

Review

Adaptation in Young Adult Novels: Critically Engaging Past and Present.

Edited by Dana E. Lawrence and Amy L. Montz.
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While a fair amount of scholarship exists on adaptation in children's literature, discussion of adaptations in young adult literature has thus far been limited mostly to ideas of pedagogy, in considerations of how adaptations might be utilized in high-school classrooms to encourage interest in the canonical texts. The essays in *Adaptation in Young Adult Novels: Critically Engaging Past and Present* do consider this use, acknowledging that YA adaptations are often employed as an introduction to the source texts, but they go beyond pedagogical evaluation to analyze how adaptation works in a specifically adolescent context. Editors Dana E. Lawrence and Amy L. Montz identify the effect of adaptation as a means of "engaging with our predecessors and the rights—and wrongs—of their literatures" (2). Through critically engaging the past and the present as they commingle in young adult adaptations, Lawrence and Montz argue, these texts "empower young readers, making them more culturally, historically, and socially aware through the lens of literary diversity" (2).

The first section in the volume, "Representation Matters", focuses on adaptations highlighting identities that are marginalized in the source texts. Fiona Hartley-Kroeger's "Re-visioning Rosaline; or, Romeo and Juliet Are Dead" brings together Shakespearean tropes,

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the nature of adolescent stories, and the feminist methodology of focusing on minor characters within the text. Indu Ohri's subsequent chapter then argues that Deborah Noyes' *The Ghosts of Kerfol* (2008) "settles the haunting" of Edith Wharton's turn-of-the-century short story "with the emancipation of a woman held captive by historical erasure" (44) via a contemporary teenage boy who can reverse the centuries of women's mistreatment. Lisa M. Valenzuela focuses on Sara Benincasa's gender-bending *Great* (2014), arguing that the adaptation's elevation of Naomi/Nick from observer to participant in the tragedy and aftermath of Jacinta/Gatsby's suicide deepens *The Great Gatsby's* themes of wealth and belonging with themes of identity, self-perception, and the agency to reject status in favor of a principled life. Dalila Forni's "LGBTQIA Fairy Tales: Queering *Cinderella* in Lo's *Ash* and Donoghue's 'The Tale of the Shoe'" begins with a concise overview of the intersection of fairy tales and adolescent literature in the realm of shaping identity, and discusses two adaptations which subvert traditional expectations of the Cinderella story and provide resolutions other than heteronormative marriage. In the final essay in this section, Saffyre Falkenberg critiques the whiteness of Rick Riordan's popular *Percy Jackson* series (2005-2009) and argues that the characters of color in Riordan's *Heroes of Olympus* series (2010-2014) are problematically subsumed into "a very Westernized mythological framework" (80), rather than being valued for their own culture's separate mythologies. Falkenberg provides a timely discussion about the current trend of Greek and Roman mythology in adolescent literature and points to Rick Riordan Presents, an imprint for middle grade and young adult books based on non-white and non-Western mythologies, as an indication that the market is improving.

The essays in the second section, "Literature and Popular Culture", examine how adaptations of canonical texts engage with trends in popular culture and genre fiction. Tara Moore delves into Charlotte Bronte's Victorian proto-feminism and suggests that readers of genre fiction will understand the Victorian emphasis on rules – and will perhaps be motivated to read *Jane Eyre* after reading about her counterparts battling injustice on a spaceship, in the ghostly realm, or in the faerie kingdom. Melanie A. Marotta's "Megan Shepherd's *The Madwoman Trilogy* and the Female Voice: The Twenty-First-Century Young Adult Adaptation of *Frankenstein* and the *Frankenstein* Franchise" claims that elevating the female side character to protagonist provides contemporary teens with more optimistic outcomes. By focusing on Shepherd's use of postmodernism and her preservation of Shelley's voice, however, Marotta argues that the *Madwoman* trilogy expands rather than subverts the original text's statement about possibilities for women. Next, Eileen Totter continues the discussion of female empowerment in young adult adaptations via an analysis of two zombie adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*. Totter demonstrates how Seth Grahame-Smith's 2009 *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* uses the zombie trope primarily as a tool to sell the novel but also as a metaphor for marriage in order to subvert Austen's reliance on the marriage plot, while Steve Hockensmith's 2010 sequel, *Dreadfully Ever After*, extends the use

of zombies to shed light on the fears and violence of motherhood and loss of agency. Michelle Anya Anjirbag and Madeleine Hunter's "A Twist in Time or a Break in Narrative: Adapting the Disney Classic Canon for a Young Adult Audience" is a valuable discussion about the differences in narrative for children and for adolescents as they appear in Disney's classics for children and the *Twisted Tales* series for teenagers. Anjirbag and Hunter reflect on the novels' unraveling of the classic tales' happily-ever-afters to introduce more complications in line with the adolescent experience. They argue that despite the novels' providing agency to princesses and allowing characters to reflect on how their actions affect others, the novels are still part of a corporate campaign and do not invite "revolution or radical upheaval" (149), only an acknowledgement of past wrongs and narratives of slow change.

Essays in the third and final section, "Making the Past Present", discuss how themes and locations of the past are brought into the present. Amy L. Montz's chapter treats New York City and the Tenement Museum as texts that are adapted in Jennifer Donnelly's 2015 novel *These Shallow Graves* and Katherine Howe's 2015 *The Appearance of Annie Van Sinderen*, arguing that the references to physical spaces as well as the bibliographies and lists of recommended reading are valuable methods for adapting the past in adolescent literature. Brett Carol Young's "Find Our Past Voice: Reimagining the Nineteenth-Century Feminist in Young Adult Literature" returns to feminist themes and suggests that Megan Shepherd's 2013 *The Madman's Daughter* is able to highlight expectations of women during the nineteenth century while also demonstrating the effects of nineteenth-century proto-feminism on twenty-first-century feminist movements by embedding a character with twenty-first-century sensibilities into a nineteenth-century story. Maya Zakrzewska-Pim's subsequent essay similarly argues that "Victorian ideas about femininity have influenced modern representations of women" (183). Comparing moments of consent and agency in Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) and Sarah Rees Brennan's *Tell the Wind and Fire* (2016), Zakrzewska-Pim demonstrates that the novels differ in the scale, rather than the quality, of their struggles and suggests that Victorian novels are therefore excellent tools for examining how things have changed as well as how things remain the same. Dana E. Lawrence then explores the phenomenon of literary tourism. Analyzing Suzanne Selfor's *Saving Juliet* (2006), Lawrence proposes that young adult novels incorporating literary tourism encourage adolescent readers to take control of the narrative, in addition to merely understanding it. In the final essay of the volume, Madeleine Tulip discusses a marginalized teen taking ownership of ancient myths as exploration of sociopolitical reception history. Tulip examines how Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones* (2011) uses the reception history of the Medea myth to make contemporary political statements, empowering the adolescent characters and readers to understand the numerous interpretations of the myth throughout history and to shape their own new interpretations.

Each of the essays provides not only an analysis of the young adult novels but also a rich discussion of the theory of adaptation, the historical period of the source texts, genre and narrative form, and the idea of adolescence. The length of the essays – no more than ten pages each – and the separate overviews of relevant ideas in theories of adaptation and adolescence in each essay also make the text an excellent resource for high-school, college, and undergraduate teaching on canonical texts and young adult adaptations. The flaw in this volume is in the essays that do not appear. The scholarly moment in which this book is published demands more sustained discussion of young adult adaptations which center marginalized racial and ethnic voices, marginalized immigrant voices, marginalized socioeconomic voices, marginalized queer voices – including genderqueer and trans voices – and the many other marginalized voices that young adult books are beginning to include with increasing frequency. In her otherwise excellent essay, co-editor Montz acknowledges that “conservative critics [...] see the movement toward diversity in young adult literature to be pandering” (158) and that “[w]hile writers of historical young adult fiction are including these voices because they are authentic, they face backlash from those who try to keep history white and heteronormative” (159). Instead of arguing that this only makes the case for non-white protagonists stronger, however, Montz suggests that “[o]ne way to approach this disconnect is through presenting a wealthy white protagonist exploring historical spaces that she would not normally have access to in a usual narrative” (159). In a move indicative of the overall structure of the book, Montz acknowledges the need for diverse representation but then turns to a hegemonic focalizer, relegating racially-, ethnically-, and socioeconomically-diverse characters to the sidelines.

Of the five essays in the first section ostensibly addressing adaptations’ affordance to represent marginalized identities, three address successfully feminist adaptations, one addresses queer adaptations that only partially succeed, and one addresses Rick Riordan’s failure to effectively represent non-white characters. Weighting the collection of essays toward cis-feminist adaptations does not reflect the strides young adult adaptations have made towards inclusivity over the past decade and is a missed opportunity to push the field beyond a white cis-feminist perspective. Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, has been adapted into a Black Brooklyn family’s story about gentrification in Ibi Zoboi’s *Pride* (2018) and an Indian-American San Francisco family’s story in Sonali Dev’s *Pride, Prejudice and Other Flavors* (2019). Queer fairy tales have also included trans representation, as in ST Lynn’s *Cinder Ella* (2016) and Ana Mardoll’s *No Man of Woman Born* (2018).

Adaptation in Young Adult Novels offers valuable insights into the capacity of young adult adaptations to critically engage the past and present. It contributes a great deal to understandings of how and why canonical texts are adapted for a specifically young adult audience, and it is a valuable resource for furthering conversations about adaptation, adolescence, and responsible engagement with a problematic canon. However, the

collection as a whole would have been strengthened by greater attentiveness to its own claim that “Representation Matters”.

REFERENCES

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