

## Editorial

by David Kern

1 The field of children's and young adult literature seems haunted by a deep-seated contradiction: while this field arguably constitutes one of the biggest, thriving and continuously growing literary markets, the global YA market does not at all reflect the diversity of children and young adult readers that form its audience. The issue of who is represented and who can see oneself represented – who can and who cannot relate to characters in a story and on which grounds – are powerfully foregrounded in Gail Gauthier's (2002) question: "Whose Community? Where Is the 'YA' in YA Literature?"

2 Melanie D. Koss and William H. Teale's 2009 quantitative analysis of 370 YA titles in the U.S. offers insights which are telling beyond the U.S. market. Their findings uncover a deeply conservative literary field privileging predominantly white, euro-centric, ableist, hetero-normative and gender-conservative frameworks of representation. Thirty-two percent of texts in their archive foreground predominantly European-American protagonists, closely followed by a thirty percent portrayal of "international" albeit largely European characters, firmly relegating multicultural and non-white people to the 'sidekick' position. Only twenty-five percent of their archive depicted disability, and only ten percent of texts employed LGBTQ\* characters.

3 The articles in this issue reveal that not much has changed ten years later, and contributors deal with the above-mentioned discontinuity and the YA literary market's resistance to change on various levels, with different areas of focus and with respect to a variety of genres and forms. The articles corroborate a general picture of precarious absences, blind-spots, and exclusions, and offer critical discussions of the multiple implications and effects of a literary space which excludes vast parts of its audience. Stories matter! And which stories we tell (our) children and which stories will be available to them to read, are part and parcel of either the perpetuation of a legal, political, cultural, epistemic and creative status quo, or the possibility to radically change the world and facilitate cultural shifts. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's talk on "The Danger of a Single Story" (2009, further discussed here in Sarah Mokrzycki's contribution), illustrates this amply and powerfully.

4 Beyond their different perspectives and points of interest, the articles in this issue are unified in an unequivocal call for the radical diversification of literature for children and young

adults. Josh Simpson's article is an investigation at the intersection of law and literature, and critically focuses on the lack of research exploring the connection of law and literature with respect to texts for children and young adults. Beyond the representation of the law in or inside the literary text, Joshua Simpson critically examines the (historical) role of the law in discouraging and even hindering the publication and promotion of allegedly 'queer' and non-heteronormative themes in literature for children and young adults, as he argues, "to understand the relationship between law and youth literature's representations of queer identities".

5 Critically exploring young adult literature's agency as a cultural institution which potentially re-enforces a normative status quo, consumer-capitalist ideals and self-interest, Kabir Chattopadhyay's article focuses on J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels and looks at how narrative strategies in this unprecedentedly successful series can shift attention away from the more problematic aspects of commodity and the gendered manipulation of consent within the logics of capitalist consumerism and economic rationalism

6 Sarah Mokrzycki's article closely examines the representation of families and family life in Australian picture books for children. As she argues, "family diversity is still a contentious issue in Australian picture books" to the effect that divergence "from the traditional or nuclear family model, whether by structure, culture, gender or sexuality, remains nothing short of radical". Deeply interested in the ethics of representation, highlighting the importance for young readers to be able to relate to characters, her article challenges the heteronormativity of Australian picture books and underlines the demand for a yet to be radically diversified representation of family life in (Australian) picture books, towards a right of the child reader to be represented.

7 Dalila Forni's article also looks at the representation of family in picture books for children, and offers a quantitative-qualitative analysis of picture books, their representation and construction of parental roles and gender dynamics. Forni critically comments on, as she argues, a tendency of many picture books to silently reproduce heteronormative frameworks of representation despite their, seemingly, non-conformist intentions.

8 The articles in this issue decisively challenge a visible lack of representational diversity that still characterizes the field of literature for children and young adults, one that clearly fails to reflect the diverse living realities of young people, families, and many of the changes and cultural shifts that mark the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But they also suggest ways forward in offering critical registers and analytical avenues to think more deeply and productively about the state of this literary field.

Suggesting different ways to theorize the YA literary market's reluctance to embrace diversity, and identifying a number of areas of concern, these articles – and together with them this issue – seeks to invite further critical inquiry and research.

9 Two literary reviews complement this issue. Anja Wieden offers a perspective on German human rights lawyer, feminist and author Seyran Ateş's 2017 book *Selam, Frau Imamin. Wie ich in Berlin eine liberale Moschee gründete* (Selam, Mrs. Imam. How I Founded a Liberal Mosque in Berlin – Anja Wieden's translation). In her review, Anja Wieden engages in a reading of Ateş's autobiographical account of her experiences in co-founding what she calls a "liberal Mosque", as well as her related thinking about the cultural politics of projects to 'reform' Islam in Germany and Europe. David Kern's review of Ambelin and Ezekiel Kwaymullina's *Catching Teller Crow* (2018), foregrounds the critical engagement of this YA novel with trauma, but also healing and cultural/spiritual resistance to abuse in relation to the colonial violence of Indigenous child removal in Australia, known as the Stolen Generations.

### **Works Cited**

Gauthier, Gail. "Whose Community? Where is the 'YA' in YA Literature?" *The English Journal*, vol. 91, no. 6, (July 2002), pp. 70-76.

Koss, Melanie D. and William H. Teale. "What's Happening in YA Literature? Trends in Books for Adolescents." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, vol. 25, no. 7, (April 2009), pp. 563-572.