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From the Editors

Engaged Reading with Young Adult Literature

Hello! We are the new editors of *The ALAN Review.* We couldn't be happier to serve as ambassadors of the young adult literature we love so well and stewards to our readers and writers who keep us abreast of what's happening in the field. We know we have big shoes to fill and are forever grateful to the former editorial team for their leadership, advocacy for the genre of young adult literature, rigorous representation of trends and issues in the field, and finally, their commitment to the readers of *The ALAN Review.*

We are delighted to kick off our inaugural issue with a focus on something we think is so very important—reading engagement. We know reading engagement increases adolescents' academic achievement, but perhaps more important, we know reading engagement positively influences most aspects of young adults' intellectual, social, and moral development.

Those of us who are lucky enough to read with adolescents know what engaged reading looks like—adolescents enter the social worlds of the narratives, begin to feel emotionally connected to the characters, and negotiate the characters' dilemmas and development right alongside them. As a result, engaged adolescent readers find connection with characters and other readers; find different identities for themselves; find other people's humanity; and find a sense of agency or power to make positive changes in their relationships, academic and personal lives, and communities. All of this, and they also turn into motivated readers!

To highlight these possibilities and the importance of engaged reading, we are honored to begin this issue with a conversation between adolescent reading researcher Gay Ivey and popular classroom teacher and author Penny Kittle.

As Gay and Penny remind us, adolescents experience engaged reading when they read young adult literature. We think this is a very powerful reason to advocate for the genre. We also think this fact opens up new territories for us to consider in our classroom work with adolescents and our research. In this inaugural issue, we feature several authors who explore these new territories. In "Franchised Fictions: Youth Navigating Social and Parasocial Readings across Branded Young Adult Literature," Nora Peterman explores the ways a group of Latinx ninth-grade students position themselves as both readers and consumers of popular YA franchises. She examines how these students form connections with commodified literature and considers the ethical and pedagogical implications of their engagement.

In "'The Fact of a Doorframe': Adolescents Finding Pleasure in Transgender-Themed YAL," Ryan Schey and Mollie Blackburn take up Rudine Sims Bishop's (1990) "windows and mirrors" metaphors as they conceptualize doorframes or frames as a necessary addition to these metaphors. They report on a study of adolescents reading a nonfiction transgender-themed YA text and consider how students used frames of pleasure as they reflect on the need for ethical and humanizing framings of pleasure when

reading YAL in secondary classrooms. In "What Matters for Eighth-Grade Female Readers: Experiences and Consequences of Sustained Reading Engagement," Julie Smit extends Gay Ivey and Peter Johnston's work by describing what reading engagement looks like with eighth-grade female students who are already motivated readers. And finally, in "'She's Saying the Thoughts I Didn't Know Anyone Else Had': YA Verse Novels and the Emergent Artistic Voice of Young Women," Emilie Curtis considers how the YA verse novel's form in popular, contemporary verse novels such as *Brown Girl Dreaming* (Woodson, 2014), *Poet X* (Acevedo, 2018), and *Blood Water Paint* (McCullough, 2018) can facilitate adolescent readers' emotional involvement and character identification and encourage readers to develop their own artistic voices and identities.

And, as if these rich articles didn't give you enough to read and think about, we also want to introduce to you three new columns we will feature in *The ALAN Review* during our editorship. Our "Teacher Talk" column will share highlights and insights from classroom teachers who are working every day to advocate for YA literature. This column is led by Mary Cate LeBoeuf, a high school English teacher in Knoxville, Tennessee. In our first "Teacher Talk" column, Mary Cate reached out to both Stacey Reece, a long-time English teacher and 2018 winner of the Penny Kittle Book Love Foundation grant, and Erin Claxton, one of Stacey's former students. Stacey and Erin remind us that a passionate teacher who reads and shares her reading life with her students is key to engaging adolescent readers with YAL. Stacey is an avid reader of YAL and a regular attendee at ALAN, and this helps her stay abreast of trends in the genre, thus helping her match the right books to the right readers at the right time. Our second column, "Master Class in YAL," is written by Mark Letcher, past president of ALAN; it will report on the 2018 "Master Class" session at the ALAN conference. Read this column to learn more about the motivations for and history behind this session at ALAN and our column. We feature Neal Shusterman in this first edition of the column. Our third column reports "From the Library," an important place where engaged reading happens, too. Our own Suzanne Sherman will lead this column and kicks it off with some tips on how librarians can collaborate with classroom teachers to create a safe space for reading in the classroom.

To end this issue, we are so very honored to share Michael Cart's ALAN Award acceptance speech. Read our introduction to this speech to learn more about the annual ALAN Award, as well as why Michael Cart was the highly deserving recipient of this award in 2018.

Thanks for reading!

Susan Groenke *is a professor of English Education and Children's and Young Adult Literature at the University of Tennessee, where she also directs the Center for Children's and Young Adult Literature. Dr. Groenke has served on the ALAN Board of Directors and has also served as a columnist and reviewer for The ALAN Review prior to beginning her term as Senior Editor. Her research interests center on adolescent reading motivation and engagement and using young adult literature (YAL) in anti-racist teacher education.*

Arianna Banack *is a doctoral student at the University of Tennessee in the Literacy Studies program with a specialization in Children's and Young Adult Literature. Arianna is a graduate research assistant and works in the Center for Children's and Young Adult Literature under Dr. Susan Groenke. Her research interests focus on the connections between adolescent reading engagement and YAL. Prior to enrolling at UTK, Arianna was a ninth-grade English teacher in a large, urban district in Connecticut, where she integrated six multicultural YA novels into her classroom curricula.*

Caitlin Metheny *is a doctoral student in the College of Education at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Caitlin's concentration is in Literacy Education, with a specialization in Children's and Young Adult Literature. She is a graduate research assistant under Dr. Susan Groenke in the Center for Children's and Young Adult Literature. Prior to starting her doctoral studies, Caitlin was a middle school Gifted and Talented English teacher for five years. She prioritized bringing diverse and engaging literature into the classroom to motivate and meet the needs of highly advanced readers.*

Suzanne Sherman *is a former English and Spanish teacher turned librarian! She has been a school librarian for 14 years and is going on her 12th year at Hardin Valley Academy, a public high school in Knox County, TN. Her transition from a classroom containing 30 some students*

to one that encompasses close to 2,000 began when she realized that the very best part of her day was when she got the right book to the right student, at the right time, and that she could do that on a larger scale. In addition to her role as a school librarian, Suzanne also teaches for the School of Information Sciences at UT Knoxville.

***Mary Cate LeBoeuf** is a secondary ELA teacher in Knoxville, TN. She holds a master's degree in Secondary English Education from The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and teaches Secondary English and Creative Writing in Knoxville. She believes in the power of the written word and strives to have every student that enters her classroom leave loving to read more than they did before.*

Call for Manuscripts

Submitting a Manuscript:

All submissions may be sent to tar@utk.edu. Please see the ALAN website (http://www.alan-ya.org/page/alan-review-author-guidelines) for submission guidelines.

Summer 2020: Exploring Adolescent Neurodiversity and Mental Health in YA Literature
Submissions due on or before November 1, 2019

Approximately one third of adolescents nationwide show symptoms of depression, and one of five adolescents has a diagnosable mental health disorder. Suicide is the third leading cause of death in 15- to 24-year-olds, and the majority of adolescents who attempt suicide have a significant mental health disorder, usually depression. Yet teen depression, anxiety, and other mental health illnesses may go unrecognized, misunderstood, or ignored by teachers and other adults, and an ongoing stigma regarding mental health illnesses inhibits some adolescents and their families from seeking help.

As YA author A. S. King shared at the 2018 ALAN Breakfast, her teenage daughter's depression was often written off by teachers and other adults as "drama and a need for attention." Fortunately, authors of young adult literature have begun to explore issues associated with mental health in the genre, confronting the stigma of mental illness head-on while presenting narratives of inclusion, validation, hope, agency, and empowerment for adolescent readers. For this call, we are interested in hearing from you about the YA literature depicting adolescent mental health and neurodiversity you are reading, teaching, and using in your research. We invite correspondence about ideas for articles as well as submission of completed manuscripts. Here's a partial list of topics, meant only to suggest the range of our interests for this issue:

- How can young adult literature help us navigate conversations in our classrooms and communities about what it means to see and experience the world in different ways? How can young adult literature help us think about the idea that neurological differences (e.g., ADHD, depression, anxiety, autism) should be recognized and respected as any other human variation? What does it mean to be a "normal" human being? What does it mean to be abnormal, disordered, or sick?
- Neuroscience increasingly identifies the complexity of human brains and is beginning to shift cultural perceptions of mental health. Some psychologists explore and celebrate mental differences under the rubric of neurodiversity. The term encompasses those with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), autism, schizophrenia, depression, dyslexia, and other disorders affecting the mind and brain. The proponents of neurodiversity argue that there are positive aspects to having brains that function differently. But others, including many parents of affected youth, focus on the difficulties and suffering brought on by these conditions. What experiences of adolescent mental health and neurodiversity—and discursive constructions of neurodiverse youth—are presented in young adult literature?
- Whose stories are being told, and by whom? Whose stories are missing?
- Do YA books stigmatize, romanticize, and/or normalize adolescent mental health and neurodiversity? What are the dangers of these representations?

- How can young adult literature help us examine and better understand the intersectional identities (e.g., race, class, [dis]ability, gender, religion, age, geography, sexual orientation) of neurodiverse adolescents?
- How do TV and movie adaptations of YA novels depicting adolescent mental health and neurodiversity (e.g., the Netflix series "Thirteen Reasons Why") affect readers' understandings of adolescent mental health? What intertextual connections about adolescent mental health can be drawn from multiple representations of the same story?
- Popular YA author John Green admits to writing his own mental illness into his latest novel, *Turtles All the Way Down,* explaining that "having OCD is an ongoing part of my life." Similarly, in Jessica Burkhart's edited collection *Life Inside My Mind: 31 Authors Share Their Personal Struggles,* YA author Sara Zarr describes her ongoing struggles with depression ("Sometime between getting out of bed and standing in front of the coffeepot, I feel the cloud...Maybe more like quicksand than a cloud….I feel fear and worthlessness, or fear that I'm worthless" [p. 260]). In the same collection, YA author Francisco X. Stork describes his own suicide attempt and experiences with bipolar disorder ("When I talk about bipolar disorder, I use words like 'loneliness' and 'uncontrollable longing' rather than words like 'depression' and 'mania' because the former are more descriptive of what I actually feel, even though depression is a bundle of feelings and thoughts more complicated than loneliness, and mania is more than irrepressible longing" [p. 284]). We wonder: When YA authors disclose their own struggles with mental health, how does this impact teen readers?

Fall 2020: Are You There, God? It's Me, a Secularist, Humanist, Areligious, Questioning, Gay Committed Christian, Atheist: Adolescence and Religion in YAL
Submissions due on or before March 1, 2020

Former *TAR* editors Wendy Glenn, Ricki Ginsberg, and Danielle King-Watkins asked teachers, researchers, and other YA advocates to consider the questions, "What's Now? What's New? What's Next?" in their final issue, published in 2019. *TAR* readers responded, writing predominantly about religion and areligion (not influenced by or practicing religion) in YAL. A year later, we wonder: How are diverse adolescents and their a/religious or atheist affiliations, beliefs, and practices represented in the YA genre? How are a/religious and atheist teen characters portrayed? What religious affiliations get dominant positive representation in YAL? Who gets to be a/religious or atheist in YAL? Do adolescent agnostics, humanists, non-believers, questioners, and skeptics get any attention in the genre? Why does religion (especially areligion and atheism) in YAL still seem like a taboo topic?

We invite correspondence about ideas for articles as well as submission of completed manuscripts. We would especially love to hear from teens about how they feel about the portrayal of a/religion or atheism in YAL, if they find a/religion or atheism to be of central importance in YAL, and why. Here's a partial list of topics, meant only to suggest the range of our interests for this issue:

- Is religion still a taboo topic in YAL? If so, why? Longtime YA scholar and advocate Patty Campbell has claimed the greatest of all taboos in YAL is religion. In a recent (2018) *New York Times* article (https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/25/books/review/religion-taboo-young-adult.html), YA author Donna Freitas shared: "This feeling of mine—that a YA writer had best stay away from the topic of faith—is elusive, a kind of vapor that began swirling around me a decade ago when I wrote my first YA novel, *The Possibilities of Sainthood,* about a Catholic girl who longs to become the first living saint. Being too overt about religion in a YA novel seemed a mistake, maybe even an act of self-sabotage—unless one is writing about cults or lampooning religion." Why does writing about a/religion in YAL seem off-limits?

- In Patrick Ness's *Release* (2017), Adam Thorn grapples with love and heartbreak while living under strict rules in an Evangelical household where he hears "I love you, but . . ." from his family who have always struggled to believe Adam "might be a bit gay." The religious teachings of his father and the lack of general acceptance from his family force Adam to question if the love he felt for his ex, Enzo, was *real* love: "Because what if they were right? What if there was something wrong with him? What if, on some level, way deep inside, right down to the very simplest, purified form of what he was, what if he was corrupted?" Manuel, an openly gay teen and committed Christian also has some thoughts on love in Alex Sanchez's *The God Box* (2009). Manuel tells his closeted lover, Paul: "Pablito, the Bible was meant to be a bridge, not a wedge. It's the greatest love story ever told, about God's enduring and unconditional love for his creation—love beyond all reason. To understand it, you have to read it with love as the standard. Love God. Love your neighbor. Love yourself. Always remember that." Finally, Julia Watts's YA novel *Quiver* (2018) presents Libby, an evangelical Christian, and Zo, her feminist, gender-fluid neighbor who must both navigate their families' cultural differences to fight for their friendship. What can readers learn from YAL about how to navigate romance, friendship, family values and beliefs, *and* multiple intersectional adolescent identities that include gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, and fundamentalist religious affiliations?
- Why is religion so divisive? Religion can be used as a weapon or to exploit and oppress. How can we use YAL to talk about what religion is and isn't? How can YAL show us how to bridge differences and create unity rather than disunity? A claim of the field of young adult literature is its power to be a window or sliding glass door into unfamiliar cultures [see Bishop, R. S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives*, *1*(3, 1990, pp. ix–xi.]. Can YAL encourage its readers to be more empathetic toward individuals from different religious backgrounds and to be more understanding of other religious perspectives? What would this look like in scholarship, pedagogy, or in a YAL novel?
- Atheism is featured in several YA novels, including *Darius the Great Is Not Okay* (2018), by Adib Khorram; *Heretics Anonymous* (2018), by Katie Henry; *Blind Faith* (2006), by Ellen Wittlinger; *A Brief Chapter in My Impossible Life* (2006), by Dana Reinhardt; *Godless* (2004), by Pete Hautman; and *Tina's Mouth: An Existential Comic Diary* (2012) by Keshni Kashyap. How can these YA novels be used to better understand atheist affiliations and beliefs? Why do teens choose to be atheist or areligious? What can we learn from these teens about the limits of religion? Where do these teens find community and connectedness?
- Volume 46, Issue 3 of *TAR* focused on the representations of Christianity in YAL, and we wonder: How does the field of YAL take up non-Christian or nondominant religious affiliations? What would it look like to have an American Muslim protagonist whose religious beliefs are not defined as threats of terrorism? Do texts like this exist? In *The Serpent King* (2016) by Jeff Zentner, parishioners of the protagonist's Pentecostal church handle serpents and drink poison as a sign of faith; they are thusly positioned as stereotypical, ignorant, small-town Southerners. How can YAL be used to "talk back to" too simplistic, limiting, problematic portrayals of religion in the genre?