student populations, and Schwarz continues her work to convince readers of the critical literacy potential inherent in the medium. Their arguments are familiar refrains, echoing—though not always acknowledging—past voices that have made similar arguments. While perhaps not as well-cited (the guest editor slyly coughs into his fist, winking) as the Phillips and Teasley article, their columns cover a range of issues associated with young adult graphica and remind readers that it is a medium with a growing presence that should not be ignored. Indeed, as I write these lines, the graphic novel adaptation of Stephanie Meyer’s *Twilight* (ICV2.com2b, 2010) has hit a one-week sales record, surpassing 66,000 copies sold out of an initial print run of 350,000. A graphic novel with a 1,000,000 copy initial print run is scheduled for release in the near future. It will be a *Captain Underpants* (IVC2a, 2010) title. Real, unreal, or hyperreal?

Jennifer Miller reviews J. T. Dutton’s *Freaked* and interviews the author. Dutton answers questions regarding the inspiration for the text and reveals how she copes with reader response from young readers whose realities do not include prior knowledge of The

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Grateful Dead, a band that she calls “a piece of history that is just as interesting to remember as other pieces of history.” *And in this way history itself comes to an end . . . history presents itself as if it were advancing and continuing, when it is actually collapsing?* (I’ll let you decide on the relevance of my Baudrillardian juxtaposition.) Dutton also examines the ever-popular idea of writing for young adults versus *just writing* and how Jack Kerouac’s and Ken Kesey’s works, which question and trope realities and offer new ones, appeal to her.

But days ago, I read Neil Gaiman’s introduction to the newly released *Saga of the Swamp Thing, Book Two* (2010). Upon reading the collected edition’s stories when they first appeared back in the 1980s, Gaiman states that he “became hooked, discovering with amazement that comics had the same capacity to disturb and unsettle that the best prose and film had.” We are at a point where we can say the same about young adult literature, regardless of its form or interface, be it film, image, digital, or some hybrid form of new media or newly excogitated media. To disturb and unsettle—that is the duty of whatever inhabits the space between what we call the real and the hyper-real, and that is the space wherein the contributors of this issue ask us to play.

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