



From the Editors

Note from former ALAN President Alleen Nilsen

Hugh Agee, who passed away this March, was ALAN president in 1980–81. At the time, *The ALAN Review* was being edited by Guy Ellis who, along with Hugh, was on the faculty at the University of Georgia. This “Georgia connection” was a big step for ALAN. Bob Small was the organization’s secretary, and the Board of Directors during Hugh’s term consisted of Dick Abrahamson, Marilyn McCaffrey, Anne Web, Mike Angelotti, Dwight Burton, Jackie Cronin, Tom Gage, Don Gallo, and Geraldine LaRocque. Ken Donelson was the immediate Past President and I was the “past-Past President.” Hugh was highly respected, both as a scholar and an administrator, and he served with a kind of elegance and grace that did much to transform ALAN from a relatively small group of YA fans into a nationally respected professional organization. Those of us who knew and worked with Hugh are grateful to have had the experience, and we send our condolences to his family and colleagues.

About This Issue

It seems to me (Jackie) as if everyone I know is reading young adult fiction these days, whether they call it by this name or not. I say this because of the large number of emails I get from current and former students and colleagues whenever they come across something regarding young adult literature that I might find interesting. For example, a colleague in another department recently sent me *Bitch Maga-*

zine’s list of the top 100 young adult novels (Wallace, 2010) featuring “kick ass teens and feminist themes.” Minutes later, she sent me a response to that list from *Fiction Writers Review* blogger Charlotte Boulay, who outlined the attention *Bitch Magazine* has received after it dropped five novels from the list (replacing them with other titles) because some readers considered them unsuitable. Topping the “appropriate” list were *Estrella’s Quinceañera* by Malin Alegria, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* by Julia Alvarez, *Choir Boy* by Charlie Anders, and *Speak* and *Wintergirls*, both by Laurie Halse Anderson. One of the five dropped was Elizabeth Scott’s *Living Dead Girl*—a novel that coeditor Melanie cautioned me was going to be disturbing but to read anyway. As an apology, *Bitch Magazine* is going to host a virtual book club on all 100 novels plus the five they removed and let participants vote on the list.

I think that it is this aspect, the edgier side of these texts, that scare many of our preservice and practicing teachers from teaching books like Kathe Koja’s *Bhudda Boy* (which I was recently told by an eighth-grade teacher has the word “fuck” in it three times, though that wasn’t enough to deter her from teaching it). However, to me, these aspects are part of what makes this genre so important and cutting edge and responsible for creating (forgive me for using jargon here) lifelong readers. For many years, others in our field have pointed to the power of these texts for not softening the lived experiences of youth, for authors’ courage to represent the harsh realities of adolescence (and, of course, the wonderful moments as

well). I'll be interested in reading the reading group's responses to those novels pulled from the list.

The idea for this issue stems from my own work and the work I observed some graduate students conducting in their own environments. Bruce Parker, Chaunda Allen, and Cerise Edwards, all who work in multicultural affairs at my university, created a young adult book club (funded by a Gallo Grant) with their colleagues. The books they chose to read each featured protagonists who tackled issues their students faced all the time, such as homophobia, discrimination, and addictions. They are still sifting through the transcribed sessions, questionnaires, and written reflections, but their findings support what many of us suspect—*young adult literature does not belong just in the classroom*.

The pieces in this issue consider how young adult literature develops communities of readers outside of the classroom. In the first article, Allison L. Baer describes a four-year reading group she facilitates with incarcerated youth; she highlights their engagements not only with powerful texts but also with several of the authors who wrote them.

Several articles in this issue address the question, "How has cyberspace influenced the way you discuss young adult literature?" They reveal that our field continues to explore the possibilities for holding conversations about young adult literature in virtual spaces. Rosemary Hathaway and Kim Richard both demonstrate how those online discussions blossom into multimodal engagements that provide opportunities for students to share their thoughts about young adult literature in intimate ways.

Susan L. Groenke, Theresa Venable, Stephanie Hill, and Ann Bennett's article as well as Gary Salvner's piece explore the question, "In what way or ways does young adult literature become part of a young adult's life outside of school?" The first of these two examines a summer reading program whose purpose is to reach out and encourage young adults to develop a love of learning. Those involved with the program chose books they think will speak to these students, who are mainly African American, and the issues they face in their lives. Gary Salvner describes the Youngstown English Festival, which has been in existence since 1978 and has a rich tradition of bringing young adult authors and their works to

college, high school, and middle school students. Both programs highlight ways to expose students to high-quality young adult literature that will hook them into lifelong reading.

The three pieces written by Vandana Saxena, Sarah Barber and Hayley Esther, and Deanna Garza each explore how magical realism texts represent cross-racial encounters, and what role allusions play in reworked versions of Shakespeare and Harry Potter. Each piece offers ways to incorporate these texts into traditional curricula that consist of mainly canonical texts and examines the possibilities for students to think about their own identities in doing so.

Jeffrey Kaplan and Joan Kaywell, both long-time members of ALAN, report on the current status in our field. In a valuable compilation of scholarship on young adult literature, Kaplan highlights the research studies published in the last year and reports on his findings. Kaywell keeps alive Hipple's tradition of researching the top young adult novels in the past decade through an extensive survey to which I hope all of you were able to contribute.

For those of you unable to attend the 2010 ALAN Conference in Orlando, we include in this issue Darren Shan's address. In this piece, he once again demonstrates the incredible thought and craft that goes into the writing of these books; his latest, *The Thin Executioner* (which deals with important issues of religion, politics, and community), is no exception.

This issue's Stories from the Field include two moving examples of how these novels touch young adults in ways we might not anticipate—much like the story Shan shares with us.

Finally, we would like to extend a warm thanks to Gary Salvner for his service and leadership to ALAN as our Executive Secretary and an equally warm welcome to Teri Lesesne, who is our new Executive Secretary.

References

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