

## Young Adult Women's Literature

When we first discussed the possibility of a special issue to mark the transition between our tenures as editors of *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, it did not take us long to settle on the topic of children's and young adult literature. Enough essay clusters and special issues of the journal had been published in recent years on the field in which we both specialize—the eighteenth century—so we gravitated to another area in which we knew we have a shared interest. This decision held an irony, though, that has guided our thinking about the field of young adult and children's literature as this issue has come together: while we both consider ourselves to be fans of young adult literature, and while we both have taught courses involving children's or young adult literature, neither of us has published in this area. That the idea of undertaking scholarly research in this field had never occurred to either of us was, we began to see, an indicator of a tacit yet powerful divide in contemporary literary studies.

At least until the recent rise of crossover blockbuster series like *Harry Potter* (1997-2007), *The Hunger Games* (2008-2010), and *Twilight* (2005-2008), children's and young adult literature has been largely a world unto itself, with its own publishers or divisions of larger publishing houses, its own bestseller lists, its own agents, and its own systems of marketing. Likewise, while scholarship on children's and young adult literature is flourishing right now, it often operates in some separation from general literary studies, with its own organizations and journals and with specialists in this area anchored in education almost as often as they are in English or comparative literature departments. These surely are not bad things, for children's literature lends itself to interdisciplinary study, and the dedication of whole journals and societies to this area facilitates vibrant conversations. At the same time, the minimal integration of children's and young adult literature into general literary study, a compartmentalization borne of notions of what counts as real literature and what merits serious research, suggests decades of lost opportunities for wider, intellectually richer conversations.

After all, what is young adult literature? Several texts from earlier eras that are now centerpieces of the English literary canon were originally marketed to young adult readers. Consider Samuel Richardson's epistolary novel *Pamela: or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740), one of the most famous and widely discussed texts of the eighteenth century. At the time of writing this preface, a keyword search for "Richardson" and "Pamela" in the Modern Language Association International Bibliography yields 467 articles, dissertations, chapters, and books that discuss countless aspects of this text:

its influences, its composition, its structure and post-structure, its migration into other languages and lands, its class and gender dynamics, its politics and theology, its feminist or anti-feminist aspects, and its afterlife in chapbooks, burlesques, and paintings. *Pamela* might justifiably be regarded as a saturated object of study, yet a glance at the title page of the first edition reminds us that this novel originally was "Published In order to cultivate the Principles of Virtue and Religion in the Minds of the Youth of Both Sexes."<sup>1</sup> It is, in other words, young adult literature. To be sure, this aspect of Richardson's novel has not gone unnoticed, but it has not been at the center of conversations about this text.<sup>2</sup> *Pamela* also has not received much attention from specialists in children's and young adult literature, a category often described as coming into existence towards the end of the eighteenth century. For the most part, this novel has fallen onto one side of a fence between what are basically two different fields. It has become big-L Literature rather than children's literature, with—let us be clear—attendant associations of seriousness and scholarly status.

The division between these two types of writing is, of course, a division borne of intellectual hierarchy, a sense of what counts as worthy of study. For this reason, we think that the relationship of children's and young adult literature to the field of literary studies should be understood as an issue connected with feminist outlooks and concerns and, more broadly, with histories of intellectual marginalization. The raising or teaching of children traditionally has fit into the category of women's "proper" concerns and women's work, with status far lower than that granted to the concerns and work of men. It is also arguably the case that children's and young adult literature in the current day holds a place in the field paralleling the position of feminist criticism and theory in the late twentieth century. Understood to span, even transcend, several chronological eras, it tends to be separated from the conversations that unfold within, say, modernist, Victorian, or early American literary studies. Just as English departments in past eras might have had a single specialist in feminist theory, now English departments that attend at all to children's literature often have a single specialist, except for the few departments that mark this as an area of concentration with a certificate or advanced degree. In both situations the specialization in this area is set apart with the implication—notwithstanding the intellectual density and impressiveness of the actual scholarship—that such study does not quite pertain to the central (more masculine, higher status) labor of literary teaching and research. We wish to reiterate emphatically that these are not our own opinions; they are rather the tacit inherited assumptions that we see still structuring the positioning of children's literature. Again, as with feminist literature in an earlier era, the specialist in this area often finds more of an intellectual home outside the English department, with scholars in education, psychol-

ogy, or media studies who also focus on texts for the young. There are, to be sure, enormous benefits to an interdisciplinary approach, but for the study of both women's and children's literature, that interdisciplinarity has, at least at times, reflected marginalization from a traditional discipline.

While acknowledging the important ongoing work of organizations, journals, and individuals devoted to children's and young adult literature, we wonder what the study of this literature would look like if it were fully integrated into the field of literary study. What would happen if, for example, children's literature transformed from its own area of study into subfields of concentration within the more traditional time-bound and genre-bound divisions of the field? What would be gained, and what would be lost? These questions are far too large for us to answer here, and they overlook the exciting work that scholars embedded in specific eras of study are already doing in literature written for young audiences. These questions were on our mind, though, as we drafted the call for submissions to this special issue. First and foremost, we sought to find out how feminist approaches and children's literature are illuminating and advancing each other right now. Even more than seeing how feminist theory and criticism affect current scholarship on children's literature, we were eager to see how a focus on literature specifically marketed to children, adolescents, young adults, and their parents advances women's literature and feminist literary study.

One of our priorities in designing this issue was to bring an intersectional feminist lens to the study of young adult literature. In 2005, Emer O'Sullivan wrote in the preface to her *Comparative Children's Literature*, "Children's literature studies in English is mainly a monolingual phenomenon, mostly dealing with the wealth of children's literature in English-speaking countries and referring to critical material written in English."<sup>3</sup> Since the publication of O'Sullivan's work twelve years ago, the field has not changed as much as we might have hoped. In a recent issue of *The Lion and the Unicorn: A Critical Journal of Children's Literature*, the contributors to "#WeNeedDiverseScholars: A Forum" argued that "while children's and young adult literature scholarship has made important strides toward inclusivity in the decades since the field's inception, there is still much more work to be done."<sup>4</sup> Taking its title from the #WeNeedDiverseBooks campaign, "a grassroots organization of children's book lovers" that advocates for "essential changes in the publishing industry" and promotes the production of "books featuring diverse characters," #WeNeedDiverseScholars calls for increased inclusivity within the academy.<sup>5</sup> The call extends both to the treatment of minority scholars and to the selection of materials that are considered worthy of study. For instance, Marisilia Jiménez García argues that Latinx young adult literature is doubly marginalized within the academy; scholarly criticism of children's and young adult literature still remains

overwhelmingly focused on narratives about white English speakers while scholars of Latinx studies overwhelmingly ignore works written for and marketed to the young.<sup>6</sup> Similar compartmentalization occurs within other subspecialties, including queer studies, African American studies, and disability studies. We are increasingly attuned to intersectionality as it applies to adult literature but less so when considering the place of children's and young adult works in our analyses.

When we wrote our call for papers, we specifically sought, among other themes, essays that focused on the intersection of femaleness with race, nationality, ethnicity, disability, or religion, and depictions of non-normative, transitional, or non-binary genders and sexualities. To our surprise, while we received many excellent submissions, we did not receive the diversity of subject matter for which we had hoped. Many of the proposed articles clustered around the much-critiqued pop culture phenomena of *Twilight* and *The Hunger Games*, while virtually all of the submissions featured literature of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Our commitment to focusing on literature written for and marketed to the young also excluded some otherwise promising submissions. The fault lines that exist in academia—the separation between traditional historically divided fields of literary study and young adult literature as a genre, as well as the focus on white literature to the exclusion of other voices and experiences—were replicated in our submissions. The essays we have chosen to publish are, in contrast, those that offer new insight into the young adult genre through a variety of theoretical and intersectional lenses. We are especially grateful to one of our board members, Sandy Alexandre, for her assistance in spreading the word about this special topics issue among scholars working on African American children's literature.

Julie Pfeiffer takes a comparative approaching by considering the genre of *Backfisch* novels, which describe female adolescents who mature into successful, married women in nineteenth-century Germany and the United States by leaving home to seek their education in the world. Part of her contribution is to show how the borrowing of terminologies across the lines of nation and language can yield insights into genres that are otherwise hard to name. Brigitte Fielder explores two groups of narratives that feature interracial pairings of girls—antebellum abolitionist fiction and the contemporary American Girl books—in order to expose the evils of slavery and model for young readers how and why they might combat racism. In her analysis of the *Pretty Little Liars* series (2006-2014), Sarah Whitney argues that the novels critique postfeminist discourse by deconstructing the trope of the “mean girl” and exposing the myriad forms of surveillance that discipline and oppress female bodies. She also examines characters in the series who diverge from the compulsory heterosexuality and disciplined

eroticized bodies of the postfeminist ideal. The novels seemingly participate in postfeminist discourse, only to expose and indict the constant societal surveillance inflicted upon adolescent girls. Roberta Seelinger Trites applies a material feminist lens to Libba Bray's *Beauty Queens* (2011), a novel that exposes the ways in which race, gender, religion, and sexuality are all used to constrain and punish girls' bodies. The girls form their identities through contact with the material world, a process that in turn affects discourses about female adolescence. Carissa Turner Smith draws upon Donna Haraway's cyborg theory to argue that Rachel Hartman's fantasy novels about a human-dragon hybrid envision a posthumanist subjectivity that also makes room for religion, especially through transformations of what is initially marked as blasphemous hybridity into a kind of saintliness. Jennifer Putzi examines the concept of being "born in the wrong body" as it is depicted in young adult literature featuring transgender characters. While early narratives privilege the concept of gender reassignment surgery as a way to "fix" the transgender character, more recent novels disrupt wrong-body discourse by acknowledging myriad gender identities and forms of sexual expression. LaKisha Michelle Simmons's Archives piece focuses on Vesta Emily Stephens, who graduated in the 1930s from the segregated, historically black Talladega College of Alabama and whose writings were preserved by her teacher, in order to reflect on her study of black girls' writings from the segregationist south. Angela Hubler has contributed a review essay on four recent works of feminist criticism focused on children's and young adult literature. The texts she reviews all engage with the ways in which literature contributes to female subject formation, especially as it relates to constructions of gender. These four works address a wide range of women's writing, from the afterlife of the well-studied *Little Women* (1869) by Louisa May Alcott to the rhetoric of early twentieth-century girls from four Kansas City-area schools—private and public, white and African or Native American.

All of these essays nudge or provoke us to think about girlhood and literature for young females more expansively, more critically, and more self-critically. That is, whether commenting on the dearth of young adult literature dealing with religion or the widely observed erasure of girls of color from children's books, they call for a feminist examination of children's and young adult literature that brings to bear a multifaceted and highly tuned awareness of how books for the young teach their readers who is valued, how, and why. While these articles bring exciting new insights to the study of several texts and genres within children's literature, we have no illusions that *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* is doing something new in calling for feminist readings of children's and young adult literature. Such work has been underway for decades by specialists in the field. We seek rather

to contribute to a conversation that is already underway, to expand the audience and participants in this conversation, and to encourage wider, more sustained consideration of what scholarship focused on literature for the young adds to feminist literary study.

This issue brings with it both greetings and bittersweet farewells. It gives us great pleasure to welcome Onyx Zhang to the staff of *Tulsa Studies* as our new Subscriptions Manager. We are excited to have Onyx on board and look forward to her presence as part of our team. She takes over this position from Amy Pezzelle, who, we are happy to announce, will begin training this semester to take over the position of Book Review Editor, when Megan Gibson completes her term. We are also excited to welcome the following scholars to our editorial board, listed here in alphabetical order.

Leslie Bow is Vilas Distinguished Achievement Professor of English and Asian American Studies at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She is the author of the award-winning *"Partly Colored": Asian Americans and Racial Anomaly in the Segregated South* (2010) and *Betrayal and Other Acts of Subversion: Feminism, Sexual Politics, Asian American Women's Literature* (2001), and editor of the four-volume *Asian American Feminisms* (2012) and a reissue of Fiona Cheong's novel *The Scent of the Gods* (2010). She is a contributor to *Progressive* magazine and the Progressive Media Project through which her op-ed columns appear in newspapers across the United States. She is currently working on a monograph that explores race and pleasure in the public sphere, focusing on fantasy and visual culture.

Mary Chapman is Professor of English at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, where she specializes in American literature and transnational American Studies. In particular, she works on intersections between cultural forms (that is, suffrage activism, print culture, parlor theatricals, parades), literary production, and politics in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America. She is the author of *Making Noise, Making News: Suffrage Print Culture and U. S. Modernism* (2014), winner of the 2015 Society for the Study of American Women Writers Book Prize and the 2015 Canadian Association for American Studies's Robert K. Martin Book Prize and a finalist for the Modernist Studies Association Book Prize. She has also edited several volumes, including *Becoming Sui Sin Far: Early Fiction, Journalism and Travel Writing by Edith Maude Eaton* (2016); *Treacherous Texts: U. S. Suffrage Literature 1846-1946* (2011), coedited with Angela Mills, which won the Susan Koppelman Prize for best anthology, multi-authored, or edited book in feminist studies in popular culture in 2012; *Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect*

in *American Culture* (1999), coedited with Glenn Hendler; and Charles Brockden Brown's 1799 novel, *Ormond* (1999). A two-time recipient of the American Studies Association's Yasuo Sakibara Prize, she is currently working on a book about Edith Eaton's use of Afro-Asian analogy.

Gillian Dow is Associate Professor at the University of Southampton and has long been affiliated with the Chawton House Library, a library of women's writing set in the Elizabethan manor house once belonging to Jane Austen's brother. Between 2014 and 2017, she was fully seconded to Chawton House Library as Executive Director. She is the editor or coeditor of several volumes devoted to women's writing of the long eighteenth century: *Translators, Interpreters, Mediators: Women Writers, 1700-1900* (2007); *Women's Writing, 1660-1830: Feminisms and Futures* (2016), coedited with Jennie Batchelor; *Uses of Austen: Jane's Afterlives* (2012), coedited with Clare Hanson; and *Readers, Writers, Salonnières: Female Networks in Europe, 1700-1900* (2011), coedited with Hilary Brown. Her current book project examines British women writers and cross-channel translation between 1750-1830.

As we welcome new members to our board, we also must bid several farewell. With this issue, we say goodbye to Jennie Batchelor, Elena Suet-Ying Chiu, and Catherine Keyser, who have concluded their terms on our editorial board. We are deeply grateful to them for their service to the journal, and we wish them the best with their future scholarly endeavors.

This issue marks the culmination of three years of collaborative effort. It is therefore both exciting and bittersweet to see our vision finally realized in print. We are grateful to the authors who have contributed such excellent articles and to Karen Dutoi, our Managing Editor, for her exemplary editorial work and stewardship of the day-to-day operations of the journal. Karen, thank you most of all for holding us to our own deadlines! We conclude this particular collaboration expecting that it will not be the last project we work on together, even if it turns out to have been the most pleasant one. The end of this joint project is the end neither of our friendship nor, we are glad to say, of the project of *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Richardson, *Pamela: or, Virtue Rewarded*, 4th ed. (London: Rivington and Osborn, 1741), Eighteenth-Century Collections Online.

<sup>2</sup> Scholarship that approaches this novel as young adult literature includes Katherine B. Gustafson, "Coming of Age in the Eighteenth-Century Novel" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2012). There has also been some work on Pamela's own comments on children's reading and education in Richardson's sequel to the novel, *Pamela in Her Exalted Condition* (1741), such as Julia Briggs, "'Delightful Task!': Women, Children, and Reading in the Mid-Eighteenth Century," in *Culturing the Child, 1690-1914: Essays in Memory of Mitzi Myers*, ed. Donelle Ruwe (Lanham, MD: Children's Literature Association and Scarecrow Press, 2005), 67-82. Studies of adaptations of this novel for young readers include Bonnie Latimer, "Leaving Little to the Imagination: The Mechanics of Didacticism in Two Children's Adaptations of Samuel Richardson's Novels," *The Lion and the Unicorn: A Critical Journal of Children's Literature*, 33, No. 2 (2009), 167-88; and Samuel Pickering, Jr., "The 'Ambiguous Circumstances of a *Pamela*': Early Children's Books and the Attitude towards *Pamela*," *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, 14 (1984), 153-71.

<sup>3</sup> Emer O'Sullivan, preface to *Comparative Children's Literature* (London: Routledge, 2005), x.

<sup>4</sup> Katherine Slater, "Introduction for #WeNeedDiverseScholars: A Forum," *The Lion and the Unicorn: A Critical Journal of Children's Literature*, 41, No. 1 (2017), 79.

<sup>5</sup> "Mission Statement," We Need Diverse Books, accessed 21 August 2017, <http://weneeddiversebooks.org/mission-statement/>.

<sup>6</sup> Marisilia Jiménez García writes, "scholars in Latinx studies rarely consider the position of literature for youth and writers for young audiences in the study of historically oppressed peoples. That is, in ethnic and postcolonial studies, literature for youth remains, for the most part, marginalized"; see Jiménez García, "Side-by-Side: At the Intersections of Latinx Studies and ChYALit," *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 41, No. 1 (2017), 115.