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Ploughing the Field:

A Discussion About YA Studies

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In 1996, Caroline Hunt asked whether "the theoretical criticism of YA literature [would] ever reach the standard already seen in children's-literature criticism" because, at the time, "it seem[ed] unlikely that this turbulent field [would] ever produce such criticism in quantity; its roots were formed in other soil" (10). Despite her concern, in the nearly two and a half decades that have passed since Hunt made this claim, YA Studies has become a thriving part of academic discourse. Indeed, with the launch of both the *International Journal of Young Adult Literature* (*IJYAL*) and the YA Studies Association (YASA), 2020 marks a turning point. While both organisations are distinct, they seek to propagate, cultivate, and harvest YA scholarship and to continue the work of this rich and fertile field. Though our (perhaps overzealous) use of farming terminology offers a light-hearted response to Hunt's claim, the metaphor is a useful one because not only is YA scholarship organic and blossoming, it is also open to productive disruption in the manner of ploughing, as the following discussion demonstrates. We have collated the perspectives of sixteen scholars (see Table 1) who research, teach, and/or publish work intersecting with YA Studies and who have roles in one or more of the Editorial Board of *IJYAL* and the Executive Board or Advisory Committee of YASA, in order to examine the past, present, and potential future of YA scholarship.[1]

1 Sixteen contributors were invited to attend one of two round table discussions hosted by Corbett and Phillips on Zoom in July 2020. Due to conflicting time zones, five contributors attended the first session, ten contributors attended the second session, and one contributor provided responses via email. Each contributor was asked to consider three questions, which structure the main discussion of this article. We collected more than 220 minutes (30,000 words) of dialogue and therefore offer an edited précis of responses in a combined account of these separate conversation that does not reflect the order in which contributors put forward their ideas.

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QUESTION ONE

> This year has seen the formation of *IJYAL* and the YASA, both of which are drawing on the conversations around YA in academia and popular culture. Why do you think YA and YA Studies are so important in our contemporary cultural landscape?

Angel Daniel Matos: YA literature and culture is a barometer, of sorts, for the limits of social acceptability, and the extent to which these limits can be transgressed. YA is resilient. YA is incredibly sensitive to changes in sociocultural circumstances. YA is not consistent, and the shapes and forms that it will assume in the future will look nothing like they do today. Everyone has different goals when engaging with these fields, and I'm interested in what happens when we start to become less defensive of these goals and start to reflect on how these objectives and foci inform and enrich each other. I study YA because I'm interested in understanding the extent to which a field of literature geared toward younger readers can challenge normative values and epistemologies. I'm interested in determining the extent to which YA literature and culture articulates ideas and feelings that are generally deemed 'unspeakable' or 'unpublishable' in more established literary and cultural fields. But on a more personal level, I grew up with YA literature. YA literature was and is formational to who I am today, and it offered me the opportunity to learn about people, ideas, cultures, and practices that otherwise would've been inaccessible to me given my cultural background and upbringing. I not only received emotional nourishment from these books, but in many ways, YA literature helped me to recognise and challenge many of the problematic ideologies and injustices present in my communities. YA showed me that everything is political.

Jennifer Gouck: In recent years I've noticed an increased understanding in public discourse of what, exactly, YA can do. Previously, YA has been associated with the 'problem novel' or seemingly frivolous romance but now there is more recognition in broader popular culture that within YA, like literature for adults, there are 'light-hearted' texts and there are 'literary' texts (and, indeed, everything in between). It's not that these stories have more or less value than each other, they're just doing different things that are now being recognised and appreciated by those outside YA scholarship circles. For example, Louise O'Neill's *Asking For It* (2015) is based on a US rape case that has been transposed onto a small town in Ireland and looks at rape and rape culture. It's a really significant text and I think people are starting to see that YA can deal with important topics with sensitivity and nuance.

Catherine Butler: It is not just a matter of YA literature being central or having a new profile in the contemporary cultural landscape, but also young adults themselves. They've taken on

a degree of agency that we haven't really seen for certainly a generation, or two, or three with their role in, for example, the environmental movement and Black Lives Matter.

Kimberley Reynolds: Going back to the 1960s, which is probably when we were the last completely activist generation, there wasn't a lot of youth literature. What you had were young people reading out and beyond what was written specifically for them because they were ambitious to read what was being read at universities. They were interested in trying to understand the culture that they could see needed to be changed, and I think that is the point when youth writers decided that they needed to write. There were some ethically engaged writers, such as S. E. Hinton, who were trying to bring people who were considered outsiders into the picture and to look at how oppression was working. Then came some specialist YA writers who were trying to fire young people up to be politically engaged. I'm thinking of authors including Joan Lingard with the *Kevin and Sadie* series who were looking at a political moment and saying to their readers that they had reason to have an opinion, pushing them to be better informed beyond fiction and what was being provided for them. When we then got such a wealth of really fascinating reading for young people, in a way it became a place that was to stop in, rather than go out from. It strikes me that maybe having too much YA fiction was in a way not necessarily giving young people agency or empowering them; maybe they were dealing with everything in the text rather than in the world. It seems to me that there's some tension in there between action and reading. I do believe reading feeds your head, and I think it's important to be a reader and an activist. I'm just not sure that all the recent YA fiction has been feeding activism.

Rebekah Fitzsimmons: The year 2020 has been a culmination moment. It's not that all of a sudden all of these things happened in YA and young adults appeared on the scene. *Harry Potter* started in 1997 and it was in the early 2000s that we got other blockbuster texts such as *The Hunger Games* and John Green's novels that made publishers more aware of the marketability and profitability of books for teenage readers. Even in the 2008 global recession, YA was one of the very few areas of publishing that was still expanding. I went to grad school to study YA in 2010, on the tail end of that YA explosion. Now, there are teens who are on the tail end of the next explosion of YA and some of them are researching and/or writing YA. Young adults are a renewable resource because there will always be new young adults. The young adults at this moment have been responding to the Parkland shooting, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the Me Too movement; you see them engaging in activism on social media. That didn't come out of nowhere and we've been building towards this cultural moment. The conversation has been getting deeper, broader, more authentic, and more nuanced.

Kelly Gardiner: One of the things that makes YA so important is that so many people who are creators or scholars are also activists. They might 'just' be social media activists but that really has an impact. I don't think that it is necessarily different from other fields of literature, but I do think that it is much more obvious in YA (and children's literature as well). There is a willingness among YA scholars and creators to have our discussions in public, whether in journals, magazines, mainstream media, or social media. That willingness lends itself to things like the Voices from the Intersection initiative in Australia that I was part of, which is designed to support the creation of Own Voices stories.

Melanie Ramdarshan Bold: YA books that explore issues of racism, discrimination, prejudice, and inequality in a way that's accessible for young people are more vital in our cultural landscape. The protests and virtual activism by young people that we've seen across the globe is really part of creating long term change, and reading has always been a crucial part of the activism. I've seen it with the work that Leah Phillips and I have been doing for the Adolescent Identities project: young people sharing different ideas and different authors throughout history that not only shape movements such as Black Lives Matter, but that also allow young people to develop and continue that conversation when these initial actions end.

Patricia Kennon: I also want to add fandom and fan cultures into the conversation about activism because it's not just reading practices, it's the whole of literature by young people and literature with young people. I think this is intertwined with the Me Too movement, trans rights, the empowering and silencing aspects of cancel culture, and all of our personal and political identities, not just as readers, but as members of those creative and transformative industries as well.

Angel Daniel Matos: My professional approach to YA stems from my personal interest in the field. I grew up as a reader of YA literature, and I was fortunate enough to witness the increasing representation of queer characters in themes from the late 1990s onward. But my discovery of queer YA more specifically was a happy accident: my parents gifted me a copy of Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (1999) which, unbeknownst to them, had a central gay character. I had never encountered queer characters in a book before, and this book sparked a desire to find more texts with queer representation. This informal research began during my high school years, and throughout this research (which was incredibly difficult due to the lack of book stores in Puerto Rico and the overall access of book ordering technologies), I began to notice a major difference in how queerness was represented and depicted in 'classic' queer literature geared toward adult audiences and how it is portrayed in young adult texts. It was clear to me at this moment that YA literature was signalling, to some extent, new, perhaps more hopeful ways of thinking and feeling about queerness.

Karen Coats: I was raised on YA because I discovered the banned books in the library in sixth grade which would have been books like Nat Hentoff's *I'm Really Dragged But Nothing Gets Me Down* (1968), S.E. Hinton's books, books about drugs, and all of the protest books as well. I think that to understand why YA is important in our contemporary cultural landscape, we need to understand the history of YA. From its inception, YA has been about the cultural outsiders. You've got Walter Dean Myers and S.E. Hinton, but then you've also got Rosa Guy, John Neufeld, Frank Bonham, and Robert Lipsyte. These were not all Own Voices, but they are authors who were pulling from different traditions and creating the 'problem novel'. If we track YA's inception, its reason for being was to look at social problems. What I think is really interesting, and this is something that I have an essay about in the pipeline, is that the twentieth century was bookended by two different views of the Self. In the early-twentieth century and late-nineteenth century, everything was collective. The eponymous young women in Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), Eleanor H. Porter's *Pollyanna* (1913), and Kate Douglas Wiggin's *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1903) changed their communities. Through the course of the twentieth century, we started getting the rise of the individual, and our ideas of the Self became more individualised. Then, in the mid-1990s' era of conglomeration in publishing there was a flip whereby children's and YA fiction became a dominant marketing concern because it started to sell better than literary fiction. You've got Christopher Paul Curtis, Virginia Hamilton, Mildred D. Taylor bringing perspectives that are more collectivist in their schemas at the end of the twentieth century. I think that YA has refocussed on the social aspect of being a teenager and this will have an effect on the way we read the fiction. Harry Potter doesn't do it on his own. Buffy doesn't do it on her own. These characters are each part of a community that's interdependent. I think that that's another aspect that we need to consider: the movement away from centring an individual towards thinking about how collective, interdependent identities and intersubjectivity makes the changes that we want to see in the world.

Mike Cadden: Building on the community idea, I was thinking less about it as a YA phenomenon and more as a cultural phenomenon. For example, it's not just Black people protesting for Black people's rights; it's Black people and white people, old and young, everybody together which makes it a very different kind of movement. Culture as a whole has really started to think about YA. Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give* (2017) has been successful as a book and then as a film. Incidentally, it was successful as a film that wasn't marketed as a specifically YA film, and that has been of interest to people of all races and ethnicities. I think we've become better at thinking about community cross-sectionally. In some ways the challenge is, now more than ever, to think how YA Studies and YA literature are in fact separate entities from the culture as a whole.

Stephanie Toliver: Thinking about online activism and how the We Need Diverse Books and Own Voices campaigns have allowed some people to speak who have not been allowed to speak for a long time has reminded me of Rudine Sims Bishop's work on African American children's literature and how she was able to talk about children's literature, middle grade, and YA in one book because there weren't that many texts to talk about. Now, there is a larger push for marginalised voices to come into these spaces, but I'm struck by how many YA authors that are people of colour, or transgender people, or those with different sexual identities are debut authors because they are people who have historically been cast out of YA publishing, and particularly mainstream publishing with larger publishers. I keep a list of speculative fiction books featuring Black boys and Black girls and something I've noticed is that approximately 75% are from small or indie publishers or are self-published. If we're thinking about YA and whose voices are being heard (or why some aren't being heard), and thinking about community and who goes to see which movies or picks up which books about whom, then there are some important questions to consider: Why it is that some books are published as a 'Black book' or a 'trans book' or a 'this book'? Why is there the assumption that, if you're going to read those books, you're more than likely going to share that identity? There have been lots of conversations recently, including from author L.L. McKinney, about how books that include Black characters are books that feature pain – someone has to die, or someone's going to jail, or someone doesn't have a parent – and there are far fewer stories of joy. I think it's important that all of these new stories are getting published, but it's vital that we are asking whether the representations of different cultures and people that we have are showcasing all different facets of that identity, or whether they're always books like Thomas' *The Hate U Give*, Nic Stone's *Dear Martin* (2017), and Jewell Parker Rhodes' *Ghost Boys* (2018) that focus on pain, sadness, and death.

Melanie Ramdarshan Bold: Authors of colour being strongly encouraged to write about their cultural heritage and identity is a bit of a vicious cycle because it means that they have to perform their identity when they're marketing their books, or if they are invited into schools or festivals. Authors of colour and other marginalised authors are less likely to be included in mainstream literary spaces and festivals and this, in turn, has an effect on aspiring writers from marginalised groups because they're not seeing role models who are like them or look like them.

Stephanie Toliver: I am a former teacher of 9th and 10th grade, and one of the issues I faced, and others continue to face, is that I was not able to access the diverse books that I wanted to talk about in the classroom. My school didn't have them and couldn't afford them. So, places like the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) convention and book festivals that

give books away for free were spaces for us to go and find those books. Often young people rely on schools and libraries for books and, when it is hard for schools and libraries to afford diverse books, that is inevitably going to affect who's able to read them.

Corinna Norrick-Rühl: There's a lot of work being done on the vicious traditions, patterns, and structures that perpetuate the marginalisation of certain authors in adult trade publishing, and it decries the conglomerate publishing system whereby publishers fund the same types of stories again and again at the expense of more interesting, inclusive, or experimental literature. I also wanted to note that, while this is what happens in Anglophone publishing, it is only the top layer of frosting on that cake that is then purchased and translated into German. The books in that top layer have already been successful and so the YA editors here in Germany are spending large portions of their budgets on high-profile Anglophone titles. About 60% of all the books in translation in Germany are from English, and YA best sellers lists here are completely dominated by blockbuster Anglophone titles. German publishers then have less resources to put into YA literature that might be more representative of the actual experiences of German young adults. It's interesting to see that these patterns, and I'm sure it's similar in other language markets, have that kind of ripple effect.

Patricia Kennon: The same is true in Ireland's publishing market. There's almost no indigenous Irish-language publishing of YA books and very little translation of international YA literature into Gaeilge, apart from the usual blockbuster suspects.

Leah Phillips: I run a YA critical theory reading group through YASA, and, particularly since lockdown began, we've had several people join from places outside of the US-UK bubble, including Abu Dhabi, Algeria and other parts of North Africa, Columbia, and Argentina. In our conversations, it's become strikingly clear that the Anglophone dominates, at the expense of fiction by authors from those places. I suspect the solution to this problem is beyond the scope of this round table.

Karen Coats: One thing I would like to say, though, is that years ago I heard Arthur Levine give a talk and he said that one of the advantages he got from having a huge best seller like *Harry Potter* is that it enabled him to take a chance on Shaun Tan, even though he knew the books wouldn't sell in high volumes. If you've got good editors who have a commitment to quality literature and who care about the work they're doing then they're going to play the branding game but use that financial power to bring in some authors whose books aren't necessarily going to be as profitable.

Corinna Norrick-Rühl: Cross-subsidization is of course the idea in publishing, but then the question is: which books are considered worth subsidising and taking a risk on? We've seen over and over again that, even when publishers are taking a chance, they are (more often than not) refusing to take a chance on diverse books.

Emily Booth: I think there's something to be said for the effects of the internet and more social justice discourse on the popularity of YA. There has been a move to destigmatise things that have had certain ideas attached to them, and since YA fiction has so often been perceived as a 'girl thing', people are now feeling like they can enjoy YA, and admit to enjoying it in a way they've previously been uncomfortable with. YA doesn't have to be a guilty pleasure anymore: people can study these books in a university context. Having senior scholars who are willing to support students' studies of YA is allowing a much larger generation of scholars to emerge. It's not just an increase in interest in YA that has seen it become so important in our cultural landscape, but also a legitimisation and validation of people's interest in YA that has enabled it to do so.

Kelly Gardiner: As YA is largely written and consumed by women of all ages, it would not surprise me if the new kind of feminist scholarship that has emerged over the last few years, building on the previous generations of feminist scholarship, has also been part of what has enabled YA to become more significant in social and academic discourse. It has allowed people to recognise that, even if YA Studies is a 'girl's subject', it's still worth doing because I think a lot of scholarship about YA (and about kid lit) has actually been about gender and intersectionality. We no longer have to focus only on dead, white, male poets, for example. This move is part of the wider broadening out of literary studies. It's clear even to universities that YA and the communities around it are enormously influential in public discourse and the public consciousness. There are blockbuster titles, adaptations, and this enormous influence on social media and in the mainstream media about and by people who consume YA fiction. Part of that is the practical reality that there are now a couple of generations of people, and I think particularly young women which is really interesting, who have grown up with amazing generations of children's literature and then YA that they've continued to read and discuss in those public fora. These people write about it and review it no matter how old they are: they've never aged out. At a very pragmatic level, some of these people are now also producing YA themselves, and an increasing number of them are now doing PhDs. They come into university with an enormous knowledge as readers and they then want to study and expand that, bringing with them an incredible level of perceptiveness about the market, readers, and the many forms that make up YA.

Angel Daniel Matos: We are living during an exciting time in which YA literature and culture are no longer viewed as frivolous, simple, problematic, or lacking in ideological complexity. I think this is due not only to the boom in the field's popularity, but also to the fact that innovative and exciting scholarship is being generated by people who grew up, admire, and unironically love what the field has done for them. However, these people are also not afraid to channel this love into critique in order to determine how the field can improve, evolve, and continue disrupting the binaries and hierarchies that we take for granted.

Elizabeth Hale: YA literature is a place of really energetic debate and the generation of new ideas. There are clichés about young adults being in a process of identity formation, growing up, and preparing to be part of the world. I suppose most clichés are true in some ways. It seems to me that there's something about YA and the coming-of-age novel, for want of a better word, that enables people to really think about what kind of people they want to be and what kind of a world they want to live in. I also think there might be a sense that we're all always adolescents in a way. In the same way that we're all former children and carry that former child within us, I think that the period of adolescence really speaks to people. I also think that in a lot of cases YA fiction is focused strongly on story in a way that is not always the case in adult literature, and for many readers this is a good thing! It seems to me that's one of the reasons *Harry Potter* became so popular: adult literature was not telling enough stories.

Lucy Pearson: We all have a past adolescent in us in the same way as we all have a past child in us, but one of the things that interests me when I teach YA fiction to undergraduate students is the way that books written in the 1980s, for example, where most moments of transition occur at the age of sixteen when the protagonist leaves school, speak very much to the undergraduates who are in the final year of their degrees. I'm at the very end of the Generation X demographic and people just slightly younger have come of age into a really difficult global context where it's become more challenging to attain some of the markers of adulthood like a permanent job or a house or all of those other traditional things. So, I wonder whether the growth of YA as both the commercial and academic category is connected with the degree to which people who are adults are also experiencing a long transition into adulthood.

Karen Coats: YA literature strikes me as being about identity. That's its core focus and one of the reasons why YA has become so important is because the whole world has started to focus on identity: how it matters and how it is shifting. Anthony Elliot talks about how we live in a culture that consistently looks at makeovers. You're not rewarded for longevity; you're rewarded for your flexibility. YA has become such a dominant market force because it

corresponds to the way we live now, but that may not be the way we live three months from now, or next year. In a sense, we have to keep moving because identity is dialectical or dialogic and so it's always relational and in correspondence with the world around us.

Angel Daniel Matos: For me, queer YA literature and media are fascinating and noteworthy cultural productions to examine precisely because they encapsulate and represent major tensions present in contemporary literature and in queer culture more broadly. Scholars have argued that YA is a conservative field in that it often celebrates assimilation and integration into the status quo and, to some extent, they are right. These assimilative tendencies are in direct opposition to some of the more radical frameworks present in the field of queer theory and studies which reject normative values and ideologies and politically align themselves against the status quo. Rather than maintaining this split, I'm interested in determining not only the extent to which queer thought, experience, and activism have challenged foundational understandings of YA literature and culture, but also how YA literature can enhance and complicate our understanding of its contemporary culture and various theoretical fields, including queer studies, affect studies, temporalities, and aesthetics. I'm also interested to see other critics exploring the ways in which YA Studies can affect and transform ideas that we take for granted in other fields.

Alison Waller: I want to pick up on the idea of community and reflect on scholarship and the world of criticism because I think that definitely has a role in how we are where we are, sitting here together. There is a tendency for scholarship to build momentum in a certain direction for a long time before it can be challenged or skewed in a new direction. I think that sense of the identity of the adolescent was core to the origins of YA criticism and I take that on board for my own research as well. My first book asked what it meant to be a teenager and to become an adult, and I think that those areas of focus have really shaped a lot of critical approaches to YA. It takes a long time for people to branch out and start to look at alternative ways of thinking about literature, adolescence, and YA. Without wanting to use those horrible phrases like 'coming of age' or 'reaching a certain critical mass', YA Studies has followed the trajectory that children's literature studies has done before. It has reached the point where there are enough people thinking about YA to have debates, dialogues, and disagreements, and to come up with new ideas. I feel as though 2020 might be the point where we've reached that really critical mass. That is not to say that there hasn't been really excellent work in the past, or conversation and dialogues, but when I started my PhD in 1999, just to say that I was studying YA was original enough. Now, there is the onus to come up with a new angle or a new way to think about these texts, and that has helped YA Studies get to the point where there are all sorts of splinter groups and interesting combinations of

approaches. The field has become much richer and I think that is worth bearing in mind alongside the social, cultural, and political shifts that we've been talking about.

Lucy Pearson: Exactly. As YA and the field of YA Studies has grown in strength and popularity, both in the UK and around the world, it has become more important but also more possible to differentiate YA scholarship from children's literature scholarship because there is a critical mass of people now working on YA. With this expansion has come the need to assert YA as a distinctive area in a way that's perhaps not unconnected with the sense that doing so gives legitimacy to particular kinds of approaches and concerns.

QUESTION TWO

> There are numerous approaches to the study of YA, many of which are represented by the scholars participating in this conversation. How do you think we might better use YA as a platform for interdisciplinary work?

Jennifer Gouck: YA Studies is inherently interdisciplinary because YA extends across a variety of forms including literature, adaptations, and culture. It's easier to stumble upon interdisciplinary avenues.

Leah Phillips: YA has a sort of stickiness: it captures a lot of topic areas and disciplines. For example, the way it's stuck to children's literature, youth studies, media studies, education, and library sciences. YA has the potential to serve as a platform for really fruitful interdisciplinary work. I love YA's stickiness, for want of a better word, but at the same time I worry that YA Studies is becoming so porous and so multifarious that we lose sense of what it is.

Corinna Norrick-Rühl: Melanie and I can relate to this because, everywhere except Germany, book studies is 'stuck to' book history, publishing studies, literary studies, history, political science, or sociology. Germany is the only place, as far as I'm aware, where book studies is just book studies, or Buchwissenschaft as it's known in German. What we need is a 'YA Wissenschaft' that understands itself as a discipline because that's the moment where I think you can change the narrative: you're not always explaining where you're coming from.

Stephanie Toliver: I wish YA Studies weren't so sticky in a way because I think its stickiness possibly limits the depth of conversation we're having about YA books. For example, scholars who focus on YA from a pedagogical perspective don't often have in-depth conversations

about the intricacies of the books themselves, they only focus on how they can be used in the classroom. It's all about 'we use this book, here's how we used it, the end.' There's never any real in depth conversation about what's in these books: what we can do with texts, and what these texts can inspire in us. I think that if YA weren't so sticky maybe we could have more nuanced conversations. At the same time, and maybe because of the stickiness, we so often only focus on the part of YA studies that is our part. Pedagogy stays within pedagogy, literary studies within literary studies.

Karen Coats: I'll do a little storytelling. I was at a Modern Languages Association (MLA) conference and I went to a panel on YA literature. There were maybe eight people on that panel and none of them were YA literature scholars; there were authors, teachers, an editor, and a reviewer. It was a huge table of people and they were asking questions that we've been talking about amongst ourselves for 20 years. When I very politely asked why there were no YA literature scholars on the panel, the organiser paled: they didn't know we existed. Another time, I was at an NCTE conference and I recommended someone come to the Children's Literature Association (ChLA) conference and they responded that they only study YA, not children's literature. They weren't aware that ChLA covers YA too. I think a lot of it has to do with the name. We're not the 'Children's and YA Literature Association' or the 'Research Society for Children's and YA Literature', and so it's definitional. It's almost the opposite of the stickiness Leah was talking about. We stick together rather than getting our scholarship out into other places. I learned a lot from working with Shelby Wolf, Christine Jenkins, and Patricia Enciso on the *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*. One of the things we talked about was that literature is the core of each of our focusses, but we approach it differently and with different emphases. In library sciences, it's all about asking how the book fits into the larger world; in education, it's about how readers work with the book and what they might take from it. In literary studies, we tend to focus more on the book's textuality, history, and subjectivity. We need to stay nimble and that's part of why we study children's and YA literature. Children's and YA literature is nimble, and it's moving and responding to culture; it has to or it's not going to be saleable.

Lucy Pearson: This conversation has made me think about my own approach to YA. It seems to me that an interdisciplinary approach is much more common across English studies than it used to be and that has given scholars slightly more flexibility. I was given my direction insofar as I did my PhD as part a funded project that was specifically based in the Seven Stories archives here in Newcastle, England. I was set off on an archival path and that naturally led me towards a book history approach because of the type of research that archival work enables and because of the collections that were available in Seven Stories at the time. I do sometimes feel a little bit like a lone voice in the wilderness within my area of

research because there are quite a lot of people who are interested in the contemporary publishing scene, and there are quite a lot of people who are interested in pre-twentieth-century book histories, but there are not that many of us who are interested in twentieth-century book histories.

Melanie Ramdarshan Bold: It took me a long time to feel comfortable enough to research YA reading and authorship. In my early days at the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing (SHARP) conferences, I didn't see anyone working in YA Studies within a book history context. I began to sneakily add YA into my research through new approaches to authorship, and to reading and writing, digital platforms and digital context. It wasn't until the 2015 SHARP conference in Montreal that I saw Marianne Martens, someone whom I like and admire as a person and a scholar, give a paper on *Pretty Little Liars*, and it changed the course of my research. It gave me permission to research what I actually wanted to when I didn't feel comfortable making the shift to YA as an early career researcher.

Elizabeth Hale: My approach is a combination of narratology, gender studies, historicism, and close reading. The approach I take is tailored to the needs of the novel (or other form). I wouldn't consider myself particularly driven by any camp. I tend to shy away from buzzwords. I endeavour to write in plain English, and as closely connected to the text as possible. I try to get inside of the text and think about what story it is I'm telling about that text. I am also very interested in intertextuality, especially because of my work in classical reception in children's and young adult literature. In discussions of intertextuality, people often get into a spiral whereby the intertextuality is more important than the reason it's there. I'm more concerned with what that use of intertextuality means for the particular novel or character I'm looking at. I'm also trying to expand my own understanding of different forms of literature as well. For example, there's huge amounts of wonderful poetry scholarship in the field of children's literature coming out of the UK and it seems to me like there might be interesting things going on in YA poetry as well.

Kelly Gardiner: One of the interesting things I've noticed in terms of forms is that there are a lot more non-fiction works and anthologies. I don't know whether that's true everywhere, but it's certainly true here in Australia. I think anthologies are one of the things that often happens when you see a community given a voice for the first time because there are a lot of authors who don't have a whole book yet or maybe the book is in the drawer because they can't find a publisher. In my own research, I tend to work on things about young women or gender more broadly. I'm also a writer so I'm also often also looking at whether things are working, what's working, what's not working, and what used to work that doesn't work

anymore. That's one of the most interesting things to me: generational changes. Those changes can be in theme, but also in text, voice, character, and form.

Emily Booth: I think positive change is so important. We Need Diverse Books came to fruition while I was finishing my undergraduate degree, and I thought 'I need to do this for Australia, somehow.' My day job is as a specialist children's and YA book seller and I wanted to bring that knowledge into my studies. That's how I ended up becoming a 'diversity pest'. I see my role as pulling from youth studies, publishing studies, diversity studies, and making everyone at English Literature conferences uncomfortable because, in Australia, we don't have anywhere near as much scholarship on diversity in children's and YA literature as there is in the broader, international field. I want my research to be me walking into a crowded room, swinging my arms around, and bringing more diversity studies or youth literature in to fill that space with me.

Emily Corbett: I think that is a brilliant way of thinking about your scholarship, Emily. It seems to me that in YA Studies, but also in children's literature and literature scholarship more generally, there has been (and still is) a tendency to overlook the ways that different elements of the human experience intersect. For example, you might have research that looks at gender or sexuality in YA but that overlooks the fact that different racial or cultural privileges are also embedded within those texts.

Lucy Pearson: One of my frustrations with YA Studies, and perhaps particularly with the more theoretical branch of work on YA, is that is often obscures the degree to which YA and its scholarship is culturally produced; that is to say, the extent to which it is looking at a particular corpus and making judgements about YA that are actually emerging from that particular culture. We're in a moment where people are becoming much more aware of that as an issue within academic discourse more broadly. People are critically engaging with scholarship by asking: what is the culture from which you are speaking, and how does that impact how you see different issues? I'd like the opportunities of a more global network to encourage us to recognise the cultural production of YA but also the cultural production of our own academic approaches to interpreting that YA.

Elizabeth Hale: It seems to me that a lot of YA scholarship is one-book-at-a-time or perhaps one-culture-at-a-time. I'm involved in an enormous project where we have one-thousand books in our database now, each one analysed individually. Owing to my engagement with this project, I've really started to want to know more about the global, multicultural landscape of YA Studies, and particularly to understand more about literature written from non-white perspectives. There's something in the comparative overlap between cultures

that's a bit nebulous, but I think that it will always be nebulous. It's about embracing that nebulosity and using it to expand our knowledge of global YA Studies. It might also be worth thinking about multilingual approaches because there's a lot of good work being done in many languages. I know that some of my European colleagues find it very frustrating because they can feel as if nobody reads their work because it's limited by the scope of the language. I remember a colleague saying: "I think the mice in my library will enjoy this article." There must be a way for us to listen to those voices more effectively than we are now.

Emily Corbett: I agree. I host *IJYAL*'s Twitter account and a lot of my time, particularly when it first launched, has been spent translating tweets from scholars all around the world who were saying how excited they were about having a YA journal. Even that small insight on Twitter shows that YA scholarship needs to be a much more global conversation than it is at the moment.

Lucy Pearson: I think that the pandemic has highlighted the opportunities for collaboration and dialogue that already existed. This discussion is a good case in point. We're spread across different continents, having a really interesting conversation about YA and YA Studies. Going back to that feeling of isolation that I talked about earlier, there are actually people across the globe working on similar things, but it can feel really hard to connect. Also, the in-person conferencing mode of connecting poses some huge barriers for lots of people for all kinds of reasons. I would really like to see the shift online as a mode of networking remain because I think that, while there are serendipitous encounters at an in-person conference that can't be fully recreated online, it makes no sense that we're flying all over the globe at huge personal and environmental cost to do things that can be supported by the technology that we have now.

QUESTION THREE

What can *IJYAL*, YASA, and we as members do to shape the field of YA Studies?

Catherine Butler: *IJYAL* and YASA are presumably there to give not just visibility, but a kind of institutional solidarity to something that might otherwise be defined by its liminality, sitting between children's and adult literature, and between many different disciplines. Do *IJYAL* and YASA have manifestos?

Leah Phillips: YASA certainly does have a statement of purpose. We had to codify one in our constitution to become recognised as an association. One of the things we'll be working on

over the next couple of years is revising that document to make sure it's as inclusive and responsive as possible. While I can't speak for the Board or members, I get the sense, and it is behind why I created the group, that we feel like there is both a need and space to do things differently. YASA has the capacity, from a foundational level, to ensure a variety of perspectives and voices across career stages and disciplines as well as from different races, ethnicities, and abilities are being included within the conversation. To paraphrase the constitution, the Association exists to increase engagement with YA studies by fostering an international community of scholars and practitioners and encouraging cross-disciplinary cooperation. We're especially keen to recognise the complexity, diversity, and expansiveness of the field. For me, this project, this article, speaks to that more clearly than anything else I could be doing.

Melanie Ramdarshan Bold: I think that bringing us all together as a collective, as this article has done, is a really great start. It's important to draw scholars from different disciplines into conversation because we all have on our own lenses, with our own models and frameworks for interpreting questions and observations, but none of these disciplines have the monopoly on which questions are important. I think a discipline, whether it's book studies or literary studies or library science, is generally characterised by the kind of questions that it seeks to answer and the types of methods that are used to get those answers. That leads to a real narrowing of focus that can be a good thing, of course, but it can also make us quite limited in the scope of our outlook and cross-discipline communication can help us find new lines of enquiry.

Alison Waller: I want to build on what you've said, Leah, and in some respects on Catherine's point, because the institutional ballast that an organisation or journal can give is something that I've thought incredibly hard about. I think that *IJYAL* is the more traditional, older sister to YASA, the more innovative, forward looking younger sibling. I don't mean that in a value laden way at all because I'm pleased that YASA is doing something slightly different and that *IJYAL* and YASA can be really complimentary. I feel like there's room for YASA and for something quite traditional like a journal; a journal that embraces lots of different voices and approaches but is still working within the conventions of academia in quite a traditional way. *IJYAL*'s Associate Editors and I thought long and hard about the title including 'YA Literature', not just of 'YA' or 'YA Studies', and we decided on that for a number of reasons. In part, we felt the title was a way of gaining a modicum of respectability in the traditional and institutional academic context. More importantly, we wanted to prioritise literature as a discipline with a history that needs to be considered as much as the innovative contemporary moment when we're thinking about YA. The history of literature and of YA literature is still something I think needs much more work, particularly in a global context.

International histories of YA are something that I feel strongly about, and I'm hopeful that that work will be submitted for publication in the journal.

Patricia Kennon: There is definitely power (and consequences) in the act of naming. It's very interesting, strategic, and full of dilemmas to decide where to submit YA scholarship. I'm excited that we have *IJYAL* as a dedicated YA journal, but there are also affordances and problems of publishing our research in journals within the more 'established' discipline of children's literature that are worth bearing in mind when we think about how to grow the journal.

Mike Cadden: YA Studies struggles with the same conundrum as children's literature studies: how do we define ourselves and the audience? When you have bodies of literature named for readers, it changes how people talk about it. If you have a journal that's about books that are for particular people, and the journal is for particular people, the question becomes: what group of people? How will the journal define itself? Instead of asking whether we have a manifesto, I want to push it in a different direction with an analogy: We're opening a bar here. We can put whatever we want on the wall and we can serve whatever drinks we want, but who is going to come and hang around the bar?

Rebekah Fitzsimmons: There are the teachers who are in the classrooms with the people who are of the age that, in theory, we are writing about; the librarians; the publishers; the authors; the academics; and then you have the people who aren't experts like the aunt who's trying to find a good book for their teenage niece. I'm particularly interested how the things that all of us do filter down to that person, the person who has no investment in this discourse but wants to know what book to give to a teenager. How do we take all of the information and knowledge that we have and give that person the quick answer they're looking for?

Kelly Gardiner: In 2018, my university held its first YA literature studies symposium, and it was about gender and identities. We anticipated a small attendance but were surprised by a much larger number of people wanting to participate and attend. One of the things that we consciously did was we opened the symposium up to anybody from the broader YA community who wanted to come and listen and so authors, people from publishing houses, editors, school librarians, public librarians, and teachers all came and that felt really quite exciting. All of these people are of course incredibly well-educated and thoughtful, and it was exciting to foster a broader conversation in that symposium. I'd like to see *IJYAL* and YASA try to breakdown the segmentation in the sector; to acknowledge everyone's contribution to the cultural production of YA and everything that goes around it.

Emily Booth: The conference Kelly is referring to is the best conference I have been to in my entire candidature because it was the only conference where I could bring to the table not only my scholarship, but also my ten years of industry experience. I was able to draw on the knowledge and experience I have from my many everyday interactions with people including teenagers, their parents, and school librarians who have bought books from me. I usually feel as if I have to choose which hat to wear for the day – my scholar's hat or my book seller's hat – because academia will often only recognise a journal article or some other form of institutional knowledge. And yet, I consider my scholarship and my profession to be equally valuable sources of knowledge that inform each other. Even if I can't cite my everyday interactions, those experiences impact how I interpret my research. That's why I was excited to see "practitioners" included on YASA's website: if we can branch out the conversations beyond our academic institutions then YA Studies could develop an even broader and richer knowledge of YA.

Rebekah Fitzsimmons: I'd also like to see us find a way to be more visible in the results of a search engine. I'm tired of reading articles in the public media about YA that cite someone who's never studied YA in their life. It would be really wonderful to use YASA as a place that links people's expertise and offers a list of appropriate people to call on as experts.

Karen Coats: As well as promoting scholars, we need to really encourage and help our students to understand the different between the type of scholarship we do, and the clickbait articles. I recently sat down to watch a webinar on picturebook studies and very quickly found out the person leading the session was doing exceptionally poor scholarship: he made the case that the William Moebius who wrote "Introduction to Picturebook Codes" was the same person as Jean Giraud, the French artist who worked under the pseudonym Moebius. I was shouting at my computer that the two were not, in fact, the same Moebius but, of course, there's no way to correct that. Therefore, I think it's important that we help our students to identify the 'fake scholarship'. I don't want to use the word gatekeeper, but I think that to an extent that's what we need to be: we need to vet each other in order to keep YA Studies sharp, focussed, and honest. We need to help our students understand that there are good reasons why someone might publish outside of traditional channels because there are barriers that impact some voices more than others and that needs to be acknowledged but we still have to be careful. Just because something is out there doesn't mean it's authoritative, well-researched, or vetted by a community of informed people. Moebius is not the same person as William Moebius, sorry.

Melanie Ramdarshan Bold: I think that the sort of resource that Rebekah is talking about is a great idea, but when we're thinking about that resource it's important to remember that not everyone always wants to be that visible. I get asked to talk on the radio or in the media about inclusive youth literature and, as a woman of colour, I don't often want to talk about issues of race and racism because it's contentious, especially at the moment.

Stephanie Toliver: A resource that enabled experts to be more visible would be nice, but I think there's training that needs to go alongside helping people get their voices into the media. When I wrote "Black Girl Magic Is Written In The Pages Of A Wrinkle In Time", I got called every 'N word' and 'monkey' there was across lots of different comment sections because of that media article, and so I think we need to talk about how our identities intersect with the work we're doing and the potential consequences for marginalised scholars. I've also written a couple of other pieces for places like Lit Hub and Huffpost, and it's worth noting that the pitching style was very different. You have to learn how to pitch because we're a lot wordier than they want sometimes, and you have to learn who to send your pitch to, and when, so that you can get your voice out there. I'd like for us to have resources to teach people how to pitch if that's something they want to do.

Lucy Pearson: Another thing that I think could be fostered by these organisations responds to something I find unsatisfying in children's literature spaces: ideas are not always tested and challenged. There's a huge emphasis on kindness and support that I think grows out of the sense of being an embattled field that can stifle critical discussion. I've given a paper with a huge hole in my thinking, and I've wanted someone to pick me up on it because it's a problem I'm trying to work through, but no one has. I think that sometimes people are reluctant to challenge others in these settings because of that culture of kindness, so I'd really like for the field to develop the structures of testing through experimentation with different types of research sharing. For example, we might present panels as more discursive places by pre-circulating papers and inviting people to be respondents. It's vital that I acknowledge that, while I'm saying the fields of children's and YA literature are supportive, that's certainly not the case for everyone as scholars of colour have recently spoken out about how these fields have not been supportive places for them at all.

Emily Booth: I agree with what Lucy has said, but it's important to make sure that that challenge of ideas is not a disguise for hostility. I have received a lot of hostility in engagement with my scholarship at conferences or in written exchanges because what I have to say about diversity and inclusivity makes people feel uncomfortable. That sort of hostility is inevitably going to force more vulnerable voices from academic spaces. While it's important to have critical engagement, part of our responsibility as members of these

organisations, but also as members of the field more generally, is to provide support for junior and/or marginalised scholars. If I'm experiencing hostility, there's a person of colour who's going to experience it ten times worse.

Jennifer Gouck: We have to acknowledge that there's a lot of work that still needs to be done that's bigger than *IJYAL* of YASA: the institutions need to change. People with positions of authority need to address the discrimination that happens at an institutional level. They also need to acknowledge that precarity is a huge problem. There are excellent early career researchers trying to build an academic career in YA Studies and institutions need to open up positions for us in order to make substantial improvements in the field.

Corinna Norrick-Rühl: Employability is a key issue in the field. How can you do the research that you want to do and still make sure you get the job you want to get? There need to be positions and structures that facilitate YA research within the academic sector to make it viable and attractive for people to focus their energies on YA, rather than them having to focus on research that might allow them to get a job whilst tacking a little YA Studies on the side. The lack of employability is always floating in the room, and I think it is something that really needs to be addressed.

Elizabeth Hale: Yes, the job market is brutal, isn't it? Also, for those of us who are in academic posts, there is a constant pressure to publish in A* journals (or the international equivalent). I think it would be useful for these organisations to have a role in assessing quality scholarship and to be a benchmark. So, it is important to have an awareness of the different academic publishing requirements across different countries. I know that there is the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in Britain, and we have Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA). I think we need to maintain standards, figure out what we mean by standards, and I think we should value many approaches, many styles, and many backgrounds and nurture the inclusivity of YA.

Kelly Gardiner: Owing to the widespread budget cuts and precarity following the pandemic, unfortunately it may be that one of the short-term things that these organisations need to do is be ready to act in defence of the field. We may be called upon to stick up for faculty, for scholarships, or for the importance of YA Studies.

Alison Waller: This conversation has really made me think about the responsibilities our organisations have to the field of YA Studies, as well as who we want to hang out round the bar, as Mike put it. I perhaps started off with the assumption that *IJYAL* would find ways of infiltrating more of the traditional academic world, but do we want to be a small voice in a

big organisation, or do we want to try to do some of the important work outside of the institution? I don't really have the answers anymore, but I think a combination of these things could work well. We want to have a voice in our institutions and our adjacent scholarship, as well as outside in the real world.

Leah Phillips: I think this is precisely why we need *IJYAL* and YASA (and probably many more YA focused organisations). No one group can do it all, but as Alison rightly points out, those of us in the room (or around that bar) do have a responsibility to the field and to the individuals working, in whichever form, within it. This conversation has clearly demonstrated, to me at least, that there's plenty of great work that's both happened and is happening but also that there's still much more to be done.

REFERENCES

Hunt, Caroline. "Young Adult Literature Evades the Theorists." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1996, pp. 4-11.

TABLE 1

Name	Affiliation	Role, University	Country
Booth, Emily	YASA	PhD Candidate, University of Technology Sydney	Australia
Butler, Catherine	*IJYAL*	Reader, Cardiff University	Wales
Cadden, Mike	*IJYAL*	Professor, Missouri Western State University	US
Coats, Karen	*IJYAL*	Professor, University of Cambridge	England
Corbett, Emily	*IJYAL* & YASA	PhD Candidate, University of Roehampton	England
Fitzsimmons, Rebekah	YASA	Assistant Teaching Professor, Carnegie Mellon University	US
Gardiner, Kelly	YASA	Lecturer, La Trobe University	Australia
Gouck, Jennifer	YASA	PhD Candidate, University College Dublin	Ireland
Hale, Elizabeth	*IJYAL*	Associate Professor, University of New England	Australia
Kennon, Patricia	*IJYAL*	Associate Professor, Maynooth University	Ireland
Matos, Angel Daniel	*IJYAL*	Assistant Professor, Bowdoin College	US
Norrick-Rühl, Corinna	*IJYAL*	Professor, University of Münster	Germany
Pearson, Lucy	YASA	Senior Lecturer, Newcastle University	England
Phillips, Leah	*IJYAL* & YASA	President, YA Studies Association	England
Ramdarshan Bold, Melanie	YASA	Senior Lecturer, University College London	England
Reynolds, Kimberley	*IJYAL*	Professor, Newcastle University	England
Toliver, Stephanie	YASA	Assistant Professor, University of Colorado Boulder	US
Waller, Alison	*IJYAL* & YASA	Reader, University of Roehampton	England