SUMMER 2017

VOLUME 44, ISSUE 3

THE ALAN REVIEW

ASSEMBLY ON LITERATURE FOR ADOLESCENTS

OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

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◆ **THE ALAN REVIEW** ◆ **Volume 44** ◆ **Summer 2017** ◆ **Number Three**

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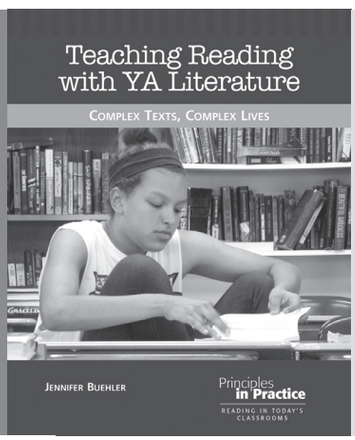

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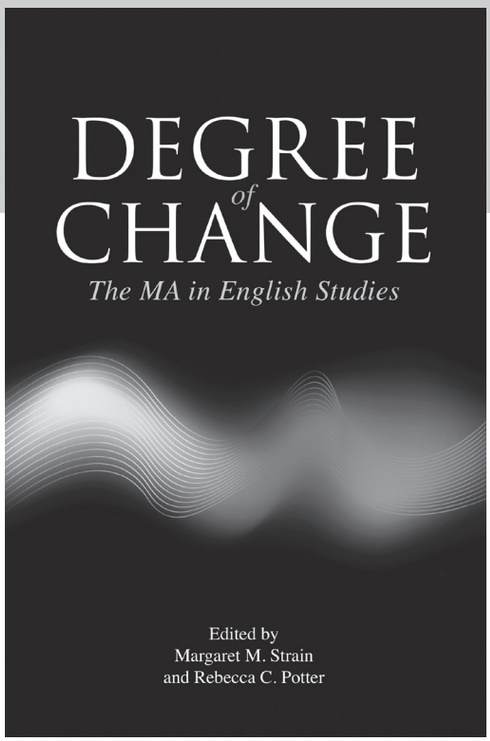
DEGREE OF CHANGE: THE MA IN ENGLISH STUDIES

Edited by Margaret M. Strain and Rebecca C. Potter

As the needs of those seeking an MA in English studies have evolved, so too have the degree's mission and identity. Margaret M. Strain and Rebecca C. Potter, editors of ***Degree of Change: The MA in English Studies,*** argue that the MA is positioned in a dynamic contact zone—"a place where disciplinary knowledge, student need, and local exigencies interact and where disciplinary identity is constantly negotiated."

Looking primarily at stand-alone master's programs, this volume examines the design, delivery, and value of a master's degree in English in the twenty-first century and challenges the characterization that MA programs in English serve primarily as stepping-stones to the PhD. Rather, contributors reveal how central the MA is to shaping the purpose and identity of contemporary English studies, through descriptions of a variety of specific MA programs.

Gathering perspectives from faculty, program directors, and students from across the country, Strain and Potter showcase not only the diversity of such programs, but also the ways in which program identity and mission are richly interwoven with concerns about local needs, graduate student career trajectories, and the effects of a market-driven educational climate. This collection provides a substantive discussion that goes beyond questioning the state of English studies—it points to curricular, programmatic, and professional innovations that are transforming the field, calling for new dialogue in higher education about the pivotal role of the MA in English.



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THE ALAN REVIEW

Instructions for **Authors**

ABOUT *THE ALAN REVIEW.* *The ALAN Review (TAR;* ISSN 0882-2840 [Print], ISSN 1547-741X [Online]) publishes articles that explore, examine, critique, and advocate for literature for young adults and the teaching of that literature. Published pieces include, but are not limited to, research studies, papers presented at professional meetings, surveys of the literature, critiques of the literature, articles about authors, comparative studies across genres and/or cultures, articles on ways to teach the literature to adolescents, and interviews with YA 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 young adult literature, librarians, YA authors, publishers, reading teachers, and teachers in related content areas. ALAN has members in all 50 United States and a number of foreign countries.

PREFERRED STYLE. Manuscripts should usually be no longer than twenty double-spaced, typed pages, not including references. A manuscript submitted for consideration should deal specifically with literature for young adults 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 young adults 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. The names of submitting authors should not appear anywhere in the manuscript. 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 from the copyright owner. YA author interviews should be accompanied by written permission for publication in *TAR* from the interviewed author(s). Interviewers should indicate to the author(s) that publication is subject to review of an editorial board. Original short tables and figures should be double-spaced and placed on separate sheets at the end of the manuscript. Notations should appear in the text indicating proper placement of tables and figures.

The ALAN Review uses the bibliographic style detailed in the *Publications Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA). Please adhere to that style when including in-text citations and preparing reference lists.

SUBMITTING THE MANUSCRIPT. Authors should submit manuscripts electronically to thealanreview@gmail.com. In the subject line, please write: ALAN Manuscript Submission. All manuscripts should be written using a recent version of Microsoft Word and use APA bibliographical format. Complete submissions include, as separate attachments, the following documents: 1) An abstract of no more than 150 words; 2) A manuscript without references to the author(s) and with name(s) removed in the Properties section under the File menu to ensure the piece is blinded; 3) A title page with names, affiliations, mailing addresses, and 100- to 150-word professional biographies for each submitting author, as well as a brief statement that the article is original, has not been published previously in other journals and/or books, and is not a simultaneous submission.

REVIEW PROCESS. Each manuscript will receive a blind review by the editors and at least three 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 made to the field of young adult literature and mission of *The ALAN Review*, scholarly rigor, and clarity of writing. Selection also depends on the manuscript's contribution to the overall balance of the journal.

PUBLICATION OF ARTICLES. *The ALAN Review* assumes that accepted manuscripts have not been published previously in any other journals and/or books, nor will they be published subsequently without permission of the editors. Should the author submit the manuscript to more than one publication, he/she should notify *The ALAN Review*. If a submitted or accepted manuscript is accepted by another publication prior to publication in *The ALAN Review*, the author should immediately withdraw the manuscript from publication in *The ALAN Review*.

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.

DEADLINES. Please observe these deadlines if you wish to have your article considered for a particular issue of *The ALAN Review*.

FALL (October) Issue Deadline:	**MARCH 1**
WINTER (March) Issue Deadline:	**JULY 1**
SUMMER (June) Issue Deadline:	**NOVEMBER 1**

Wendy **Glenn,** Ricki **Ginsberg,** and Danielle **King**

From the Editors

The World of Young Adult Literature

The world of young adult literature extends beyond the United States. And yet, readers in our nation are not often invited to consider stories published in or written about other lands, cultures, and communities. While the US is rich in diversity, and the field is increasingly recognizing the need to share stories for and about all readers, we are a single nation on a globe inhabited by many. We wonder what might be gained from increased exposure to the wider array of young adult literature that lies beyond our national borders. We wonder, too, what challenges exist in finding, publishing, and teaching such titles and how we might address these with care and humanity.

In this issue, contributors consider the stories of adolescence that are written around the globe and tackle questions related to international literature, both broadly and narrowly defined. They examine the common experiences, realities, and ways of knowing, doing, and being that exist across cultures. And as they explore how differences might reveal our biases—and enhance our understandings—they question whether cultural differences are ever too big to bridge. Finally, they reveal the role of translators in telling stories to new audiences whose members might be unfamiliar with particular places and people, and they invite consideration of whose stories get published and whose remain untold to a larger community.

In the end, these contributors help us consider whether and how literature can unite people across distant places. Is it true that "Even when you got crazy people or drunk people on buses, people that went on stupidly, and shouted rubbish or tried to tell you all about themselves, you could never really tell about them either" (Almond, 2000 p. 13)? Or can story help us know an unfamiliar somebody a bit better? Although "two mountains can never meet, . . . perhaps you and I can meet again. I am coming to your waterfall" (Danticat, 1998, p. 283).

We begin this issue with "Translated from Page to Page: Cultures, Norms, and Opportunities," a collaborative conversation between Olga Bukhina, Mara Faye Lethem, Lyn Miller-Lachmann, Avery Fischer Udagawa, and Laura Watkinson. These five translators, whose experience extends across eight languages, share the intricacies, cultural and professional norms, and complexities that come with the process of translation.

Janine J. Darragh, in "'Let Us Pick Up Our Books': Young Adult Literature and the Refugee Experience," invites readers to consider how young adult literature may provide an effective vehicle by which to start conversations about refugees in the United States today. She describes a research project that sought to analyze how the refugee experience is portrayed in young adult literature that has appeared on the Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People lists over the past five years. The piece shares the results of the study, ideas for classroom implementation, and available resources for teaching about refugees.

In Stacy Graber's article, "Existential Meditation on Morality: Janne Teller's *Nothing,*" she argues that, despite the desolate and chaotic universe portrayed in Teller's novel, the author offers readers a rich,

intellectual conversation on meaning, morality, and authenticity. The resulting article demonstrates how *Nothing* can invite students into the moral conversation advanced by philosophical literature and engage in dialogue with existentialism, a theory that emphasizes ethical critique and personal accountability, essential to the process of growing up in a complicated world.

In her article, "Adapting Elaine: Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shalott' and Feminist Young Adult Novels," Aimee Davis explores how two YA novels, Meg Cabot's *Avalon High* (2006) and Libba Bray's *A Great and Terrible Beauty* (2003), critique the gender-related sanctions placed upon their adolescent female protagonists by utilizing adaptations of the story of the Lady of Shalott, an important figure in Arthurian legend and the title character of Tennyson's 1842 poem. Davis analyzes how these authors offer their characters and their readers models of womanhood that enable them to challenge gendered social norms and affirm their own identities.

In his final Book in Review: A Teaching Guide column, Toby Emert brings readers on an adventure—a road-trip adventure. Titled "Of Porcupines and Trusty Sidekicks and Road Trips to Infinity," Emert's column peels back the layers of the "road-trip" YA novel to highlight three titles that send queer and questioning characters on the road: Julia Watts's *Finding H. F.* (2011); Bill Konigsberg's *The Porcupine of Truth* (2015); and Kristin Elizabeth Clark's *Jess, Chunk, and the Road Trip to Infinity* (2016). Emert explores the physical and psychological journeys the characters take and provides innovative teaching resources and strategies for using these texts with students.

Angel Daniel Matos partners with Dani Green in his last Right to Read column, "Reframing Critique: Young Adult Fiction and the Politics of Literary Censorship in Ireland." Green, a scholar of nineteenth-century British and Irish literature with an interest in issues of modernity, space, and narrative, offers an account of contemporary acts of censorship in Ireland and explores how Irish YA literature is particularly suited to express ideas deemed unspeakable and unprintable. By way of example, she argues that Kate Thompson's (2005) YA novel *The New Policeman* enables a cultural critique that is often impossible to achieve in other forms of Irish literature, highlighting the potential of YA fiction to challenge censorship though genre-bending, formal experimentation, and disruption of the familiar.

In her final Layered Literacies column, "Booktubing: Reader Response Meets 21st Century Literacies," Peggy Semingson invites Colombian scholars Raúl Alberto Mora and Tatiana Chiquito into a discussion of the global impact of booktubing, a medium of video-based expression. Together these authors provide illustrative descriptions and examples of booktubing and offer both strategies for and benefits of booktubing for educators, librarians, and youth themselves.

We express heartfelt thanks to our outgoing column editors. Toby, Angel, and Peggy, your wisdom, care, and passion have resulted in writings that make a significant contribution to this journal and the field. We appreciate you.

Heather Lennon, Managing Director at North-South Books, a small publisher devoted to publishing books by artists and authors from around the world, shares her publishing expertise in "A Good Book Is Universal." In this article, she takes readers behind the scenes into the process through which international titles are discovered and secured. She explains concerns of translation and describes how international titles are sometimes modified to fit American cultural norms. In the end, she advocates for a balance between a text's unique qualities and nuances and the universal merits of story, characterization, and engaging artwork and innovation.

Our final piece in this issue, "A Witness in Red Stockings," features the careful thinking and writing of Canadian author for young adults Emil Sher. In this challenging and important article, he explores the existence of the benevolent witness in young adult literature, drawing specifically on *Fatty Legs*, the memoir of Margaret Pokiak-Fenton (Jordan-Fenton & Pokiak-Fenton, 2010), an Aboriginal person who spent two years in a residential school in the Canadian Arctic. As Sher explains, Poliak-Fenton's story "points a damning finger at systemic racism as it paints a compelling portrait of a young girl determined to stand her ground after she has been uprooted." In doing so, it joins the other articles in this issue in advancing the importance of looking outward around the globe to learn more about those who seem so different and looking inward to recognize our complicity and necessary commitment to others who inhabit our shared earth.

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Call for Manuscripts

Submitting a Manuscript:

Manuscript submission guidelines are available on p. 2 of this issue and on our website at http://www.alan-ya.org/page/alan-review-author-guidelines. All submissions may be sent to thealanreview@gmail.com.

Summer 2018: Dollars and Sense?—Economic (In)Equities in YAL

Submissions due on or before November 1, 2017

Some might agree with Billy Idol: "It doesn't matter about money; having it, not having it. Or having clothes, or not having them. You're still left alone with yourself in the end." Others, like Franklin D. Roosevelt, might subscribe to the belief that "Happiness is not in the mere possession of money; it lies in the joy of achievement, in the thrill of creative effort." These words, however, reflect the voices of those with money, those who have the privilege of deciding that the money they possess isn't all that it's worth. We can't shake the steady voice of Nelson Mandela who advises us to remember that "Money won't create success, [but] the freedom to make it will." When it comes to money, our local and global realities are complicated. We talk of the top 1%, those in positions of power by virtue of their hefty investment portfolios. We learn of the vastly different living wage earned by people around the world. We hear of families in our own communities without homes, of jobs lost, of educational opportunities denied, of institutional oppression that limits access and mobility.

For this issue, we invite contributors to consider the complexities of economics and how they are taken up in young adult literature. How do authors represent class systems in the settings they create? How often is race conflated with socioeconomic status? What are the implications of such representations for young adult readers? How can we support critical reading and understanding of wealth and poverty and their role in politics and policies, in literature and life? Do those with financial equity benefit inequitably? Are they "untouchable, immune to life's troubles" (*The Dream Thieves*, Maggie Stiefvater, 2014, p. 66)? Is it true that all young people have a chance, that "Someday an opportunity will come. Think about Harry Potter. His life is terrible, but then a letter arrives, he gets on a train, and everything is different for him afterward. Better. Magical" (*Boy 21*, Matthew Quick, 2013, p. 73)? Can we find truth in the advice to "Take care not to listen to anyone who tells you what you can and can't be in life" (*The Girl Who Could Silence the Wind*, Meg Medina, 2012, p. 79)? Do economic disparities leave us in despair?

continued on next page

Fall 2018: The Psychology of YA Literature: Traversing the Intersection of Mind, Body, and Soul
Submissions due on or before March 1, 2018

Mental illness, the effects of violence, trauma, and other psychological issues permeate the lives of the young people with whom we work and the families and friends who exist around them. Young adult authors have taken up these topics in their writings, providing space and opportunity for readers to find solace and support and to develop understandings that complicate their existing assumptions and beliefs.

In this issue, we invite you to consider how YA authors explore, for example, what it means to feel lost, to be in that "moment when I know that I should scream. But screaming would be hard. And blackness would be easy. Black picks me" (E. K. Johnston, *Exit, Pursued by a Bear*, p. 47). Or to feel worn out, to have "no emotions left: I was a candle that'd burned all the way down" (Rahul Kanakia, *Enter Title Here*, p. 181). Or to want something you can't have due to forces out of your control: "I want to grab your hand, allow you to pull me through, to take us wherever you want to go, fill my calendar with your smile and laugh the way we used to" (Eric Gansworth, *If I Ever Get Out of Here*, p. 12).

As educators, we invite you to describe your efforts in using YA literature in the classroom. Perhaps your work might help students build richer understandings of the mind, body, and soul and learn to challenge, as noted by David Levithan, how "some people think mental illness is a matter of mood, a matter of personality. They think depression is simply a form of being sad, that OCD is a form of being uptight. They think the soul is sick, not the body. It is, they believe, something that you have some choice over. I know how wrong this is" (*Every Day*, p. 119). We wonder how your work can offer hope. Yes, it is a "hard cycle to conquer. The body is working against you. And because of this, you feel even more despair. Which only amplifies the imbalance. It takes uncommon strength to live with these things. But I have seen that strength over and over again" (*Every Day*, pp. 119–120).

As always, we also welcome submissions focused on any aspect of young adult literature not directly connected to these themes.

Olga **Bukhina**, Mara Faye **Lethem**, Lyn **Miller-Lachmann**, Avery Fischer **Udagawa**, and Laura **Watkinson**

Translated from Page to Page:

Cultures, Norms, and Opportunities

From the Editors: In this collaborative conversation, we are thrilled to feature the words of several YA translators who address explicitly the intricacies of conveying stories across languages. We are grateful for their candor as they share both the challenges and the joys that come with the translation process and hope that their willingness to engage in this thoughtful and public conversation will highlight just how important their work is to the field.

As to process, we generated and sent a series of questions to each author. We compiled the responses into a single document and then sent the compiled version back and forth to authors to solicit questions, elaborations, and revisions until all were satisfied with the resulting piece. We hope that in reading this piece, you gain both an increased appreciation for these authors and the value of translated works of YA fiction and nonfiction.

How do you acquire the opportunity to translate a particular title? Do you have a choice in what you translate?

Avery: In the US, the traditional sequence is 1) a publisher overseas publishes a book; 2) a US publisher buys the rights to publish it in English, perhaps at an international book fair; and 3) the US publisher commissions a translator. Translators do not have direct choice, but they may position themselves to receive commissions by networking and building up a resume. One way to do this is to translate samples of works for overseas publishers, which they use to sell rights at the book fairs.

There are nontraditional ways to land translation jobs, as well. For example, an author and his wife hired me to translate an unpublished novel that they then pitched to US and Japanese publishers. It happened to sell first in the US and then in Japan.

Laura: Books come to me through various routes. Sometimes I translate an excerpt for a Dutch publisher, who then talks to British and American publishers at one of the book fairs and shows them the sample excerpt. If you're lucky, the publisher will like your style and ask you to translate the whole book. Other times, I'm approached directly by the English-language publisher who asks me to write a report on the book or, if they're already convinced, to translate the whole book. When I've worked with publishers for awhile, I get to know their list and what kinds of books they're looking for. In that case, I might discover a book that I think would be of interest to them, and then I recommend it.

I wouldn't choose to translate a book that I didn't enjoy in some way. Translators spend so long working on a title that they have to get along with it.

Olga: For me, the choice of a book to translate is always collegial. I translate from English into Russian. A publisher in Russia suggests the title, but

it is always my decision whether I want to work with the particular book. Sometimes (not that often lately), I am able to suggest a particular book to a publisher. Then that publisher buys the rights, and I translate. For one or two publishing houses, I sometimes serve as a scout and read and review potential texts for translation. At the moment, I am negotiating a new assignment with a new publisher who approached me because I wrote a review of several books by the prize-winning author of the book in question.

Mara: I am always approached by editors. This sometimes results from a sample translation I've done for a literary agent, cultural institution, or rights representative at a publishing house. Other times, it is based on a recommendation. I wouldn't say that I have a lot of choice in what I translate, since I don't have a "day job." Translating is how I make my living, and there aren't very many titles translated into English.

Lyn: Most of the time, publishers approach me. I also look for books each year when I'm in Portugal; I attend book fairs and scour publishers' catalogs for possibilities. Sometimes authors who write in Portuguese or Spanish contact me directly.

Do you work in isolation, or do you work with others? In what ways, if at all, do you collaborate with authors in the translation process? Does a community of translators exist? Do you draw upon one another's expertise?

Lyn: The PEN Translation Committee consists mainly of translators of adult literary work, but they have appreciated my perspective as a translator of books for young people. I point out that it's hard to persuade adults to read books in translation if they haven't encountered them while young. I've been active in the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) Translators Group and am working with other translators, publishers, and librarians through the Global Literature in Libraries Initiative (GLLI). Our focus with GLLI is to engage in outreach to libraries and the general public to build an audience for books in translation. We have to make the case for translation because publishers won't make these books available if they believe there's no readership for them.

I have worked directly with authors who have hired me to translate their works, and I've translated books where I've never met the author at all. (I also have never met the translator of my own YA novel, *Gringolandia* [2009], which came out in Italian two years ago.) Some authors want to have input into how their books are translated, but in most cases, authors trust the translator because they don't know English or don't know it well enough. With that trust comes a huge responsibility to get it right—not only to reflect the voice and intention of the author, but also to make sure the final product works in English in the United States.

A final component of my collaborative process is working with the English language editor. I came to translation later in life, after writing fiction for teens, and I appreciate the mentorship of two award-winning translators, Groundwood editor and Vermont College of Fine Arts faculty member Shelley Tanaka and my editor at Enchanted Lion, Claudia Bedrick.

Olga: For many years, I worked alone. Translation is a lonely occupation. Lately, I have worked with a co-translator (she happens to be my sister). We have translated nine books together, even though I live in New York City and she lives in Moscow. I also had a very interesting collaborative experience on a translation with an author who wrote his book in English but also is fluent in Russian. The experience of working closely with another author who knew the target language but not fluently was rather difficult. We did not reach a level of true collaboration, and the work was quite challenging and even painful at times.

Speaking of a translators' community, I am lucky to have two of them. There is a community of Russian translators in Moscow. I have many good colleagues and friends there, and I always feel that I can ask for help or advice. There is also the American Literary Translators Association (ALTA), a community of translators with whom I regularly discuss their work and mine.

Mara: My work is essentially done in isolation, although I always have native speakers to whom

I ask questions, particularly when translating from the Spanish of the Americas. I used to never consult authors, but in recent years, that has changed. I now enjoy having some back and forth with them, and I feel it always improves the final draft. It can be a bit of a strange dance, humbling in ways for both parties. It's important to delicately establish your right to STET (the indication to "let it stand" when you want to reject an edit), as with editors. I think working from Catalan has fostered my relationships with authors. Because of the importance of an English language translation for a literary work from a minority language, there is more of a sense of appreciation and, in turn, responsibility.

I have several friends who are translators, yet for most of my career, I've worked from Barcelona, so I've been far from the community of English language translators. In Spain, literary translations are a much bigger part of the market, and conditions are more standardized (which is not to say better, except in the case of royalties). Now that I'm living in New York, I am involved in a community of translators, which is most helpful in terms of comparing notes on negotiations. It is very supportive, though there is still a real struggle for further professionalization of translation in the US.

Avery: Translation is writing and, as such, is solitary. I've found it helpful to join two professional organizations—SCBWI and the Tokyo-based Society of Writers, Editors, and Translators—and attend their events when possible. I also join email lists, post to a group blog, attend the Asian Festival of Children's Content in Singapore, do school visits, and share my work with staff and students at the school where I teach. Interaction and feedback matter!

Laura: Translation is a pretty isolated job, but I like it that way. However, I have collaborated with other translators in the past—at workshops, in particular. Working with others is fun, and I can learn a lot, too. But ultimately, it is a solitary profession. Organizations like the UK Translators' Association, ALTA in the US, the Emerging Translators' Network (ETN), and the SCBWI are great sources for advice and networking, though. It's good to have colleagues all over the world with whom you can share knowledge and experience. The world of translators is quite tightly knit. I've already met the other translators in this discussion, in fact, either in person or online. We're a friendly bunch as a whole.

What is one notably interesting thing you've learned about another culture in the translation of a particular title?

Olga: I was translating *The Rootabaga Stories* by Carl Sandburg (1922) when I was still living in Moscow. I learned a lot about America and even about baseball. I knew nothing about the game that was then practically unknown in Russia. Now I am in the unique position of living in the US and translating books into Russian for various Moscow publishing houses. It gives me a chance to bring my hands-on knowledge of American culture into my translations. One of my latest translations had a chapter about tattoos and another chapter about cancer awareness walks. I learned a lot.

Lyn: In Europe, people are more open to depictions of the human body in books for children. For instance, the original version of *The World in a Second* (Martins, 2015) contained a spread of a barbershop in the Azores with pictures of topless women on the walls. For the US edition that I translated, the illustrator had to change those pictures to volcanoes.

Avery: I never knew that in the mid-1960s, after the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, many homes in Tokyo still had no bathtubs. Lots of people went to public baths. When I was translating *J-Boys: Kazuo's World, Tokyo, 1965* by Shogo Oketani (2011), I relished a scene in which a group of grade-school boys and a group of middle-school boys are in the men's side of a public bath—a big room with faucets and communal tubs—and the older boys are singing a Beatles song. A local *yakuza* gets irked and throws cold water on the boys, thrilling a younger boy they had teased earlier.

It was fun to translate this passage and get people thinking about (and chuckling over) how times have changed, especially now that Tokyo is preparing for the 2020 Olympics.

Laura: I've come to appreciate that there are so many more similarities than differences across places and people. That's why we all need to expand our reading lists. No matter where we're from, our human experience unites us.

How do you work to share unfamiliar cultural norms and values with readers who might have little knowledge of or experience with them?

Laura: If I'm describing an unfamiliar custom or character, such as the Dutch Sinterklaas, for example, I might weave a brief explanation into the story if it's important for the plot or potentially interesting for the readers. I don't like to over-explain, though. If I can, I let the text do the talking. It's great if readers feel inspired to go off and do their own research, too.

Mara: In novels for adults, I favor the stealth gloss, which is basically like sneaking a footnote-like explanation into a subordinate clause, but in books for children, I often adapt such things as holidays, mythical creatures, songs, games, food, etc., depending on whether the elements are fundamental to the plot. In Spain, it is the Three Kings, not Santa, who bring presents on January 5th, and instead of the Tooth Fairy, a mouse called the Ratoncito Pérez collects teeth. Catalan Christmas traditions are quite scatological, including a "shit log" you have to feed for awhile and then beat with a stick so it will defecate little gifts. You have to make a judgment call every time you attempt to convey such elements of culture; you don't want the text to read like someone explaining a joke when it should read as funny.

Avery: I have used different approaches for different texts. With *J-Boys*, the publisher requested the inclusion of sidebars on many pages to define unfamiliar items and events, from tatami to the Tokyo fire bombings. In *Tomo: Friendship through Fiction: An Anthology of Japan Teen Stories* (Thompson, 2012), the editor included a glossary that briefly defined key terms. In the story I translated for *Tomo*, "House of Trust" by Sachiko Kashiwaba, I also inserted short explanations in the text—identifying a *furisode* as a "long-sleeved showpiece kimono," for example, as this mattered to the story (about a teenaged boy learning kimono fitting). I love Mara's term for this approach: stealth gloss!

Olga: For me, there are several ways to transmit unfamiliar cultural norms together with some unfamiliar facts and many little bits of new knowledge. It is especially difficult to reach the right balance between domestication and foreignization when translating children's books. On the one hand, the text should be accessible to children without too many extra explanations or footnotes. On the other hand, without introducing new information, children will never learn about different cultures. I personally learned a lot from translated children's books when I was growing up. I try to keep this balance and provide an opportunity for readers to accept a new culture as something not alien.

Lyn: I sometimes add a small explanation to the text or in a translator's note. In *Three Balls of Wool* (Cristina, 2017), a picturebook set in 1967–1968, I expanded the author's note that introduced the Cold War, the right-wing dictatorship in Portugal, and the Communist dictatorship in Czechoslovakia; I also suggested a map that showed Europe during the Cold War and today.

Generally, the younger the readers, the more likely a translated book will be "domesticated," or adapted to the readers' culture. This "domestication" often includes changing names that may be difficult to pronounce. With books for older readers, I keep the original names and cultural references unless they rely on racist or colonialist tropes.

What do you most enjoy about this work? What is uniquely challenging?

Avery: The unique challenge is the lack of demand for translations in the US children's book market. In my work for SCBWI, I recently obtained 22 years' worth of translated book logs from the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. This center receives copies of most new children's books published in the US each year and compiles valuable data on racial representation, which has informed the We Need Diverse Books movement. The CCBC also

tracks translations. By counting titles in their logs, I learned that translated books have accounted for fewer than 3 percent of new children's books published in the US since 1994; most years, they accounted for fewer than 2 percent. (Note: I used the CCBC's estimated total number of children's books published in the US from 1994–2014 to calculate these percentages. The CCBC no longer posts this estimate.)

What this means in practical terms for my colleagues and me is that few translators can make a living in children's literature. Japan (the home of my source texts) publishes up to 5,000 new children's books annually. Yet in 22 years, only 57 books translated from Japanese, in total, were logged at the CCBC.

Lyn: My challenge is convincing publishers and readers to take a chance on a story that doesn't have a familiar name attached to it and may not have a predictable structure or conform to popular genres. It's like asking you to see a quirky foreign film rather than the latest Hollywood blockbuster.

Laura: I enjoy finishing translations. There's something hugely satisfying about completing that long journey and taking a story all the way from one language into another. It's also lovely when your books arrive in the mail—seeing those words finally on the pages of a proper book. That's always great.

Challenging? Ah, the challenges are all part of the fun. Puns can prove tricky, but it feels so good when you have a sudden brainwave. Inspiration can strike at the strangest times; it's as if your brain is working away in secret and then suddenly spots a solution in an unexpected place.

Mara: When working with books for children, I really enjoy exploring the intersection between text and image and the challenges of rhyme. In general, I feel lucky to have a job where I am constantly learning new things. Most challenging are probably the sedentary lifestyle and relentless deadlines.

Olga: The most enjoyable part is learning new things about other countries and other cultures and gaining knowledge around minute details and important facts. I enjoy the challenge of figuring out the ways of rendering all of that into a new language and into a new culture. Unlike in the US, the stream of children's books in translation is pretty steady in Russia, but it is very painful to see that American children and young readers rarely read books written and illustrated by contemporary Russian authors and artists.

How do you conceptualize your role as a translator? Do you see yourself as a writer?

Mara: I prefer to think of myself as a craftsperson working with words.

Lyn: As a translator, I shine a spotlight on world literature that I want to make available to children and teens in the US who can't read the books in the original language. Like most writers these days, I'm both a literary artist and a tireless advocate for my books. I feel ownership for the books I've translated as well as for the books I've authored, and I appreciate being part of the collaborative effort to bring these translated books to readers.

Laura: You know the expression: writers write. Well, that's what we translators do all day, every day (or most days, anyway). We're definitely writers. Are we authors, though? Hmm, not really. So that's perhaps a useful distinction in this context. We don't come up with the ideas; we work with the language.

Avery: Indeed—I see myself as a writer but not as the author, and when I translate, I write to honor the author's story. This I can never do by "converting" it word for word, like Google Translate; I must interpret, unpack cultural norms, make choices about idiom and register, and coax the story to flow in a different language. Yet in doing so, I cannot rewrite the story. To use an analogy sometimes applied to translators, a performer of classical music may interpret a score in many ways—indeed *must* interpret it, for the piece to soar—but she will not depart from the score itself, for to do so is to compose a new piece.

Olga: A translator is a bridge or a ferry to another side of a cultural river. Rephrasing (Americanizing) the metaphor which was used by Russian poet Alexander Pushkin: translators are the Pony Express of Education. When I translate, I do not feel myself a writer. I am a vessel that transports someone else's work to another side. At the same time, I am a writer. I have published (again with my coauthor) three books for children, and I regularly write about children's books. I believe that the writing experience enriches me as a translator, but it is important not to go too far in feeling that I am a "co-writer" when I translate.

Olga Bukhina *lives and works in New York City. She has translated 30 books from English into Russian, including American, British, and Canadian young readers' novels and picturebooks, as well as historical fiction, nonfiction, and scholarly books. Among the authors whose works she has translated are Louise Fitzhugh, Jacqueline Kelly, B. J. Novak, Carl Sandburg, Elizabeth George Speare, Enid Blyton, Elizabeth Goudge, Philippa Gregory, C. S. Lewis, Philippa Pearce, and Jean Little. She has recently coauthored three children's books and writes about children's literature for various journals, collections, and online publications in Russia and in the US. She also serves as Executive Director of the International Association for the Humanities.*

Mara Faye Lethem *has translated novels by Jaume Cabré, David Trueba, Albert Sánchez Piñol, Javier Calvo, Patricio Pron, Marc Pastor, and Toni Sala, among others, and shorter fiction by authors such as Juan Marsé, Rodrigo Fresán, Pola Oloixarac, Teresa Colom, and Alba Dedeu. Her translation of* The Whispering City *by Sara Moliner recently received an English PEN Award, and two of her translations were nominated for the 2016 International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. Last year, she was hired by Barcelona's City Hall to redact the successful application that earned the Catalan capital designation as a UNESCO City of Literature. She is currently on the 2017 PEN American Translation Prize jury.*

Lyn Miller-Lachmann *is the author of three award-winning novels for teens—*Gringolandia, Rogue, *and* Surviving Santiago. *She translates from both Portuguese and Spanish to English. Translations include the picturebooks* The World in a Second, Three Balls of Wool, The Queen of the Frogs, *and* Lines, Squiggles, Letters, Words. *She is a board member of the Global Literature in Libraries Initiative and a member of the PEN American Center's Children's Committee and Translation Committee. She divides her time between New York City and Lisbon, Portugal.*

Avery Fischer Udagawa *is the International Translator Coordinator and Japan Translator Coordinator for the SCBWI. An American based in Thailand, she teaches Japanese at International School Bangkok. Her translations from Japanese to English include the historical novel* J-Boys: Kazuo's World, Tokyo, 1965 *by Shogo Oketani and the story "House of Trust" by Sachiko Kashiwaba in* Tomo: Friendship through Fiction: An Anthology of Japan Teen Stories.

Laura Watkinson *lives in Amsterdam and translates from Dutch, German, and Italian into English, with a particular focus on children's books. She founded the Dutch chapter of the SCBWI and is the society's Dutch Translator Coordinator. Her recent translations include three Dutch children's classics by Tonke Dragt for Pushkin Press:* The Letter for the King, The Secrets of the Wild Wood, *and* The Song of Seven.

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Janine J. **Darragh**

"Let Us Pick Up Our Books":

Young Adult Literature and the Refugee Experience

"'Let us pick up our books and our pens,' I said. 'They are our most powerful weapons. One child, one teacher, one book and one pen can change the world.'"

—Malala Yousafzai, *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban,* p. 262

The complex and often controversial issue of the plight of refugees has been a hot-button topic of late. From local, national, and world news sources to Presidential debates to social media, one can find passionate opinions on both sides of this matter. In my work with preservice and inservice teachers of English language learners, I have heard multiple stories of how these often-polarizing opinions about refugees play out, sometimes in unfortunate ways, in the lives of the students they teach. With the wide array of opinions regarding refugees in the United States today, it is essential to spend class time discussing this topic in a safe space moderated by a knowledgeable educator. But how does a teacher even begin to broach the subject? Children's and young adult (YA) literature that portrays the refugee experience may be just the place to start. In this article, I share a research project in which I sought to answer the question *How is the refugee experience portrayed in middle and high school literature included on the Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People lists of the past five years?* I follow this analysis with ideas for classroom implementation and other available resources for classroom use.

Review of Related Literature

"Mother says,
People share
when they know they have escaped hunger.
Shouldn't people share
because there is hunger?"
(Thanhha Lai, *Inside Out and Back Again*, p. 93)

Bishop (1990) speaks of how literature can act as a window or mirror for its readers. In seeing mirror reflections of their own lives in the literature they read, for example, teens may not feel so alone in the world; literature might validate their lives as interesting, important, and of consequence to others. Conversely, reading literature that portrays lives different from one's own can serve as a window into the unknown. Students can see beyond their personal experiences, communities, and daily lives. Reading about lived experiences different from our own can help us to "pierce the balloons of old thought to allow prejudice to dissipate . . . [to] deflate our self-importance, making room for other perspectives" (Miller, 2014, p. 31). Indeed, scholars propose that reading global literature

can "effectively foster empathy and perspective-taking" (Parsons & Rietschlin, 2014, p. 131) and that "interacting with literary fiction creates relationships that should be considered real experiences that are part of a person's history and dynamic interactions with the world" (Medina, 2010, p. 42).

Reading literature that portrays characters who are refugees can yield dual benefits. First, for students who have not had the refugee experience, these texts can offer knowledge about different cultures, countries, and histories, as well as provide a vehicle for readers to vicariously live through the characters portrayed. Engagement with this firsthand experience can help students gain empathy and understanding about the long-standing complexity of the refugee issue and the challenges their classmates who are refugees might have faced and still be facing. Second, students who are refugees can see their lives and experiences represented in the literature and, as a result, might not feel as isolated, different, and alone from their classmates, as refugees often do (Finnerty, 2015; Mosle, 2016).

[F]ictional works portraying refugees can offer students and teachers a common and safe reference point for discussing a topic about which students may have conflicting thoughts and/or misperceptions.

Eritrean refugee Fitsum Berhe, now living in Boise, Idaho, shared, "My first time in high school, I didn't like it. I didn't like any white students, because they didn't understand me. I was from a different culture. In my country, when you talk to people, you don't have eye contact with them. Everything is different" (Mosle, 2016). Iraqui refugee Zahraa Naser, also currently living in Boise, Idaho, shared similar thoughts. She explained, "My friends are mostly refugees. I also have American friends, but I only talk to them at school. I think for Americans, if they talk to you once, if they see you out somewhere, anywhere else outside of school, they just act like they don't know you. I know; I've tried it a lot" (Mosle, 2016). As evidenced by these examples, students should read literature that portrays the refugee experience because it represents the diverse society in which we live.

Similar to reading and discussing YA literature on topics like poverty, race, and sexuality, fictional works portraying refugees can offer students and teachers a common and safe reference point for discussing a topic about which students may have conflicting thoughts and/or misperceptions. This is important work with implications that extend beyond the classroom. In today's information-saturated society, it is increasingly important for students to critically analyze global and societal issues and to develop their own informed positions on a variety of topics. Parsons and Rietschlin (2014) posit, "Many adolescents learn about global issues through mass media or video games that focus on 'catastrophe, terrorism, and war' (Short, 2012, p.13), resulting in superficial understandings and fear-based perspectives. However, adolescents may develop deeper connections and understandings through engagement with global young adult (YA) literature" (p. 130). Literature about refugees may serve as a vehicle to impact both knowledge and empathy. Moreover, while it may be difficult or uncomfortable for students to share personal opinions about refugees, they may be more compelled to grapple with those thoughts and discuss their feelings in class when talking about a fictional character in a book. The results of doing so can be powerful, serving as "part of a personal-cultural transformation that can help student readers become more empathetic, thoughtful, and communicative citizens in, as Friedman refers to it, our 'flat' globalized world" (Kuo & Alsup, 2010, p. 22). YA literature that portrays the refugee experience has the ability to do all that and more.

Methods

"Around the lunch table everyone seems to have given something up—dairy, meat, gluten, sugar, carbs. Only in a land of plenty could people voluntarily go without so much."
(J. C. Carleson, *The Tyrant's Daughter*, p. 62)

As a professor of YA literature, secondary English methods, and ESL teacher preparation, I am always looking for titles and ways in which to incorporate literature that portrays the English language learner experience, in general, and the refugee experience, in particular, into my teacher education courses. Embarking on this project, my goal was to analyze the

representation of immigrants and refugees in children's and YA literature. I quickly realized I needed to narrow my search parameters if I ever wanted to complete the task. While multiple book awards and lists could provide an effective sample, I chose to analyze books on the Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People lists of the past five years to see what titles were included and in what ways the immigrant and refugee experience was portrayed. I used this list for a variety of reasons. First, it was a source with which my students, both preservice teachers and practicing teachers, were familiar. Second, when I shared my interest in looking more closely at YA literature that portrays the refugee experience, this list came up several times as a recommendation from colleagues, librarians, and teachers. Finally, because the list was published by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), these titles had already been identified as being quality works for teaching K–12 social studies concepts that could easily be tied to Common Core State Standards. As such, I felt they warranted further analysis.

Regarding text selection for the Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People lists, the NCSS website explains that:

> The selection committee looks for books that emphasize human relations, represent a diversity of groups and are sensitive to a broad range of cultural experiences, present an original theme or a fresh slant on a traditional topic, are easily readable and of high literary quality, and have a pleasing format and, when appropriate, illustrations that enrich the text. Each book is read by several reviewers, and books are included on the list by committee assent. (NCSS, 2015)

For each identified book, the list provides a recommended reading level [P: Primary (K–2); I: Intermediate (3–5); M: Middle (6–8); H: High (9–12)] as well as thematic strands of the NCSS curriculum standards for social studies (NCSS, 2010). While lists are available from 2000–2015, I chose to focus on the identified books of the last five years (2011–2015) for this project in order to analyze the most recent trends. In total, there were 532 books on the combined lists. Of those 532 titles, 39 (7.3%) feature protagonists who are immigrants or refugees. Of those 39 books, 25 are intended for student readers at the middle or high school levels.

As I began reading, analyzing, and charting the identified texts, it became clear to me that I needed to separate the texts that portray immigrants from the texts that portray refugees. While the definition of an immigrant is "a person who has come into a foreign country in order to live there" (Cambridge, 2016), refugees are unique in that they are *forced* to leave their homes because it is unsafe for them to stay where they are. Because of the prevalence of trauma and the lack of choice and autonomy refugees often experience, their stories are uniquely different from other newcomers to a country; as a result, recurring patterns and themes emerged from the texts portraying refugees that were different and/or absent from the books portraying immigrants.

With this new focus in mind, I used the Department of Homeland Security's definition of refugee to identify texts: "People outside of their country who are unable or unwilling to return home because they fear serious harm. Refugee status or asylum may be granted to people who have been persecuted or fear they will be persecuted on account of race, religion, nationality, and/or membership in a particular social group or political opinion" (Department of Homeland Security, 2015). As such, texts like *Between Shades of Gray* (Sepetys, 2011) and *Copper Sun* (Draper, 2006), while on the NCSS lists, were not included in this study; the characters, though forced to leave their home (e.g., deportation, slavery), did not fit into the determined refugee definition. While I only looked at titles on lists from the past five years, I included all works that portrayed refugees, regardless of setting and/or genre, because I wanted to give as complete a picture as possible. Because different formats appeal to different readers, nonfiction, fiction, and novels in verse were all included. Moreover, reading historical fiction about refugees can offer a point of reflection regarding the commonalities of the refugee experience throughout the years. In total, 15 books were analyzed for this study (see Appendix A).

Results

"It was hope that enabled me to survive in Africa in the face of abuse, starvation, pain, and terrible danger. It was hope that made me dare to dream, and it was hope that helped that dream take flight."
(Michaela DePrince, *Taking Flight: From War Orphan to Star Ballerina*, p. 243)

Characteristics of Books

Times and Places

While there are different reasons people become refugees, war and political conflicts yield the largest numbers of people garnering refugee status. Of the 15 books identified and analyzed for this study, three books share stories of characters whose experiences during World War II led them to become refugees. *My Family for the War* (Voorhoeve, 2012), *Prisoner B-3087* (Gruener, Gruener, & Gratz, 2013), and *Now* (Gleitzman, 2010) offer different perspectives on what it meant to be a child during the Holocaust, the after-effects of the trauma, the very different reasons for leaving one's country, and the different places the characters went. In *My Family for the War,* Jewish protagonist Franziska learns about the *kindertransports* from her friend and shares the information with her family members. She says:

***The Red Umbrella* (Gonzalez, 2010), *Waiting for Snow in Havana: Confessions of a Cuban Boy* (Eire, 2003), and *Learning to Die in Miami: Confessions of a Refugee Boy* (Eire, 2010) . . . share stories of the Cuban Revolution and Operation Pedro Pan, offering different perspectives on a subject about which many students may be unfamiliar.**

> I . . . answered lots of [my family members'] questions: where to sign up (at the Jewish Community Center), who paid for it (the Refugee Children's Movement, an organization that was founded in England just to help us), how many trains were leaving (one or two each week, from different big cities each time), and how old the children had to be (at least four, no older than sixteen). (Voorhoeve, 2012, p. 51)

In both *Prisoner B-3087* and *Now,* the Jewish protagonists survive the Holocaust and then take advantage of the vouchers provided to war survivors who no longer feel safe in their home countries, choosing to relocate in the United States and Australia, respectively. Collectively, these three novels extend readers' thinking about the historical aspects surrounding refugees; how war and conflict contribute to the need to flee one's country; and the long-lasting physical, emotional, and psychological distress that can result from being forced to leave one's home.

My Havana: Memories of a Cuban Boyhood (Wells & Fernandez, 2010) and *90 Miles to Havana* (Flores-Galbis, 2010) also share a historical look at the refugee experience, in this case connected to the Cuban Revolution of 1961. Author Enrique Flores-Galbis shares his experiences as a nine-year-old participant in Operation Pedro Pan, the "largest recorded exodus of unaccompanied minors in the Western Hemisphere" (Operation Pedro Pan Group, 2009) in his book *90 Miles to Havana*. For decades, no one knew about Operation Pedro Pan, an effort in place "from December 1960 to October 1962, [when] more than fourteen thousand Cuban youths arrived alone in the United States" (Operation Pedro Pan Group, 2009) to escape the Cuban government. Currently, efforts are being made to identify children who were part of Operation Pedro Pan, and as a result, more and more stories like these two books are emerging. While not included on the NCSS lists, *The Red Umbrella* (Gonzalez, 2010), *Waiting for Snow in Havana: Confessions of a Cuban Boy* (Eire, 2003), and *Learning to Die in Miami: Confessions of a Refugee Boy* (Eire, 2010) are other YA texts that share stories of the Cuban Revolution and Operation Pedro Pan, offering different perspectives on a subject about which many students may be unfamiliar.

Several books on the Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People lists provide a more current representation of refugees. *Lost Boy, Lost Girl: Escaping Civil War in Sudan* (Dau & Akech, 2010) and *The Red Pencil* (Pinkney, 2014) share stories of refugees from Sudan. *Taking Flight: From War Orphan to Star Ballerina* (DePrince, 2014) begins in war-torn Sierra Leone. *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban* (Yousafzai, 2013) and *The Tyrant's Daughter* (Carleson, 2014) offer experiences from the Middle East. Two nonfiction pieces, *Children Growing Up with War* (Matthews, 2014) and *Outcasts United: The Story of a Refugee Soccer Team That Changed a Town* (St. John, 2012), provide stories from refugees across the world, including Sudan, Liberia, Kosovo, Somalia, Burundi, Bosnia, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, and Rwanda. Of particular note, *Children Growing Up with War* is a powerful nonfiction text written by photojournalist Jenny Matthews, who details her experiences in various worn-torn countries from 1994 to

2013. Matter of fact and somehow hopeful despite the unspeakable situations, the book shares stories and photos of loss, bravery, courage, and joy and includes a "Map of Conflicts" in the back of the book to provide visual context so students can see the extent and effects of war across our world.

Ages and Genders

My analysis of the NCSS titles revealed much variety with regards to age and gender of the refugee protagonists as well as the genres of the books (see Appendix A). The ages of the refugee protagonists range from 6 to 80, with many of the books spanning multiple years of the refugee's life. Gender composition was fairly evenly split. In 8 books, the refugee protagonist is female; in 5 books, the refugee protagonist is male; and in two books, both male and female main characters are present. Relative to genre, 5 of the texts are nonfiction, with the remaining 10 works being fiction. Among the fictional works, 5 are based upon or inspired by true experiences, often those of the author and/or coauthor. Additionally, 2 of the books are novels in verse, a format that is often more accessible for English language learners due to the shorter chunks of text, less complicated sentence structures, repetition, and the cultural familiarity it often contains (Robertson, 2015). For example, 10-year-old Ha from *Inside Out and Back Again* explains her experiences learning English:

> She makes me learn rules
> I've never noticed,
> Like *a, an,* and *the,*
> Which act as little megaphones
> To tell the world
> Whose English is still secondhand.
> ***The*** *house is red.*
> But:
> *We live in* ***a*** *house.*
> *A, an,* and *the*
> Do not exist in Vietnamese
> And we understand
> Each other just fine. (Lai, 2011, pp. 166–167)

The experience of learning English and its various grammatical conventions is something to which many English language learners can relate. Additionally, the novel in verse format provides a unique style that students can explore and practice in their own writing.

Thematic Patterns

Outside Assistance

Across all of the books analyzed in this study, outside help was provided to the refugees, often through governmental support and/or that of other relief organizations. Such portrayals are critical in helping students see not only the multitude of ways in which one can serve those in need, but also how desperately that support is needed. For example, the United Nations provided food and helped set up schools in the Kenyan refugee camps for the lost boys and girls of Sudan in Dau's and Akech's (2010) inspiring narrative. Protagonist John, 13, explains:

> The next day was over 100 degrees. The ground was so hot that blisters formed and burst on the bottoms of my bare feet and the dry air made me very thirsty. I tried to keep going, finally I had to stop . . . . We were too thirsty and hungry to keep going, and too tired to care. I thought I would die. As if by a miracle, a UN truck arrived that day to bring water to the line of Lost Boys. I ducked my head in the truck's water tank and took a big gulp. . . . I found the strength to keep moving. (p. 86)

In this case, outside support literally saved lives.

Other organizations, such as the Refugee Children's Movement and Operation Pedro Pan, are referenced in Flores-Galbis's *90 Miles to Havana* and Voorhoeve's *My Family for the War* as evidence of support for the safe transfer of thousands of children. At the individual level, families provided temporary and forever homes for refugee children in several of the titles, including Voorhoeve's *My Family for the War;* Dau and Akech's *Lost Boy, Lost Girl: Escaping Civil War in Sudan;* DePrince's *Taking Flight: From War Orphan to Star Ballerina;* and Railsback's *Betti on the High Wire.* The nonfiction text Matthews's *Children Growing Up with War* includes a page dedicated to providing Web addresses of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) around the world that provide assistance to displaced people. The message that it is our civic responsibility to stand up for and support the vulnerable and that this support can take place in multitudes of ways is an important and powerful one for teens to consider.

School Experiences

The refugee protagonists' experiences in school are represented in 9 of the 15 books analyzed. Unfortunately, school is not often depicted in a flattering light. While 5 of the texts describe somewhat positive

school experiences for the refugees, the others show students struggling, mostly in the form of bullying from their classmates, and feeling different. For example, protagonist Frances in Voorhoeve's *My Family for the War,* explains, "My school career had so far consisted mainly of pushing, fighting, and being made fun of" (p. 100). Ha, of *Inside Out and Back Again,* is also a victim of bullying at her school:

> A pink boy with white hair
> on his head
> and white eyebrows and
> white eyelashes
> pulls my arm hair.
> Laughter. (p. 145)

These negative depictions of interactions with peers—quite the opposite of what so many of the characters desperately want—offer prime discussion opportunities for all students. What was school like in the character's home country? How does that compare to education in the United States? Why is school such a negative experience for the character? What changes could be made at the district, building, and classroom levels to make school better for students who are refugees in schools across the country today? These are just a few questions that can help students to begin to consider perspectives on schooling that are perhaps different from their own.

[B]ooks like these can inspire discussions of both the value of education and the notion that access to free education should be a basic human right for all people.

Other negative school experiences endured by the protagonists ranged from being placed in classes with much younger children to not being safe in their school. Matthews's *Children Growing Up with War*, for example, shares statistics regarding girls in Afghanistan having acid thrown in their faces as they try to go to school, as well as schools being bombed and burned down. This denial of the opportunity to go to school at all offers much for adolescent readers to consider. As Malala explains in her story, "Though we loved school, we hadn't realized how important education was until the Taliban tried to stop us. Going to school, reading and doing homework wasn't just a way of passing time, it was our future" (Yousafzai, 2013, p. 121). For many students in the US, the idea that school is a desperately desired commodity will be a new concept, and books like these can inspire discussions of both the value of education and the notion that access to free education should be a basic human right for all people.

Violence and Trauma

Unfortunately, trauma is a part of being a refugee, and all of the books analyzed here depict some sort of trauma, often extreme, experienced by the refugee protagonists. In 13 of the 15 books, the character loses a loved one, and often the character witnesses that person's brutal death. For example, though only three-years old at the time, Michaela DePrince vividly recalls the murder of her beloved teacher:

> "NO-O-O!" I shouted as they surrounded Teacher Sarah . . . . The leader then raised his long, curved knife above his head. When I saw what the debil was about to do, I threw myself on Teacher Sarah. The debil leader laughed at me, picked me up by my shirt, and flung me aside as though I were no heavier than a bug. Then he slashed downward with his knife and cut into Teacher Sarah. Blood spurted everywhere, covering me from head to toe. The debil reached inside of Teacher Sarah and pulled out her unborn baby . . . . He then tossed the infant into the bush on the side of the road. I ran into the bush to try to save the baby. If I couldn't save my teacher, at least I might rescue her child. (DePrince, 2014, pp. 54–55)

Graphic, horrifying realities like these help illuminate the terror and trauma that, unfortunately, all too many refugees have faced. While displaced people may come to find a safe home in another country, the memories of their past will likely haunt them forever.

In 12 of the books analyzed here, the character sees violence enacted on another person, usually a family member or close friend; in 11 of the books, the character experiences personal violence (see Appendix A). Sudanese refugee John Dau describes trying to escape the Ethiopian army:

> Smoke and dust filled the air, and shells exploded on the ground. Boys were running for their lives all around me. Some fell as bullets fired from the far shore tore into their bodies. I ran too, until I was out of range of the guns and mortars. Fortunately for us, the Ethiopian army would not cross a crocodile-infested river . . . . I still have bad dreams about crossing the Gilo River. I still wonder what war does

> to people to make them shoot unarmed children. (Dau & Akech, 2010, p. 71)

While not at war, Malala was the target of a violent attack that led to her ultimately leaving her beloved Pakistan and gaining refugee status in England. Shot in the head by the Taliban "because of her pioneer role in preaching secularism" (Yousafzai, 2013, p. 216), she describes the last thing she remembers while riding in a van on a school field trip:

> I didn't see the two young men step out into the road and bring the van to a sudden halt. I didn't get to answer their question "Who is Malala?" or I would have explained to them why they should let us girls go to school as well as their own sisters and daughters. The last thing I remember is that I was thinking about the revision I needed to do for the next day. The sounds in my head were not the *crack, crack, crack* of three bullets, but the *chop, chop, chop, drip, drip, drip* of the men severing the heads of chickens, and them dropping in the dirty street, one by one. (Yousafzai, 2013, p. 202)

While these violent depictions can be troubling for students to read, it is important for them to know that this is a reality for refugees. Recent reports indicate that "half of refugees are experiencing psychological distress and mental illness resulting from trauma [and that] one-fifth of refugee children are also suffering from PTSD" (Finnerty, 2015). It is also important for students to know that arrival to a new, seemingly safe country does not necessarily mean "happily ever after" for refugees. Indeed, a multitude of new and different challenges are just beginning, and once trauma is over, the effects remain.

Moreover, unexpected events may serve as triggers for refugees who have experienced trauma. For example, in DePrince's memoir *Taking Flight: From War Orphan to Star Ballerina,* Fourth of July fireworks bring back haunting memories of danger, war, and violence. Michaela DePrince recalls:

> On our first Fourth of July in the United States, Papa and Mama took us to watch the fireworks. We didn't know what fireworks were, so Mama drew us each a picture of them and sprinkled glitter on them . . . . When it was dark, Papa pointed to the sky. I looked up, expecting to see glitter. What a shock it was to hear an explosion and see the real fireworks. "Bombs! Bombs!" Mia and I screamed. I thought the war had followed us to America. (p. 112)

Betti and George, refugees from an unnamed war-torn country in Railsback's *Betti on the High Wire* (2011) have a similar experience on the Fourth of July:

> BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM! The sky flashed with color . . . . Gray smoke filled the air. My body froze and my heart practically stopped. BOOM BOOM BOOM! I plugged my ears. I squeezed my eyes shut. No, no, no. No one was even ducking on the ground! I covered my whole head with my arms. I remembered everything. The circus camp shaking, the helicopters making dust storms, the soldiers hollering and running in big boots through the village and the woods. "Help . . ." I said in a muffled, tiny voice. (Railsback, 2011, pp. 257–258)

In reading stories like these, young adults may reflect on their own lives, making connections to their own fears. Holidays and other occurrences that might seem like cause for joyous celebration for some can bring back painful memories for others. Refugees in particular are bound to have invisible scars from the trauma they have experienced, and empathy gained from reading refugee accounts may yield more compassion, patience, and understanding for all who are different, both in and out of the classroom.

Pedagogical Implications

"I have fought many, many times to stay alive, and I have won that wrestling match every time. I am blessed. Today, living in America, I sing my new song of joy and hope."
(John Bul Dau, *Lost Boy, Lost Girl: Escaping Civil War in Sudan*, p. 156)

YA novels that portray characters who are refugees can be used in varied ways in the classroom. One way is to create intentionally grouped literature circles with different students reading different books. For example, a teacher might choose to use ability-leveled groupings using books that take place during the same time era. In sharing these different stories, students can get a fuller picture of the refugee experience at a specific time period; in addition, reading different books can provide differentiation opportunities in conjunction with developmental reading levels. Teachers might also want to have students read multiple texts from multiple eras. By first reading a book about Jewish refugees leaving their homes during World War II, then reading about Operation Pedro Pan and the mass exodus of children from Cuba during the Revolution, followed by a more current text sharing refugee stories from counties like Sudan, Iraq, and Pakistan, students can start to analyze the historical trends regarding

refugees and identify similarities and differences across the refugee experience.

In leading class discussions on these texts, teachers might want to refer to Ehst and Hermann-Wilmarth's (2014) article, "Troubling the single story: Teaching international narrative through a critical literacy lens," as it offers suggestions for how to use critical theory in the classroom in an effort to avoid "the pitfalls of tokenism" (p. 24). The authors explain:

> In well-meaning attempts to understand the tragedies represented in these texts, it is possible that teachers reify notions of difference and Western superiority—"we" are the helpers and "they" are the helped. As teachers, we must be careful to disallow the tendency to characterize certain countries or ethnic groups only by their greatest tragedies and struggles. (p. 27)

The authors go on to offer guiding questions that can be useful in discussing literature that reflects international identities and that can be particularly helpful in discussions about refugees, including: "How does each reader's race, class, and gender influence the way they understand history?" and "What kinds of difference do we tolerate? What kinds of difference do we marginalize?" (p. 27). Questions like these can spark courageous conversations about issues of refugees, ethnicity, difference, and acceptance.

YA texts that portray the refugee experience also lend themselves to student research opportunities. These books may introduce students to new worlds they have only seen on the news, places like Sudan, Somalia, Cuba, and Poland. This research can inform students not just about unfamiliar settings, but also about unfamiliar historical events, such as the *kindertransports* used during World War II or Operation Pedro Pan of the 1960s. Many of the books include an author's note explaining the research that was done in writing the book, the parts that were true or inspired by truth, and the parts that were imagined. Students could model this practice and conduct their own research to inform a fictional narrative. The possibilities are endless.

Digital Resources

"Today, tomorrow, sooner or later, you will meet someone who is lost, just as you yourself have been lost, and as you will be lost again someday. And when that happens, it is your duty to say "I've been lost, too. Let me help you find your way home."
(Katherine Applegate, *Home of the Brave*, p. 253)

Beyond the literature mentioned here, there are many electronic resources available for teachers wanting to explore the topic of refugees with their students, and many of these provide current information regarding the refugee crisis in places like Syria and Sudan. For example, popular YA author John Green has a nine-minute vlog episode entitled "Understanding the Refugee Crisis in Europe, Syria, and around the World" that gives a succinct, easy to understand overview of this topic (Vlogbrothers, 2015). Similarly, broadcaster Katie Couric provides a four-minute clip in her Now I Get It series that explains the distinction between people who are migrants and those who are refugees, focusing on the current Syrian crisis (Foley, 2015). Rochelle Davis, Associate Professor in the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, has created a blog entitled "Teaching about Refugees: Curriculum Units and Lessons." This site offers sample lesson plans and resources for teachers to use in the design of a unit about refugees and forced displacement. As described by the author, the project originated from field research completed in Jordan and Lebanon during May and June 2013. The lesson plans on this site are intended for secondary students and focus on current events. Adding reading and discussion of YA texts like Yousafzai's *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban* (2013) and Matthews's *Children Growing Up with War* (2014) from this study would pair well with the lessons provided.

Teachers can also draw upon resources from places outside of the United States that not only offer wonderful teaching tools, but also show that the refugee crisis is a concern for countries outside of the United States as well. For example, the British website BBC.com includes an interactive activity entitled "Syrian Journey: Choose Your Own Escape Route" that provides students with a hands-on opportunity to consider the multitude of decisions that a refugee must face in trying to find safety. The site explains, "The routes, options and outcomes in this Syrian journey feature were based on real stories uncovered by extensive research as part of a BBC Arabic digital project exploring migration from Syria" (BBC News Services, 2016), reminding students that this is not

an exciting game; it is a dangerous reality for so very many people across the world.

Similarly, Oxfam offers a unit of study for teachers entitled "South Sudan: The Unseen Emergency" that contains a variety of activities, PowerPoints, visuals, and teaching guides to introduce the plight of Sudanese refugees to students (Oxfam Education). These resources would be a great introduction to refugee novels like Dau and Akech's *Lost Boy, Lost Girl: Escaping Civil War in Sudan* (2010) and Applegate's *Home of the Brave* (2007)—a novel in verse about Sudanese refugee, Kek, that makes an appearance on an earlier NCSS list—as they provide some background information and context for the settings and scenarios that are described in these texts. UNHCR, the United Nations Refugee Agency, has a website of stories (written and video recordings) about refugees. These stories can be used as companion narratives to the chosen novels and provide a "real world" face and story to put to the crisis. Additionally, documentaries like *God Grew Tired of Us* (Quinn, 2006), based on author John Bul Dau's journey to the United States and referenced in *Lost Boy, Lost Girl: Escaping Civil War in Sudan,* and major box office films like *The Good Lie* (Schwartz, 2014) can provide a different narrative format for comparison and analysis.

While it is important to look globally at the refugee crisis, it is every bit as important to look nationally and locally as well. According to the United States Department of State:

> American communities welcomed 84,995 refugees in Fiscal Year 2016. The refugees admitted under the program come from 79 countries. Over 70 percent fled five countries: the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Syria, Burma, Iraq, and Somalia, where protracted conflicts have driven millions from their homes. Over 72 percent of the resettled refugees are women and children. (US, 2016)

(Note that the government's fiscal year begins on October 1 of the previous year and runs to September 30 of the stated year.) This fact sheet goes on to share that the top five states where refugees are resettled are California, Texas, New York, Michigan, and Ohio, but all states help to resettle refugees. In my state of Idaho, for example, there is a large refugee population—a fact that takes many of my students by surprise. Introducing students to state websites, like the Idaho Office for Refugees, and sharing local news articles can show students that this is not just a global issue, it is a local one as well.

Conclusion

"No one person can do everything . . . but we can all do something."
(Warren St. John, *Outcasts United: The Story of a Refugee Soccer Team That Changed a Town*, p. 146)

There are many wonderful titles that portray the refugee experience that were not included in this study; future research might look at the earlier years of the Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People booklists as well as other available lists, such as the NBGS (Notable Books for a Global Society), the OIB (Outstanding International Books), and the Jane Addams Peace Association Children's Book Awards. Interviewing teachers and librarians about their own and their students' experiences with texts that portray characters who are refugees would provide another compelling research opportunity, as would getting feedback about the books from those who have personally experienced life as a refugee.

It is . . . important for students to know that arrival to a new, seemingly safe country does not necessarily mean "happily ever after" for refugees. Indeed, a multitude of new and different challenges are just beginning, and once trauma is over, the effects remain.

While we cannot stop the violence, trauma, despair, confusion, frustration, and heartache that often come with the topic of refugees, we can help our students better understand the complexity of this issue. We can help them to, for a moment, feel what it might be like to be torn forcibly from one's country and to face the unknown in the hope of a better, safer, more peaceful life. Child refugee, activist, and inspiration Malala Yousafzai said in her book *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban,* "One child, one teacher, one book and one pen can change the world." It is my convic-

tion that quality middle and high school literature that portrays the refugee experience can inspire readers to look past differences, to seek truth, to show compassion, to stand up for the vulnerable, and to go forth and change the world.

A former high school English teacher, ***Janine J. Darragh*** *is Assistant Professor of Literacy and ESL in the University of Idaho's College of Education where she instructs courses in Secondary English Methods, Young Adult Literature, Content Area Literacy, and ESL. Her research interests center on sociocultural issues in teaching and learning, YA literature, and teacher preparation.*

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Appendix A: Refugee-Related YA Titles Included on the Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People Lists (2011–2015)

Notable year	Author	Title	Designated reading level	Genre	Refugee moved from where to where and when	Gender of refugee	Did the refugee receive outside help?	Was school depicted positively?	Has the refugee lost anyone?	Has the refugee experienced personal violence?	Has the refugee witnessed acts of violence to others?
2011	John Bul Dau & Martha Arual Akech	*Lost Boy, Lost Girl: Escaping Civil War in Sudan*	M	Nonfiction	Sudan to Ethiopia and then to Kenya 1987–2006	Both Male and Female	Yes	Yes for John; No for Martha	Yes	Yes	Yes
2011	Enrique Flores-Galbis	*90 Miles to Havana*	M	Fiction based on the author's experiences	Havana, Cuba, to Miami, Florida 1961	Male	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
2011	Lisa Railsback	*Betti on the High Wire*	M	Modern fiction	The country is not named on purpose. The author note mentions that there are so many children in war-torn areas that she didn't want to identify one specific place. Modern times	Female	Yes	N/A, but bullied at summer camp	Yes	Yes	Yes
2011	Rosemary Wells with Secundino Fernandez	*My Havana: Memories of a Cuban Boyhood*	M	Fiction based on true story	Havana, Cuba, to New York 1952–1959	Male	Yes	No; teacher is mean and protagonist is bullied	No	No	No
2012	Thanhha Lai	*Inside Out and Back Again*	M	Novel in verse based on author's experiences	Saigon, Vietnam, to Alabama 1975–1976	Female	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
2013	Morris Gleitzman	*Now*	M/H	Fiction	Poland to Australia 1940s	Male	Yes	N/A	Yes	Yes	No
2013	Christina Diaz Gonzalez	*Thunderous Whisper*	M	Fiction	Guernica, Spain, to London, England 1937	Female	Yes	No; she is bullied	Yes	Yes	Yes

Continued on next page

2013	Warren St. John	*Outcasts United: The Story of a Refugee Soccer Team That Changed a Town*	M/H	Nonfiction	(Multiple):Sudan, Liberia, Kosovo, Somalia, Burundi, Bosnia, Ethiopia, and Afghanistan—all to Clarkston, Georgia 2003–2006	Males	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
2013	Anne Voorhoeve	*My Family for the War*	H	Fiction	Germany to London 1938–1945	Female	Yes	No; she is bullied	Yes	Yes	Yes
2014	Alan Gratz, Ruth & Jack Gruener	*Prisoner B-3087*	M	Fiction based on author's experiences	Poland to New York 1940s	Male	Yes	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes
2015	J. C. Carleson	*The Tyrant's Daughter*	H	Fiction inspired by the author's time as an undercover CIA agent in the Middle East	Unnamed place in the Middle East to Washington, DC Modern times	Female	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
2015	Michaela DePrince	*Taking Flight: From War Orphan to Star Ballerina*	M/H	Nonfiction	Sierra Leone to New Jersey 1998–2013	Female	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2015	Jenny Matthews	*Children Growing Up with War*	M/H	Nonfiction	(Multiple): Libya to Tunisia, Syria to Jordan, Sudan to Chad, Iraq to Kurdistan, Palestine to Gaza, Syria to Jordan, Rwanda to Zaire 1994–2013	Both Males and Females	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
2015	Andrea Davis Pinkney	*The Red Pencil*	M	Novel in verse	South Darfur to Kalma, Sudan* 2003–2004	Female	Yes	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes
2015	Malala Yousafzai with Christina Lamb	*I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban*	M/H	Nonfiction	Pakistan to England 2012–2015	Female	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

*Note: While moving from South Darfur, Sudan, to Kalma, Sudan, does not technically fit into the definition of "refugee" that I used (leaving one's country), the title is included as it takes place in a refugee camp.

Stacy **Graber**

Existential Meditation on Morality:

Janne Teller's *Nothing*

Even if the system politely assigned me a guest-room in the attic so I could come along all the same, I'd still prefer to be a thinker who is like a bird on a twig.

—Søren Kierkegaard, Journals and Notebooks, 1845/2001

The epigraph for this discussion on Janne Teller's (2010) *Nothing*, an artful and iconoclastic work of young adult fiction from Denmark, comes from the notebooks of the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. Intended as a critique of academia (British Broadcasting, 2013), the sentiment expressed is offensive and amusing. If we understand "the system" as code for academia (reflective of Kierkegaard's contempt for the professoriate) (British Broadcasting, 2013; Kaufman, 1975), then Kierkegaard here implies that a bird on a branch is more seriously reflective than a professor at a university, or that a philosopher in a tree comes closer than an academic to the legitimate province of philosophy. To arrive at Kierkegaard's sense of the mission or responsibility of philosophy, we must draw, again, from the author's notebooks in which he writes: "What I really lack is to be clear in my mind *what I am to do*, not what I am to know, except in so far as a certain understanding must precede every action" (1835/2001, p. 15).

This remark suggests that, for Kierkegaard, the protocol for moral action is personal, reflective, and perhaps necessarily undertaken at a remove, like the philosopher/bird on a twig. At the same time, as Kaufman has observed (Partially Examined Life, 2011), the statement represents Kierkegaard's critique on the limits of reason or his objection to the academic premium placed on logic as the ultimate path to understanding. Therefore, the bird on a twig might be viewed as metaphoric of the retreat of the thinker to a place apart from institutionally sanctioned practices and beliefs. This situation is mirrored in another story of a thinker who took to the trees, Janne Teller's (2010) Batchelder Award-winning novel, *Nothing*.

In Teller's stylistically austere, existential allegory, a middle school student named Pierre Anthon, who lives in the town of Tæring ["a verb meaning to gradually consume, corrode, or eat through" (p. 229)], announces that "nothing matters . . . [s]o nothing is worth doing" (p. 1). Thereafter, he quits school and takes up residence in a plum tree. From his position above the doings of Tæring society, Pierre Anthon pelts his peers from the seventh-grade class with overripe fruit and "truth bombs," or deconstructive statements that threaten the social and ontological sense of order and coherence that the kids have always accepted without question. From there, the seventh graders work to assemble an object lesson that will disabuse Anthon of his skepticism, but their plan degenerates into chaos. In the end—true to its existential roots—Teller's *Nothing* proposes no answers to the questions it raises, nor does it offer an alternative belief system to replace the one the philosopher in the tree debunks. The reader is left only with a menac-

ing admonition from the narrator of the story, Agnes, and must make personal sense of the moral message conveyed by the text.

Contextualing *Nothing*

Outside of the theoretical realm, it is rare to discover a book that grapples as aggressively with questions of ontology, authenticity, and accountability, bearing out Kaufman's (1975) suggestion that "at least some part of what the existentialists attempt to do is best done in art" (p. 49). At the same time, the very features that make *Nothing* such an effective translation of existential thought and motifs make it an especially edgy reading choice for a youthful audience due to its extreme level of darkness and violence. However, I intend to argue that, despite the desolate and chaotic universe portrayed in the novel (which couldn't be rendered any other way, as Teller is an inheritor of an unavoidably stark and unsettling philosophical tradition with antecedents in Kierkegaard, Sartre, and Camus), Teller creates a rich, intellectual conversation on the status of meaning, morality, and authenticity for 21st-century youth that raises the level of significance of literature written for young adults and catalyzes discussion on the ethics of authenticity and personal responsibility.

Counterintuitive to conventional systems of morality, Teller's book ultimately proposes the prescriptive value of nothing, or a politics of (in)action as an assertion of personal integrity.

This deeper understanding, however, is difficult to access with (as yet) few scholarly essays dedicated to discussion of the book (see Lareau, 2012; Ommundsen, 2008; Wannamaker, 2015), coupled with the fact that reviewers have painted a fairly fragmentary and unflattering portrait of *Nothing*. For example, some critics dwell on the hideous procession of sacrifices offered to the moribund altar of meaning within the book (Lewis, 2010; *Publisher's Weekly*, 2010) as opposed to situating the action in a way that would clarify the relationship of the content with existential theory. In fact, after reading a review consisting of a decontextualized catalogue of grotesqueries contained in the novel (e.g., a decapitated dog, the body of an exhumed infant, biological evidence obtained from a rape, and a dismembered finger), it is difficult to imagine what value might be gained from such a seeming grindhouse of a book. Therefore, similar to Wannamaker's (2015) general claim that literature acts as a guide to theory (although different, in that Wannamaker demotes the importance of existentialism), I will demonstrate how *Nothing* helps to clarify and extend the moral conversation in the philosophical literature and engages a new audience in dialogue with existentialism, a theory enduringly important for its emphasis on ethical critique and personal accountability.

If the term "existentialism," as Kaufman (1975, p. 11) suggests, is complicated by differences between its proponents, then there is another way to approach a definitional sense of the word as it is reified in the literature. For instance, one might argue that Teller's book demonstrates many of the classic themes commonly associated with existential thought, as identified by Kaufman (1975), such as hyper-consciousness of death and the irrationality of life (represented by Pierre Anthon's insistence on the futility of human existence and endeavor); struggle with anxiety (reflected in the children's collective hysteria to disprove Anthon's nihilistic thesis); adoption of a skeptical and anti-institutional stance (represented in Anthon's deconstruction of socially authorized beliefs and practices); and persistent critique of a lack of authenticity [reflected in the motif of seeming versus being and in the aggressive challenges to "self-deception" Anthon levels throughout the text (Kaufman, 1975, p. 42)]. Counterintuitive to conventional systems of morality, Teller's book ultimately proposes the prescriptive value of nothing, or a politics of (in)action as an assertion of personal integrity.

In Defense of *Nothing*

Admittedly, the shock factor of *Nothing* is high in terms of gore and subversive content, but the material is not gratuitous. The kids in the story live in a town that, basically, translates as "Corrosion" (Aitken as cited in Teller, 2010, p. 229), and it is obvious that a deterioration of ethical values drives the allegory. This is apparent not only in the grisly sacrifices gathered by the kids to affirm the existence of meaning, but in

Teller's satire aimed at greed and pretense when the abject collection amassed by the kids is ultimately declared a great work of art by an American cultural behemoth (implied to be the Museum of Modern Art in New York City) and sold for the remarkable sum of 3.5 million dollars. The riff on Andersen's (1837/2016) "The Emperor's New Clothes" in the final third of the book might be read through Baudrillard's (1994) postmodern analysis of the seduction and transparency of media images, but it is more appropriate to locate the variety of social commentary evident in *Nothing* as older than that. In other words, the evaluation is more properly understood, in the tradition of existential critique, as an expression of "the contrast [between] inauthentic . . . and authentic life" (Kaufman, 1975, p. 50).

Therefore, as with virtually everything that happens in the secondary ELA classroom, framing would be key to contextualizing Teller's novel in a way that would justify its academic merit and situate its social critique as one relevant to the ongoing conversation on ethics in contemporary culture. In terms of the structure of this article, I will provide a brief overview of scholars whose work frames this literary and philosophical discussion; draw from selected works of Kierkegaard, Sartre, and Camus to situate *Nothing* in a way that highlights its ethical content; and conclude with suggestions for classroom use of the novel.

Selected Literature Review

First, it seems important to situate Teller's novel *Nothing* in the context of debates surrounding children's literature at large and related conversations concerning attributes of Scandinavian literature written for children and young adults. For instance, *Nothing*, in terms of style and theme, can add to the ongoing discussion regarding whether the demarcations of "children's literature," "young adult literature," and literature produced for adults are still relevant. As scholars have argued for other titles, *Nothing*'s resistance to categorization results from its genre-defying stylistic elements and age-transcendent audience appeal (Bjørk-Larsen, 2012; de Vries, 1997; Nikolajeva, 1998). Related to fluidity in terms of genre and audience, Bjørk-Larsen (2012) and Nikolajeva (1998) point to the tendency of Scandinavian children's literature to traverse conventional boundaries concerning appropriate content in literature written for young people. This attribute is echoed by Ommundsen (2008), who characterizes Scandinavian literature by its predisposition for "taboo breaking" and "extreme depictions" (p. 38), and these qualities are reflected in Lareau's (2012) study of the "eroticization of children" in *Nothing* (p. 236).

Yet another thread of scholarly discussion useful for contextualizing *Nothing* concerns work situated at the intersection of literature produced for a youthful audience and philosophy. Scholarship utilizing various philosophical frameworks for the interpretation of children's and young adult literature might be examined by audience age-group. For instance, notable studies of children's literature interpreted through distinct, philosophical approaches include Johansson's (2013) analysis of "moral thinking" (p. 89) in a Norwegian picturebook informed by the theory of Wittgenstein. This group also includes de Rijke's (2013) analysis of existential motifs in the writings of Russell Hoban and Johansen's (2015) analysis of the Kierkegaardian evolution toward individual identity in the works of Shaun Tan. Notable studies incorporating philosophical perspectives in the analysis of texts written for a young adult audience include Gillespie's (2010) chapter on the value of philosophical theory for catalyzing literary analysis organized around key existential themes. This group also includes Wright's (2008) account of the existential framing of comic book superheroes and villains in the political context of the 1960s and '70s and Trites's (2000) Foucault-inflected reading of the mechanics of power in youth culture and young adult literature.

This essay contributes to the extant scholarship by building the conversation on this radical novel and by exploring how the allegory acts as a vehicle of moral critique.

These studies are helpful for contextualizing the stylistic attributes of and challenges posed by Teller's novel. At the same time, they offer a methodological cue for analysis guided by philosophical perspectives. This essay contributes to the extant scholarship by building the conversation on this radical novel and by exploring how the allegory acts as a vehicle of moral critique.

Begin at the End

In his essay titled, "An Absurd Reasoning," Camus (1955) challenges the notion of meaning by refusing the possibility of certainty; subsequently, he explains the way everyday life empties out into gestural exercises to try to supplement absence or bury the uncomfortable apprehension of the void. Camus's (1955) assessment renders life as pointless, "mechanical" (p. 10), and threatened constantly by an awareness of death, which he deems "the only reality" (Camus, 1955, p. 42). These preoccupations are drawn from his admiration for Kierkegaard (1843/1987) who, through the pseudonymous narrator "A" in *Either/Or*, writes:

> How empty and meaningless life is.—We bury a man; we accompany him to the grave, throw three spadefuls of earth on him; we ride out in a carriage, ride home in a carriage; we find consolation in the thought that we have a long life ahead of us. But how long is seven times ten years? Why not settle it all at once, why not stay out there and go along down into the grave and draw lots to see to whom will befall the misfortune of being the last of the living who throws the last three spadefuls of earth on the last of the dead? (p. 29)

It is this Kierkegaardian sense of dread that seventh grader Pierre Anthon activates when he leaves school and unnerves his peers with the pronouncement, "Nothing matters. . . . I've known that for a long time. So nothing's worth doing. I just realized that" (p. 5). After his withdrawal from society, Anthon relentlessly pursues his existential thesis from his place in a plum tree and provokes the kids to awaken to the acknowledgement of nothing. His comments include rebukes: "It's all a waste of time. . . . Everything begins only to end. The moment you were born you begin to die. That's how it is with everything" (p. 8); admonitions: "There's nothing to wait for . . . . And there's nothing at all worth seeing. And the longer you wait, the less there'll be! (p. 62); and exhortations: "In a few years you'll all be dead and forgotten and diddly-squat, nothing, so you might just as well start getting used to it! (p. 10).

Pierre Anthon's criticisms delivered throughout the book are intended to rouse the kids from their illusions and liberate them from the human superimposition of order and purpose that existentialist writers like Camus, Kierkegaard, and Sartre attempt to strip away. His abbreviated lectures, delivered from a branch above his peers (making him seem like a kind of romantic deity), permit no refuge from anticipation of the end or shelter from criticism for attempting to disguise that inevitability. So part of Anthon's troubling effect on the kids of Tæring is not that he is initiating them to a new concept, but that he is reminding them of an old one—one with the power to cut through polite routines and social rituals that conceal anxiety. His comments restore the centrality of death and, by extension, the futility of life and the struggle to ignore that condition, tenets central to existential writing.

This is precisely the understanding that the story's narrator and effective mouthpiece for the group, Agnes, works to conceal. Early in the book, we learn from Agnes that this story is negotiated by the concrete realities of social class as much as, if not more than, abstract, philosophical debates. Agnes informs the reader that Anthon's remarks are a direct assault on the idea that "We were supposed to amount to something," and "[s]something was the same as someone" (p. 5). Understand that the kids of Tæring enjoy a "swank" (p. 6) lifestyle. They possess a sense of self-importance that is threatened by the leveling potential of Anthon's nothingness argument. Through her introductory comments, Agnes reveals that her peers live in attractively landscaped homes, view apartment dwellers with contempt, and have an investment in the status quo that ensures the continuity of their "worldly" existence, as Kierkegaard (1849/2013, p. 302) would describe it. They don't bother with the interrogation of meaning because in their world, larger, cosmic questions are settled by conventional, social facts (i.e., that material prosperity, upward mobility, and the assurance of distinction override murkier issues of being, purpose, and mortality).

Furthermore, judging by the kids' level of upset at Anthon's attack on meaning, it would seem that they have never posed (or permitted) questions of ontological significance with the potential to destabilize their position and worldview. Speaking on behalf of the group, Agnes asserts, "We didn't want to live in the world Pierre Anthon was telling us about. We were going to amount to something, be someone" (p. 9). Agnes tells us that the ultimate index of reality is how things look from the outside and that this sensibility is not in accord with Anthon's revolt (p. 16). And although we see virtually nothing of the adults in the town of Tæring, there is reason to believe that the

values described by Agnes are an inheritance from the parents who wear "a mask" (p. 191) to conceal uneasiness as to the artificiality and pretense of their lives.

In the town of Tæring, maintaining a kind of "double-think" (Orwell, 1949/1961) insulated from doubt and despair is generally do-able until the destabilizing taunts of Pierre Anthon. From the moment Anthon opts out of the system, he activates worries concerning longstanding, social commonplaces and threatens the durability of broader assumptions that have allowed a particular way of life to flourish. After Pierre Anthon inserts doubt through his surreal, aerial volleys of Socratic dialogue, all beliefs are imperiled, and no intrinsic or transcendental sense of meaning is guaranteed. Agnes admits, "All of a sudden I was scared. Scared of Pierre Anthon" (p. 6).

Coming closer to the conversation on morality, Anthon not only acts as a representative of dread or messenger of the end, he interrogates a specific kind of dishonesty. And to understand that critique and its chaotic result in Teller's novel, one must look to Sartre.

A Problem of Integrity

Like so many of the existentialist writers, Sartre owes a debt to Kierkegaard, who writes: "The unhappy one is the person who is always absent from himself, never present to himself" (1843/1987, p. 222). Sartre (1956) echoes this idea almost exactly in his conception of "mauvaise foi" or "bad faith" (p. 87) in *Being and Nothingness*: "[I]n bad faith it is from myself that I am hiding the truth" (p. 89). The ethical transgression in Sartre's (1956) notion of bad faith is not so much the problem of lying, but the individual's deliberate self-deception or conscious denial of the truth. This stress on consciousness cannot be underestimated because, in his rejection of Freud's theory of repression, Sartre (1956) argues that one must be aware of something in order to conceal it (p. 93). This secondary and more insidious form of lying is revealed as a foundational problem in *Nothing,* as Agnes becomes more acutely aware of how pretense structures nearly every facet of sociality.

In fact, one could argue that the authentic cause for hysteria in the book is not the threat of meaninglessness, but the anxiety-provoking realization that people "play" at life—all the time—like Sartre's (1956) example of the waiter whom he discovers "playing at *being* a waiter in a café" (p. 102). Specifically, according to Sartre (1956), people pretend that the adoption of socially determined roles and values is natural and meaningful when they suspect otherwise. Awakening to consciousness of (and taking responsibility for) this phenomenon is central to Teller's book, and it is located in the pervasive language of performance and deception found in many exchanges. For instance, Anthon scolds the kids by saying: "It's all a big masquerade, all make-believe and making out you're the best at it" (p. 8); and, "[H]ow come everyone's making like everything that isn't important is very important, all the while they're so busy pretending what's really important isn't important at all?" (p. 25). Likewise, Agnes expresses anxiety regarding the exposure of deception in her remark: "We couldn't go on making like things mattered as long as Pierre Anthon remained in his plum tree, yelling at us that nothing mattered" (p. 15). Reminiscent of Kierkegaard's (1849/2013) critique of the "theater of life" (p. 292), these examples negatively foreground performative language like "masquerade," "make believe," "making out," "making like," and "pretending," and centralize the violation of authenticity of which the kids (and their parents) are guilty and that Anthon's existential "reality checks" aggressively expose.

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Throughout the book, Agnes reveals awareness of a kind of betrayal of the truth or consciousness of hypocrisy. She recognizes that it is customary to base value judgments on external perceptions of significance as opposed to gauging meaning determined by an individual sense of worth. Based on this, it might be inferred that Anthon's comments initiate feelings of guilt in the kids, judging by their frenzy to disprove his thesis regarding the absence of meaning (a frenzy caused, one would suppose, by their fervor to uphold

dogmas in which they only partially believe). Perhaps this is what makes their betrayal of the objects sacrificed to the "heap of meaning" (p. 48) inevitable.

Interestingly, of all the arguments that Anthon makes to expose bad faith, he is most vigorous in his attack of the world of work (and attendant to that, the world of commerce), which, he argues, operates by false values driven by the desire for prestige. This is why, when Agnes asserts, "I'm going to be something worth being! And famous, too!" (p. 27), Pierre Anthon counters:

> Sure you are, Agnes. . . . You'll be a fashion designer and teeter around in high heels and make like you're really something and make others think they are too, as long as they're wearing your label . . . . But you'll find out you're a clown in a trivial circus where everyone tries to convince each other how vital it is to have a certain look one year and another the next. And then you'll find out that fame and the big wide world are outside of you, and that inside there's nothing and always will be, no matter what you do. (pp. 27–28)

In this diatribe, Anthon attacks the myth of social distinction and flattens the allure of status goods. He accuses Agnes of complicity in a fraudulent system disconnected from any authentic (i.e., personally held) index of value and foregrounds the outside/inside (seeming vs. being) dichotomy upon which the existential problem of bad faith is based (Sartre, 1956). Moreover, he refuses Agnes the sanctuary of self-deception that has been characteristic of sociality in Tæring.

At the same time, Anthon's remark is important in the way it highlights the opposite end of the socioeconomic spectrum from the one emphasized in Sartre's (1956) anecdote of the waiter. In the chapter titled "Bad Faith" from *Being and Nothingness* (1956), Sartre explains that the waiter could recognize the oppressive reality of his working life and "break away and suddenly elude his condition" (p. 102). Anthon, conversely, proposes a more incendiary possibility. In his critique, members of the privileged class might awaken to realize the moral bankruptcy of their existence and the precariousness of their position. Based on this Sartrean-Marxist bombshell, it comes as no surprise that, incited by Anthon's progressively more penetrating complaints, Agnes eventually confronts the impossibility of "pretending" or lying to herself further about the vacancy of the bourgeois dogmas she has inherited from the adults.

Parsing the *Nothing*

In the first part of Kierkegaard's (1849/2013) *The Sickness unto Death*, the pseudonymous author, Anti-Climacus, outlines the "busy occupations" (e.g., choosing a career, getting married, raising children, attending social engagements, etc.) in which people participate in order to distract themselves from intimations of despair (p. 328). Kierkegaard (1849/2013) argues that these "diversions" sidetrack the individual from a "truer conception of despair," which is the human "condition" (pp. 296, 328). Likewise, Pierre Anthon interrogates the senselessness of practices dedicated to habitually parsing time:

> If you live to be eighty, you'll have slept thirty years away, gone to school and sat with homework for nine, and worked for almost fourteen. Since you've already spent more than six years being little kids and playing, and you're later going to be spending at least twelve cleaning house, cooking food, and looking after your own kids, it means you've got nine years at most to live . . . . And you want to spend those nine years pretending you've amounted to something in a masquerade that means nothing, when instead you could start enjoying your nine years right away. (pp. 24–25)

Here, Anthon reduces the routine of life to a flat catalogue of mundane gestures intended to stave off the apprehension of irrelevance. If, as Kierkegaard (1849/2013) argues, "unawareness is . . . the most dangerous form of despair" (p. 321), then Anthon echoes this notion by critiquing actions performed automatically that inhibit critical "consciousness" and contemplation of larger, philosophical questions (Kierkegaard, 1849/2013, p. 317).

At the same time, Anthon adopts another Kierkegaardian argument in critiquing conformity with the values and practices of "the crowd" (1849/2013, p. 303). For instance, Anthon challenges the meaningfulness of actions undertaken in conformance with "how things are done" and points out inconsistencies from an existential perspective:

> How come it's so important we learn to say please and thank you and the same to you and how do you do when soon none of us will be doing anything anymore, and everybody knows that instead they could be sitting here eating plums, watching the world go by and getting used to being a part of nothing? (pp. 25–26)

> First you fall in love, then you start dating, then you fall out of love, and then you split up again . . . . And that's the way it goes, time and time again, right until you grow

> so tired of all that repetition you just decide to make like the one who happens to be closest by is the one and only. What a waste of effort! (p. 59)

Pierre Anthon removes layer after layer of social sediment that lends a sense of naturalness and authority to the rituals of everyday life (e.g., observing etiquette, going to school, dating and getting married, working at a career, raising a family, etc.), causing them to appear pointless and absurd. Therefore, when Anthon directly confronts the kids with the possibility that the life they lead is deliberately neglectful of the status of "nothingness" (Sartre, 1956, p. 56), or broader questions of ontology, and comprised instead of failed strategies to assign purpose, the fragile world depicted in the allegory shatters in denial. It is at this point that the story escalates to a surreal level of violence as the kids construct a supposed monument to meaning.

Andersen Redux

It is necessary to dedicate at least part of this discussion to the assemblage of macabre artifacts in *Nothing,* but in a way that focuses less on the grotesqueries and instead emphasizes the ostensible motive for the endeavor, its failure, and the ethical implications of the media spectacle that ensues and exploits the false emblem of meaning.

Basically, the kids set out to prove to Pierre Anthon that there is meaning in the world that they can point to, which would, in turn, validate the transcendent notion of Meaning. And not surprisingly, their project assumes the form of a collection, as objects are markers of personal and communal meaning(s) (Pearce, 1992). Wannamaker (2015), in part, addresses the place of material culture in Teller's novel through the critical lens of Posthumanism, which assigns primacy to objects as "mediators" rather than "intermediaries" in a social context (Latour, 2007, p. 85). However, the relationship between objects and people in *Nothing* is troubled because—in a process similar to the one described by Pearce (1992) and Stewart (2001)—objects are subordinated to people by being decontextualized and redeposited into a disingenuous account.

By way of explanation, initially, the kids labor according to a kind of anthropological methodology, collecting storied objects from community members, things that distill sentimental or kitschy meanings. Thereafter, the project morphs into the collection of more protectively held or cherished possessions from which the owner is loath to part. Significance graduates in intensity at this point in the book because the kids sense the aura of importance instilled in these objects for the owner, but they misperceive the source of significance and come to believe that the pain upon loss of these objects equals "the meaning" (p. 157). And over a short span of time, this misperception catalyzes a chain of forced sacrifices no longer focused on meaning but retribution, as each kid exacts a more intimate sacrifice as retaliation for the object that s/he is forced to relinquish.

[I]n Teller's *Nothing*, the idea of meaning is always in peril, not (exclusively) because of Pierre's existential-nihilistic challenges, but because the kids don't wholly believe in it, and in bad faith they create a kind of false idol.

It should be said that, if the objects had any transcendent meaning or capability for reifying a broader sense of significance, that potential is betrayed by the bad faith in which they are acquired. For instance, Agnes demands Gerda's hamster as remuneration for the loss of her sandals; Frederick exacts "Lady William's" (p. 53) diary as payback for the loss of his flag; Otto requires the body of Elise's baby brother in recompense for his boxing gloves; Ursula-Marie calls for Hussain's prayer mat for the loss of her hair; Huge Hans requires Sophie's virginity in recompense for the loss of his bike; Holy Karl demands the head of Elise's dog as compensation for a religious statue; and Sophie demands Jon-Johan's finger as reparation for the loss of her "innocence" (p. 106). The lack of discrimination between the trivial and profound in this catalogue is problematic, as is the kids' utter abandonment of the pursuit of meaning ostensibly guiding the endeavor. That is, the quest for meaning is replaced by the motive of vengeance. Furthermore, the dishonesty of the effort is amplified by an obvious disconnect between individuals and the payback exacted (e.g., Holy Karl requires the squeamish Pretty Rosa to decapitate Elise's dog, thus

punishing Elise more than Rosa). All of which is to say that, in Teller's *Nothing*, the idea of meaning is always in peril, not (exclusively) because of Pierre's existential-nihilistic challenges, but because the kids don't wholly believe in it, and in bad faith they create a kind of false idol.

Thus far, I have attempted to argue that the way the kids sadistically exact, weaponize, and enshrine "souvenirs of death" (Stewart, 2001, p. 140) in a moribund tableau points to bad faith and is antagonistic to the meaning they seek. More important, this dishonesty is iterated on a larger scale in terms of the exploitive attention the popular press lavishes on the kids in praise of their creation, in the manner of the Danish classic, "The Emperor's New Clothes," Andersen's (1837/2016) tale in which fraud is hailed as genius. Agnes details the hype and instant celebrity surrounding the kids and their bogus creation, which is so powerful that a local art critic is forced to retract his denunciation of the piece as trash. And though Agnes well knows the corrupt method of acquisition that created the so-called "heap of meaning" (p. 158), she defers to public opinion for an estimation of its value, trumpeting: "[S]o many people couldn't possibly be wrong. Many! More! The truth!" (p. 176). Agnes doesn't actually believe this for the reason stated above, and her suspicion intensifies when Anthon suggests that the community has only seized on the controversy surrounding the contested collection as a stimulus for local business (p. 179). She admits, "I didn't tell anyone about my doubts" (p. 183), thus consciously choosing deception by indulging in the social refuge of wrongheaded public opinion. In so doing, she performs a kind of ironic reversal of the role of the child from Andersen's (1837/2016) fairytale, who boldly admits before all that the king is naked. In Tæring, the kids recognize but have no interest in attesting to the truth, which is a cynical prospect indeed.

[W]hether young readers endorse or refute Pierre's existential-nihilistic perspective isn't really the issue at all so much as the way the book dramatizes the moral courage required by dissent and the idea that individual choices are metonymic expressions of personal integrity.

Not surprisingly, following an American museum's purchase of the collection for a ludicrous sum, which the kids accept as another validation of the meaning inherent to the objects, Pierre Anthon points out that, had the kids truly believed in the significance of their project, they "wouldn't have sold it" (p. 201). Anthon thus levels the unanswerable moral charge, similar to Kierkegaard's (1849/2013) indictment that "[w]hat is called worldliness is made up of just such men who . . . pawn themselves to the world" (p. 305).

By the time the tale comes to a close, the kids beat each other mercilessly, Anthon is murdered, and the "theater of life" (Kierkegaard, 1849/2013, p. 292), or socially authorized version of reality, has been restored. Agnes unemotionally reports on Pierre Anthon's funeral service and reflects vaguely on its significance: "[W]e cried because we had lost something and gained something else" (p. 221), but this is no iteration of Ralph's epiphany on the beach with the arrival of the naval officer in *Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1954/2003). Instead, in summation of the story, Agnes issues the warning that "the meaning is not something to fool around with . . . . Is it, Pierre Anthon?" (p. 226), and we realize by this admonition that she defends bad faith over integrity.

The Moral Value of *Nothing*

Agnes recalls, after Anthon's death, that it seemed the kids could "hear him" speak: "The reason dying is so easy is because death has no meaning. . . . And the reason death has no meaning is because life has no meaning. All the same, have fun!" (p. 224). By concluding his tautological argument with the words, "All the same, have fun!" Anthon proposes that his classmates reconcile with death and the absurd condition and find pleasure in acceptance, as they will forever lack the certainty they seek.

This notion of "fun" or enjoyment in connection with nothing appears elsewhere in the text, notably when Anthon asks, "Why not admit from the outset that nothing matters and just enjoy the nothing that is?" (p. 28). Readers who would insist that the premise of nothingness necessarily leads to anguish might be surprised by Anthon's invitation to "enjoy

the nothing." But the fact that Anthon seems content with his position in the tree (i.e., secure in his refusal of established values) constitutes the seduction of this character and the central paradox of the narrative. The idea of pleasure in nothingness is important due to its relationship with Camus's (1955) essay, "The Myth of Sisyphus." In this essay, Camus (1955) recounts the tale of Sisyphus who challenged the gods and earned the sentence of perpetually "rolling a rock to the top of a mountain" (p. 88). For Camus, this figure, wed "to a futile and hopeless labor," represents the absurdity of life (pp. 88, 90). However, Camus argues that Sisyphus embraces the meaninglessness and in so doing, "negates" his punishment; therefore, "[o]ne must imagine Sisyphus happy" (p. 91).

The point of relation here is that the kids see Pierre's self-imposed exile from society as an illustration of stasis instead of an ethical stance. They reproach Anthon, telling him "All you ever do is sit there gawking" (p. 9), and fail to see the morality in his plan of (in)action. Meanwhile, Anthon reverses their criticism on ethical grounds: "If nothing matters, then it's better doing nothing than something. Especially if something is throwing stones because you haven't the guts to climb trees" (p. 26). Here Anthon interprets "doing something" as cowardice if the action is undertaken in bad faith (i.e., out of fear of embracing nothing). Therefore, whether young readers endorse or refute Pierre's existential-nihilistic perspective isn't really the issue at all so much as the way the book dramatizes the moral courage required by dissent and the idea that individual choices are metonymic expressions of personal integrity.

Possibilities for Teaching

In terms of the utility of Teller's *Nothing* for teachers, the book could serve as the centerpiece for a thematically related collection of young adult texts foregrounding philosophical themes and concepts (see Table 1). Of this list, Gaarder's (1994) layered meditation on thinking and survey course in philosophy, *Sophie's World*, is the most teachable text, while other selections offer complementary, individual reading possibilities, ranging from the Beckett-inspired, absurdist banter in Ostrovski (2013) to the Foucauldian rumination on authority and resistance in Lockhart (2008). Additional texts include de la Peña's (2009) and Green's (2005) depictions of kids who are trying to forge meaning in an indifferent world but are violently evacuated of identifiable reason or purpose. On the opposite end of the tonal spectrum is Kashyap's (2011) quirky journey toward selfhood via imagined conversations with Sartre.

Table 1. A sampler of YA books centralizing philosophical themes and concepts

Matt de la Peña (2009) *We Were Here*
Jostein Gaarder (1994) *Sophie's World*
John Green (2005) *Looking for Alaska*
Keshni Kashyap (2011) *Tina's Mouth: An Existential Comic Diary*
E. Lockhart (2008) *The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks*
Emil Ostrovski (2013) *The Paradox of Vertical Flight*

I see the greatest utility in *Nothing* as a primer for the study of existential literature, as I have attempted to demonstrate in offering multiple instances of correspondence between the novel and classic philosophical texts. Concurrent with reading *Nothing* (and building on adolescent readers' enthusiasm for graphic texts), students might explore a selection of illustrated, introductory texts on philosophy, such as titles from series such as *Kierkegaard for Beginners*, *Introducing Nietzsche*, and other books of philosophical introduction. These books outline theoretical concepts with lucidity and are punctuated by engaging, comic illustrations that initiate students to primary philosophical texts.

At the same time, related to Connors and Shepard's (2012) remarks concerning the potential for young adult literature to prompt sophisticated work in the service of state standards, the philosophical grounding attained through study of Teller's *Nothing* might prepare students to write various types of claims. For example, considering the emphasis placed

on argument in the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) in tandem with existentialism's focus on individual morality, students could compose ethical or proposal arguments that would prompt them to "lay out more clearly the grounds and warrants of [their] own beliefs" (Ramage, Bean, & Johnson, 2001, p. 347). Ramage, Bean, and Johnson (2001) maintain that ethical arguments require students to "move from arguments of good or bad to arguments of right or wrong" (p. 347), which the authors find tantamount to posing a moral existential question, like "How should one live?" (p. 347). Similarly, proposal arguments often require the defense of solutions through an ethical analysis of "consequences" (Ramage, Bean, & Johnson, 2001, p. 350).

Identical to the ethical premise informing Sartre's (1975) essay, "Existentialism is a Humanism," the existential hero in *Nothing* refuses the possibility of Meaning, and instead enacts an individually derived code of conduct in the interest of broader, social accountability.

Stacy Graber *is an assistant professor of English at Youngstown State University. Her areas of interest include popular culture, young adult literature, pedagogy, critical theory, and semiotics.*

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Aimee **Davis**

Adapting Elaine:

Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" and Feminist Young Adult Novels

One of the hallmarks of young adult literature is its focus on adolescent protagonists who struggle to reconcile what they want with what they are supposed to want. Indeed, some of the most enduring works of young adult literature, from L. M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (2006) to Judy Blume's *Forever* (1975), place their young characters at a crossroads between cultural convention and individual desire. Foundational scholarship in the field of young adult fiction has suggested a recurring conflict in novels for young readers in which a protagonist finds himself or herself directly at odds with social expectations (McCallum, 1999; Trites, 2004). Furthermore, critics such as Trites (1997), Wilkie-Stibbs (2003), and Mallan (2009) have noted that many of these works concern an adolescent search for identity that is complicated by issues of gender politics, in which a protagonist's grappling with conventional notions of masculinity and/or femininity is fundamental to a completed coming of age. In *Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children's Literature*, Roberta Seelinger Trites (1997) argues that this kind of novel "demonstrate[s] characters 'turning inward' in 'a search for identity' because some form of environmental pressure has made them aware that they are not upholding socially sanctioned gender roles" (p. 2). In turn, these novels can become cathartic for adolescent readers, who may be facing similar struggles in the throes of real-life adolescence.

Relying on the definition of a feminist novel established by Elaine Showalter (1977), Trites (1997) defines a "feminist children's novel" as one "in which the main character is empowered regardless of gender," or a novel in which "the child's sex does not provide a permanent obstacle to her/his development. Although s/he will likely experience some gender-related conflicts, s/he ultimately triumphs over them" (p. 4). Though many novels fit this description, two bestselling young adult novels distinguish their adolescent female protagonists' search for identity as inspired by the legends of Arthurian literature. Meg Cabot's *Avalon High* (2006) and Libba Bray's *A Great and Terrible Beauty* (2003) each reference the Arthurian legend of the Lady of Shalott—specifically the version that was retold and adapted by Alfred, Lord Tennyson in his 1842 poem "The Lady of Shalott." Both novels use the characters, language, and symbolism from Tennyson's poem to provide their heroines—and by extension, their adolescent readers—with a template through which they can understand, examine, and potentially reject the social codes that attempt to determine their behavior. In capitalizing on the ways in which Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" enhanced and adapted the traditional Arthurian legend for a Victorian audience, Cabot and Bray access what Ann Howey (2007) calls the "constellation of association and meanings" (pp. 89–92) connected to the Lady of Shalott in the medieval and Victorian texts, many of which are distinctly feminist by Trites's definition.

In this article, I will argue that in drawing inspiration specifically from Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott," Cabot's and Bray's novels develop their feminism through the framework of a Victorian narrative that is more thematically complex and more politically

charged than any earlier, medieval version of the Lady of Shalott legend. Specifically, Cabot's and Bray's novels reflect the impact of feminist criticism of Tennyson's poem found in the works of Victorian scholars Nina Auerbach (e.g., *The Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth*, 1982) and the team of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (e.g., *Madwoman in the Attic,* 1984). This foundational work identifies in Tennyson's adaptation of the Lady of Shalott a dualistic and subversive set of alternatives that is not present in the medieval sources: her status as both a docile, passive figure who is "powerless in the face of the male" (Gilbert & Gubar, 1984, p. 618) and, simultaneously, as an icon of deviant and potentially powerful feminine desire. To identify the ways in which Cabot's and Bray's novels revise the Lady of Shalott narrative and embrace this subversion of traditional gender roles, I will first examine the Lady of Shalott narrative in medieval Arthurian literature and in Tennyson's poem, focusing on how Tennyson's enhancements to the tale transformed the Lady of Shalott into an iconic image of Victorian femininity. I will then demonstrate how Cabot and Bray employ revisionist strategies to adapt the gender politics of Tennyson's poem for a 21st-century young adult readership, creating heroines who reject the passive qualities of the Lady of Shalott in favor of a more autonomous alternative and who, in doing so, model for adolescent readers a search for identity that results in self-identification and empowerment.

Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" in Cabot and Bray

As Lupack (2011) notes, Tennyson's Arthurian legends were a ubiquitous presence in the works of literature for young people in the 19th century (pp. 99–100), and even today, there are many works published for young adult readers that concern Arthurian characters, and many in particular that include the Lady of Shalott. (See Howey [2007] and Lupack [2011] for a list of literature, artwork, and popular culture artifacts that feature the Lady of Shalott.) I have chosen to focus my analysis on *Avalon High* and *A Great and Terrible Beauty* for two reasons. First, in both of these works, Tennyson's poem "The Lady of Shalott" serves a central role in the structure of the novels and in the narratives themselves. Each novel features excerpts from "The Lady of Shalott" as epigraphs—in Cabot's novel, a stanza of the poem introduces each chapter, and in Bray's, four key stanzas are excerpted before the opening chapter and then reappear at key points in the narrative. Each novel also links its heroine directly to the Lady of Shalott and utilizes the language and imagery from Arthurian legend and from Tennyson's poem to establish how the Lady of Shalott serves as a touchstone for each protagonist and her peer group.

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Second, these novels are singular in their use of the Lady of Shalott in this way; although other Arthurian adaptations feature her as a character, Cabot's and Bray's novels are unique in their close association between their respective heroines' searches for identity and the fate of the Lady of Shalott. (It is perhaps important to note that another novelist for young readers, L. M. Montgomery, used the figure of the Lady of Shalott in a brief episode in *Anne of Green Gables*. The chapter titled "An Unfortunate Lily Maid" features Anne reenacting the Lady's fateful voyage. However, *Anne of Green Gables* is differentiated from Cabot's and Bray's novels in that the poem does not inform the structure or narrative of the entire work. Howey [2007] provides a detailed analysis of the use of Tennyson's poem in Montgomery's novel.)

Cabot's *Avalon High* (2006) retells the legend of the Lady of Shalott and the fall of Camelot as set in a modern-day Maryland high school. Narrated by Ellie Harrison (named after Elaine, the Lady of Shalott), the novel describes Ellie's burgeoning feelings for Will, a popular and handsome classmate who resembles the mythical King Arthur, and her unnerving sense that she has encountered Will and his friends Lance and Jennifer in a former life. When Will is threatened by a murder plot, Ellie enters the confrontation determined to help, despite her seemingly unassailable ties to the passive Lady of Shalott.

Bray's *A Great and Terrible Beauty* (2003) adapts the Elaine narrative in more subtle ways; rather than retelling the legend, Bray sets the novel in Victorian England circa 1895, when Tennyson's poem was still well-known and widely referenced. *A Great and Terrible Beauty* begins with the mysterious death of Gemma's mother, after which Gemma is sent to finishing school in London. Soon, Gemma is plagued by psychic visions that lead to her discovery of her mother's involvement with an Order of ancient, powerful sorceresses. Bray frequently surrounds Gemma and her friends with imagery of water, mirrors, and boats to demonstrate the parallels between the Lady of Shalott's curse and Gemma's own developing magical powers.

[B]oth novels revise the legend of the Lady of Shalott as a distinctly feminist, adolescent tale about feminine desire and a young woman's ability to choose her own fate.

In adapting the legend of the Lady of Shalott as it appears in both Arthurian romance and in Tennyson's poem, each novel accomplishes what Arthurian scholar Mary Frances Zambreno (2010) describes as filling in the gaps of Arthurian legend—taking advantage of the "piecemeal" structure of the Arthurian canon to narrate the gaps that "may be filled in by other stories, new stories, and perspectives omitted from or slighted in the original narrative" (p. 119). Additionally, both Cabot and Bray seek to fill in these gaps with perspectives that directly counter the medieval and Victorian texts' repression of feminine voices, accomplishing what Trites defines as a necessary feat for feminist young adult novels: "The presence of traditionally depicted females could be used to serve as part of the revision, for it is only against the passive female, the silent female, the objectified female, that the feminist protagonist's achievements can be fully understood" (p. 6). By narrating these gaps in a way that reinterprets the potential agency in a figure that is traditionally silent, passive, and objectified, both novels revise the legend of the Lady of Shalott as a distinctly feminist, adolescent tale about feminine desire and a young woman's ability to choose her own fate. Moreover, both authors locate in the Lady of Shalott the ordeals of a young woman in crisis and adapt the legend so that it suits one of the primary purposes of contemporary young adult literature: giving voice to the singular adolescent experience for modern adolescent readers.

The Lady of Shalott in Arthurian Literature

Although the Lady of Shalott has been covered extensively by criticism in the fields of medieval studies, Victorian poetry, women's and gender studies, and art history, there is little critical consideration that I can locate of her appropriation in literature for young adults, excepting those works cited here. Still, before analyzing the ways in which Cabot and Bray adapt Tennyson's poem, it is important to trace the historical tradition of the Lady of Shalott in Tennyson's sources—the major works of Arthurian literature. The earliest accounts of King Arthur and his knights can be traced back to the 12th century, but the most monumental incarnations appear in Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* (ca. 1469–1470). Malory developed the legends into a more cohesive narrative, and his work served as inspiration for most of the modern adaptations with which contemporary readers are familiar.

The Lady of Shalott does not figure in the earliest Arthurian narratives, but she does appear in some form in all of the most significant works, usually referred to as Elaine, the Maiden of Astolat. Each account tells a similar story: during one of his quests to prove his chivalry, Lancelot passes through Astolat, and Elaine falls in love with him. Because of his affair with Guinevere, Lancelot rejects Elaine. Wrought by unrequited love, Elaine sets off in a boat and floats downriver toward Camelot, where Arthur and Lancelot discover her lifeless body and a note that describes her passionate love and her tragic death. In these accounts, the character of Elaine serves primarily as a plot device or a counter-narrative to the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere. In not choosing the honorable, available Elaine, but rather the dishonorable, adulterous Guinevere, Lancelot demonstrates that he has lost his honor and betrayed his oath to Arthur. The corruption of Arthur's best knight soon contributes to the fall of Camelot and its chivalric order. In each of these tales, the arrival of Elaine's

body on the shores of Camelot serves as a foreboding symbol of the death and sorrow that will soon follow.

Given this tradition of the Lady of Shalott as a symbol of ominous but passive unrequited love, it is significant that Cabot and Bray specifically reference the first version of Elaine's story that takes exception to this tale. Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" (1842) deviates sharply from the earlier Elaine narratives. Much of the basic plot remains, but Tennyson reconfigures the Lady of Shalott as a tapestry artist, locked in a tower on an island and subjected to a deadly curse. The Lady is forced to weave into her tapestry only what she can see of Camelot from a view twice removed—in a mirror's reflection of a window behind her back. In a fit of discontent, the Lady declares that she is "half sick" (line 71) of seeing only "shadows of the world" (line 48), and when Lancelot's armor flashes in her mirror, she leaves her work to watch him. This brings the curse upon her; her loom splinters, her mirror cracks, and so she leaves the tower, writes her name on a boat, and floats downriver to Camelot. Here the plot aligns with the earlier versions: her body floats ashore, and Lancelot finds her and muses on her "lovely face" (line 169).

Immediately striking about Tennyson's poem are the ways in which the meaning of the tale (and the significance of the Lady) are complicated by his added and enhanced details. Other than basic plot points, all of the poem's most significant features, including the mirror, the curse, the tapestry, and the island, have little relation to any previous version of the Elaine narrative (Potwin, 1902). Because of these distinctions, Tennyson's version of the Lady of Shalott became an instant success among his Victorian contemporaries and inspired countless art objects and popular culture references in succeeding years (see Howey, 2007). Tennyson's revisions reinvigorated the Elaine legend, and suddenly the Lady of Shalott became not the harbinger of doom and destruction that she was in medieval Arthurian legend, but rather a symbol of failed artistry, tragic beauty, and feminine willpower.

Among the many interpretations of Tennyson's poem that followed its publication are two central themes that are most relevant to Cabot's and Bray's novels. First, much of the 19th-century obsession with Elaine centered on Tennyson's characterization of her as an artist, one who moves from private, isolated observer to public performer throughout the course of the poem (Psomiades, 1992, p. 33). This transition is marked by a notable shift in her relationship to artistry: Elaine can only weave her work while looking in a mirror reflection, locked in her tower, twice removed from reality. Once the Lady abandons her work—and abandons it for what seems to be sexual desire—she is no longer an artist but instead an art object (Plasa, 1992, pp. 251–252; Psomiades, 1992, p. 34). She writes her name on the boat (lines 125–126) and decorates herself with a "snowy white" robe (line 136), creating something like a virginal, bridal tableau (Plasa, 1992, p. 259), so that by the time she arrives at the shores of Camelot, she has become subject to her audience's interpretation of her performance, as indicated by Lancelot's final, objectifying comment (Psomiades, 1992, p. 36).

Cabot's and Bray's novels are drawing on the myriad associations between the Lady of Shalott and the capability of women to produce and create in an autonomous setting.

Thus, Tennyson's poem recasts Elaine, either as a female artist who in the end is objectified in death by the man she loves or, arguably, as an artist who chooses to objectify herself rather than be at the mercy of a repressive curse. In this way, as Plasa (1992) argues, Tennyson represents a significant divide between art and art object that is coded in terms of gender. In referencing this particular version of Elaine's tale, then, Cabot's and Bray's novels are drawing on the myriad associations between the Lady of Shalott and the capability of women to produce and create in an autonomous setting. Tennyson's poem paints an image of an artist whose fatal flaw is her inability to reconcile her artistry with her participation in the social codes of her environment. Cabot and Bray relocate this conflict as a young heroine's struggle to reconcile the life she wants to build for herself using her own capabilities with the societal strictures that attempt to stifle her efforts.

Also significant in Tennyson's version of the Elaine legend is its complex investigation of Victorian sexual politics and gender roles. Critics have long since noted that Tennyson's poem "accurately

replicates the gender conventions informing Victorian society" (Plasa, 1992, p. 249), but feminist scholars have further identified in iconic Victorian figures such as the Lady of Shalott the imaginative creations of a culture that feared women even as it sought to control them. In *The Woman and the Demon*, Auerbach (1982) argues that Victorian images of angelic, corpselike women were fueled by cultural fears of unregulated female desire. Docile figures such as the Lady of Shalott, contained in her tower or in death on her boat, implicitly condemn her opposite: the "demonic," deviant women whose passionate, unsanctioned desires defy repression (pp. 9–15). In this way, Auerbach (1982) locates in these "powerful images of oppression" certain subversive "images of barely suppressed power" (p. 188).

By introducing readers to these misconceptions about medieval society and implying that Arthurian legends unfairly place blame on pivotal female characters, Cabot signals to her readers the novel's revisionist and feminist strategies.

In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar (1984) locate this dichotomy in Tennyson's poem: ". . . the Lady's uniform of snow [white robes] suggests the suicidal passivity implicit in Victorian femininity," and yet, like other significant feminine icons in Victorian literature, she is "suffering from unrequited love and from the overwhelming rage that inevitably accompanies the lover's rejection" (pp. 618–619). The presence of both devotion and rage in the figure of the Lady of Shalott implies a potentially explosive combination. In presenting a version of Elaine that is coded with these contradictory images of femininity, Tennyson overturns the traditional, medieval portrait of the Lady of Shalott as simply a figure of passive, tragic devotion and presents her in a Victorian context as something like a feminist icon, discontent with her oppressed state and seeking some kind of autonomous alternative. Thus, in responding specifically to Tennyson's Elaine, Cabot and Bray are bringing into the conversation of their novels a serious examination of the Lady's feminist potential and her associations with socially sanctioned codes of conduct.

The Lady of Shalott in Cabot's *Avalon High*

Both Cabot's and Bray's novels begin their engagement with Tennyson's poem by critiquing the social codes and sexual politics of Tennyson's Victorian culture and his medieval source texts. *Avalon High* accomplishes this by modernizing the Elaine narrative. By retelling the mythical fall of Camelot through the lives of adolescent characters in a modern-day high school, Cabot recreates the social codes inherent in the original texts to reveal the practices and behaviors that still make up an expected code of conduct for adolescent girls today. Ellie's practical, often sarcastic, critiques of these medieval social codes and their contemporary legacies allow Cabot to offer her readers a heroine who makes decisions that are effective specifically because Ellie chooses to do what she needs to do rather than what she is told or expected to do.

Early in the novel, Cabot establishes this distinction through Ellie's obvious antipathy toward the Lady of Shalott. One of the first things Ellie's narration reveals is that she has little respect for her namesake; she tells readers that Tennyson's poem is "very lame" (p. 38) and that "*no way* am I the reincarnation of a dope like Elaine" (p. 192). Ellie's first-person narration presents Elaine as a questionable model for Cabot's adolescent readers, primarily because of her passivity and her lack of identity beyond her unrequited love. As Ellie puts it, "It's not exactly cool to be named after someone who killed herself over a guy" (p. 7). Ellie's narration also serves to inform young adult readers about medieval culture, specifically about its oppressive social codes and Ellie's distaste for them:

> Most people have this really messed up idea about what things were like in the Middle Age. . . . You know, women floating around in pointy hats and pretty dresses saying "thee" and "thou," and knights thundering up to save the day. But [. . .] things weren't like that at all. . . . The women were all oppressed and had to marry people they didn't even like and everybody blamed them for every little thing that went wrong. I mean, look at Guinevere. Everyone thinks it's all her fault Camelot doesn't exist anymore. I'm so sure. (p. 10)

By introducing readers to these misconceptions about medieval society and implying that Arthurian legends unfairly place blame on pivotal female characters, Cabot signals to her readers the novel's revisionist and feminist strategies. Ellie's doubt about tradi-

tional interpretations of the fall of Camelot indicates how Cabot is pursuing Zambreno's (2010) "gaps" in Arthurian literature by narrating an omitted perspective from the legend. In this retelling, Cabot seeks to correct the kind of omissions in the original narrative that lead to assumptions about Guinevere's guilt and Elaine's lack of control over her own fate. *Avalon High* revises the fall of Camelot by highlighting the productive contributions that Ellie chooses to make in direct rebellion against the antiquated models offered by traditional incarnations of Guinevere and Elaine.

In addition to distinguishing herself from Elaine of Astolat, Ellie further characterizes herself as a feminist heroine by distinguishing herself from her female peers. Ellie describes Nancy, her best friend, as a "romantic optimist," and then adds that she, Ellie, is "*not* that way. You know, the *Oh my God, he* looked *at me, I can barely breathe* type" (p. 27). Ellie also rejects the model of Jennifer, a popular cheerleader who represents Guinevere: "I'm not ugly, or anything, but I'm no Jennifer Gold. I mean, she's one of those *Oh, I'm so little and helpless, please rescue me, you big strong man* types of girls" (p. 34). In each of these descriptors, Ellie identifies in Nancy and Jennifer many of the qualities associated with the Lady of Shalott and with antiquated notions of acceptable femininity: passivity, speechlessness, and subservience to male authority. In contrast, Ellie asserts that she is "the daughter of educators" (p. 193) and "the practical one" (p. 27), indicating that she takes pride in her intelligence, self-sufficiency, and practicality.

Ellie also disregards concerns about how her deviance from social standards appears to others. Though her mother frequently reminds her to maintain the family's "image," Ellie regularly flouts rules because maintaining an image would interrupt whatever it is that Ellie is trying to accomplish (pp. 13, 245, 276). When Ellie admits to her growing feelings for Will, her friend Nancy advises her not to "[joke] around with boys" because "boys don't develop romantic feelings for girls who goof around like stand-up comics" (p. 42). Her mother's and Nancy's advice suggests a suppression of individuality that recalls the ideal femininity of Tennyson's Victorian culture; Cabot argues that this remains a lingering expectation for modern adolescent girls like Ellie. Ellie rejects Nancy's advice, and when Ellie describes later in the novel "how I made [Will] laugh over the plate of steaming hot crab dip we shared" (p. 169), readers understand that Ellie's decision to embrace her humor and individualism has directly impacted the romantic relationship that blossoms between her and Will. Thus, in the figure of the Lady of Shalott, Cabot identifies a series of qualities and social expectations for her female characters that Ellie must process as part of her search for identity. By rejecting a confltion of her identity with that of the Lady of Shalott, and by rejecting the social expectations espoused by her mother and her peers, Ellie identifies herself first as *not* that "type" of girl and eventually as her own individual self.

By rejecting a conflation of her identity with that of the Lady of Shalott, and by rejecting the social expectations espoused by her mother and her peers, Ellie identifies herself first as not that "type" of girl and eventually as her own individual self.

Once these social codes have been established, Cabot's novel resolves its primary conflict (and Ellie's own search for identity) by rejecting and subverting the model of the Lady of Shalott and the passive, submissive qualities that she represents. When Will is threatened by his stepbrother, Marco, Ellie seeks advice from her English teacher, Mr. Morton, a member of an ancient society that protects reincarnations of Arthur. Mr. Morton discourages Ellie from intervening because, as he claims, she is powerless to stop Marco:

> "Only those in Arthur's closest circle can put an end to the dark side's reign, in any case," [said Mr. Morton]. "So . . ." [Ellie responds], "Who, then? Lance? Jennifer?" "Certainly," he said. "Either of them. Just not . . . well. You." I gave him a dirty look. "Because Elaine of Astolat never even met King Arthur historically, is that it?" "I told you that you were better off not knowing," Mr. Morton reminded me in a sad voice. (p. 213)

Ellie's "dirty look" is a reaction to Mr. Morton's assumption that because she shares a name with Elaine of Astolat, she also shares Elaine's identifying features: passivity and ineffectiveness. In response, Ellie again declares her independence from the model presented by Elaine and effectively breaks the connection that Mr. Morton has attempted to build: "There

was nothing *Elaine of Astolat* could do here. But that was fine, because I wasn't Elaine of Astolat, no matter what [they] might think. And there was plenty Elaine Harrison could do" (p. 262). At this point, Ellie's rejection of Elaine is no longer just a matter of distaste, but also a key step in Ellie's search for identity. Ellie must cast off Elaine as a model of behavior, not only because she is "very lame" (p. 38) and "a dope" (p. 192), but also because her traditional incarnation is a model that offers few outlets for action, autonomy, and individual desire.

Even after she has proven her abilities, Ellie must continue to reject antiquated models of femininity in favor of her own self.

Once she has rejected Elaine and claimed her own identity, Ellie is able to take part in the events at the end of the novel in a productive and empowering way. In the final confrontation between Will and Marco, Ellie serves as the weapon bearer, offering Will a medieval sword (one of her father's relics) with which to defend himself. When she and Will have Marco cornered, Ellie notes that Marco "[glares] at me with eyes filled not only with malice, as before, but also with something I'd never seen in them before . . . Fear" (p. 269). In transitioning away from the model of Elaine, Ellie has crossed the boundary from a threat that Marco can identify to one that he cannot. In Auerbach's (1982) terms, by discarding her sanctioned identity as Elaine of Astolat, Ellie has shifted from a "powerful image of oppression" to an "image of barely suppressed power" (p. 188). In effect, she has accessed the subversive, deviant alternative as read in Tennyson's poem by feminist critics—that is, the Lady as a cultural image representing the fears of a patriarchal society. Ellie ultimately promotes what she feels is the real message of Arthurian legend: the idea that "an individual—not an army; not a god; not a superhero; just a regular Joe—can permanently alter the course of world events" (p. 79). In her creative solutions to Marco's threats, Ellie adopts this notion of an innovative individual as her new model of behavior. In demonstrating that an individual—regardless of gender—can affect change in his or her environment, Cabot creates a more empowered, autonomous alternative to traditional interpretations of the Lady of Shalott and to traditional notions of what adolescent girls can and should be able to accomplish.

Cabot ends the novel with one final point about identity and its determining factors. Mr. Morton finally concedes that he was wrong to conflate Ellie with the Lady of Shalott, because he "ought to have seen that [she was] someone far, far more important" (p. 276). To Ellie's surprise, he suggests that Ellie is the reincarnation of the Lady of the Lake, another female figure in Arthurian literature, often credited for bestowing Arthur with a powerful sword. Ellie responds to this declaration with the same disavowal that she previously reserved for the Lady of Shalott: "I'm *not* the Lady of the Lake" (p. 287). It is significant that in the final pages of the novel, Ellie must once again define herself as *not* what those around her have determined that she must be. Even after she has proven her abilities, Ellie must continue to reject antiquated models of femininity in favor of her own self. In this way, Cabot defines Trites's adolescent, feminine "search for identity" as the struggle to define oneself—instead of being defined by others—in an environment that continually threatens to undermine that goal.

The Lady of Shalott in Bray's *A Great and Terrible Beauty*

Bray's novel similarly articulates her main characters' search for identity through their responses to the model of the Lady of Shalott. Because of its 19th-century setting, *A Great and Terrible Beauty* (2003) engages much more specifically with Victorian sexual politics. Through Gemma's first-person narration, Bray creates an immediate tension between what Gemma and her friends want to do and what they are supposed to do according to the expectations of middle- and upper-class Victorian society. In an early scene, Gemma and her brother Tom discuss what kind of lady she is expected to become at finishing school. Referencing actress Lily Trimble, Tom remarks, "What sort of way is that for a woman to live, without a solid home, husband, and children? Running about like she's her own lord and master. She'll certainly never be accepted in society as a proper lady" (p. 27). Then he explains what qualities *do* make for a proper lady: "A man wants a woman who will make life easy for him. She should be attractive, well groomed, knowledgeable in

music, painting, and running a house, but above all, she should keep his name above scandal and never call attention to herself" (p. 27). Following his description of the "fallen" Lily Trimble, Tom's description of ideal womanhood becomes a corrective, instructing Gemma in the behaviors that she should avoid and the ones for which she should strive.

Bray's descriptions have all the markings of ideal Victorian femininity; as Auerbach (1982) explains, "all clean-minded Victorians knew [that] a normal, and thus a good woman, was an angel, submerging herself in family, existing only as daughter, wife, and mother" (p. 4). In contrast, Tom's description of Lily Trimble represents the paradigmatic fallen woman, who embodies the presumed consequence of becoming both "experienced and tragic" (Auerbach, 1982, p. 63). This threat is repeated throughout the novel: Gemma is warned repeatedly against doing anything that might call her chastity into question, and she is encouraged to pursue activities that promote her marriageability. Like Cabot's novel, then, Bray's novel also establishes a dichotomy of acceptable and unacceptable femininity that governs the heroine's behavior; Gemma's conflict lies in her ambivalence about adopting a predetermined pattern of behavior that prevents her from acquiring any real autonomy.

After establishing the social codes with which Gemma must grapple, Bray then links these qualities of "good" and "bad" femininity to the image of the Lady of Shalott. For example, after a visit from her family, during which Gemma feels powerless and unacknowledged, she remarks, "We're all looking glasses, we girls, existing only to reflect their images back to them as they'd like to be seen. Hollow vessels of girls to be rinsed of our own ambitions, wants, and opinions, just waiting to be filled with the cool, tepid water of gracious compliance" (p. 305). In the imagery of looking-glass mirrors, reflections, hollow vessels, and cool water, Bray employs the symbolism of Tennyson's poem and creates a parallel between what is expected from Gemma to maintain her family's image and the fate of the Lady of Shalott. For Gemma to behave in a way that is docile, passive, and submissive, Bray implies, would be tantamount to reliving the Lady's decision to passively accept her fate and float to her death.

Bray further develops this parallel in a scene during Gemma's art class. While discussing an illustration of Tennyson's poem, the art teacher, Miss Moore, argues that "the lady dies not because she leaves the tower for the outside world, but because she lets herself float through the world, pulled by the current after a dream" (p. 102). In this interpretation, Miss Moore suggests that the Lady of Shalott's sin was not being cursed, an act that she could not control, but was rather in choosing to be pulled by the current rather than controlling her own course. Thus, Miss Moore offers her protégées two feminine types: one who allows herself to float along the stream of cultural convention, and one who chooses to pursue her own path.[1] By linking the social codes that oppress Gemma to the curse that threatens the Lady of Shalott, Bray accesses Tennyson's complex portrait of feminine passivity and performance and adapts Victorian social codes so that they are no longer presented in gendered terms (i.e., passive equals female and active equals male) but rather as human choices between acting or being acted upon.

Once established, this choice as represented by the Lady of Shalott becomes the paradigm through which Gemma and her friends—specifically, her classmate Pippa—complete their search for identity. Although Gemma's narration indicates that she is suspicious of the Lady of Shalott as a model of behavior, her friend Pippa is much more conventional. In assessing the Lady of Shalott's fate, Pippa exclaims, "She dies for love . . . . She can't live without him. It's terribly romantic" (p. 101). Pippa admires Elaine's self-sacrifice and finds her tale attractive because it reflects the kind of romantic relationship Pippa herself desires. Pippa's reality is much bleaker. She is engaged to "the clumsy, charmless Mr. Bumble" (p. 148) and suffers from epilepsy, a condition that, were it known publicly, would ruin her chances of marrying (p. 190). Pippa embraces the romantic idealism of Tennyson's poem as an escape from the reality of her situation, and for Bray's readers, Pippa serves a role similar to that of Nancy or Jennifer in Cabot's novel: she is Gemma's peer, but the choices of the two characters reflect fundamental opposites. In choosing to "be pulled after a dream" (p. 102) rather than to challenge convention, Pippa's contrasting stance highlights the individual willpower that drives Gemma.

This distinction becomes paramount when the girls use Gemma's powers to enter the magical realms, a purgatorial "world between worlds" where "all

things are possible" (p. 254). There, Pippa recreates herself into an idealized, romanticized Lady of Shalott; she conjures a boat and a chivalrous knight who bears a striking resemblance to Lancelot. Pippa takes refuge in this imaginary relationship, but after several failed attempts to cancel her real-life engagement, Pippa demands Gemma's help. Gemma's magical efforts awaken a monstrous wraith, and when the monster strikes, Pippa's knight abandons her. Pippa escapes onto "a large boat, a bier, onto the river, where the wind has pushed her out into the wide deep of it" (p. 384). The specification of the boat as a bier, a type of boat used for medieval funeral services, links this scene directly to the Lady of Shalott's funereal voyage to Camelot. Although it began as play-acting, Pippa's decision to model her behavior after the Lady of Shalott has now reached its fullest consequence, and so her reenactment of the Lady's death is almost inevitable. Despite Gemma's pleadings, Pippa refuses to return to the real world, because she cannot face becoming "Mrs. Bartleby Bumble" or choose to be "a fighter," like Gemma (p. 395). Aided by her knight, Pippa "lets [the boat] carry her across the river." In the same instant, in the real world, Pippa's body convulses and then dies (p. 396). Thus, in characterizing Pippa's choice to "be carried" rather than to "fight," Bray indicates that for Pippa, the Lady of Shalott represents a decision to give up, to let go, to escape the unbearable real world for a more acceptable—but illusory—alternative.

Gemma now . . . understands to defy that standard is to become not a forlorn, "fallen" woman, but rather an unregulated, willful, and sexualized woman who is powerful enough to be feared.

In contrast to Pippa's "powerful image of oppression," Gemma becomes the novel's triumphant and subversive "image of barely suppressed power" (Auerbach, 1982, p. 188). Gemma's experiments with her magical abilities soon lead to explorations of her sexuality. For example, Gemma is both attracted to and hindered by Kartik, her guardian from the Rakshana, a brotherhood "stretching to the time of . . . Arthur" (Bray, p. 121). Kartik demands that Gemma repress her visions and ignore her powers, because the Rakshana holds the power of the realms and has "no intention of giving it back" (p. 121). Gemma refuses, and the ensuing tension between them becomes not only sexualized, but also coded with the same power dynamic that exists in Tennyson's poem.

Relying on an interpretation of the Lady's "movement from [the tower of] Shalott to Camelot" as a "deregulation of patriarchal gender codes" (Plasa, 1992, p. 251), Bray pinpoints the dislocation of patriarchal power in her novel at the intersection of Gemma's developing magical powers and her burgeoning sexuality.[2] When Gemma and her friends enter the gypsy camp where Kartik is staying, they prevent Kartik from realizing their real purpose (seeking information about the Order of sorceresses) by pretending that they want to seduce him and the other gypsy men. As they approach the camp, Gemma notes, "I don't yet know what power feels like. But this is surely what it looks like, and I think I'm beginning to understand why those ancient women had to hide in caves. Why our parents and teachers and suitors want us to behave properly and predictably. It's not that they want to protect us; it's that they fear us" (p. 207). Gemma's identification of fear as the cause of social sanctions directly echoes the feminist critiques of "The Lady of Shalott"—although she recognizes what makes a proper, "angelic" woman, Gemma now also understands to defy that standard is to become not a forlorn, "fallen" woman, but rather an unregulated, willful, and sexualized woman who is powerful enough to be feared.

The significance of this choice is communicated in the final act as Gemma faces not only the monstrous wraith, but also her own ambivalence about what kind of woman she wants to become. To further link Gemma's decision to that of the Lady of Shalott, Bray recreates the curse's strike on the Lady's tower. When Gemma attempts to acquire the power of the ancient runes, she notes that "the sky opens up in a churning sea of dark clouds" (p. 383), mimicking Tennyson's "stormy east-wind straining" and heavy "low sky raining" (lines 118, 121). Further, Bray adapts the iconic floating imagery of the Lady of Shalott to articulate Gemma's struggle when the wraith engulfs her and tries to steal her magic. Under the wraith's possession, Gemma is overwhelmed by the temptation to be joined with the creature: "I'm weary with choice. It makes me heavy. So heavy I could sleep forever. Let [the evil sorceress] Circe win. Abandon my family

and friends. Float downstream" (p. 391). In this final moment of choice, Gemma returns to the language of Tennyson's poem and Miss Moore's interpretation and acknowledges the relief she would feel by simply allowing herself to be "pulled by the current" (p. 102).

However, having witnessed Pippa's escape on the boat, Gemma decides to fight the creature, and she does so through the kind of self-identification that also allowed Ellie to actively contribute to her fate: "It would be so very easy to escape into the safety of those illusions and hold fast there. But I won't. I want to try to make room for what is real . . . [And] what is most real is that I am Gemma Doyle" (p. 394). By declaring her own identity, Gemma also declares her rejection of the submissive femininity as represented by Pippa, the medieval Lady of Shalott, and the Victorian "angel of the house" model that defines her culture. In embracing an unregulated alternative to these models, Gemma chooses to pursue autonomy in both the magical realms and in the real world. For her readers, Bray demonstrates that the adolescent search for identity is often one of subversion, requiring young women not only to question the demands placed on their behavior, but also to harness some kind of authority and autonomy that allows them to govern themselves.

Suggestions for Teaching

There are multiple ways in which teachers could incorporate these texts and their important themes into the classroom. Consider the following options:

To offer students a broader survey of revisionist strategies that challenge the familiar stories we tell and retell as a culture, include *Avalon High* and/or *A Great and Terrible Beauty* in a unit on other feminist fairy tale and folklore adaptations. Possible readings might include (as they are age appropriate): *My Mother She Killed Me, My Father He Ate Me* (2010), edited by Kate Bernheimer and Gregory Maguire; *The Rose and the Beast: Fairy Tales Retold* (2000), by Francesca Lia Block; *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), by Angela Carter; and/or *Ella Enchanted* (1997), by Gail Carson Levine. Direct students to compare and contrast the adaptations with the traditional tales. Discuss the difference between telling one's own story and having one's story told by someone else. Lead students to brainstorm about why these distinctions are significant and how many of these adaptations fill in the gaps of the traditional narratives in ways that empower and give voice to female characters.

To introduce students to the practice of feminist literary criticism, incorporate discussions of gender into other class readings. Direct students to consider the presence or absence of female voices in the works under discussion and how these choices impact the author's larger thematic concerns. Highlight the ways in which masculine and/or feminine identities are constructed in the work, and compare and contrast the ways in which various characters respond to these identity conflicts. Many classic works of young adult literature suit these discussions well, including, for example, *Little Women* (1868/2009), by Louisa May Alcott; *Peter Pan* (1911/2004), by J. M. Barrie; *A Little Princess* (1905/2002), by Frances Hodgson Burnett; and *Catcher in the Rye* (1951), by J. D. Salinger.

To help students further link the discussions of antiquated gender roles and social codes to their lingering legacies in modern culture today, assign a research project in which students compare and contrast the lives of young men and women in Victorian society with their own lives. Discuss briefly all of the important changes that have occurred in western society since 1895 (for example, voting rights for women; child labor laws; equal employment laws; the Civil Rights Movement; etc.). Ask students to research these same opportunities as they are or are not afforded to young men and women in other cultures around the world today. Introduce discussions about marriage rights, access to education, contemporary forms of slavery, and basic privileges like voting and driving. As a class, examine how the forms of oppression that Ellie and Gemma faced still exist for many young men and women around the world today and how others are fighting to solve these problems.

Conclusion

Overall, the significance of these novels and their analysis of Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" lies in their methods of communicating to young adult readers the social codes and sexual politics inherent in myths, legends, and cultural imagination. Both novels discussed here accomplish this by encouraging young adult readers to examine the demands that are placed on their behavior in their own cultural environment

and to measure them against their own goals and ambitions. For adolescents, particularly adolescent girls, identifying with characters like Ellie Harrison and Gemma Doyle can be revolutionary at a time when the pressure of social expectations can be nearly overwhelming. Bringing change to their social environments, even in small ways, can have a major impact on their development into productive, contributive members of a more egalitarian world.

Endnotes

1. Although in this novel Miss Moore is an instigator of Gemma's individuality, later in the series she becomes Gemma's most dangerous enemy and the one that Gemma must defeat in order to retain her powers. This complicates Gemma's decision to embrace Miss Moore's advice, as autonomy has clearly corrupted Miss Moore and changed her into a force of evil. Thus, Bray's theory of choice is complex: it provides young women with the ability to determine their own fate, but it also makes them responsible for however they decide to use their autonomy.
2. In a 2003 interview with *Publishers Weekly*, Libba Bray said: "A lot of the initial idea [for the novel] stemmed from emerging female sexuality and how threatening that is to the girls themselves and to the world at large. . . . We're comfortable with women in certain roles but not comfortable with women expressing anger or fully accepting their power. The most daring question a woman can ask is, 'What do I want?'" (Brown, 2003, p. 31).

Aimee Davis *earned a Master of Fine Arts degree in creative writing from Louisiana State University. She currently works as a research writer and editor in Little Rock, Arkansas. Previously, she taught courses in English and writing at Louisiana State University and then served as an editor at a publishing company in Nashville, Tennessee. Her work has also been published in* Barnstorm Journal.

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Book in Review: A Teaching Guide

Toby **Emert**

Of Porcupines and Trusty Sidekicks and Road Trips to Infinity

This article is also available in an online format that allows direct access to all links included. We encourage you to access it on the ALAN website at http://www.alan-ya.org/publications/the-alan-review/the-alan-review-columns/.

When I was a kid, my mother would send me or my younger brother to the attic—typically in late July or early August—to drag down the Samsonite suitcases to prepare for the annual family road trip to visit my father's aunts, uncles, and cousins. In the late 1940s, my grandparents had plucked my father and his siblings from a backroad farm in the Tennessee hills and plunked them down on a similar backroad farm in Virginia. At the time, when telephones and car trips, even postage stamps, were luxuries, the comfort of family must have seemed a lifetime away. To maintain the bond, my grandfather's nine sisters—none of whom ever moved more than 40 miles from the house they grew up in—hosted a summer family potluck. My grandfather always attended, even when he could not afford to take his family along. When my parents married, they made the trip to the reunion our annual "vacation."

The eight-hour road trip was a highlight of the year; it was essentially the only traveling my family did, and it required preparations. My mother spent the week prior to the trip choosing the clothes we would take, filling the toiletry case with small bottles of shampoo and new toothbrushes, and shopping for groceries for our in-route picnic lunch. My father disliked restaurants and air conditioning, so a shady picnic at a roadside table was a welcome relief from the sweaty backseat of our Chevrolet Impala. The hills of East Tennessee were dotted with "attractions": airbrushed t-shirt shops, miniature golf greens, pancake houses, and steak-and-potato restaurants. After a few days, we would return home, mimicking the accents of our distant cousins and showing off our inexpensive souvenirs. Now, with the ubiquity of air travel, a journey of 350 miles seems inconsequential, but when I was young, the idea of a road trip possessed a sense of possibility. As the miles ticked by, moving me away from what I knew and understood best, the world across the state border shimmered with expectation.

The "Road-Trip" Young Adult Novel

"There's just something about being behind the wheel of a car with the windows rolled down and the music cranked up that makes it seem like anything is possible," former children's librarian Janssen Bradshaw writes in an article about young adult "road-trip" novels for Brightly, a website sponsored by Penguin Random House (http://www.readbrightly.com/best-ya-road-trip-books/) (n.d., para. 1). A good road-trip story "is a careful balance of an outward voyage with an inner journey" (Philpot, 2010, para. 3), which makes it a compelling narrative meme, remarkably resonant and infinitely adaptable. Young adult literature is rich with stories about the rites of initiation that rely, structurally and metaphorically, on the trope of travel. Riffing on the traditional features of the con-

temporary bildungsroman (https://www.britannica.com/art/bildungsroman), a variety of young adult authors have imagined stories in which their protagonists leave the familiar terrain of "home" and set off on a driving adventure that forces them to confront their conceptions of self and their understanding of the world.

John Green's quirky *An Abundance of Katherines* (2006), a Printz Honor Book and finalist for the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize, is a good example. Green puts 17-year-old Colin Singleton in the car with his buddy Hassan on a post-graduation trip from Chicago to Tennessee after Colin is dumped by the 19th girl named Katherine. Colin explores his self-doubt and his obsession with predicting his own future, especially his romantic future, as he and Hassan travel to Gunshot, Tennessee, on the fool's errand of locating the gravesite of Archduke Franz Ferdinand.

Similarly, Sharon Creech's thoughtful *Walk Two Moons* (1994), winner of the 1995 Newbery Medal (http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/newberymedal/newberyhonors/1995newberymedal), places her main character, Salamanca Tree Hiddle (Sal), in the car with her grandparents on a trip from Ohio to Idaho after Sal's mother leaves her father. Creech's story-within-a-story plays with metaphor and mystery as Sal and her grandparents visit spots highlighted in the postcards her mother sent as she traveled West.

Alex Sanchez's third book in the Rainbow Boys series, *Rainbow Road* (2005), a finalist for the Lambda Literary Award, also features a cross-country road trip. Sanchez continues the alternating-perspective accounts as his characters—Jason, Kyle, and Nelson—pack into a car bound for Los Angeles in the summer before college; Jason has been invited to speak at an LGBTQ high school after gaining national attention for coming out as a bisexual athlete. The characters continue to develop their friction-prone triangulated relationship, seen in the previous novels in the series, as they encounter a variety of aspects of queer culture.

To this sampling of the list, we could add Christopher Paul Curtis's *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* (1999), Ellen Wittlinger's *Zigzag* (2003), Paul Fleischman's *Whirligig* (1998), Elisa Janine Hoole's *Kiss the Morning Star* (2012), Libba Bray's *Going Bovine* (2009), Matt de la Peña's *We Were Here* (2009), Linda Collison's *Looking for Redfeather* (2013), and many others. Each of these novels remixes elements of the hero's quest tale to render characters who mature as they encounter new people, new locales, and new ideas. The key trait for a good road-trip novel is that "the journey is always as interesting as the destination" (Smith, 2015, para. 4).

In this column, I highlight three novels that send queer and questioning characters on road trips through regions of the American South, West, and Midwest: Julia Watts's Lambda Award winner *Finding H. F.* (2001); Bill Konigsberg's Stonewall Book Award winner (http://www.ala.org/news/press-releases/2016/01/george-and-porcupine-truth-win-2016-stonewall-children-s-and-young-adult) and ALAN Pick (http://www.alan-ya.org/alan-picks-apr15/) *The Porcupine of Truth* (2015); and Kristin Elizabeth Clark's just-released *Jess, Chunk, and the Road Trip to Infinity* (2016).

Watts's novel was one of only a handful of young adult books published in the early 2000s that introduced readers to a lesbian protagonist, and it was the only YA book in 2001 to deal explicitly with the struggle to negotiate a queer identity in the rural South, specifically Appalachia. Heavenly Faith Simms (H. F.) is a 16-year-old in Morgan, Kentucky, whose teenaged mother, Sondra, abandoned her when she was born. H. F. lives with her churchy "memaw" and spends most afternoons driving around with her closeted friend Bo, who serves as the football team's punching bag. When H. F. discovers that Memaw has been hiding letters from Sondra in a bedroom dresser drawer, she is furious, so she and Bo hatch a plan to drive from Morgan to Tippalula, Florida (the return address on the letter) to find Sondra. Neither of them has ever been farther than the state line, so the journey is a smorgasbord of "firsts": their first car trip, their first visit to a large city, their first encounter with self-accepting lesbians and gay men, their first dip in the ocean. Watts is intentional in introducing her tenderfoot characters to the world in ways that are both eye-opening and heartbreaking. Elements of the novel read as historically specific (cell phones and the Internet were in their infancy in the late 1990s when the book was written, so H. F. and Bo use pay phones, for example), but the comedy and the pathos of a journey into the unfamiliar are on full display in this endearing story.

Konigsberg's *The Porcupine of Truth* also has a

secret at the core of the plot. Carson Smith is spending the summer with his alcoholic father in Billings, Montana, when he meets Aisha Stinson in the gift shop at the local zoo. She is unlike any girl he knows, and he develops an immediate crush, which complicates the relationship because Aisha is lesbian. It is the reason she is estranged from her religious, wealthy family and working at the zoo to support herself. When Carson discovers that his father's neighbor, John Logan, a friend of Carson's estranged grandfather, is hiding something about his grandfather's past, Carson steals into Logan's attic to find a box of his grandparents' mementos. The pictures and letters further confuse Carson, and he coaxes Aisha to accompany him on a road trip to San Francisco to sleuth out his grandfather. The trip is rocky and revealing. Carson is forced to confront his romantic attraction to Aisha, the truth about his grandparents' relationship, and his father's addiction.

Clark's story, *Jess, Chunk, and the Road Trip to Infinity,* like Watts's and Konigsberg's, puts two teenaged friends in a car together. Jess, a painter preparing to enter art school in New York, has convinced her friend Christophe, whom she affectionately calls Chunk, to ride with her from San Jose to Chicago to attend her father's wedding. The last time Jess spoke with her father, she was Jeremy, his 17-year-old son. Jess had called her father to ask his permission to begin hormone therapy. He refused, and Jess now imagines showing up at the wedding as a kind of revenge fantasy. Having only received hormones for seven months, Jess is concerned about "passing," and the road trip with Chunk brings her self-doubt into full relief. She feels both self-conscious and rightfully fearful, especially as they travel through the upper West,. She obsesses about her discomfort and her disappointment with her father, which ultimately affects her relationship with Chunk and threatens to mar the trip. Clark interrupts the narrative with flashbacks to Jess's past, each illuminated by a description of one of her paintings; this pattern is designed to provide readers a perspective on Jess's transition, her family struggles, and her hopes for the future.

These three novels tinker with the conventions of the "road-trip" motif, sending their characters on emotional and spiritual journeys that are heightened by the geography of the routes they follow to their destinations.

In the Classroom

Students benefit from learning strategies that prime them for reading, assist them in processing texts as they read, and help them retain connections to important "take-away" ideas. Road-trip novels fit within frameworks that rely on recognizable conventions, inviting readers to experience the perils and exuberances of packing the car and leaving the familiar in the rearview mirror. Activities that heighten the readers' experience of the stories and the landscapes they encounter expand their access to the novel's intimacies and endear them to characters. In the following section, I provide an overview of strategies aimed to engage students before, during, and after reading the novels highlighted in this column.

Context becomes key to the novel's intellectual and emotional impact, especially for younger readers, whose grasp of history may be limited.

Pre-reading Activity: Mapping the Journey

Identifying and visualizing the physical characteristics of the settings of stories reinforce general comprehension of the plot; it is important, therefore, for readers to be able to translate the author's descriptions of time periods and locales into mental images that allow them to understand the "when and where" of any specific scene. A limited set of reference points—the lack of personal experience or familiarity with (or having only stereotypical notions of) eras, cultures, regions, and communities, for example—hinders and possibly distorts the readers' grasp of the story being told. When reading a novel that features a physical journey, students benefit from pre-reading activities that assist them with picturing the settings they will encounter as they read. These activities serve as mediation—reinforcing what the students already know, but also providing a more exact entry into the story.

Watts's novel, for example, begins with a first-person introduction to the protagonist and to Morgan, Kentucky, the fictional town where H. F. lives with her "memaw." H. F. addresses readers in a dialect—evidenced by her choice of vocabulary, the idiomatic expressions she uses, and the syntax of her sentenc-

es—that might be construed broadly as "Southern." Watts is intentional in her efforts to render the cadences and color of a *particular* Southern accent, however. H. F. lives in Appalachia—a stretch of mountainous terrain that extends from southern New York through northern Alabama and Mississippi (http://lookingatappalachia.org/defining-appalachia). Her accent is definitive and serves as an indicator of the specific regional culture in which she is growing up. As they travel south, H. F. and Bo stop in Atlanta for the evening and encounter a trio of lesbian teenagers in a city park. One of the characters notices that they "talk cute," an indication that their accents signify a particular regionalism. Georgia, Florida, and Louisiana are also Southern states, for example, but characters from each of those states would "sound" different on the page. The US is, in fact, a collection of local cultures with some similarities, but also with striking distinctions. Preparing to read a "road-trip" novel allows for interesting discussions of these regional differences.

"Questions that . . . ask [students] to consider the stereotypes they may have been offered . . . encourage more careful readings and prime the students for future discussions about how authors consciously employ archetypes and disrupt stereotypes in a road-trip novel.

Reviewing a map of the eastern United States and identifying the region in which Watts has situated her fictional town of Morgan, as well as discussing the sociocultural and socioeconomic characteristics and history of Appalachia, acclimate young readers to the dialect(s) and the characters they will encounter in the novel. Furthermore, these tasks allow for discussions of stereotypes, media misrepresentation of regional traits, and our penchant for categorizing people in response to their speech patterns. Without this kind of examination of Watts's choice to employ dialect in the novel and its effect on readers, students might mis-assume that the characters in the novel are rubes, which is not the case. H. F. and Bo are, however, naïve and inexperienced, and Watts purposefully depicts their innocence in her efforts to manipulate the conventions of the picaresque novel. At the same time, these protagonists are observant, sharp, and self-aware characters.

A discussion of regional geography, language patterns, and stereotypes can be instructive and disarming. Questions that guide students to express their background knowledge and ask them to consider the stereotypes they may have been offered about specific US regions encourage more careful readings and prime the students for future discussions about how authors consciously employ archetypes and disrupt stereotypes in a road-trip novel. Possible questions for discussion before reading a "road-trip" novel are:

1. What are the characteristics of stereotypes? Of archetypes?
2. What purposes do stereotypes serve? How are they instructive, and how are they destructive?
3. When you think about regions of the US, what stereotypes come to mind? How did you learn those stereotypes?
4. Which regions of the US are most familiar to us, even if we have never visited them? Why is that the case?
5. Which US geographic or landscape features are elements of the identity of various regions?
6. What role do language usage and dialect play in the identity of various US regions?
7. How have authors you've read in the past used regional differences to create setting, imply tone, or develop characters?
8. Why are so many humans attached to the places they grew up in and know well? What does that kind of attachment say about human needs?
9. What are some of the reasons an author might choose to send characters on a road trip through regions of the US?
10. How might the elements of a region—its geography, its culture, its people—serve as metaphors in a story that features a road trip?

During-reading Activity: Facts and Inferences

Reading literature, of course, demands that we decode, decipher, and deduce. Writers employ a range of literary devices to convey plots and themes. The "road-trip" novel in particular, however, relies heavily on signification—the author typically chooses destinations along the journey that are patently symbolic or richly evocative—to highlight key themes and ad-

vance character development. Consequently, readers must use inference skills to translate explicit details into deeper meanings. Inferring is a natural process; we are hardwired to interpret and extrapolate. It is easy for students to draw quick conclusions and form impressions and opinions. It is more complicated to provide evidence for those impressions and to scrutinize passages of text to develop fine-grained analyses that lead to informed and lively discussions. Asking students to create Facts and Inferences charts can assist them with this skill. For this activity, students compile a list of quotations that they perceive to be significant as they read the novel. I often give students a set of "sticky flags" and ask them to mark passages and pages for later consideration. They tend to find this task easier and less disruptive to their reading than stopping to write notes. Underlining passages also works well, of course, but my students take pride in the physical representation of their engagement when they bring their "flagged" chapters to class. After "marking" the text, the students review their selections and transfer the most significant passages to their notes.

For the note-making, they create a T-chart with two headings: "Facts" (typically in the left-hand column) and "Inferences" (typically in the right-hand column). Under "Facts," students copy the passages they have chosen as symbolic or representative of an important theme. Under "Inferences," they develop a list of interpretations/inferences about the passages. For example, students reading *Finding H. F.* might select the scene in the Atlanta city park where H. F. and Bo first meet three lesbian street kids—Dee, Chantal, and Laney—and identify that scene as a "fact" of the plot. In the "inferences" column, the students would assign meaning to the setting, the characteristics of the girls, the tone of the dialogue, or Watts's use of language to describe the park and the people H. F. and Bo notice there.

In *The Porcupine of Truth*, students might select one of the novel's early scenes in which Carson visits the zoo in Billings and first meets Aisha. For this scene, the students might generate inferences about our conception of zoos, animals in general, or Konigsberg's choice to place his character in Montana or in a gift shop. Later in the novel, Carson and Aisha wander around San Francisco in search of Carson's estranged grandfather. The iconography of the city plays a role in these scenes, so students might choose to interpret the descriptions of the physical characteristics of the city or of Carson's and Aisha's reactions to the setting and the people they meet.

The objective of this kind of close reading activity is to explore the effect of setting on the development of the characters and the plot. The road-trip novel intentionally places characters in a variety of settings, so an exercise like Facts and Inferences spotlights the author's choices and emphasizes micro-themes that help the reader draw connections between the physical and psycho-social journeys depicted in the narrative.

After-reading Activity: Metacognition Statements

Writing Metacognition Statements reinforces students' connections to the texts they read and helps them further process noteworthy themes. The statements can also serve as concise, yet sophisticated, summaries that allow students to demonstrate comprehension and articulate ideas that resonate for them personally. Furthermore, especially for students who struggle with writing, the composing template offered by a Metacognition Statement provides a scaffold for developing thoughtful, strong sentences as it models syntax, vocabulary use, and grammar conventions. The writing frames for the statements can address any aspect of a reading, but in the case of the road-trip novel, focusing on definitive traits of the meme can punctuate prior class discussions and review concepts that will be useful for future reading.

"The challenge for the teacher is to draft sentence stems that provoke students to think deeply; the challenge for the students is to craft responses to the blanks that reveal their capacity to analyze and reflect."

Metacognition Statements are conceptually simple: the teacher provides a "fill-in-the-blank" paragraph composed specifically to help students summarize and reflect on the class reading. The students complete the blanks with phrases and sentences that personalize their "take-aways" and then share the statements with their peers, often reading them aloud. The challenge for the teacher is to draft sentence

stems that provoke students to think deeply; the challenge for the students is to craft responses to the blanks that reveal their capacity to analyze and reflect.

The most basic statements might include just a few sentences. Here's an example, using Clark's novel as the topic:

In Kristin Clark's novel *Jess, Chunk, and the Road Trip to Infinity*, the author tells the story of two characters who _____. Jess is intent on _____, while Chunk hopes _____. Both characters learn something important about themselves as they travel; for example, Jess learns _____, and Chunk learns _____. One idea from the novel that resonated for me as a reader was _____. I think that is because _____.

Filling in the blanks may, at first, seem elementary to students, but in my experience, most students (and teachers) are less adept at this kind of thinking and responding activity than they predict when it is presented. It may help the class to understand the expectations for the writing if the teacher demonstrates the activity with the whole class, illustrating how the frame extends an invitation to develop interesting and thoughtful reflective summaries. I often project the framework onto the classroom screen and ask students to help me generate language to fill in the blanks in the paragraph, setting the expectations for the length and the tone of strong responses. It takes more than one attempt for most students to finesse this strategy, but once they are practiced at completing the sentence stems, they can reply to more complex invitations that challenge their thinking and bolster their writing skills. For example, the sentence stems can elicit more open-ended responses, reiterate important terminology, and present sophisticated sentence structures. Here's an example using Konigsberg's novel as the topic:

Author Bill Konigsberg sends his characters on a prototypical quest in *The Porcupine of Truth*. As they travel across the country, Carson and Aisha discover_____ _____ _____. Not surprisingly,_____ _____. Interestingly, the characters reveal _____. I was intrigued by this revelation because _____ _____. In fundamental ways, I'm like (Carson or Aisha) in that I also _____. I expect I will remember _____ when I think back to my experience of reading *The Porcupine of Truth*.

Metacognition Statements are traditionally only a few sentences in length, and they always include an element of reflection. The aim is to help students voice a succinct culminating response to a text they have read, as well as to provide practice with using the language of summary. Ultimately, students may transcend the confines of the sentence frame and craft reflexive synopses that illustrate critical interpretive skills.

Conclusions

Road-trip novels are appealing to readers for a variety of reasons, and even if middle and high school students have limited experience *reading* about cross-country driving adventures, they tend to understand the road-trip story's implicit tropes. Film and television have taught them the structures of such narratives, so integrating them into curricula speaks to the strengths students bring to the classroom. Furthermore, road-trip novels that focus on the developing identities of queer and questioning protagonists present an amplified version of the travelers' symbolic negotiation with unfamiliar environments. In all well-crafted road-trip narratives, the interactions with people the characters meet reverberate with meaning for the characters' notions of self, their relationship to others, and their understanding about the world-at-large. But when authors develop adolescent characters whose struggles with self-acceptance are clouded by institutional social disapproval of their identity, the stakes for the metaphorical journey are elevated. The three novels highlighted in this column offer stories set in quite different regions of the US, but in each story, the angst about romance and attraction—omni-important concerns for adolescents—is further complicated by the characters' fears of abandonment because of their sexual identity.

In the call for articles for this issue of the journal, the editors ask this question: "What common experiences, realities, and ways of knowing, doing,

and being exist across cultures?" Unfortunately, the common reality for most queer and questioning youth is the ubiquitous apprehension that even those they love most—parents, siblings, and best friends—will, at the least, misunderstand them, and, at the worst, harm them. It sometimes takes a road trip far away from the "safety" of family and "home" to develop the sense of self-confidence that allows for a real homecoming—a celebration of self-reliance, if you will. Watts, Konigsberg, and Clark understand this reality and have written compelling stories that offer students an opportunity to learn along with the characters, to take a sort of journey of their own, one that will likely inspire as many questions as answers. But such is the nature of traveling; it almost always takes us somewhere unexpected.

Toby Emert *is a professor in the Department of Education at Agnes Scott College, a small liberal arts school for women, located just outside Atlanta, Georgia. He teaches courses in literature, literacy, research, and the arts, and writes about his work on arts-based instructional interventions, students with less access to quality educational experiences, and the need to advocate for more inclusive classrooms, especially classrooms that incorporate texts that feature queer and questioning characters. He is currently partnering with the Matthew Shepard Foundation to develop a teaching guide for the verbatim play* The Laramie Project, *writing about his work doing digital storytelling with refugee learners, and serving as panel chair for the Children's and Young Adult Category of the Lambda Literary Awards. He can be contacted at* temert@agnesscott.edu.

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Right to Read

Dani **Green**
with
Angel Daniel **Matos**

Reframing Critique:

Young Adult Fiction and the Politics of Literary Censorship in Ireland

This article is also available in an online format that allows direct access to all links included. We encourage you to access it on the ALAN website at http://www.alan-ya.org/publications/the-alan-review/the-alan-review-columns/.

If you briefly peruse the American Library Association's annual compilation of the "Top Ten Most Frequently Challenged Books," it would not be farfetched for you to assume that censorship is an act that is nearly exclusive to children's and young adult (YA) literature. The complex and close relationship between informational suppression and YA fiction should come as no surprise—authority figures and institutions often want to "protect" children and adolescents from ideas and depictions of realities that they consider harmful. At times, these parental and institutional forces outright question teenagers' competence when it comes to comprehending and thinking through difficult social and literary issues. While YA literature is often susceptible to acts of censorship, is it possible that the very literary traits of this genre might provide us with the critical tools needed to counteract the suppression of information and ideas? To what extent do YA novels articulate ideas and critiques that other genres of literature refuse (or are unable) to discuss?

This issue of *The ALAN Review* is particularly invested in expanding our understanding of YA literature by exploring the stories that can or cannot be told in different contexts, communities, and locations. While an understanding of the acts of censorship that occur in a US context offers us a glimpse into the tensions that arise between ideas, publishers, and target audiences, an examination of censorship in non-US contexts allows us to further understand the historical and cultural foundations that lead to the institutional suppression of knowledge. Additionally, a more global understanding of these issues could push us to understand the ways in which YA fiction thwarts censorship in surprising, unexpected ways. To nuance our understanding of censorship by adopting a more global perspective, I have collaborated with my friend and colleague Dani Green, who offers us an account of contemporary acts of censorship in Ireland and the ways in which Irish YA literature is particularly suited to express ideas that are deemed unspeakable and unprintable.

Dani is a scholar of 19th-century British and Irish literature with an interest in issues of modernity, space, and narrative. As an academic who specializes in both historicist and poststructuralist study, Dani is particularly suited to think through the fraught historical and literary situation of contemporary Ireland and the ways in which YA fiction escapes (and perhaps challenges) the pressures of nationalistic censorship and self-censorship. In the following column, she provides us with a brief overview of the past and present state of censorship in Ireland, focusing particularly on how contemporary Irish writers steer away from offering critiques of Ireland's economic growth during the mid-1990s to the early 2000s. After sharing this historical context, Dani conducts a case study in which she focuses on how Kate Thompson's YA novel *The New Policeman* (2005) blends elements from fantasy and Irish mythology to both communicate and critique

Ireland's economic boom. By taking advantage of elements commonly found in YA texts, she argues that Thompson's *The New Policeman* enables a cultural critique that is often impossible to achieve in other forms of Irish literature. Dani ultimately highlights the potential of YA fiction to turn censorship on its head through its characteristic implementation of genre-bending, formal experimentation, and disruption of the familiar.

Young Adult Fiction and Censorship in the Irish Literary Landscape:

The Case of Thompson's *The New Policeman*

Dani Green

While YA fiction does not conform to any one genre apart from that which accords it an assumed audience, there are several with which it is associated, including historical fiction, science fiction, and fantasy. As Smith (2007) points out, "[T]he best YA fiction often defies classification," thus associating young adult fiction with innovations in what he terms "genre bending" (p. 43). If YA fiction is characterized by radical work with genre, arguably a conservative system of potentially limiting codes and conventions, what radical agendas might YA fiction support in terms of content? And how might an interrogation into the politics of YA fiction help us understand the relationship between YA fiction and censorship, which is the focus of this column?

In this installment of "Right to Read," I explore these questions through Thompson's 2005 Irish YA novel, *The New Policeman*, a text that arguably deploys several genres, but especially fantasy. Thompson's novel was published during a period that economists and historians call the "Celtic Tiger," referring to the unprecedented economic boom that Ireland experienced from approximately 1995–2008.[1] Fueled by globalization and technological revolution, the Celtic Tiger saw Ireland transform from one of the poorest western European countries into one with a robust economy with international stakes. Economists rushed to examine and discuss Ireland's newfound prosperity, but its fiction writers remained notoriously silent about the country's changing fortunes. *The New Policeman*, however, was not shy about addressing the present moment.

Set in Kinvara, a small seacoast village in County Galway, Ireland, the novel follows 15-year-old J. J. Liddy in his quest to buy time for his mother in a world that seems to be constantly short of it. The search takes J. J. through a souterrain, or fairy mound, to Tír na n'Óg, the fairy land populated by the legendary Tuatha Dé Danann.[2] There he discovers a time leak sustained by the belligerent Father Doherty, who J. J.'s great-grandfather had been accused of murdering decades earlier. While J. J.'s adventure is one of personal discovery as he comes to terms with his musical talents and explores his family history, the plot is couched within an appraisal of present-day Ireland that critiques the pitfalls of technological innovation, the housing boom, and the European Union. Thompson's engagement is quite distinctive, given the notable silence of Irish authors or authors writing about Ireland, and suggests that YA fiction is especially suited to social critique.

***The New Policeman* demonstrates how literature for younger audiences is uniquely equipped to deal with some of the controversial topics of the present, particularly in a country like Ireland.**

In the remainder of this discussion, I explore the ways that YA fiction could address Ireland's contemporary position and offer opposing viewpoints on its economic prosperity. I argue that *The New Policeman* demonstrates how literature for younger audiences is uniquely equipped to deal with some of the controversial topics of the present, particularly in a country like Ireland, which experienced decades of censorship laws influenced by a conservative Catholic culture and a staunch sense of nationalism. I will first briefly explore Ireland's history of censorship and suggest that an unofficial censorship dominates in the present, resulting in a reluctance, unconscious or otherwise, to represent the present, especially in critical terms. I then explore how *The New Policeman* navigates this dilemma through the freedoms that YA fiction and fantasy afford. I suggest that these affordances—a term I borrow from Levine and will define below—enable YA fiction to mobilize cultural critiques in ways that other literatures do not.

Censorship in Ireland: Past and Present

Ireland was generally wary of offering negative speculation on the economy during the Celtic Tiger, and just two years after *The New Policeman* was published, economist Morgan Kelly was met with skepticism when he predicted that the economy would fail. Indeed, several newspapers declined to publish his prediction that the housing boom could not sustain itself, and the head of Kelly's department at University College Dublin was even asked to find someone to write "a learned piece" refuting his claims. The negative response to Kelly's prediction seemed to stem from the idea that "a positive outlook on real estate prices" translated into "a love of country and a commitment to Team Ireland" (Lewis, 2011, p. 95). In other words, to offer an unpleasant view of Ireland's economy was to be unpatriotic, and an unofficial censorship apparatus sprung up in defense of the status quo.

Official censorship has a decades-long history in Ireland, which established several laws early on in its existence.

Of course, official censorship has a decades-long history in Ireland, which established several laws early on in its existence. Throughout the first few decades of the 20th century, several groups and organizations campaigned for censorship on moral grounds. These campaigns resulted in the Censorship of Films Act (1923; see http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1923/act/23/enacted/en/html) and the Censorship of Publications Act (1929; see http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1929/act/21/enacted/en/html), which were passed shortly after Ireland earned independence and dominion status in December 1922. Both acts installed a formal apparatus for reviewing and prohibiting films, books, and periodicals on the basis of moral and ethical concerns, mainly having to do with birth control, abortion, and sexuality (Ó Drisceoil, 2005, pp. 146–147). Moreover, this clearly Catholic morality was highly inflected by nationalist concerns. In his important work on the topic, Adams (1968) writes, "[U]ndoubtedly, nationalistic motives were involved—the idea of self-sufficiency, and dismay at the fact that most of the reading matter bought in the new State was written for an English public. . . . And now that the country was self-governing it was in a position to control that flood [from England] by legislative action on its own account" (pp. 16–17). In other words, passing these bills offered some satisfaction to the Irish as they defined their national ethos over and against England's by way of their Catholic faith.[3]

While censorship laws have certainly been relaxed and bans undone, the nationalist character that drove them into existence continues to persist in a way. The remains of this nationalism may be seen to linger in the country's reluctance to admit that its economic prosperity would not last. As Maher (2014) suggests, "[D]uring the Celtic Tiger years, the majority of Irish people were undeniably in favor of 'maximum gain within the economy,' believing, mistakenly, that 'a rising tide lifts all boats'" (p. 19). This stubborn belief in the economy's ability to improve and benefit Ireland on all levels and in all areas led "to the silencing of dissenting voices, especially those who expressed reservations in relation to the direction the country was headed. It was viewed as heresy to question the dominant view of the political class that the good times would roll on forever, that Ireland had finally assumed its place at the top table of wealthy nations and would continue to stay there" (p. 20). Maher's observation suggests that an unofficial censorship operated within the context of Ireland's economic boom, with dissenting voices silenced by a louder and more intense optimism for the country's future. With a long history of poverty and economic distress, criticisms of the Celtic Tiger and evidence of a potential economic downturn were not what the country wanted to hear.

Maher's use of the word "heresy" links the unofficial censorship he describes with Ireland's history of religiously inflected official censorship and brings us back to literature. While the country's literary production remained as strong as ever, the content of Irish fiction seemed to reject explicit engagement with Ireland's present moment, and much of the work turned out by the country's most celebrated authors during the years of the Celtic Tiger found their settings in the mid-20th century. For instance, Kiberd (2005) observes that the current generation of writers was reluctant to take up the "rich pickings" that an era of "such a profound social change" had to offer. Instead, "there [was] no major celebration or corrosive criticism of these developments in good novels, plays or

poetry," and writers seemed to be setting their work in "a period at some remove from the present" (p. 276).

Several years after Kiberd made his observations, Gough (2010) posted a heated complaint about the state of the contemporary Irish novel on his blog, in which he compares Irish novelists to the clergy of a theocratic Ireland. Gough suggests that writers did not just simply ignore present conditions, but produced moralizing, didactic literature. But Gough was not taking "genre fiction" into account; chick lit, YA novels, and crime fiction—the last of which O'Toole remarked did "a good job of depicting Ireland's 'globalised culture'"—continued to cultivate present-day representations (as cited in Prospero, 2011). Why is this the case?

The Politics of Genre: YA Fiction, Fantasy, and *The New Policeman*

Kiberd suggests that, more so than literary fiction, children's and young adult literature exists in a less pressured space, wherein writers are much freer to do the slightly daring, or even say the unspeakable, in a form that tends not to be taken as seriously as other literary genres (Kiberd, personal communication, November 4, 2015).[4] YA fiction's lack of legitimacy is a concern for scholars and teachers who study and teach novels that are subjected to "considerable efforts to discount the works as merely genre fiction" (Garcia, 2013, p. xi). But in Kiberd's conception of it, YA fiction's status *as* "merely genre fiction" enables a type of radical politics, in the sense that the challenges it poses to the status quo might go unremarked even as it influences generations of people. For example, Gierzynski and Eddy (2013) find that the Harry Potter series has had a measurable impact on the politics of the "Millennial Generation," which they characterize as accepting, tolerant, nonviolent, and supportive of equality—in short, liberal (p. 6). While these politics might not be precisely "radical," they are radical in the sense that they pose a challenge to accepted or traditional social norms. But a radical politics need not simply extend to a book's content; it can also happen through form. Indeed, what I want to suggest here is that YA fiction's openness to genre bending, to recall Smith, evinces a type of radical politics that can be useful at times and in places where censorship—official or unofficial—might predominate.

As Levine's recent contributions to literary theory demonstrate, genres (or forms) have certain affordances, a term she borrows from design theory that "describe[s] the potential uses or actions latent in materials and designs" (Levine, 2015, p. 6), and by deploying multiple forms, we give ourselves the best chance of making up for one form's possible deficiencies (Levine, 2016). I focus here on the affordances the fantasy genre offers *The New Policeman* as an Irish YA novel. Hunt and Lenz (2001) propose that "it is not surprising that fantasy and children's literature have been associated with each other, because both are essentially democratic forms—democratized by being outside the solipsistic system of high culture" (p. 3). Therefore, while fantasy is not specific to YA and there are many "adult" fantasy novels, fantasy and YA literature amplify one another's democratic impulses and allow Thompson to produce a text that is both familiar yet defamiliarizing in its representation of Ireland. In other words, Thompson produces a text that invites a kind of double-reading because it juxtaposes reality and fantasy.

[W]hile fantasy is not specific to YA and there are many "adult" fantasy novels, fantasy and YA literature amplify one another's democratic impulses and allow Thompson to produce a text that is both familiar yet defamiliarizing in its representation of Ireland.

This juxtaposition does not mean that reality and fantasy are mutually exclusive, however, and indeed the double-ness of *The New Policeman*'s world(s) is part of its mode of critique. "One thing that can rarely be said of fantasy," Hunt and Lenz argue, "is that it has nothing to do with reality" (p. 2). Moreover, "[T]he assumption that fantasy is childish because you may not need to know much about this world in order to read about an invented one overlooks the obvious fact that knowledge of this world is necessary to *invent* one. . . . [A]lternative worlds must *necessarily* be related to, and comment on, the real world" (p. 7).

In *The New Policeman*, Thompson does not precisely invent a world because she draws on Irish

mythology and folklore as source material, but the effects are comparable. As I mentioned earlier, Tír na n'Óg is the mythical land of youth occupied by the Tuatha Dé Danann, and this fantasy world functions in concert with the real world, rendering the relationship between reality and fantasy as symbiotic. This symbiosis allows the differing contexts of each world to defamiliarize and inform one another, ultimately leaving the reader with a renewed sense of the Celtic Tiger deficiencies Thompson wants to highlight.

YA's practice of "genre bending"—its willingness to include and occupy a variety of forms—is a democratic impulse in itself, but it also allows for a process of defamiliarization that permits readers to approach potentially disagreeable topics with a different, more open, frame of mind.

Defamiliarization thus allows Thompson to posit a critique of the Celtic Tiger by presenting a familiar situation in an unfamiliar way, allowing us to see our world from a different perspective by merging it with that of the mythical fairy world. In the case of *The New Policeman*, this is augmented through fantasy, which affords the maintenance of a physical link between real and imagined worlds. Though the fairies closed the sky and sea gates as soon as people learned to fly and build submarines (pp. 269–270), the supposed boundaries between the real and the fantastic remain blurry and, well, leaky. This leakiness is both the novel's major conflict (time is leaking into the timeless fairy world from the real world) and what enables a critique of what Thompson frames as the real-world conflict produced by the Celtic Tiger: despite time-saving devices and machines, people (literally) do not have enough time to enjoy life, and this has upset the fabric of the world in a material way.

The biggest disruption to this fabric is the leak produced and maintained by Father Doherty, who has lodged J. J.'s great-grandfather's flute into the time skin to destroy the fairy world and its link to Irish culture. Because the priest holds music and mythology in tension with modernity and progress in his confrontation with J. J., Thompson makes an explicit value judgment by casting him as the villain and the fiddle-playing J. J. as the young hero, yet the encounter of these characters takes place in a fairy world that places reality at enough of a remove to make the critique less straightforward—without necessarily diminishing its effects.

There are other types of leaks, too, that have nothing to do with the priest and are simply part of the structure of this dual-world model, thus allowing for subtle critique. For instance, Aengus tells J. J. about "the sock leak," which provides the fairies with useful markers for places where new houses have gone up in the real world, a reference to the housing boom that was part and parcel of the Celtic Tiger. Beginning in 2006, however, "property prices started sliding" and uninhabited housing estates—or "ghost estates"—remain "the most visible scars of Ireland's extraordinary crash" ("Ireland's Crash: After the Race," 2011). In Thompson's Tír na n'Óg, this process seems to be anticipated by representing its reverse: inhabited houses marked only by lost socks render them ghostly, uncanny, and defamiliarized, especially for J. J. who knows what is meant to occupy the missing space. By maintaining the link between spaces in this way, Thompson implies a criticism of one aspect of the Celtic Tiger (the housing boom) without explicitly denouncing it.

A technique of defamiliarization is interesting to think about in the context of censorship. While Ireland's official censorship is rarely exercised anymore, self-censorship, or "practices of omission," may arise "from perceived or real sensitivities in politico-social contexts" (Ho, 2008, p. 491). As I discussed earlier, criticism of the Celtic Tiger, even criticism in the form of predictions about potential losses, was perceived as unpatriotic, considering Ireland's unprecedented chance at becoming a global player. As Mundler (2016) notes of Liz Jensen's use of otherworlds in her fiction, "[T]he fact that the gap between imaginary and real is narrow serves to point up the faults of the real, contemporary world by defamiliarizing them" (p. 68). Such a technique makes it possible to temper the sting of critique by making the object of analysis look slightly less real. If it's not real, it can be dismissed, especially when it comes encased in a novel that is seen as mere kids' stuff.

But even if we take Thompson's YA fantasy novel seriously, she sidesteps the issue of patriotism by positing Ireland's traditional culture as the remedy for the Celtic Tiger's shortcomings. Kennon suggests that this move is evidence of a traditionalist agenda that sanctions "a conservative and politically passive status quo" (cited in Markey, 2012, p. 116). What critics have called Thompson's "nostalgic conservatism," according to Markey (2012, p. 115), is most apparent in the novel's paratextual material, which includes a glossary of mythical personas and sheet music for traditional Irish folk songs between each chapter.

The presence of such paratextual materials is not unusual in YA or fantasy novels. Most notably, the latter often includes maps of the alternative worlds to which readers are taken, and even the interactive nature of Thompson's sheet music is anticipated in the translatable pictograms that run along the bottom of *Artemis Fowl*'s (Colfer, 2001) pages. It is this interactive nature of sheet music that undermines Kennon's observation that Thompson's novel endorses a passive agenda. Music performance, an activity that requires work beyond just reading, invites the reader to become active. As Matos (2017) argues in his discussion of book covers in the previous "Right to Read" column, paratexts are "interpretive thresholds" that facilitate communication between author, text, and reader and function as invitations to the reader to take an active role. By including such materials, Thompson does one better and invites her readers to *play* the music, moving the action beyond the insular world of reader and text to the world surrounding them. In this way, Thompson envisions her novel as one that has play in the social world outside of the text.

Reconsidering the Political Effects of YA Fiction

Through an examination of *The New Policeman*, I hope to have shown that YA's status as "merely genre fiction" can be figured as one of its greatest assets when it comes to making political statements. YA's practice of "genre bending"—its willingness to include and occupy a variety of forms—is a democratic impulse in itself, but it also allows for a process of defamiliarization that permits readers to approach potentially disagreeable topics with a different, more open, frame of mind. This is especially important for helping us to think through the relationship between censorship and YA. While many of the "Right to Read" columns have perceptively illustrated instances in which YA novels have been themselves censored, I have focused on how the genre can function more effectively than literary fiction within an atmosphere of unofficial or self-censorship. As the world seems to face another cycle of nationalist propaganda and the growth of authoritarian regimes, it is important to develop strategies for cultivating toleration, acceptance, and political action. With the potential for real political effects that Gierzynski and Eddy noted, YA fiction can provide us with the critical and material tools to escape actual and indirect acts of censorship.

Endnotes

1. See Lewis (2011) for more on the Celtic Tiger and its international contexts.
2. The Tuatha Dé Danann are a supernatural race thought to represent the gods of pre-Christian Ireland. They reside in the Otherworld known as Tír na n'Óg, but myths often feature interactions between the Otherworld and the human world, with residents of each moving between the two. Aengus Óg, the god of love, is J. J.'s primary companion when he is in Tír na n'Óg.
3. Defining Ireland against England was an especially important move in the context of their colonial relationship, a relationship that began as early as the 12th century and that became particularly embittered after England's Protestant Reformation in the 16th century made religious differences between Catholics and Protestants a central part of the conflict. After centuries of uprisings in response to British rule culminated in the Rebellion of 1798, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland was created through the 1800 Act of Union. This act replaced over a century of governance through penal laws but did not include Catholic Emancipation. Though 1829's Roman Catholic Relief Act removed most of the restrictions on Catholics, religious and political tensions motivated discussions about Home Rule throughout the 19th century. A little over a century after the Act of Union, though, Ireland finally threw off the yoke of British rule through a guerilla war fought throughout 1919–1921. The Irish War of Independence led to the creation of the Irish Free State and achievement of dominion status in 1922. Of course, Northern Ireland, consisting of six counties, remains part of the United Kingdom, while the remaining 26 counties now function as the Republic of Ireland.
4. In this column, I draw a distinction between genre fiction (of which YA fiction is a part) and literary fiction. Mundler (2016) draws the same distinction in her scholarship on contemporary British writer Liz Jensen, whose works she describes as "literary thrillers." She elaborates: "[A]t first glance, the expression may appear to be a contradiction in

terms, since a thriller, by its nature, tells a story, whereas a literary novel, in the wake of postmodernism, tends to be to some extent self-reflexive and to make commentary on its own textuality . . . . A thriller is inclined toward the popular and formulaic, while a literary novel may be elitist and formally audacious." Moreover, "the very mixing of genres, and the self-consciousness created by this, with the various parts of the text illuminating and undermining each other, is what lends these novels credibility as serious artefacts" (p. 2).

Dani Green *is a PhD student in the Department of English at the University of Notre Dame, where she is also completing graduate minors in Irish Studies and Gender Studies. She specializes in British and Irish literature of the long nineteenth century, with interests in queer theory, space and materiality, and narrative theory. Her current research considers what counts as experience and how Victorian and modern literatures register experience in relationship to narrative time and space.*

Angel Daniel Matos *is a Consortium for Faculty Diversity Postdoctoral Fellow in English at Bowdoin College. He specializes in young adult literature, LGBTQ fiction and media, and gender studies. In his current book project,* Feeling Infinite: Affect, Genre, and Narrative in Young Adult Queer Literature, *he explores how contemporary young adult novels use optimism and positive emotions to reconfigure perspectives on queer community, queer politics, and identity.*

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Peggy **Semingson**
Raúl Alberto **Mora**
and
Tatiana **Chiquito**

Booktubing:

Reader Response Meets 21st Century Literacies

This article is also available in an online format that allows direct access to all links included. We encourage you to access it on the ALAN website at http://www.alan-ya.org/publications/the-alan-review/the-alan-review-columns/.

The theme of this issue of *The ALAN Review* is focused globally on the world of young adult literature. As with previous Layered Literacies columns, our aim is to share emerging and exciting ways that youth are meaningfully engaging with digital tools and young adult novels. In this column, two of us from Medellín, Colombia (Raúl and Tatiana) and one of us from Texas in the United States (Peggy, the Layered Literacies column editor) share our mutual interest in booktubing. We provide an overview of booktubing, describe the characteristics of this medium of video-based expression, illustrate several cases of booktubing in global contexts, and offer concrete ways in which educators, librarians, and youth themselves can get started with and engage in this practice.

Background: Youth Engagement, 21st Century Literacies, and Literary Engagement

Twenty-first century literacies have become increasingly participatory spaces where youth can engage with and produce multimodal texts (Burnett & Merchant, 2015; Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Lammers & Marsh, 2015; Morrell, 2012). In this new form of digital and multimedia-based production, engagement with canonical and alternative literary genres seems to be morphing into new dialogic spaces where the selection of texts and conversations about the texts are kaleidoscopic (Heath & Street, 2008) in nature. For those of us in the fields of literacy and reading studies, the potential for these new forms of expression provides both moments of awe and possibilities for us to expand our practice and research.

One of these new forms of literary engagement is *booktubing.* This is when a book reviewer creates a specific channel on YouTube® or other video platform to provide opinions and commentary about literary works. In doing so, the booktuber actively seeks to build a following of viewers (who are typically subscribers to the channel). Booktubing, which is practiced by both youth and adults, has become an increasingly popular outlet for young adults to engage with today's literature in more open and critical ways. Whether it can be considered a twist on traditional literary reviews or an entirely new style of its own, booktubing has great potential in the new age of online text production. In this column, we describe booktubing in detail and show its global possibilities. We also share insight into how language teachers (both language arts-focused and second language-focused) and librarians can tap into booktubing's potential to highlight YA literature.

A Booktubing Primer

Intersecting Our Interests in Booktubing

The three authors who engaged in this written conversation about booktubing come to this topic

from very different conceptual, experiential, and geo-located vantage points. Raúl's interest stemmed from his current research on 21st century literacies (Mora, 2015) and previous experiences using reader response and multimodal essay creation (Mora, 2016) with his preservice teachers. Peggy's interest in global booktubing stemmed from watching four youth booktubers, ages 16–18, at a North Texas Teen Book Festival panel facilitated by library science professor Karin Perry (https://goo.gl/2pX2HY). During this panel, Karin facilitated a discussion with the booktubers about the ways in which youth engage with multimodal literacies and the rituals of a video-based community of readers in cyberspace. Tatiana's interest stemmed from her blogging experiences and from watching videos on YouTube while looking for new releases. She is interested in booktubing as a different way of promoting literature.

A strong example of the participatory nature of YouTube lies in the presence of YouTubers, or people who produce video content and then broadcast their commentaries and other materials on their channels.

Defining Booktubing

Since its initial appearance in 2005, YouTube has become one of the key players in the Web 2.0 era, as it has evolved from a repository of videos to a space where individuals and organizations often create their own videos and broadcast on their own user channels. A strong example of the participatory nature of YouTube lies in the presence of *YouTubers,* or people who produce video content and then broadcast their commentaries and other materials (which range from carefully, professionally crafted videos to gonzo-style productions) on their channels. A recent spin-off of the YouTube culture is the *booktuber* phenomenon.

Booktubing refers to channels produced by users (Machado Balverdú, 2014; Sorensen & Mara, 2014), usually between the ages of 15 and 25 (Torrego, Acebes-de-Pablo, & Dornaleteche, 2016), who talk about and review literary works, most typically young adult novels. The tone and style of the videos is usually casual (Machado Balverdú, 2014), and videos often include book reviews, Q&A sessions with others, or read alouds.

Booktubing Features

Most booktubers include three shared elements in their videos: *background, editing, and content*. When we looked at representative videos, we discovered that most usually last between three and nine minutes in length, although some are even longer. Booktubers tend to choose specific *backgrounds* and locations for their videos, such as shelves with bookish items, posters related to books and maps, or blank backgrounds for video effects (e.g., words or images featured in the video). Ultimately, it is the content of the video itself that seems to determine the chosen background. Some booktubers combine *background, editing, and content* to make meta-videos or "how-to" videos about how to be a good booktuber. Booktubers usually record themselves using smart phones, professional cameras, or webcams. During the *editing* process, they often use different kinds of effects to improve their videos. For instance, the video might turn grey to represent doubts or questions about what is being said. They might cut sections of the video to avoid repetition or mistakes, make themselves sound more fluent, or provide emphasis on key ideas. They might also include links to prior videos or comment on different gadgets and relevant ideas highlighted in the video. With regard to *content*, several booktubers include animated avatars to represent the channel. These avatars serve the dual purpose of greeting viewers and helping other booktubers and users recognize the channel.

There are three salient video formats. The most common are *book reviews,* where booktubers record videos about new releases or books requested by followers. During their reviews, booktubers typically begin by holding the book in one hand, showing the cover and remarking about its design. Then, they often introduce the book and the author, describing their own literary preferences or their opinions of the authors. During the first few minutes of the video, booktubers usually explain whether they loved or hated the book and why. Reasons for liking or disliking a book have to do with an affinity (or lack thereof) with the author's writing style or with some of the characters in the book. Booktubers usually provide a caveat stating that they are just expressing their own

opinions, as opposed to producing sponsored reviews. This clears doubts about potential conflicts of interest. They often talk about the plot, characters, and genre, and they usually do not provide much plot detail in order to avoid spoilers. Instead, the review typically mentions whether the book is well written and the characters realistic. Booktubers tend to introduce characters meticulously and in detail. In the event that booktubers have read other books by the same author, they often compare books or characters.

The second kind of video is *unboxing*, which features booktubers opening boxes from sites such as Owlcrate (www.owlcrate.com), Illumicrate (www.illumicrate.com), Bookcase (www.bookcase.club), or The Bookworm Box (www.thebookwormbox.com). These websites feature boxes with monthly subscriptions for one or more YA hardcover books (often signed by the author) and three to five bookish "keepsakes." Each month highlights a theme related to the book(s). Booktubers record themselves opening the boxes to advertise the chosen website.

The third kind of video relates to *the booktuber's life.* Booktubers organize their books on visible shelves—either by colors, authors (bookshelf tours), best-of-the-month lists (wrap-ups), or new books to read (book hauls). They may even pose questions to other booktubers about their reading preferences (book tags). For all types of videos, many booktubing vloggers (video bloggers) do funny things in front of the camera like acting out sections or changing the inflection of their voices. This personality-driven engagement with viewers enables them to garner more followers.

Why Booktubing Matters

As a 21st century literacy, booktubing is relevant to English teachers (both English language arts and English as a second language), literacy researchers, and librarians. Booktubing represents a networked attempt to learn and discover literature in today's digital and multimodal spaces. Booktubing invites us to rethink how we respond to what we read, and it is a form of reader response (Rosenblatt, 1994). What used to be an individual transaction with the text has now become a participatory moment that has the potential to develop agency in readers regarding text selection, content, and layout. Booktubers also represent growing online communities of readers where feedback and comments become just as important as talking about the text. Interactions between booktubers and their followers make the videos all the more powerful in the ways they open new avenues of engagement with print text.

As a global phenomenon (see Machado Balverdú, 2014, and Torrego, et al., 2016), the cross-cultural implications of booktubing are multidimensional. One tangible example became evident when looking at videos from the two regions the authors come from (Colombia and Texas, USA). One common feature across videos from both countries is the presence of book hauls as a genre feature. The choices of authors are also noteworthy: it is typical that booktubers in both regions choose similar authors (whether in English or the translated Spanish version of these books). However, they are also mindful of highlighting local and regional authors in their reviews.

What used to be an individual transaction with the text has now become a participatory moment that has the potential to develop agency in readers regarding text selection, content, and layout.

In the case of Colombia, booktubing is a rather recent phenomenon. About three booktubers appeared at Filbo (Festival Internacional del Libro de Bogotá / Bogotá International Book Fair) to speak and to interview the authors they read. There are almost 100 booktubers in the country, seven of whom are the most influential, based on the number of visits to their channels and their emerging presence in social media. They share the same elements as other booktubers around the world (background, editing, and content), but they also record how-to videos. Topics for these videos, other than the traditional topics we previously noted, include discussions about how to start reading in English and the difficulties of learning the language. Interestingly, these booktubers often explain that their English was poor when they attended school but later improved. They also provide tips for buying books abroad (e.g., Amazon, Book Depository, Linio), which connects with the issue of finding books in Colombia. Books can sometimes be very expensive, difficult to find, or pirated. Some translations are not accurate to the original text or not written in Latin-American

Spanish. (Iberian Spanish remains the most prevalent variant in most translations.)

Overall, booktubing affords a great deal of potential for book and language exchange and is a space for second language acquisition. One potential option for booktubing is a comparison of multi-language versions of popular texts across channels.

Steps for Getting Started with Booktubing

Teachers and librarians can adapt booktubing to highlight YA literature and give students a platform to share ideas about texts. In this section, we provide an overview of ways to implement booktubing across educational settings, including libraries and schools. Beyond formal school settings, students can also be made aware of booktubing as an engaging and interactive literary practice. Educators can dialogue with students and focus on ways students can engage fully in any combination of viewing, commenting, or producing booktubing videos. Students can be provided with opportunities to critically reflect on the booktubing genre and the production process.

Educators can dialogue with students and focus on ways students can engage fully in any combination of viewing, commenting, or producing booktubing videos.

1. **Modeling booktubing**: Educators might provide students with opportunities to locate examples of good booktubers whose videos can serve as mentor texts with regard to content and format. Teachers and librarians might also consider becoming booktubers themselves to serve as models for students. For instance, they could do a Monday weekly booktubing video to highlight YA novels they are reading or intend to read. They might also consider doing an unboxing of books.
2. **Exploring booktubers and booktubing as a genre, platform, and digital community**: Educators might provide students with time to explore booktubing as a medium and a genre of multimedia. A good starting point is the Booktubers app (available in English, Spanish, and French for both iPhone and Android smart phones), which provides a list of booktubers in alphabetical order with links to social media, blogs, and YouTube channels. In addition to this app, teachers can create a simple handout that provides some of the basics about booktubing, drawing on ideas from this column and their own observations of booktubers on various video channels. They can encourage students to find booktubers they enjoy following and emphasize that a booktuber's focus is to gain a following of the video channel and share their love of books and authors. Booktubing goes beyond traditional book reporting because booktubers share their personalities, idiosyncrasies, and literary preferences; they respond to texts in ways that traditional book reports simply cannot capture.
3. **Evaluating booktubing videos**: Educators might invite students to add their ideas about the booktubing genre. They can discuss the value of considering audience in order to gain a following. Students might examine booktubers who have larger followings and consider what they have in common and how they appeal to their audiences.
4. **Creating and producing videos**: Teachers and librarians should encourage students to become booktubers themselves, either inside of school, if school policy permits it, or outside of school, if students are interested. Capturing videos is simple with cell phones and apps. Students can consider whether they want to script videos or use bullet points on index cards to guide their thinking. If students wish to fully script their booktubing videos, they can use a simple app such as Teleprompter (https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/teleprompter-pro-lite/id578104295?mt=8) in conjunction with a tablet device. Scripting and reading off a teleprompter are ideal if students are nervous about what to say or if they fear forgetting what they want to say.

For planning purposes, storyboarding can be used to plan the sequence and content of booktube videos. Students can use a series of sequential boxes in a simple graphic organizer to sketch key events in their narrative. We include an example of a template that could be used to plan a booktubing video (see Fig. 1). The features included in this storyboarding format

General Features of the Booktubing Video		
1. Focus of the video (e.g., bookhaul, overview of latest favorites, booktalk, unboxing, solo, dialogue)	2. Estimated length of video (under 10 minutes is ideal)	3. Background and set design
Storyboard Sequence		
1. Introduction (big ideas)	2. Main ideas and reaction to book one	3. Main ideas and reaction to book two (optional)
4. Main ideas and reaction to book three (optional)	5. Other ideas (continue storyboarding, as needed)	6. Wrap up and thank viewers. Request viewers subscribe to the booktubing video channel.

Figure 1. Example of storyboarding template

Booktuber Screen Name and Country	URL Link to Booktubing Channel
Andreo Rowling (Spain)	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCF8T4cUCdpMp3t3IeuXqV4w
Las palabras de fa (Mexico)	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCHJnpw2ZR-7hlfCgdDHPWYw
Macarena (Argentina)	https://www.youtube.com/user/graciasaloslibros
The Grey Lady (Colombia)	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMehl1qNroCOco9evTVbapw
The Booktube Network	https://www.youtube.com/user/TheBookTubeNetwork
Abookutopia (UK)	https://www.youtube.com/user/abookutopia
Katytastic (US)	https://www.youtube.com/user/Katytastic
Epic Reads (US)	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSRwwQb-oMNAWWAnw0bh27w
Lucythereader (UK)	https://www.youtube.com/lucythereader
Little Book Owl (Australia)	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYOhq5F-joK8qQPekd-jU1g
Rincey Reads (India)	https://www.youtube.com/user/rinceyreads

Figure 2. List of exemplar booktubers (both Spanish-speaking and English-speaking)

are important for students to consider, regardless of whether they complete the storyboard. The best way to start thinking about booktube videos is to view a variety of booktubers, so we have also included a list of booktubers who might serve as models (see Fig. 2).

5. **Reflect on the videos**: As students design videos within the booktubing genre, teachers can provide opportunities for them to share their videos. Students in the class might reflect on the videos and provide constructive feedback to one another. Teachers might create a physical bulletin board space, highlighting booktubers in the school and/or classroom by displaying screenshots of student and faculty booktubers. Within the classroom or library, educators might share videos on a password-protected platform such as EdModo or on a website or blog.
6. **Consider connecting booktubing to a book club**: If schools and libraries have an existing book club, booktubing would be a great synthesizing experience for readers. In contrast to book trailers, where students provide an overview about a book, booktubing is more reader-specific and focuses on the reader's reaction to the text.

Conclusion

Booktubing provides a creative way to engage young readers with books and allow them to connect with others who share a love of a particular author or genre. Booktubers share ideas and a passion for read-

ing in a medium that transcends distance, place, and time, and they can build very large followings. Because these video channels tend to be open platforms, discussions of media literacy, digital citizenship, video production, and design should all be included in conversations with students if educators wish to include booktubing in their curricula or library instruction.

We hope that you will consider the value of booktubing and the ways it evokes response about YA texts. If you choose to create your own booktubing video channel, consider tagging *The ALAN Review* (@ALANReview) and ALAN (@ALANorg) on Twitter with a link to your channel so that we can view it. Also consider using the #NCTEChat hashtag, so the broader NCTE community can view your videos!

Dr. Peggy Semingson *is an associate professor of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Texas at Arlington where she teaches online courses in Literacy Studies. Dr. Semingson has experience as a classroom teacher and reading specialist in both Southern California and Texas. Her research interests include social contexts of literacy learning, digital pedagogies, and online literacy teacher education. She has published in* Teachers College Record, Language Arts, *and* Research in the Teaching of English. *She was awarded the Jeanne S. Chall Research Grant from Harvard University in 2009–2010.*

Dr. Raúl Alberto Mora *is an associate professor of English Education and Literacy Studies at the School of Pedagogy Graduate Programs at Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana (UPB-Medellín, Colombia). He currently chairs the Literacies in Second Languages Project (LSLP), a research initiative currently studying literacy expressions in urban, digital, and schooling spaces in Colombia. Dr. Mora has been a visiting and guest lecturer at several universities (both in person and via webinar) in Colombia and abroad. His research interests include the study of second language literacy practices in urban spaces and gaming communities in Medellín, the translation of alternative literacies to second-language instruction and teacher education, critical discourse analysis, and transmedial discourse in sociocultural studies. You can follow Dr. Mora online through his personal website (*http://elpatronhimself.net*), the LSLP website (*http://literaciesinl2project.org*), and on Twitter (@elpatronhimself and @lslp_colombia).*

Tatiana Chiquito *is presently finishing her BA in English-Spanish Education at Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana in Medellín, Colombia. She is a student-researcher at the Literacies in Second Languages Project (LSLP), has engaged in field work on English literacies in urban spaces in Medellín, and is a language teacher at Language Center at UPB. She has been selected to participate in several teacher training workshops by the British Council and recently presented her first AERA paper in Washington, DC. She is very interested in developing frameworks to implement culturally responsive pedagogy and critical literacy in the learning and teaching of second languages. You can follow Tatiana on Twitter (@tatianachiquito).*

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Heather **Lennon**

A Good Book Is Universal

In *Odd Dog* (2012), written and illustrated by Claudia Boldt, two dogs live next door to one another (see Figure 1). One jealously guards his apple tree and is just waiting for a delicious apple to ripen. When it finally drops to the ground, it's on the other side of the fence. The dogs are named Helmut and Igor. The author-illustrator is German, living in London. (NorthSouth Books bought the book from Random House UK, where it was originally published.) At NorthSouth, we thought Helmut and Igor were a bit unusual for dog names, so with the author's permission, we changed the names to the more American Milo and Peanut, which we thought were very cute. Later in the process, we learned that Helmut and Igor were meant to poke fun at a strained relationship between Germany and Russia—two countries historically prone to thinking that the other is always getting the better deal. All this, in a funny little book about dogs in their backyards.

Figure 1.

In the end, we still decided to change the dogs' names. The cultural context is fascinating, and in hindsight, perhaps we should have included the backstory as a note somewhere in the endpapers. However, I wonder how much it would matter to most children and parents who are, as they should be, simply looking for a great book to read before bed? Would it matter more today than it did in 2011, when we published *Odd Dog*?

Since coming to NorthSouth Books in 2008, I have noticed a wonderful opening of minds when it comes to supporting books in translation and international publishing. In 2008, after years of hearing that our books were "too European" or simply *too weird* for the US market, we decided to try to embrace our international identity instead of obscuring it. Yes, we still change cover images and fonts to make them as appealing as possible to American readers, and we might still tinker with names and Americanize spellings, but we simplified our mission down to bringing the best in international picturebooks to the US. And with that came wonderful new relationships, absolutely gorgeous books, and a clearer identity and purpose.

The Value of Relationships

How do you bring the best in international publishing to the US? The first step is having relationships with some of the best publishers around the world. Due to NorthSouth having a parent company in Zurich, Switzer-

land, we are in a unique position to interact with the German market and observe what is bubbling to the top as far as awards and sales. Then we bring those projects to the US.

Many German publishers rely on rights sales to share their picturebooks with US readers. Having warm relationships with quality German and Austrian publishers has enabled NorthSouth to publish author-illustrator Sebastian Meschenmoser, who was recently nominated for the German Children's Literature Award, or Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis. Meschenmoser's work has been very warmly received here in the US, despite the fact that his books are often very European and very wonderfully weird.

Children's publishing in the US has a deserved reputation for prudishness. We don't like bare breasts! Or jokes about urinating.

Many relationships with publishers and author-illustrators are forged at the large book fairs in Frankfurt, Germany, and Bologna, Italy. And one of the hottest places to hunt for talent is the Nami Island Concours, which provides an incredible opportunity to see some of the work of talented illustrators from countries all over the world. The challenge is that the farther afield you go geographically and the farther you reach outside your comfort zone, the longer everything takes.

I am very often asked why we don't publish more books from the Middle Eastern countries or from Africa. It's not a lack of interest. As a publisher, I think it has more to do with the complexity of negotiating contracts in those languages and coming to an understanding of what each country thinks of as standard. In addition, since many books in translation don't hew to US norms, it's not uncommon for international picturebooks to have lexile levels that teachers are more used to seeing for far more advanced readers.

Also, the concept of a book differs all over the world. We're fairly rigid here in the US about what we accept as a picturebook. We want 32 pages, with a spine and a jacket. At some country pavilions in Bologna or Frankfurt, I have seen beautiful illustrations, but they are held in a staple-bound book of very few pages. The layout is often vastly different than what we expect. At a certain point, you take a photo of the book cover with your Iphone and say you will remind yourself to contact that artist and perhaps commission something fresh instead of translating and re-engineering what exists. Still, we do find books that are wonderful while being outside the norm of US trade publishing. *My Little Book of Chinese Words* (Louis, Bo, & Bradley, 2008), a 200-page paperback in small trim with French flaps and priced at $17.95, became a surprise hit for us, reprinting many times.

The Challenges of Publishing International Titles

Fitting American Cultural Norms

Children's publishing in the US has a deserved reputation for prudishness. We don't like bare breasts! Or jokes about urinating. NorthSouth has published several books where we've decided to add a camisole to topless ladies. I can offer a rationale beyond being Puritanical. As someone who has led many story hours at my local school library, nothing brings on children's giggles like topless ladies. While both books that I am thinking of, *Coco and the Little Black Dress* (Van Haeringen, 2015) and *The Queen of Colors* (Bauer, 2014), featured warm, joyful, respectful art, in the US, including that original artwork changes how the book is perceived and thus affects the way it could be enjoyed here.

NorthSouth makes other minor changes to make international texts acceptable to readers in the United States. Our US editor, Beth Terrill, sees more allowance for children doing things at their own risk in books from other cultures versus the US, where she sees books that tend to be more measured. For example, in the Japanese import, *Seven Little Mice Go to the Beach* (Iwamura & Yamashita, 2012), seven young mice and their parents go to a little inlet away from the crowd (and the lifeguard); Beth addressed the US's more protective stance by adding details to the text demonstrating that the baby mice in this story are proficient swimmers and are wearing life jackets.

We also see humor that differs from ours, sometimes in shocking ways. In Sebastian Meschenmoser's (2015) *Mr. Squirrel and the Moon*, a squirrel finds a wheel of cheese outside his home. He thinks it's the moon. Mr. Squirrel worries that he'll be accused of stealing the moon and sent to jail, which leads to a

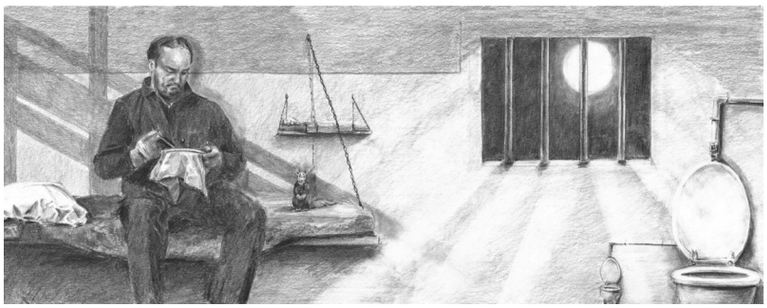

Figure 2.

black-and-white spread of Mr. Squirrel, in a jail cell, sitting on a bed with a hardened convict next to him, and a teeny, tiny urinal in the bottom right corner of the page (see Figure 2).

Meschenmoser visited the US, and I attended a story hour where he read the book to an audience of children at McNally-Jackson Books in NYC. The mom sitting next to me had deposited her children in the front row and then come around to the back to sip her coffee and read her phone messages. By chance, she looked up when Meschenmoser reached the jail spread, and she visibly started and looked at me, confused. Taken out of context, it's very different from what you see in most picturebooks! However, the children at the story hour loved it. "Mr. Squirrel worries he will go to jail for stealing the moon," Meschenmoser intoned, with his very deep voice and slight German accent. But the kids squealed in delight, yelling back, "It's cheese, Mr. Squirrel! It's CHEESE!" Afterwards, Meschenmoser said that he thinks children love the story because they know more than Mr. Squirrel knows.

While the children at this store loved the book, and many reviewers gave it high praise, we knew the humor would be challenging for some, so we weren't completely blindsided by the *School Library Journal's* (Simpson, 2014) review: "The book's droll sense of humor is marred, however, by three spreads that presumably come from the worried squirrel's imagination. These dark pictures of a man in jail are downright creepy and ruin the playful tone of the story. Readers should use their judgment when sharing this book with children." However, *Booklist* (Weisman, 2015) softened the blow with their verdict: "This makes a good choice for story hours or one-on-one sharing."

Meschenmoser's illustrations don't pull punches—his jail scene is dark and humorous at the same time. In person, he casually mentioned that the scene was inspired by Charlie Chaplin's *Little Tramp*, and the humor then became even more obvious. But I needed a conversation with him to discover this. It wasn't a detail that came across in emails prior to publication.

Discovering International Titles

The deeper understanding that face-to-face contact with an author can bring to a publication leads me to the issue of discoverability and the challenges of not having authors here "on the ground" in the United States. Most books and careers are built in the school market. Unless you're a celebrity, it's the first pillar of support. NorthSouth has a commitment to bringing authors and illustrators to the US, and in the last several years, we've been lucky to host Ute Krause, Torben Kuhlmann, Lisbeth Zwerger, and Sebastian Meschenmoser for events in the US, ranging from meetings of the Book Expo of America (BEA) and the American Library Association (ALA) to the United States Board on Books for Youth (USBBY).

The annual USBBY list of Outstanding International Books is one path to discoverability. The Batchelder Award also offers tremendous visibility in the library community. Outside of the library community, though, the interest in books in translation is not great. And that is the challenge—to give educators and librarians the information and context they need, but also to create a book that stands on its own feet as simply a great book, regardless of where it was originally published.

While there has been a rash of articles about the dearth of translated books available, I notice many of them seem to focus solely on the Big 5 publishers, possibly because the writers don't realize there are smaller publishers that are actively pursuing these titles. In fact, statistics about books in translation are hard to find, and when I dig deeper, I often discover that these writers have only surveyed the Big 5. There are also books in translation that the public does not always recognize as being translations, like Manga (a huge trend), Taro Gomi's board books, and clas-

sics like *The Rainbow Fish* (Pfister & James, 1999); I submit that is true, at least in part, because they are so well done.

Translation and International Titles

Of course, publishing international titles would be impossible without translators. Our translators are very skilled and offer a bridge that online tools like Google Translate can't touch. No offense to the online translator (which can, in a pinch, be great for an email), but when nuance and context are key, you must rely on a quality *human* translator.

All the changes we initiate in our books that have been translated from other languages are aimed at making them accessible to a wide audience without diminishing their unique qualities and nuances.

David Henry Wilson, a translator who handles many NorthSouth picturebook translations, offers this observation about names, which brings us full circle to *Odd Dog* and Helmut and Igor:

> I think names are important, especially in books for younger children. It would be hard for an American child to identify with a pig called Gottfried, especially as the name is pronounced Gotfreet, and the author certainly wouldn't have intended her pig to get fried. But Percy Pig immediately brings a little smile to your face. And so, if the author doesn't mind, it's well worth making such changes. And you can often do the same in the text itself: if there is a pun or a bit of alliteration that you can't translate in one sentence, maybe you can use the device in another; you don't change the content, but you do try to emulate the style, which is just as important.

Universality in Story

All the changes we initiate in our books that have been translated from other languages are aimed at making them accessible to a wide audience without diminishing their unique qualities and nuances. We select books based on the universal merits of story, characterization, and engaging artwork and innovation. Where the book comes from and what language it was originally written in are intriguing and informing, but ultimately not relevant to most readers.

Overall, more than differences, I'm impressed by the universality that exists across all cultures. What are some of these universalities? As NorthSouth editor Beth Terrill says:

> Love of our children, families, friends, pets, neighbors, environment, and world; humor—often thought to be very culture-specific—but can't most of us laugh at the little dung beetle mistaking a golf ball for an egg as seen in *Babak the Beetle* (Paranuzzi & Prigent, 2016), originally published in France, or hearing 999 tadpoles ask "Are we there yet?" as seen in *999 Tadpoles* (Kimura & Murakami, 2011), originally published in Japan; and those daily challenges—getting our children to go to bed, eat their vegetables, share, be open minded and accepting of others who are different.

I couldn't agree more.

Heather Lennon *is the Managing Director at NorthSouth Books, a small publisher devoted to publishing beautiful picturebooks from an array of artists and authors from around the world.*

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Emil **Sher**

A Witness in Red Stockings

"There's no pain on earth that doesn't crave a benevolent witness," says eleven-year-old Sarah Grimke in Sue Monk Kidd's (2014) *The Invention of Wings* after she is humiliated at the hands of her mother. The benevolent witness is a ten-year-old slave named Handful. Although Monk's novel is not intended for young readers, she has crafted a beautiful, singular phrase that transcends genre.

The world of young adult literature is filled with benevolent witnesses. Armed with an unvarnished honesty, they describe the indescribable, take us to places we would otherwise never reach, lift the lid on bitter truths that cannot and should no longer be contained. They inject their insights with humor, a directness that can make us squirm or laugh or stop us in our tracks.

Sometimes benevolent witnesses step forward decades after a scarring experience that has seared their soul and left a stain that no amount of revisionism or skepticism can scrub away. It can take years before the world is ready to open its ears to cries that were initially muted, stunned into silence. Bodies of literature that are, in essence, testimonies-as-art aren't simply hatched; those who live to chronicle the unspeakable must first believe they have the legitimacy to share their stories, and that journey can take a long time. A benevolent witness has to be ready to speak; the world has to be ready to listen.

Voices Silenced

Phrases like "the Holocaust" and "slavery" have become shorthand for moments when our collective humanity collapsed, and books for young readers slowly emerged from the long shadows they cast to contribute to the painstaking process of repairing our fractured, fragile world. Now there are shelves of books that sag from the weight of the damage we have wrought in the name of warped ideologies. In time, a phrase like "residential schools" may find its way into our consciousness, into conversations, and onto bookshelves, thanks to authors like Margaret Pokiak-Fenton (and co-author Christy Jordan-Fenton), who had younger readers in mind when she revisited the trauma she endured as a young girl.

"My name is Olemaun Pokiak—that's OO-lee-mawn," says Pokiak-Fenton (2010) in *Fatty Legs*, a memoir of her years spent in a residential school in the Canadian Arctic, an experience of witnessing she shares through her daughter-in-law, author Christy Jordan-Fenton. "I am going to let you in on a secret that I have kept for more than 60 years" (p. 1). Over the course of a hundred or so pages, that secret is unraveled in language that points a damning finger at systemic racism as it paints a compelling portrait of a young girl determined to stand her ground after she has been uprooted.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was officially established in June 2008. For the next six years, the commission travelled across the country to hear some 6000 Aboriginal people describe in their own words what it was like to be taken from their families and shipped to distant schools whose primary aim was to strip these children of their identity—schools where they learned ABCs of a whole other order: A is for abuse; B is for beating; C is for the cultures that were crushed in these government-run classrooms where children were forbidden to

speak their native languages. Approximately 150,000 children attended these schools from the time they first opened in the 1870s until the last one was shuttered in 1996.

Traditionally, history is written, sealed, and preserved by the victors. A book like *Fatty Legs* upends that tradition and gives voice to victims whose stories would have otherwise gone unnoticed and unheard.

These so-called schools weren't designed to enrich young minds so much as they pounded young souls into believing their culture, their very sense of being, was inferior to everything and anything the white teachers had to offer. The thousands of residential survivors who shared their harrowing stories with the Commission were the lucky ones, if you will, compared to the 4,000 children who were reported to have died, some in unmarked graves, while under the care of the schools' teachers.

Voices Heard

When pain and sorrow are contained like a river that is dammed, it takes benevolent witnesses like Pokiak-Fenton to wield the small pick axes that chip away at those stone walls and let the stories burst through. Traditionally, history is written, sealed, and preserved by the victors. A book like *Fatty Legs* upends that tradition and gives voice to victims whose stories would have otherwise gone unnoticed and unheard.

In hindsight, Pokiak-Fenton unearths a dichotomy she could not have discovered as a young girl: the clenched fist of an oppressor can also open doors. In this case, the door was a portal into literature. Pokiak-Fenton passionately wants to learn how to read, all the more so after she is told about the magical tale of *Alice in Wonderland*. Like any other child the world over, she is desperate to go to school, keen to spend her days with her nose in a book. She describes seeing the white teachers who worked at the residential schools:

> I was mesmerized on each trip by the spectacle of the strange dark-cloaked nuns, whose tongues flickered with French-Canadian accents and the pale-skinned priests who had travelled across a different ocean from a far-off land called Belgium. They held the key to the greatest of the outsiders' mysteries—reading. (p. 4)

Year after year, she asks her father if she can finally go to school in Aklavik, a five-day journey from home on an island in the Arctic Ocean. Her father, who Pokiak-Fenton describes as a smart man who loved to read, doesn't mince words when he tries to dissuade his daughter: "The outsiders do not teach you how to hunt," he warns her. "They feed you cabbage and porridge . . . . They teach you their songs and dances instead of your own. And they tell you that the spirit inside you is bad and needs their forgiveness" (p. 11).

What Pokiak-Fenton does so well in *Fatty Legs* is stay true to who she was as a young child. She preserves the naiveté that makes children children, the assumption that goodness is affirmed, and the only ones who pay a price are those who misbehave. She writes that she was determined to stay out of trouble, unaware that her teachers would play by a different rule book altogether. It's that childlike innocence that anchors a line like, "They would see that my spirit was good" (p. 11).

Faced with a stubborn child, Pokiak-Fenton's father uses a stone as a beautiful but forceful metaphor for what she can expect. He picks up a rock and, in Pokiak-Fenton's artful writing, tells her that the stone "was once jagged and full of sharp, jutting points, but the water of the ocean slapped and slapped at it, carrying away its angles and edges. Now it is nothing but a small pebble. That is what the outsiders will do to you at school" (p. 13). Like all strong-willed children, Poliak-Fenton allows nothing to stand between her and what she wants. Not even the warning that the school's nuns will cut her long, beautiful hair or that she will be forbidden from talking to her cousin, as boys and girls were separated. The warnings leave her unscathed, and by 1944, Pokiak-Fenton's father relents and allows her to go to school.

Most of us can recall our first day at school as a mixture of nervous anticipation mixed with a dollop of excitement. The school year lay before us like a blank page. At residential schools, a child's fate was predetermined. The nuns were there to save children like Pokiak-Fenton from the clutches of a so-called backwards culture. "An outsider with a hooked nose like a beak came for me," she recalls, upon meet-

ing the nun she would call the Raven, "her scraping footsteps echoing through the long, otherwise silent halls. 'I am glad you have come to your senses,' she told my father in Inuvialuktun. 'You certainly can't teach her the things she needs to know.' She wrapped a dark-cloaked arm around my shoulder and ushered me away, without giving me a chance to say goodbye" (p. 28).

History has shown that one of the most effective ways to diminish a people is not only through physical assault—a slave master's whip, a Nazi's boot. As Pokiak-Fenton's father pointed out to her, you can wear people down by humiliating them as surely as water wears down stone. When she was warned that the nuns would cut her hair, she brushed it off. But then the moment came when it happened, when a nun showed up bearing shears. As a benevolent witness, Pokiak-Fenton uses language that provokes and evokes:

> "I can fix my own hair," I protested in Inuvialuktun, but she held it tight and, with the same motion a bird makes to pull a piece of flesh from a fish, clamped the jaws of the shears down on my braid and severed it. I was horrified. I wasn't a baby. My other braid fell to the floor to meet the first, and I joined the others in their weeping. (p. 31)

Pokiak-Fenton also learns firsthand an enduring but pointed truth about human nature: when a group of people is mistreated, humiliated, devalued, then there are those within that group who will do the same amongst their own. In other words, douse people with invective, and they will wring that abuse over the head of another. The abused becomes the abuser. In the case of *Fatty Legs*, the abused-turned-abuser is a Gwich'in girl named Katherine who compounds Margaret's misery. The Gwich'in are Athabaskan-speaking Aboriginal people who live mostly above the Artic Circle. "The Gwich'in always thought they were better than us," Margaret recalls (p. 36).

One incident stands out where Katherine's laughter is as painful as any physical bruise:

> I placed some paste from the tube on the end of my toothbrush, and stuck it in my mouth. . . . It was worse than a fly's breakfast. I couldn't help but gag and spit it out. The raven-like nun called out "Katherine," and the Gwich'in girl who had smiled when my hair was cut tore the tube from my hand and took it to her. The nun cackled and held the tube up for other girls to see. The older ones laughed loudly, especially the Gwich'in girl called Katherine. . . .
>
> A tall slender nun appeared in the doorway. She was pale and seemed to float across the bathroom floor. She turned to the Raven, seeking an explanation for the commotion.
>
> I could hardly take my eyes off her.
>
> The Raven made a gesture from her cheekbone to her jaw, like a man shaving whiskers. The new girls now laughed, too.
>
> My mother had bought the tube for me. They were not just laughing at me. They were laughing at her. I wanted to tell the nun that it was not funny. My mother could not read. How was she to know that she was buying shaving cream and not toothpaste? (p. 37)

The humiliation of arrow-sharp laughter, of having beloved braids shorn, was just one part of the arsenal teachers used to break down the very children whose lives they were meant to fortify. But the truth is, the young First Nations children weren't seen as bright minds that a teacher's touch could help mold. They were, instead, little more than commodities. "It wasn't just the chores," Pokiak-Fenton writes, speaking of how students labored in ways that can only be described as punishment. The nuns "were paid by the government per student and plucking us from our homes and keeping us in their nests was a money-making business" (p. 55). The church-run schools were, in their own way, more about being entrepreneurs who traded in human lives than educators committed to shaping them.

When Pokiak-Fenton is finally given the opportunity to set the record straight, she speaks with the unfiltered honesty that is the hallmark of children's voices. It is unadorned, shorn of ornate language as it reveals a quiet despair beneath. "*Dear Mother and Father*," begins a letter she has been instructed to write to her parents, as dictated by the Raven. Instead of parroting her teacher's lies—in a different context, it would be labeled propaganda—Pokiak-Fenton braves the consequences of speaking truth to power. "*I hate this school*," she bluntly states. "*You were right. The food is awful and the nuns are very mean. They won't even let me wear the stockings you bought for me. As you can see, I have already learned to read and write. Please, come to get me as soon as you can. I am ready to go home*" (p. 61).

Pokiak-Fenton's plainspoken, piercing words never make it to the air. The letter is torn in half. The nuns decide the best way to prevent incorrigible chil-

dren from writing a subversive letter is to have them read scripted, glowing dispatches over the airwaves. As Pokiak-Fenton steps into the radio station where her message is expected to be broadcast far and wide, she is handed a pre-written note: "*Hello, Mom! Hello, Dad!* it read. *Merry Christmas! I miss you, but the nuns here treat us like family and school is very fun*" (p. 63).

We have entered a wonderland of a tyrant's making. In the opening pages of *Fatty Legs,* Pokiak-Fenton writes that she tried imagining what it was like being Alice and notes that "she was brave to go into that long, dark tunnel, all for curiosity" (p. 5). She reveals her own bravery after she's been handed the scripted letter she's expected to read over the air: "I stood in front of the microphone. *Mother, Father, get me out of here, please. Take me home! I'm freezing and my teacher is wicked and mean,* I thought, but I said nothing. Not one word. I never stopped talking at home; my silence would surely tell them that something was wrong" (p. 64).

Of all the ways children communicate their true feelings, silence is one of the most profound examples of self-expression, and it behooves adults to pay attention to what children don't say as much as we latch on to the words they do share.

The nuns don't take kindly to Pokiak-Fenton's silent protest. For every benevolent witness, there is a culprit. Come the day when all the girls are given new black stockings, she is handed a pair that is red. "I looked like a plump-legged circus clown," she writes (p. 67). Hence the corrosive nickname Fatty Legs. And if Pokiak-Fenton has endured a trial by fire, it is the flames beneath the vat in a laundry room where she finds salvation. A system bent on breaking children found its match in young Margaret. "Be careful what birds you choose to pluck from their nests," she writes. "A wren can be just as clever as a raven" (p. 74). She tosses her red stockings into the flames, and when a kind-hearted nun named Sister MacQuillan takes her under her wing, she savors a quiet but important triumph.

It is Sister MacQuillan who gives Pokiak-Fenton a parting gift when she receives word that her parents want her to come home. "You will be very missed, Margaret," she says as she hands her a copy of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. And then she continues: "You will be very missed, Olemaun" (p. 77). Hearing her real name brings tears to Olemaun's eyes.

Her long-awaited reunion does not unfold as anticipated. "Not my girl," her mother says after the two-year absence. "Not *my* girl" (p. 79). Her daughter, of course, had changed from the eight-year-old she once knew to the ten-year-old who now stood before her, changed in ways that could be seen and in ways that Pokiak-Fenton would keep to herself for decades.

After two years in residential school, Pokiak-Fenton had to relearn who she once was. Before bed her first night back home, she read from *Alice in Wonderland*. "My curiosity had led me far away," she says in the closing paragraph. "And now here I was, after two years, satisfied that I now knew what happened to girls who went down rabbit holes" (p. 82).

That is why we need books like *Fatty Legs*, told through the lens of a young benevolent witness who can slip down rabbit holes and unearth painful truths that we owe it to ourselves to confront, truths that would otherwise forever remain buried and unmarked.

Emil Sher *writes prose and plays for the young and the once-were-young. His debut novel for young adult readers,* Young Man with Camera*, was a 2015 VOYA Perfect Ten, a 2015 Chapter Book Favorite of the International Literacy Association, and a 2016 White Raven book. Other works of children's literature include two board books,* A Button Story *and* A Pebble Story*, and two picturebooks,* Mittens to Share *and* Away*, a story told through sticky notes. Emil abridged Mona Golabek's* The Children of Willesden Lane *for young readers. His stage adaptation of* Hana's Suitcase*, the beloved Holocaust book by Karen Levine, has been performed across the US and Canada. Other stage plays include* The Book of Ashes*, inspired by the true story of an Iraqi librarian who saved over 30,000 books in the midst of war, and the adaptation of Marie Edwards's* Edward the 'Crazy Man,' *a chronicle of the bond between a young boy and a homeless man living with schizophrenia.*

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