

# Young Adult Literature

From Romance  
to Realism

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FOURTH EDITION

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MICHAEL CART

ALA  
Neal-Schuman

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# INTRODUCTION

**"N**o book without an introduction; no introduction without a book," the German humorist Erich Kaestner once declared. So, to prove him right, here are both an introduction and a book. Let's begin with the introduction.

Welcome to the fourth edition of *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism*. When the first edition of this book was published in 1996, I had no idea that twenty-six years later there would be a fourth edition. That there is, evidences the dynamic, ever-changing nature of young adult literature, still one of the most exciting areas of American publishing.

As always, the field is replete with trends. The most important of these is the dramatic growth in the field's diversity, driven, in part, by the indispensable organization We Need Diverse Books (WNDB), to which I give considerable attention along with other aspects of diversity in this fourth edition. Speaking of which, another important aspect of diversity is the rise of LGBTQIAA+ literature, a genre that is now in a golden age. Graphic novels and comics are also now in a golden—some would say platinum—age. Nonfiction, too, is currently bright and shiny, with a fineness of at least 14 carats. There is currently a great deal of activity in the area of middle school literature at the arguable expense of young adult literature, which is in the midst of a slight decline. What can I say but *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*—the more things change, the more they stay the same, for this trend echoes the late 1980s and early 1990s when the emergence of the middle school movement spawned the first middle school literature at the same time that young adult literature was in a precipitous decline. Literary fiction continues to flourish, thanks, in large part, to the Michael L. Printz Award, presented annually to the author of the best young adult book of the year, "best" being defined solely in terms of literary merit. Audio-books are presently scorching hot—more than half of Americans having now listened to an audiobook. Lesser trends in publishing include a rise in the popularity of fantasy and mystery/thrillers, the presence of older protagonists, the continuing runaway market for young adult literature among adults, exceptionally strong and exciting new contemporary voices, and the rise of the rom-com in the wake of the film trilogy based on Jenny Han's *To All the Boys I've Loved Before*.

All of these trends are expansively addressed in this edition, which contains some 35 percent more material than the third edition.

So what's new in addition to the more expansive treatment of what was previously covered? Well, for one, there is a new chapter, which I'm calling "A Critical Apparatus." In the first three editions of this book, I lamented the fact that no such apparatus for the serious evaluation of young adult literature existed. In the wake of the twenty-two years of the existence of the Printz Award, that has changed, and there are now critical tools for the serious explication of the literature, which is worthy of the same serious examination as adult literature. I discuss those and demonstrate their viability with a close reading of M. T. Anderson's monumental, two-volume novel *The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing*,

*Traitor to the Nation: Taken by Accounts from His Own Hand and Other Sundry Sources* (volume I, *The Pox Party* [2006]; volume II, *The Kingdom on the Waves* [2008]) that you will find in the appendix. This is serious stuff; to counterbalance it, I've included a new section on humor in young adult literature and greatly expanded my coverage of the short story as a genre.

You will find that I have enhanced the fourth edition with a number of interviews with industry leaders. Among the interviews are those with David Levithan, vice president/publisher and editorial director, Scholastic; Justin Chanda, senior vice president and publisher, Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers; Mark Siegel, creative and editorial director, First Second Books; Nicole Johnson, executive director, We Need Diverse Books; Sarah Hunter, books for youth editor, *Booklist* magazine; Heather Booth, audiobooks editor for *Booklist*; and Pam Spencer Holley, former YALSA president. I've also interviewed a number of authors, including novelist Jacqueline Woodson; nonfiction author, editor, and professor; Marc Aronson; multiple Eisner Award-winning graphic novelist Eric Shanower; and novelist Bill Konigsberg.

So much for the present. What of the future of young adult literature? I can think of no better answer than to quote a forecast given to me by publisher Justin Chanda: "When we're in it, we'll know."

In the meantime, I hope you'll enjoy this new edition.

# PART I

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## That Was Then

# From Sue Barton to the Sixties

## What's in a Name? And Other Uncertainties

There is ready and well-nigh universal agreement among experts that something called “young adult literature” is—like the Broadway musical, jazz, and the foot-long hot dog—an American gift to the world. But the happy concurrence ends when you then ask these experts to explain precisely what this *thing* called young adult literature is, because that act is about as easy as nailing Jell-O to a wall. Why? Because the term, like the gelatin, is inherently slippery and amorphous. Oh, the *literature* part is straightforward enough. Who can argue with the British literary critic John Rowe Townsend (1980, 26) who defines it as “all works of imagination which are transmitted primarily by means of the written word or spoken narrative—that is, in the main, novels, stories, and poetry?” No, the amorphous part is the target audience for the literature: the young adults themselves. For it’s anybody’s guess who—or what—they are! Indeed, until World War II, the term “young adult”—like its ostensible synonym *teenager*—was scarcely used at all. For while it was acknowledged that there were human beings who occupied an ill-defined developmental space somewhere between childhood and adulthood, the *idea*, the *concept*, the *notion* that this space comprised a separate and distinct part of the evolution from childhood to adulthood was still foreign in a society accustomed to seeing children become adults virtually overnight as a result of entering the full-time workforce, often as early as age ten. Who, then, had the discursive leisure to grow up, to establish a culture of youth, to experience a *young adulthood* when there was so much adult work to be done? Indeed, as late as 1900 only 6.4 percent of American seventeen-year-olds postponed adult responsibilities long enough to earn high school diplomas (Kett 1977); in fact, no more than 11.4 percent of the entire fourteen- to seventeen-year-old population was even enrolled in school, and those who attended received—on average—only five years of education (Mondale and Patton 2001). Simply put, until 1900 we were a society with only two categories of citizens: children and adults.

This situation was about to change, however—and in only four years, at that. The agent of impending change was G. Stanley Hall, the first American to hold a doctorate in psychology and the first president of the American Psychological Association. It was in 1904 that he “invented” a whole new category of human being with the publication of his seminal work *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education*. As the length of its title suggests, this was a massive, multidisciplinary, two-volume tome that Joseph F. Kett (1977, 26) has described as “a feverish, recondite, and at times incomprehensible book, the flawed achievement of eccentric genius.”



It was flawed because much of what Hall posited about this new stage of life that he called “adolescence” has been discredited, especially his notion of recapitulation (i.e., child development mirrors that of the human “race.” In other words such development recapitulates humanity’s evolution from “savagery” to “civilization”; that is, little children are “savages” but as they grow, they become more and more “civilized”). Nevertheless, his theories were enormously influential in their time, particularly among educators and a growing population of youth workers. The latter embraced Hall’s view of adolescence as a time of storm and stress (a phrase that invoked the German Sturm und Drang movement and visions of Goethe’s sorrowful young Werther), along with inner turmoil, awkwardness, and vulnerability, all phenomena that invited—even required—adult intervention and supervision in such controlled environments as schools and a growing number of youth organizations like the Boy Scouts and the YMCA. Neither Hall nor his disciples used the term young adult, of course, but their definitions of adolescence generally embraced our modern sense of young adults as being somewhere between twelve and nineteen years of age. Indeed, Hall was prepared to extend his definition’s reach as far as the early twenties, but educators generally stopped at nineteen and youth workers at sixteen. In addition to these two groups, Hall inspired two other sets of influential devotees: members of the vocational guidance movement (Hall believed in teaching adolescents practical life and job skills) and the authors of “parents’ manuals,” which sought to guide the management of teenagers in middle-class and upper-middle-class homes (Kett 1977, 221). Michael V. O’Shea, one of the most prolific writers of these manuals, was also among the first to capitalize on the potential economic importance of adolescents, so much so that Kett (1977, 224) has dubbed him “the first entrepreneur of adolescence.” As we will see, there have been many others.

As a result of this new focus on the perceived needs of adolescents, the percentage of young people in school gradually began to grow; by 1910, 15.4 percent were enrolled (Rollin 1999) and the old model of the six-year high school was beginning to change, too, as over the next decade, more and more junior high schools were created. “By 1920,” Lucy Rollin (1999, 8) noted, “the pattern of the four-year high school was well established,” and by 1930 almost half the adolescent population was enrolled there. This was the good news for advocates of education, but the bad news was that slightly more than half of America’s adolescents were still not in school but in the workforce, where they continued to be regarded as adults. But this, too, was about to change. Indeed, it had already begun as the workplace was employing increasingly sophisticated technology that required additional education, as—more forcefully—had a spate of compulsory education laws.

It took the economic devastation of the 1930s, however, to effect truly seismic change. As Grace Palladino (1996, 5) has written, “The Great Depression finally pushed teenage youth out of the workplace and into the classroom.” Rollin (1999, 85) concurred: “The Thirties were a fulcrum for this shift.” The numbers alone are telling: by 1939, 75 percent of fourteen- to seventeen-year-olds were high school students, and by 1940 nearly 51 percent of seventeen-year-olds were earning diplomas (50.8 percent according to Kett [1977]).

## THE EMERGENCE OF YOUTH CULTURE

This influx of students into high school was an important step in advancing universal education, but what was even more important in terms of the later emergence of young adult literature is that putting young people into each other’s company every day led to the emergence of a youth culture centered on high school social life, especially in the newly

popular sororities and fraternities, which provided the context for a newish wrinkle in courtship rituals: dances and dating. Quick to recognize this was the already entrenched, *Scholastic* magazine, which had been founded in 1922 by M. R. “Robbie” Robinson, another of the early entrepreneurs of adolescence. In 1936, *Scholastic* introduced a new column to its pages. Titled “Boy Dates Girl,” it was written by Gay Head (the pseudonym for Margaret L. Hauser), whose columns would provide the fodder for a number of later books, including *First Love*, *Hi There*, *High School!*, and *Etiquette for Young Moderns*. As the last title suggests, the column focused more on manners than on advice to the lovelorn. Among the topics Hauser addressed, according to Grace Palladino (1996), were how to make proper introductions, which fork to use at a dinner party, and whether or not to wait for a boy to open a car door. Although boys took pride of place in the column’s title, its intended readers were clearly girls, who were admonished not to correct their dates, because boys did not appreciate “brainy” girls. In the early days of youth culture, it was obvious that it was already male-centered. This was a reflection of the then-prevailing cultural attitudes, of course, as was Hall’s almost single-minded focus on male adolescents in his own work. He had written so little about girls, in fact, that H. W. Gibson, an early disciple and social worker with the YMCA, dubbed adolescent psychology of the time “boyology” (Kett 1977, 224).

Although boys may have been the objects of lavish attention, the stereotypical image of the male adolescent that emerged in popular culture was an unflattering one: the socially awkward, blushing, stammering, accident-prone figure of fun typified by William Sylvanus Thaxter, the protagonist of Booth Tarkington’s best-selling 1916 novel *Seventeen*, (the inspiration for Carl Ed’s long-running comic strip *Harold Teen*, which first appeared in 1919). Twenty years later, this image was still the rage, this time informing the spirit of radio’s Henry Aldrich and the movies’ Andy Hardy. (*The Aldrich Family* debuted on NBC in July 1939, while the first Andy Hardy movie, *A Family Affair*—starring Mickey Rooney—was released in 1937.) With the first appearance in 1941 of another soon-to-be youth icon, the comics’ Archie Andrews (in *Pep Comics No. 22*, on December 22, 1941), it became clear that Hall’s “adolescent” was fast morphing into a new kind of youth: the teenager. In fact, the first use in print of the term “teenager” occurred in the September 1941 issue of *Popular Science Monthly* (Hine 1999; see also Palladino 1996), and the term became commonplace in the decade that followed, though it wasn’t until 1956 and Gale Storm’s hit record *Teenage Prayer* that the term passed into currency in the world of popular music (the same year saw the debut of the singing group Frankie Lyman and the Teenagers).

The co-opting of the adolescent—now teenager—by popular culture did not mean that psychologists and other serious thinkers had abandoned the subject. Far from it. Two of the most significant works in the academic literature would appear less than a decade later: Robert James Havighurst’s *Developmental Tasks and Education* and Erik Erikson’s *Childhood and Society* both appeared in 1950, and both broke new ground in the field of psychology, especially as it pertains to stages of human development. Each writer defined specific stages of this development; Havighurst identified six stages and Erikson, eight. For both, two of these stages were “adolescence” and “young adulthood,” which they identified—respectively—as thirteen through eighteen and nineteen through thirty (Havighurst), and twelve through eighteen and nineteen through forty (Erikson). In short order other significant work followed, most notably Jean Piaget’s *The Growth of Logical Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence* (1958) on cognitive development, and Lawrence Kohlberg’s on moral development (published intermittently throughout the 1970s).

All of this work, like that of Hall’s, would have significant influence on therapists, youth workers, and especially educators, who found an equivalence between the tasks that

Havighurst associated with each developmental stage and books for teens that dramatized the undertaking and accomplishing of these tasks. It's worth noting that the introduction of the term "young adulthood" into these various professional vocabularies may have been instrumental in the American Library Association's decision to form, in 1957, the Young Adult Services Division (YASD). This was a long overdue professional acknowledgment not only of a now au courant term, but also of the singular life needs of those we might as well now call young adults. Why young adult and not adolescent, though? Well, there is no definitive answer. However, the term "young adult" was not altogether foreign to the library world. The youth services librarian Margaret Scoggin had first used it in the professional literature as early as 1944 (C. Jenkins 1999) and Kenneth R. Shaffer, then director of the School of Library Science at Simmons College, recalled in 1963 "our excitement of nearly a quarter of a century ago when we made the professional discovery of the adolescent—the 'young adult'—as a special kind of library client" (Shaffer 1963, 9). Also, one might presume that *adolescent* smacks a bit too much of the clinical, and some might even regard it as sounding faintly patronizing, though young adult might not be much better. As we will see, such uncertainty as to precisely what to call such youths has continued to invite much heated discussion and debate even to this day, although in 1991 YASD did finally decree, in concert with the National Center for Education Statistics, that young adults "are those individuals from twelve to eighteen years old" (B. Carter 1994).

## A LITERATURE FOR YOUNG ADULTS

What impact did all of these developing attitudes and theories have on the writing and publishing of books targeted at such young people (however they might have been labeled and categorized at any given moment)? The short answer is "not much."

Because adolescents, teenagers, or young adults were—at least until the late 1930s—still widely regarded as children (even if the boys had mustaches and the girls had breasts), there was no separate category of literature specifically targeted at them. However, as, over the course of the first four decades of the twentieth-century opinions began coalescing around the viability of recognizing a new category of human being with its own distinct life needs, books aimed at these "new" humans began to emerge. This happened very gradually, however, and may have had its roots in the long-ago publishing world of the immediate post-Civil War years when, as Nilsen and Donelson (2009, 42) have asserted, "Louisa May Alcott and Horatio Alger, Jr. were the first writers for young adults to gain national attention." The two authors' respective novels *Little Women* and *Ragged Dick* both appeared in 1868, and gave impetus to an era—already underway—of series fiction: dime adventure novels for boys and wholesome domestic stories like the Elsie Dinsmore books for girls. Then, as now, it was firmly believed there were girl books and boy books and never the twain would meet.<sup>1</sup> The always opinionated G. Stanley Hall had much to say about this, too. In a 1908 *Library Journal* article, he asserted: Boys loved adventure. Girls sentiment. Books dealing with domestic life and with young children in them are left almost entirely to girls. Boys, on the other hand, revel in humor, rollicking fun, abandon, rough horse-play, and tales of wild escapade (Nilsen and Donelson 2009, 52).

Series books for both sexes hit their stride with the formation of the Stratemeyer Syndicate in 1900. Edward Stratemeyer, who had worked as a ghostwriter for Alger, had the bright idea of hiring other ghosts to develop his own cascade of story ideas into

novels. The result became what Carol Billman (1986) has called The Million Dollar Fiction Factory. Working pseudonymously, these otherwise-anonymous writers churned out hundreds of titles in endless series, most of them now forgotten, though a few—The Rover Boys, Tom Swift, the Bobbsey Twins, and Ruth Fielding—are still remembered with a twinge of pleasurable nostalgia.<sup>2</sup> Arguably the most successful of the Stratemeyer series—and the ones that come closest to our modern conception of young adult fiction—didn't appear until well after World War I. The Hardy Boys solved their first case (*The Tower Treasure*) in 1927, and Nancy Drew hers (*The Secret of the Old Clock*) in 1930.

Coincidentally, 1930 is the year that ALA formed its Young People's Reading Roundtable, whose annual list of best books for "young readers" (think "young adults" here) contained a mixture of children's and adult books. The first list, for example, ran the gamut from Will James's *Lone Cowboy* (1929) to Edna Ferber's adult novel *Cimarron* (1930).

This situation endured until 1948 when librarians—realizing the new but still amorphous group of older "younger readers" no longer had any interest in children's books—changed the name and content of their list to Adult Books for Young People (Cart 1996a).

Meanwhile prescient publishers, taking notice of the emerging youth culture of the 1930s, began cautiously publishing—or at least remarketing—what they regarded as a new type of book. One of the first of these was Rose Wilder Lane's adult novel *Let the Hurricane Roar*. Published in 1933, this story of two teenage pioneers by the daughter of the Little House books' author offered intrinsic appeal to contemporary teens. Recognizing this, its publisher, Longmans Green, quickly began promoting it as the first in its promised new series Junior Books, a frankly patronizing phrase that lingered in publishing like a bad odor in the refrigerator for nearly a decade. Nevertheless, it may have set the stage for another book that would be published by Little, Brown in 1936.

This one caught the eye of the pioneering young adult librarian Margaret Alexander Edwards of the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore. Writing some years later in the *Saturday Review*, she reported Little, Brown's editorial bemusement when the publisher received a manuscript from the writer Helen Boylston. "While it was not a piece of literature, it was an entertaining story which did not fit into any category. It was too mature for children and too uncomplicated for adults. In the end Little, Brown took a chance and published the story under the title 'Sue Barton Student Nurse' and the dawn of the modern teen-age story came up like thunder" (Edwards 1954, 88, emphasis added).

The thunder was, presumably, the sound of fervent adolescent applause, as *Sue Barton* (for reasons that seem elusive to modern readers struggling through its turgid pages) quickly became one of the most popular books in the history of young adult literature. In 1947—eleven years after its publication—a survey of librarians in Illinois, Ohio, and New York chose it as "the most consistently popular book" among teenage readers, and it remained in print for years thereafter, along with its six sequels, which saw young Sue finish her training, serve in a variety of professional capacities (visiting nurse, superintendent of nurses, neighborhood nurse, staff nurse), and finally marry the young doctor she had met in book number one (Cart 1996a, 41).

The popularity of the series may have derived in large part from its verisimilitude. Boylston was a professional nurse herself and there's truth in the details of her settings, but there are also stereotypes in her characters and clichés in the dramatic situations in which they find themselves embroiled. Told in an omniscient third-person voice, the books betray their author's often too-smug, patronizing attitude toward her material and her characters—not only Sue, but also, and especially, the "quaint" immigrants who are the chief patients at the big-city hospital where Sue receives her training.

Nevertheless, because of its careful accuracy regarding the quotidian details of the nurse's professional life, *Sue Barton* was the prototype of the career story, an enormously popular subgenre among the earliest young adult books.

Rivalling Sue for the affection of later nurse-story lovers was Helen Wells's own fledgling professional Cherry Ames, who debuted in 1943 (*Cherry Ames, Student Nurse*), and whose subsequent adventures filled twenty volumes. Wells also gave eager girl readers stories about plucky flight attendant Vicki Barr. Still another writer who recreated occupational worlds that she was personally familiar with was the remarkable Helen Hull Jacobs, whose many books about the world of championship tennis and military intelligence reflected her own life as the number-one world tennis player and a commander in the Office of Naval Intelligence during World War II.

As for boys, they had been reading vocational stories since Horatio Alger offered his paeans to the rewards of hard work (and marrying the boss's daughter). More contemporary writers like Montgomery Atwater, Stephen W. Meader, and Henry Gregor Felsen offered fictions about such real-life jobs as avalanche patrolling, earth-moving, and automobile mechanics. In the years to come other less-talented writers would report on virtually every other conceivable career—in often drearily didactic detail.

A decade before Boylston's initial publication, another influential and wildly popular author for adolescents debuted: it was 1926 when Howard Pease published his first book, *The Tattooed Man*. A better writer than Boylston, Pease would soon rival her in popularity. In fact, a 1939 survey of 1,500 California students found that Pease—not Boylston—was their favorite author (Hutchinson 1973).

Like Boylston, Pease specialized in a literary subgenre: in his case, it was the boy's adventure story set—usually—at sea. And again, like Boylston, Pease knew his material from firsthand experience of service in the United States Merchant Marine during World War I.

In 1938 still another important early writer, who also specialized in genre fiction based on personal experience, made his auspicious debut: John R. Tunis, the “inventor” of the modern sports story, published the first of his many novels, *The Iron Duke*. Tunis had played tennis and run track as a student at Harvard and, following service in World War I, had become a sportswriter for the *New York Post*. What set his work apart from that of earlier sportswriters was that he focused less on play-by-play accounts of the big game than on closely observed considerations of character, social issues, and challenges—not on his characters' hand-eye coordination but, instead, their personal integrity and maturation.

## THE FIRST YOUNG ADULT NOVEL?

In retrospect any of these writers (though especially Pease, Boylston, and Tunis) could be reasonably identified as the first writer for young adults, but most observers (myself included) would opt to join the redoubtable Edwards (1954, 88) in declaring (on second thought in her case) that “it was in 1942 that the new field of writing for teen-agers became established.”

The signal occasion was the 1942 publication of Maureen Daly's first, and for forty-four years *only* novel, *Seventeenth Summer*.

Amazingly, the author was only twenty-one when her history-making book appeared, although how old she was when she actually wrote the book is irrelevant. Ms. Daly herself



claimed she was a teenager, but *The New York Times* reported that only fifty pages of the book had been written before the author turned twenty (Van Gelder 1942). Daly herself was quick to point out, however, that her novel was not published as a young adult book. “I would like, at this late date,” she wrote in 1994, “to explain that ‘Seventeenth Summer,’ in my intention and at the time of publication, was considered a full adult novel and published and reviewed as such” (Berger 1994, 216).

John R. Tunis was similarly—and unpleasantly—surprised to learn from his publisher Alfred Harcourt that *The Iron Duke* was a book for young readers. He was still fuming thirty years later when he wrote, “That odious term juvenile is the product of a merchandising age” (Tunis 1977, 25).

The merchandising of and to “the juvenile” had begun in the late 1930s, coincident with the emergence of the new youth culture. The movement picked up steam in the 1940s as marketers realized these kids—whom they dubbed, variously, *teens*, *teensters*, and finally (in 1941) *teenagers*—were “an attractive new market in the making” (Palladino 1996, 52). That market wouldn’t fully ripen until post-World War II prosperity put money into the kids’ own pockets, money that had previously gone to support the entire family. The wild success of *Seventeenth Summer* was, however, an early indicator to publishers of an emerging market for a literature that spoke with immediacy and relevance to teenagers. In the case of Daly’s novel these factors were not only due to her own youth and the autobiographical nature of her material (“What I’ve tried to do, you see,” she told an interviewer, “is just write about the things that happened to me and that I knew about—that meant a lot to me” [Van Gelder 1942, 20].) but also to the fact that she chose to tell her story of sweet summer love in the first-person voice of her protagonist, seventeen-year-old Angie Morrow. For its time, the book was also fairly bold and thus further reader-enticing because of its inclusion of scenes showing teenagers unapologetically smoking and drinking. And yet to modern readers Angie seems hopelessly naïve and much younger than her years. Her language now sounds quaintly old-fashioned and the pacing of her story is glacially slow, bogging down in far too many rhapsodic passages describing the flora and fauna of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin (the book’s setting). If Angie’s diction is now dated, so—more painfully—are her attitudes. Humiliated, for example, by the bad table manners of her new boyfriend, the otherwise desirable (and always very clean) Jack Duluth, Angie frets, “His family probably didn’t even own a butter knife! No girl has to stand for that!” (Daly 1942, 147). Clearly Jack and his deprived family had never read Gay Head’s column or her books!

Despite all this, *Seventeenth Summer* has remained tremendously popular; it’s sold well over a million-and-a-half copies since its publication, and it’s still in print in a smartly redesigned paperback edition.

Even more important than *Seventeenth Summer* to the cultivation of a readership for a newly relevant literature was the inaugural publication of the new girls’ magazine *Seventeen* in September 1944. Teens were thrilled to be taken seriously at last. The first printing of 400,000 copies sold out in two days and the second—of 500,000—in the same short time. One reader wrote the editors to thank them for “looking upon us teenagers as future women and Americans, instead of swooning, giggling bobbysoxers.” Another chorused, “For years I have been yearning for a magazine entirely dedicated to me” (Palladino 1996, 91–92).

Here was a niche to be exploited, and the editors of *Seventeen* were quick to recognize it, making theirs one of the first magazines to actually survey its readers—not to determine their editorial interests but, instead, their taste and interests in consumables. Oddly,

such research was “unheard of at the time in fashion magazines.” But *Seventeen* quickly changed that by hiring research company Benson and Benson to conduct the important market survey that it called “Life with Teena” (the name of the hypothetical everygirl it conjured up to report the survey’s results breathlessly). “Teena has money of her own to spend,” the editors enthused, “and what her allowance and pin money earnings won’t buy, her parents can be counted on to supply. For our girl Teena won’t take ‘no’ for an answer when she sees what she wants in ‘Seventeen.’” The not-so subtle message to American business was “place your ads here.” And the business wasn’t confined to the manufacturers of sweater sets. “We’re talking about eight million teenage girls who can afford to spend \$170,000,000 a year on movies,” the magazine trumpeted to motion picture producers (Palladino 1996, 103–6).

The year this happened was 1945. In Chicago, nineteen-year-old shoe clerk Eugene Gilbert was wondering why so few teenagers were buying shoes in his store. His conclusion: “Stores and manufacturers were losing a lot of money because they were largely blind to my contemporaries’ tastes and habits. I started then to become a market researcher in a virtually unexplored field.” Four years later, as head of the Youth Marketing Company in New York, Gilbert was sagely observing, “Our salient discovery within the last decade was that teenagers have become a separate and distinct group in our society” (Palladino 1996, 109–10).

It was a revelation and a revolution, such a liberating experience for teens that *The New York Times* published a Teen-Age Bill of Rights (Rollin 1999, 107–8). Here it is:

1. The right to let childhood be forgotten.
2. The right to a “say” about his own life.
3. The right to make mistakes, and find out about himself.
4. The right to have rules explained, not imposed.
5. The right to have fun and companions.
6. The right to question ideas.
7. The right to be at the Romantic Age.
8. The right to a fair chance and opportunity.
9. The right to struggle toward his own philosophy of life.
10. The right to professional help whenever necessary.

Oddly—if one is to judge by the gender of the pronoun employed—these rights belonged exclusively to (given the time, no doubt white) male teenagers! Odd, because otherwise the decade pretty much belonged to the girls, who certainly owned much of the media attention of the time. Not only did girls have *Seventeen*, but they could also read another popular magazine devoted to them. *Calling All Girls* actually antedated *Seventeen*; it launched in late 1941. Meanwhile manufacturers and the motion picture industry catered to the girls, as did radio, which offered them such popular fare as *A Date with Judy*, *Meet Corliss Archer*, and *Your Hit Parade*, while newspaper comic strips served up daily doses of *Teena*, *Penny*, and *Bobby Sox*.

As for the fledgling young adult literature, imitation was definitely the sincerest form of flattery. In the wake of *Seventeenth Summer*’s success, romance fiction quickly captured the hearts—and balance sheets—of American publishers. One of the earliest of the faux Angie Morrows that followed was sixteen-year-old Julie Ferguson, the heroine of Betty Cavanna’s 1946 *Going on Sixteen*. As its title suggests, the book is almost an homage to Daly. In fact, Cavanna’s protagonist, Julie, actually mentions having “just last month read

a newspaper account of a book written by a girl of seventeen” (Cavanna 1946, 89). This is offered in the context of Julie’s own longing for a career in publishing—not as an author but as an illustrator. In this regard Cavanna borrows not only from Daly, but also from career books like Boylston’s. There are other similarities as well. Both books are about the interrelationship of dating and popularity; the book’s dust jacket even claims that it offers “numerous useful tips on how to overcome shyness and how to become ‘part of things.’”

Perhaps Cavanna’s heroine read the book herself, because she finally does become “part of things” by finding true love (and dates) with a neighbor boy named Dick Webster, who habitually calls her Peanut and Small Fry. One supposes these are intended as endearments, but they sound merely condescending. Consider the following: “‘Hey!’ Dick scolded, suddenly masculine. ‘We’ve got to get going,’ Dick looked at her Dad in a way that said ‘Women!’ and grabbed her hand authoritatively. ‘Come on.’” (Cavanna 1946, 220).

Girl readers were apparently quite ready to go along, too, because Cavanna, ultimately the author of more than seventy books, became one of the most popular authors for adolescents of the 1940s and 1950s. *Going on Sixteen* was the third most popular book in a 1959 survey of school and public libraries, close behind—yes—the still more popular *Seventeenth Summer*.

Another romance author who rivaled Cavanna for popularity was Rosamund du Jardin (who was the only author to have two titles on that 1959 survey: *Double Date* and *Wait for Marcy*). Du Jardin’s own first book, *Practically Seventeen* (do you detect a trend in these titles?) was published in 1949, and is yet another pale imitation of Daly.

Like *Seventeenth Summer*, *Practically Seventeen* is told in the first person, in the dumb-foundingly arch voice of Du Jardin’s protagonist Tobey Heydon (which sounds too much like *hoyden* to be a coincidence). Like Daly’s Angie, Du Jardin’s Tobey has three sisters—two older and one younger. Like Angie’s father, Tobey’s is a traveling salesman. He is fond of saying that because he is “completely surrounded by females in his own home” he “would go crazy without a sense of humor and that he has had to develop his in self-defense.” “But none of us mind,” Tobey hastens to reassure the reader. “He is really sweet, as fathers go” (Du Jardin 1949, 4).

Like *Seventeenth Summer* (again), Du Jardin’s book is a story of young love but much slighter in substance and lighter in tone. Tobey’s big dilemma—and the theme that unifies the book’s highly episodic plot—is whether her relationship with boyfriend Brose (short for Ambrose) will survive until he can lay hands on the class ring he has asked her to wear. Given the episodic structure of her first novel, it’s no surprise to learn that Du Jardin had been a successful writer of magazine fiction, her short stories having appeared in such popular women’s magazines as *Cosmopolitan*, *Redbook*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *McCall’s*. Certainly, her work is slicker, more innocent, and funnier than Daly’s. For at-risk teens of the current day, there is something pleasantly nostalgic and comforting in reading about peers (even long-ago ones) whose biggest problems are pesky younger sisters, about who will take them to the big dance (the “Heart Hop” in this case), and about how to resolve a rivalry for a boy’s affection with a visitor from the South named, appositely, Kentucky Jackson.

The book’s dust-jacket blurb speaks, well, volumes—not only about *Practically Seventeen*, but also about the type of book that would prevail in publishing for young adults throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Here’s a sample paragraph:

In recent years, permanent recognition and popularity have been accorded the junior novel . . . the story that records truthfully the modern girl’s dream of life and romance



and her ways of adjusting to her school and family experiences. *Practically Seventeen* is such a book—as full of life as the junior prom.

And about as relevant to today's readers, I would add, as *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*.

And yet, were it and other such books relevant to and reflective of *their* contemporary readers' lives? Perhaps more than modern readers might realize. In 1951 J. B. Lippincott published a fascinating book called *Profile of Youth*. Edited by Maureen Daly (yes, *that* Maureen Daly), it collected profiles of twelve “representative” teenagers that had appeared in issues of *Ladies' Home Journal* throughout 1949 and 1950.

“We chose our young people from the North and South, the East and West,” Daly wrote, “From the hangouts and the libraries; from the popular and the aloof; the leaders and the followers. Some are planning professional careers; others are preparing themselves for marriage. Some just want a job—any job. We asked them about their lives—and let them tell their own stories. We asked them about their problems—and joined with them on the solutions” (1951, 9).

Although there are differences among the kids—especially in their circumstances (though none are homeless or impoverished)—the one thing they have overwhelmingly in common is, for twenty-first-century readers, an astonishing innocence. Almost none of them smoke or drink; drugs are never mentioned; none of the students are gay or lesbian or a gang member. None are emotionally troubled or the victim of abuse. Instead, their biggest concern (the book calls it “A National Problem”) is whether to go steady. They also “resent” parents who refuse to understand or recognize the importance of fads and customs in high school. (In her introduction, Daly [1951, 10] expresses hope that a parent reading this book “may listen with greater patience to a sixteen-year-old's plea for orange corduroy slacks or a red beanie when he realizes how vital ‘fads’ are to adolescent security.”) Reading the profiles is eerily like reading the novels we have been discussing, especially when one comes to the editors' valedictory summing up of their findings (“American Youth—Full View”), where they affirm, “We have recorded, as told by youth itself, the things *they* find important—the good schools, the basketball rivalries, the college scholarships and Friday night dates” (Daly 1951, 256).

Perhaps life really was simpler back in the 1940s!

To the editors' credit, however, their book does differ from the young adult literature of the 1940s, which was created almost exclusively by white authors and white editors for a largely white audience, by including one African American teen, although one wonders how representative she may be. Her name is Myrdice Thornton, and she is the daughter of an affluent mother (her father, the first African American member of the Chicago Park Police, was killed in the line of duty). Living in the North, she attends an integrated school in the Hyde Park neighborhood and seems to have experienced little racial prejudice or related problems, telling her profiler, “I never did feel different . . . I see no reason to act that way.” Perhaps more indicative of reality was the reaction of an African American boy who, when interviewed (though not profiled) expressed amazement that anyone would be interested in his opinion.

One other teen in the book, Hank Polsinelli, the son of Italian immigrants, is also “different.” Alas, his parents are presented as the same kind of stereotyped and “quaint” eccentrics that Boylston featured in *Sue Barton*. Hank's mother, for example, is said to be “a real Italian mother; she believes it is her main business to cook, keep house and make a home for her husband and children and not ask too many questions.” She does scold Hank when he misses mass, “but Hank takes reprimands lightly and his mother understands

men. ‘He is a good boy at home,’ she says, ‘I don’t know what he does outside’” (Daly 1951, 76).

That Hank and the several other working-class teens who are profiled seem much more mature than their privileged peers reminds us that adolescence, in its first several decades at least, was primarily an experience of privileged middle- and upper-middle-class white kids, who lived, for the most part, in all-white small towns. According to Kett (1977, 245), such “towns and small cities proved to be much more responsive to the institutions of adolescence than were rural and metropolitan areas, while a mixture of apathy and antipathy continued to mark the attitudes of lower class youth.” Small wonder that urban settings and youth remained largely invisible in young adult fiction until the social upheavals of the turbulent 1960s.

There are other disconnects between the idealized (or fantasy?) world of early young adult fiction and the real one. This is inadvertently reflected in *Profile of Youth* in a series of topical essays in which the editors and profilers step back from their individual subjects and do some actual research and investigative reporting, which leads to a somewhat less sunny picture of teenage life in the late 1940s. It’s there we learn, for example, that “boys estimate that about half the eighteen- and nineteen-year-old boys have had sex experience” (Daly 1951, 153); that “in almost all cases the boys feel it is up to the girls ‘to keep things under control.’ She should know how and when to say ‘stop,’ for after all it’s just *natural* for a fellow” (152), and that “pregnancy itself is still considered a social disgrace and a personal disaster” (153). Also, “society as a group has little sympathy for the unwed mother” (154), especially if she is economically deprived. “These girls may be placed in a charitable institution, to be trained in sewing or a trade while waiting out the birth of a child” (154). Sex, of course, remained absent from young adult fiction until the late 1960s and it was equally absent from any serious discussion in the home. “Most teen-agers do *not* get sex information from their parents” (65). Nor did they get it from schools. “Oregon is the only one of the forty-eight states in which sex education is generally taught” (73). Nor, of course, did they get it from books—at least not the whole story. As one girl stated, “I read all about ‘that’ in a book when I was eleven. But nobody ever told me I was going to get so emotional about it” (155). Too bad, for that’s what a good work of realistic fiction, with fully realized characters whose lives invite empathy from the reader and with it emotional understanding, can do—had there been any such books available. That there weren’t may be evidence that adult authors (and publishers) did not yet trust young adult readers with the truth of reality.

Another example of an invisible topic is the consideration—or lack thereof—of juvenile delinquency and the presence of gangs in teen life. Juvenile delinquency has been an issue in American life since the mid-nineteenth century; the 1930 White House Conference on Children and Youth formally defined it as “any such juvenile misconduct as might be dealt with under the law” (Kett 1977, 309). However, it wasn’t until adolescents or teen-agers had become a distinct—and distinctive—culture that popular attention turned, with a vengeance, toward the “problem.” A significant catalyst was the universal hand-wringing over the spate of unsupervised—and possibly out of control—youths during World War II, a situation that was the product of fathers at war and mothers at work. Thus, “during the first six months of 1943 alone, twelve hundred magazine articles appeared on this subject (juvenile delinquency)” (Palladino 1996, 81). One of these, “Are These Our Children?” which appeared in the September 21, 1943, issue of *Look* magazine, inspired RKO to produce a movie based on it. *Youth Runs Wild* was released in 1944 and ads promoting it featured such titillating headlines as “What Happens to These Unguarded Youngsters?”

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