Children's Literature
Peter Hunt

"Children's literature" is a term used to describe both a set of texts and an academic discipline—and it is often regarded as an oxymoron. If "children" commonly connotes immaturity, and "literature" commonly connotes sophistication in texts and reading, then the two terms may seem to be incompatible. Henry James, in "The Future of the Novel" (1900), observed that "the literature, as it may be called for convenience, of children, is an industry," but not one to be taken seriously: "the sort of taste that used to be called 'good' has nothing to do with the matter; we are demonstrably in [the] presence of millions for whom taste is but an obscure, confused, immediate instinct" (quoted in Hughes 1978). As recently as 1997, Roderick McGillis wrote: "[B]ooks for the young still carry a burden of perceived simplicity that sets them outside the complexities we associate with literature for adults." This view is held by many regardless of whether the possessive (children's) is taken to indicate "for," "by," "of," or "belonging to." Both parts of the term are what Raymond Williams (1976/1983a) would have called "difficult" in that both cover a huge range of possible meanings, synchronically and diachronically, and together they have caused much confusion and influenced (often negatively) the development of the areas that they ostensibly name. The term has so many practical and theoretical disadvantages that "books for children" or "children's fiction" are often used as equivalents.

The earliest use of the term to describe texts has not been established, although it appeared as the title of an anonymous article in the Quarterly Review in January 1860 (469-500); otherwise, the term "juvenile literature" was well-established by the end of the nineteenth century (for example, Juvenile Literature As It Is [Salmon 1888]), while Charles Dickens referred to "the fairy literature of our childhood" in "Frauds on the Fairies" (1853). Its use as a title for academic courses probably dates from the 1960s in the United States and the 1980s in the United Kingdom.

All definitions rely on their purpose, and so the broadest definition of "children's literature"—any text read by any child—is of little practical value. Another distinction, popularized in the United States in the 1960s, largely for administrative purposes, is between "children's literature" and "young adult literature." However, it goes back at least as far as Sarah Trimmer's Guardian of Education (1802) in which she distinguishes between "Books for Children" and 'Books for Young Persons," adding, "We shall take the liberty of... supposing all young gentlemen and ladies to be children, till they are fourteen, and young persons till they are at least twenty-one."

It is helpful to consider the elements of the term, children's and literature, separately and together. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (1987) unhelpfully defines children as "boys or girls," but there is some question as to whether "children" is too broad a term.
Matthew Grenby (2008) asks: “Is there such a thing as children’s literature? Might it be more accurate to talk of a boys’ literature and a girls’ literature?” Perry Nodelman (2008b) concurs in part: “[A] defining characteristic of children’s literature is that it intends to teach what it means for girls to be girls and boys to be boys.”

The cultural concept of “children” (and “childhood”) also changes radically with time, place, gender, and perceive, and so the corpus of texts (“children’s literature”) is unstable. Childhood two hundred years ago (and consequently the books designed for it) may seem so remote from current childhood (and its texts) that a distinction might be made between “historical children’s literature” (or books that were for children) and “contemporary children’s literature,” books that address or relate to recognizable current childhoods (see P. Hunt 1996; Flynn 1997). The body of texts, however constituted, can be seen as a symbiotic moveable feast: the book defines its audience (children), and that in turn affects how children are generally defined, as well as how they actually are in the future. In this context, the term “children” is increasingly being interpreted as “comparatively inexperienced/unskilled readers.”

Because of the possessive, the element “children’s” in “children’s literature” does not have the same standing as the adjective in “Canadian” in “Canadian children’s literature”. “Children’s literature” is one of the relatively few categories of texts/literature defined by its audience (compare “women’s literature”). A. A. Milne, writing about the verses in *When We Were Very Young*, observed to a friend that “they are a curious collection; some for children, some by, with or from children” (Thwaite 1990), thus pinpointing the essential power-relationships within “children’s literature.” Leaving aside the very few examples of books written by children (such as Daisy Ashford’s *The Young Visitors* [1919]), and the very many books that are about childhood that are sometimes brought into the category (such as William Golding’s *The Lord of the Flies* [1954]), difficulties hinge on books for children. The current Western concept of “children” connotes immaturity, inexperience, lack of responsibility—and, perhaps most importantly, dependence. Hence the presence of “the hidden adult” in (almost) all texts for children (Nodelman 2008b), and hence the denial of the possibility of “children’s literature’s” existence at all as something independent of adults, something that belongs to children. Jacqueline Rose, who, in *The Case of Peter Pan* (1984), carefully uses the term “children’s fiction,” suggests (negatively) that children’s fiction is impossible, not in the sense that it cannot be written (that would be nonsense), but that it hangs on the impossible relation between adult and child... Children’s fiction sets up a world in which the adult comes first (author, maker, giver) and the child comes after (reader, product, receiver), but where neither of them enter the space in between.

As Jack Zipes (2001) puts it, in “Why Children’s Literature Does Not Exist,” “[T]here has never been a literature conceived by children for children, a literature that belongs to children, and there never will be.”
"Literature" has proved a particularly contentious term for those working in the field of “children’s literature,” because the latter is most frequently taken as a category that subsumes any texts (written, spoken, visual) intended for children. Most of these fall into Williams’s “popular literature” category:

At the same time many, even most poems and plays and novels are not seen as literature; they fall below its level, in a sense related to the old distinction of polite learning; they are not “substantial” or “important” enough to be called “works of literature.” A new category of popular literature or the sub-literary has then to be instituted, to describe works which may be fiction but which are not imaginative or creative, and which are therefore devoid of aesthetic interest, and which are not art. (Williams 1975)

Initially, this grouping together of all texts for children was a negative, default adoption: “children’s literature” is any text not for adults. There have been several consequences of this. The first is that all has been compared to some: that is, because the category of “adult literature” (as opposed to the “sub-literary”) is comparatively clear, texts that are demonstrably “sub-literary” for children have come to characterize the whole of “children’s literature”—which therefore equates with “popular literature.” The second consequence is that those texts within “children’s literature” that have stylistic or content characteristics normally associated with “adult literature” (or which are valorized by their age) are (with a very few notable, rule-proving exceptions, such as Milne’s Winnie-the-Pooh [1926]) removed from the category of “children’s literature” into a hybrid category of “the classic.” They become, in effect, canonical, and cease to be “children’s literature” in any significant sense. Some of these (which are often crossover texts), such as Frances Hodgson Burnett’s The Secret Garden (1911) or Robert Louis Stevenson’s Treasure Island (1883), are published both in series of “classics” for children and scholarly editions for adults, supported by academic textual apparatus. In short, the less a book looks like a “popular” book for children, the more likely it is to acquire the status of “children’s literature” or “literature” and to be treated with critical tools not specifically designed for it. The third consequence is that many people concerned with mediating or teaching children’s books to children are still in thrall to the nebulous idea that some texts are “literature”—inherently better than others—and they consequently denigrate the very books that are most likely to connect with children.

More recently, as the literary canon has been challenged in a way that would not have been recognized by Williams (see Nodelman and Reimer 2003), the grouping of diverse texts into the “children’s literature” category has been seen as indicative of a liberated critical approach. The premise is that all texts are complex, and therefore all texts are worthy of serious critical and theoretical examination. Hence category and discipline boundaries come together (or are crossed) in a positive concept of “children’s literature” whose strength is its very diversity.
Children's Literature has been a set of definitions and books designed for entertainment and instruction. Definitions of children's literature as overlapping with adult literature have been developed and strengthened by the work of John Newbery and others. The term "children's literature" has been used to describe works of fiction written specifically for children, and the boundaries between adult and children's literature have been blurred over time. Historians have attempted to distinguish between different types of literature, and the concept of "children's literature" has evolved to include works that were previously considered adult literature. The study of children's literature has become increasingly important in the field of literary studies, and recent research has focused on the role of literature in shaping children's ideas and behaviors.
children" or "children's literature." History is littered with authorial ambiguities—notably Mark Twain's indecision over character in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), Louisa May Alcott's misjudgment of the quality of *Little Women* (1868), or Arthur Ransome's assertion that he wrote only for himself. Similarly, crossover books from Richard Adams's *Watership Down* (1972) to Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2003) demonstrate commercial ambiguities, and invalidate one of the earliest attempts at a definition, by John Rowe Townsend (1971a):

> I know from conversations over a period of years that there are intelligent and even bookish people to whom children's literature, by definition, is a childish thing which adults have put away. . . . They . . . regard . . . interest [in it] as an oddity, an amiable weakness. . . . Yet children are part of mankind and children's books are part of literature, and any line which is drawn to confine children or their books to their own special corner is an artificial one. . . . Arguments about whether such-and-such a book is "really for children" are always cropping up, and are usually pointless in any but organisational terms. The only practical definition of a children's book today—absurd as it sounds—is "a book which appears on the children's list of a publisher."

Other writers, such as Peter Hollindale (1997), feel that "children's literature" partakes of a certain *jouissance*, and can be seen as an "event":

The definition of children's literature which I propose therefore involves the author, the text and the child, and with qualified meanings in each case. The author is a person with imaginative interests in constructing childhood (usually but not necessarily through creating child characters) and who on purpose or accidentally uses a narrative voice and language that are audible to children.

The text of children's literature is one in which this construction is present. The reader is a child who is still in the business of constructing his or her own childhood, and aware of its presentness—aware that it is not yet over. Where these conditions co-exist, the *event* of children's literature takes place.

This definition recognises a doubleness that we have to live with, namely that children's literature is characterized both by textual status and by readership, and its uniqueness is evident at the point where they meet.

In other words, "[C]hildren's literature knowingly engages with the idea of power at the heart of the relationship between author and reader" (Thacker and Webb 2002).

This idea has been elaborated by David Rudd (2005), who observed that "it is not enough to declare that children's literature is just 'a boojum'—a meaningless construction—and leave it at that":

Children's literature consists of texts that consciously or unconsciously address particular constructions of the child, or metaphorical
equivalents in terms of character or situation... the commonality being that such texts display an awareness of children's disempowered status (whether containing or controlling it, questioning or overturning it). Adults are as caught up in this discourse as children, engaging dialogically with it (writing/reading it) just as children themselves engage with many "adult" discourses. But it is how these texts are read and used that will determine their success as "children's literature," how fruitfully they are seen to negotiate this hybrid, or border country.

This same question of the "border country" has applied to "children's literature" as an academic discipline. There are many thousands of undergraduate and graduate degrees called "children's literature" across the world, although in practice many have little in common. They range from primary education to abstract theory, and from aspects of childhood studies to the most arcane bibliography—and despite a common title, they do not present a coherent, or even mutually comprehensible core. The basic division is sometimes seen as one between "child people" and "book people" (a distinction first coined by Townsend [1971]); the one sees "children" as central to the enterprise, the other not. At the literary end of the spectrum, as Beverly Lyon Clark (2003) has pointed out, the distortion of the term "children's literature" to "kiddie lit" indicates the condescension of some in the academic establishment. This may be a reaction to the predominance of women teachers in the field of children's literature, and its association with low-status (female-dominated) disciplines, notably education and librarianship. As Clark notes, "[A]ttitudes to children's literature are never simple; they're always complicated by attitudes associated with gender or class or... a particular profession." "Children's literature" is marginalized by being excluded from critical and theoretical discourses to which it could contribute vitally (Thacker 2000); this is the more surprising in that it is widely established as an exemplar of interdisciplinary studies.

The reaction by those working within the academic-literary field called "children's literature" to academic "marginalization" has variously been to adopt the critical and theoretical strategies of their peers in "adult literature," or to position "children's literature" as a valuable partner in the cross-disciplinary "childhood studies" or an essential concomitant to established academic areas such as "Victorian Studies."

"Children's literature" as a term carries with it complex emotional freight, which a more precise term ("texts intended for inexperienced readers," for example) might not—but there is little chance that, for all its shortcomings, it will be displaced. As Nodelman (2008b) has observed, "[C]hildren's literature... is always ambivalent."
Voice
Mike Cadden

The first mention of "voice" as metaphor appeared in 1587 when Golding De Mornay wrote that "there is . . . a dubble Speech; the one in the mynd, . . . the other the sounding image thereof . . . uttered by our mouth" (Oxford English Dictionary). Four centuries later, double-ness had become multiplicity. As Charlotte Otten and Gary Schmidt (1989) note, the "word voice itself is undergoing changes: it has moved from being a strictly descriptive term into the realm of metaphor that now includes more than point of view and that encompasses all that identity itself connotes." However, "voice" as a narrative metaphor is arguably the defining quality of literature for children and adolescents, and the notion of "dubble speech" marks the inherent tension in determining whether a book is a "children's book." The issue of voice is, then, the critical issue of how, between who, and to whom.

A standard definition of "voice" is "the set of signs characterizing the narrator and, more generally, the narrating instance, and governing the relations between narrating and narrative text as well as between narrating and narrated" (Prince 1987). Children's literature scholars stress the distinction between the narrator's voice in children's books and character dialogue or character narration, noting that it is important whether it is an "anonymous" voice or one with "verbal specificity" (Sircar 1989; Hourihan 1997). Barbara Wall (1991) uses voice as a means of genre definition: "It is not what is said, but the way it is said, and to whom it is said, which makes a book for children."

Uses of the external narrative voice range from the general and imperceptible to the intimate and often didactic. Folk literature set the fashion for an external narrator neither perceptible nor remarkable by voice. As early as the seventeenth century, but more typical of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Western writers for children constructed perceptible external narrators who employed "intimate" voices—"either auncly or ayuncular"—in children's books that often talked down to the implied audience; examples include works by Mrs. Molesworth, Lewis Carroll, Charles Kingsley, and George MacDonald (Sircar 1989; Hunt 1991; Wall 1991). These authors influenced the narrative voices of later authors such as Beatrix Potter, Kenneth Grahame, A. A. Milne, and C. S. Lewis. This is not to say that children's books lacked a didactic impulse prior to the eighteenth century; however, what was communicated is a different matter than how. Earlier, lessons were communicated largely by indifferent external narration and character dialogue. The "overt authorial narrator who flourished in the nineteenth century and spoke as 'I,' 'your author,' 'dear reader,' . . . has been out of fashion with critics in recent years" (Wall 1991), though there are contemporary inheritors who poke fun at this Victorian narrative voice, such as Lemony Snicket in his thirteen-part Series of Unfortunate Events (1999–2006) and Lois Lowry in her recent
parody The Willoughbys (2008). The avuncular narrator's voice has been otherwise less popular in contemporary children's and young adult fiction, though that fiction often features tale-ending character narration outlining what was learned through the adventure (Trites 2000). Critics continue to argue about the audience reception of narrative voices that may or may not be interpreted as "cute" or condescending (Nodelman 1982; McGillis 1984).

The most important tensions that critics reveal have to do with the use of narration and narrative voice in the definition of children's literature. An extreme position is that children's literature itself is "impossible" because of the distance between the adult author's construction of an implied reader and actual children, and no literary genre has as great a "rupture" between writer, implied reader, and real reader as does children's literature (Rose 1984). While one position is that there is no child addressed but the one constructed by the adult writer, most other critics focus on the nature of the narrative engagement and the presumed ideological and ethical effects it entails. Although the disconnect between the implied and real readers could offer children the opportunity to learn to shift their own subject positions, most critics are concerned that the narrator is in a position to more forcibly prescribe the reader's subject position (Stephens 1992; Zipes 2001). There is the simple matter of power relations to consider—power that comes both with age differentials and narrative authority. Maria Nikolajeva (2002a) summarizes the problem well: "[T]he profound difference in life experience as well as linguistic skills create an inevitable discrepancy between the (adult) narrative voice and both the localized child character's and the young reader's levels of comprehension" (see also Hunt 1991). This power differential has concerned critics who take a cultural studies approach to the study of children's literature, especially theorists working in feminism and postcolonialism (Nodelman 1992; Romines 1995; Kertzker 1996; McGillis 1999).

Critics see the choice of character narration as potentially more manipulative than more external narration. While for some, the voice in children's literature is a means to gain trust and embrace readers, others worry that first-person/character narration necessarily "invites the reader's acceptance of the narrator's values and judgments" more effectively than external narration (Hourihan 1997). Writers have addressed this concern in different ways. In Voices in the Park (1998), Anthony Browne disturbs the conventional authority of the narrator by creating one story composed of four separate "voices," each with its own characteristic typeface and style of illustration. The epistolary form, as seen in Jean Webster's Daddy-Long-Legs (1912), is especially compelling in its depiction of the development of the protagonist's voice, as she "moves from feeling 'silenced' in the beginning of the novel...[to] ultimately reaching a sense of personal authority and confidence" (Phillips 1999). In contrast, and perhaps ironically, school textbooks tend toward external narration, where the presumption is that the reader is meant to be kept at arm's length by textbook writers and publishers.
(McGillis 1991; May 1995; Hourihan 1997). The voice of the character narrator can be made more distant through the time lapse between the events narrated and the telling of them. In Sharon Creech's *Walk Two Moons* (1994), the narrator has gained distance while remaining an engaging, intimate teller of the tale. In contrast, Christopher Paul Curtis's *The Watsons Go to Birmingham, 1963* (1995) is narrated shortly after the events of the novel, and is thus an "immediate" rather than "distant" character narration"; its immediacy is further enhanced by the use of first-person address (Schwenke-Wylie 1999). Some implications are that distance increases the likelihood of irony and decreases reliability. A common but erroneous assumption is that a narrative voice more ironic and unreliable necessarily corresponds to an adult readership.

A healthy critical body of work has been produced that focuses on the ethical implications of narrative voice. John Stephens (1992) has gone so far as to assert that the "most important concept for children to grasp about literary fictions is always that of narrative point of view, since this has the function of constructing subject positions and inscribing ideological assumptions." Arguments that narrative voice can draw in and situate young readers result in a tension between artistic and ethical concerns. While some writers for children who take a rhetorical view have ethical qualms about what one ought to write (Hunter 1976; Paterson 1981; Byars 1982), others take a more aesthetic view and argue that the writer must not censor themselves (Walsh 1973). Some make the case that it is simply right for children's writers to pay attention to the real and likely audiences to which their books are handed. These arguments center around the notions that children's writers are more willing to focus on ethics than writers for other audiences, that many pursue ethical fiction indirectly by choosing particular genres in which to write, and that children's writers need to be more self-aware than other authors (Rose 1984; Mills 1997; Cadden 2000b). Indeed, Rod McGillis (1999) even wonders whether writers for children "steal the voices of others in the very act of providing a medium for those voices?" As a result, some critics have espoused strategies for defensive or resistant reading, or have celebrated books that employ narrative strategies for presenting multiple voices (McCallum 1999; Cadden 2000a; Trite 2000).

A strand of criticism that hinges on the question of voice concerns "crossover" fiction. In 1989, Otten and Schmidt noted A. A. Milne's narrator's "dual" voice in *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926). The 1990s saw a marked increase in the study of the phenomenon of crossover work, which often focused on the narrator as the crux for determining when a book works for two audiences and when it doesn't. Barbara Wall's (1991) use of the terms "single address," "double address," and "dual address" was an early taxonomy for the ways narrators in children's fiction speak, respectively, to children, over the heads of children to adults on occasion, or to both children and adults simultaneously. Wall noted that dual address is rare and difficult, "presupposing as it does that a child narrator is addressed and an adult reader simultaneously satisfied"—as is seen, arguably,
in works of nonsense especially. Double address—when a writer offers something for both children and adults through the use of irony and side commentary—is much more prevalent in successful children's books; in the special issue of Children's Literature on cross-writing, U. C. Knoepflmacher and Mitzi Myers (1997) argue convincingly that "a dialogic mix of older and younger voices occurs in texts too often read as univocal," and that this appeals to both children and adults. Often a text deemed "cross-written" is an accidental occurrence; Sandra Beckett (1999) notes that "many authors now aspire to and engage in the form of crosswriting that consists of addressing the same texts to young and old alike"—either in double or dual address, as Wall would have it—and that most crosswriting is the practice of authors writing for adults and children in separate works. Beckett (2009) has recently extended her inquiry to examine the worldwide trend of cross-writing and how it is changing our notions of separate readerships.

Children's and adolescent literature are genres defined by their audiences, so the voice of the narrator speaking to the implied reader through the narratee is an important consideration in defining them. As we further study narrative voice and the transaction between narrator and narratee, we may come to understand in more significant ways the relationship between adult author and child reader.

Young Adult
Lee A. Talley
The phrase "young adult" reflects the history of changing perceptions of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood and how these ideas have shaped parenting, education, libraries, publishing, and marketing (Cart 1996; Ecclesghare 1996; Campbell 2009). The Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) denotes ages twelve to eighteen as composing "young adult" readers (YALSA 1994). Given the dominant conception that this period of growth is particularly important, understandings of what constitutes "good" young adult literature vary extensively, for there is a great deal at stake.

Readers often imagine young adult (YA) literature as texts that challenge the status quo. They believe that while children's literature finds its roots in a cheerful, Wordsworthian Romanticism, YA literature is heir to the more revolutionary strain of Blakean Romanticism with characters who incisively expose society's ills (Lesnik-Oberstein 1998). An examination of the phrase's history, however, reveals a more complex Romantic inheritance that can illuminate contradictions within the various communities that coalesce around their interest in YA literature, and in their belief in sheltering these readers from or introducing them to a range of texts.

Oddly, "young adult" is not found in most dictionaries even though it is used in thousands of articles in
academic, educational, and library journals in addition to the popular press. Patty Campbell (2003) documents the earliest "use of the term young adult for teen books . . . [in] 1937, although it didn't come into general use until 1958." This move followed organizational changes within the American Library Association, dividing the Association of Young People's Librarians into the Children's Library Association and the Young Adult Services Division in 1957 (Starr n.d.), but librarians had already begun creating special spaces and services for their teenaged readers as early as 1926 (Campbell 2003).

"Young adult" is not in the Oxford English Dictionary, but Random House Dictionary defines it as "a teenager (used especially by publishers and librarians)." Unpredictably, their editors skip the phrase's adjectival form entirely. Although they gesture toward the textual world—reminding readers that people who work with books use this word—they never remark upon it in the context of YA literature. They also define it as "a person in the early years of adulthood," a definition that only points to the very end of the age continuum, excluding most of the readership addressed by Random House's YA imprint, Delacorte. It does incorporate the more expansive understanding of "young adult" that includes the MTV demographic of readers as old as twenty-five, however (Carr 2001).

The dominant way of imagining and marketing YA literature is shaped primarily by the age of the work's intended reader. Yet "crossover" novels such as Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials trilogy (1995-2000) and J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series (1997-2007)—read by children, adolescents, and adults—challenge the categorization based solely on age. Further complicating the often dualistic category of crossover literature, YA literature comfortably houses award-winning "adult" texts such as Mark Haddon's The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time (2003); children's books like Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith's The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales (1992; see Aronson 2001); texts that have won awards in children's and young adult fiction, such as Nancy Farmer's The House of the Scorpion (2002); as well as literature imagined as young adult, such as Sherman Alexie's The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian (2007).

Importantly, defining "young adult" according to what readers between the ages of twelve and eighteen (or twenty-five) would enjoy or benefit from reveals assumptions about adolescent readers that pre-date the "beginning" of YA literature in the 1960s. Sarah Trimmer appears to be the first to have used the concept of a young adult readership in her periodical, The Guardian of Education (1802-6), although she uses the terms "young person" or "young people" (Chambers 1985a; Eccleshare 1996). Trimmer, a deeply religious writer and publisher, loomed large on the intellectual landscape of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Rueve 2001), and upon her death, more than one person publicly urged Britain to memorialize her in Saint Paul's Cathedral (Myers 1990). Trimmer designed The Guardian to help adults choose "safe and good" books for children and young persons "from
the most respectable sources" (Trimmer 1802). Her primary concern was helping readers avoid books influenced by contemporary philosophy, and promoting those that would shape well-behaved, submissive, and God-fearing youth.

Relying on some of the new theories of child development, Trimmer makes what is likely the first distinction between child and young adult readers, explaining how she shall endeavour to separate [texts] into two distinct classes, viz. Books for Children, and Books for Young Persons . . . [and shall] take the liberty of adopting the idea of our forefathers, by supposing all young gentlemen and ladies to be Children, till they are fourteen and young persons till they are at least twenty-one; and shall class books we examine as they shall appear to us to be suitable to these different stages of human life. (Trimmer 1802)

Although Trimmer's understanding of young people is remarkably contemporary in its perception of young adulthood as lasting until "at least twenty-one," and also in how it is conceptualizing young adult readers, The Guardian's recommended reading is literature that might be enjoyed by adolescents but was not necessarily written with them in mind. (See Trites [1996, 2000] on the distinction between adolescent and YA literature; see Immel's index [1990] for the list of texts Trimmer recommended to her adolescent readers.) Undeniably, determining whether or not a work is written expressly for young adults is a significant variable in defining contemporary YA literature.

Contrary to Trimmer's understanding that good literature should fashion young readers into deeply moral people, contemporary YA literature ostensibly shuns that didactic impulse. And while Trimmer's periodical provided children and young people with models of near impossible virtue in order to shape more upright adults, today's YA literature could hardly be said to advance this agenda—indeed, the "adult" in "young adult" is often code for its euphemistic meaning of mature content. Yet, as many have pointed out, the problem novel in the 1970s, a staple genre within YA literature, was freighted with deeply didactic impulses (Cart 1996; Trites 2000). Undeniably, the conventional association between YA literature's beginnings and realism privileges both verisimilitude and a strong sense of moral purpose (see Cart 1996; Tribunella 2007; Campbell 2009; Nilsen and Donelson 2009). For if we take Raymond Williams's (1983a) important articulation of realism as "a description of facing up to things as they really are, and not as we imagine or would like them to be," then we arrive at a dominant theme in much of contemporary YA literature. While Trimmer's understanding of "things as they really are" is grounded in readings that reflect a prerevolutionary world order and a divine transcendental signified, the foundational texts of YA literature, such as S. E. Hinton's The Outsiders (1967), Paul Zindel's The Pigman (1968), and Robert Cormier's The Chocolate War (1974), are anchored in an equally fervent—though more subtly articulated—commitment to "facing facts" (Williams 1983a).
S. E. Hinton (1967b) calls for a young adult literature fashioned against romance—those novels about the "horse-and-the-girl-who-loved-it" as well as the "fairy-tale of proms and double dates." Instead, she insists that texts address the real "violence of teen-agers' lives . . . [such as] the beating-up at a local drive-in" or the "reality" of "the behind-the-scenes politicking that goes on in big schools, [and] the cruel social system" that defines popularity. She demands this realism because of her belief that young people "know their parents aren't superhuman, . . . that justice doesn't always win out, and that sometimes the bad guys win." Her understanding of fiction has an implicit moral imperative: to "face facts," certainly, but also to show that "some people don't sell out, and that everyone can't be bought." Jerry Renault, the protagonist of The Chocolate War, could be held up as an example of Hinton's latter claim. (Anita Tarr's [2002] vital rejoinder to this dominant reading extends Hinton's insistence on the importance of exposing the real violence of teenagers' lives. For Tarr reveals that Jerry does not make a conscious choice to "disturb the universe," and asserts that academics' and teachers' attention to his "decision" to resist the chocolate sale shifts critical focus away from the novel's deeply troubling and virulent misogyny—another "fact" readers need to face.)

Many contemporary YA writers, even those not allied with realist works, are also committed to this politics of realism, which often addresses ethical concerns. M. T. Anderson's Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing novels (2006, 2008) present eighteenth-century American society in new and ominous ways, ingenuously illuminating the horrors of slavery, and melding rich historical realism with new imaginary perspectives. Octavian Nothing pushes readers to contemplate what it means to be human, and has stirred debate about the nature of youth and what they should be reading. Other significant YA texts also advance a realist agenda ineluctably bound up with a sense of the moral possibilities of literature. Francesca Lia Block's magical realist fiction reminds readers of the transformative potential of love and art in stories that address topics such as sexual abuse and AIDS, all the while challenging heteronormativity by consistently providing readers with gay characters. Other, more realist writers advance similar agendas and illuminate the limits of Block's more utopian yearnings. Jacqueline Woodson makes alarmingly clear that race still clouds how people see other humans in If You Come Softly (1998) and reveals the particular challenges facing biracial youth in The House You Pass on the Way (1999), as well as presenting a range of sexual identities and experiences for her characters. Walter Dean Myers's Monster (1999) scrutinizes flaws in the American judicial system while also trenchantly examining contemporary constructions of masculinity. And Catherine Atkins's When Jeff Comes Home (1999) considers sexual violence against boys and men, crucially illuminating effects of trauma as well as the intensely gendered ways we conceptually victimize victims of sexual violence (Pattee 2004). Other texts that examine rape, such as Laurie Halse Anderson's Speak (1999), work to show young readers that
adults are not "superhuman," to use Hinton's phrase, but significantly depict them as human and humane—unlike the remote, distasteful, and sometimes sadistic adults presented in *The Chocolate War*. If sex and death are the two primary concepts from which we shelter children (Mills 2000), and then introduce young adults to in texts that reflect their burgeoning maturity, Jenny Downham's *Before I Die* (2007) considers both. Yet her novel and Cynthia Kadohata's *Kira-Kira* (2004) are as much about living fully as they are moving examinations of young people succumbing to terminal illnesses. Aidan Chambers's masterful *Postcards from No Man's Land* (1999) also addresses death, but pushes readers to contemplate the possibility of euthanasia for an aged protagonist, as well as challenging them to think about the Dutch and British legacies of World War II, teenagers' fascination with Anne Frank, and bisexuality.

Novels such as these reflect the breadth of the best of contemporary YA literature, but some would prefer these—and a host of others—to be censored. The disagreements reveal interesting ideas about young adults that recall the phrase's dual Romantic roots: YA readers are innocents in need of further shelter or last-minute instruction, or are readers who need to "face the facts" about the world, ideally becoming more enlightened, democratic world citizens. While contemporary YA writers have largely used literature to advance Western notions of adolescence as a time to question the power structure, rebel, or embrace one's "individuality," scholars should not forget this term's occluded Romantic inheritance of narrower reading practices and antirevolutionary sentiment. The rich field of YA literature is indebted to a number of revolutions, including but not limited to the social movements of the 1960s and the backlash that followed them; it is also heir to the French Revolution and reactions against the Enlightenment philosophies that brought it about. Both legacies reflect people's comprehension of literature's ability to shape, define, expand, and alter experience. Given the considerable changes in mind and body that mark adolescence, and our belief in the significance of this liminal state between childhood and adulthood, it is no wonder that YA literature is viewed—positively or negatively—as potent and transformative.