

# The Complications of Adaptation: An Interview with Dana E. Lawrence and Amy L. Montz

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While adaptation might seem like a recent phenomenon, it has long had a presence in culture. As Linda Hutcheon (2012) notes in the preface to the first edition of *A Theory of Adaptation*, “The Victorians had a habit of adapting just about everything – and in just about every possible direction... We postmoderns have clearly inherited this same habit, but we have even more new materials at our disposal... The result? Adaptation has run amok” (XIII). From film to opera to television to movies, adaptations surround us. Adaptation’s popularity is especially evident in young adult literature. Besides the adaptations of books like *Twilight*, *Harry Potter*, and *The Hate U Give* into film, many young adult (YA) books themselves revisit and retell stories. Recent examples of this include as David Elliott’s *Bull*, Hannah Capin’s *Foul is Fair*, and Ibi Zoboi’s *Pride*, which are based respectively on mythology, Shakespeare, and classic literature. While some of this might be due to the name recognition of the source material, the best adaptations are not a paint-by-numbers replication of the original. Instead, adaptations have the ability to complement and even enrich their sources by uncovering hidden layers or adding new meaning for readers.

Despite the popularity of adaptation in young adult literature, this topic has previously not received the scholarly attention it deserves, with the majority of adaptation theory work focusing on other mediums. Fortunately, Dr. Dana E. Lawrence and Dr. Amy L. Montz recognized this gap in the research and sought to fill it with their 2020 work *Adaptation in Young Adult Novels: Critically Engaging Past and Present*. With chapters examining recent works of YAL ranging from Rick Riordan’s Percy Jackson series to Jesmyn Ward’s *Salvage the Bones*, *Adaptation in Young Adult Novels* thoughtfully explores how adaptation functions in young adult novels and particularly how YA books can change and complicate the past.

The lack of previous attention makes this a challenging undertaking. Fortunately, Lawrence and Montz bring a wealth of knowledge and experience related to this work. Both have extensive backgrounds in English literature and young adult literature and have previously considered how these two seemingly disparate worlds can connect. Lawrence, who currently serves as an associate professor of English as well as the director of the Academic Success Center at the University of South Carolina Lancaster, has researched Shakespearean adaptations, literary tourism, and modern poetry, and has presented her work at the Children's Literature Association (ChLA) conference. Montz is an associate professor of English at the University of Southern Indiana, where she teaches classes on British literature and young adult literature. She has presented at ChLA, co-edited *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*, and published her work on adaptations of Jane Austen in *The Lion & the Unicorn*.

**Terri Suico (TS):** How did you become interested in studying young adult literature?

**Amy L. Montz (ALM):** I took a class in graduate school with Lynn Vallone, and it was *The Big and Small in Children's Literature*. We did a couple of YA books, and I've always read YA. I'm friends with some really great YA scholars like Sara Day and Sonya Sawyer Fritz and Victoria Ford Smith. Also, just going to ChLA [the Children's Literature Association] and seeing all the smart things that people are doing makes me interested in YA. I work strictly in YA and new adult books - I don't look a lot at books for the younger grades. I teach a young adult lit class - I share it now with someone else in my department. I also teach the teaching methods class for our English education majors, and so we read *Hunger Games* in that class; that's our primary text that we do. I think YA is a beautiful avenue to explore many different issues.

One of my upcoming projects is on fatness in YA lit. That seed was planted in 2002 when I took that seminar with Lynn Vallone. I think it's a beautiful field that's getting so much more respect these days now, because of the smart work that scholars are doing.

**Dana E. Lawrence (DEL):** I came to young adult literature through the back door. I teach at a two-year regional campus of the University of South Carolina, and so we don't have an English major at my school. I really wanted to teach a class that students would take voluntarily and that students would be interested in. We have a partnership with the main campus in Columbia for the

elementary education degree, so students do the first two years at our campus and then move to either online or in-person at Columbia. I decided I wanted to teach the children's literature class, and so I took several graduate classes at USC to prepare for this. Also, I have a young adult child, and we started reading novels together. As a result of the grad classes I was taking, I encountered adaptations of Shakespeare for young readers, which fit with my original field, which was 16<sup>th</sup> century British literature. I told Amy I just ordered ten more adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* to read, because I think the different ways the story remains relevant to the experiences of young people are fascinating.

**ALM:** With these adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet*, they're actually writing good adaptations. I've done some work on Jane Austen adaptations, and I published something in *The Lion and the Unicorn* about that. In my research, I found that there are some really bad adaptations out there. However, Dana is able to find the good ones and sort through the wheat and the chaff.

**DEL:** Well, I've read some very bad ones (laughs).

**TS:** I always find it interesting to see how people come to young adult literature, particularly people in English departments. Also, it's fascinating that both of you have some connection to teacher preparation in higher education.

**ALM:** I used to teach high school, so that's how I fell into young adult literature. The university I teach at hired me to focus on teaching 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century British literature, and they also said, "We have this class that has not been taught in ten years. What do you think?" (laughs). And I thought, "okay." We built the YA class from the ground up. I taught it as a special topic class. I did a sci-fi YA class and then did straight YA. Then the university put it in the Core [the University of Southern Indiana's general education program], and it filled. I get biology students in that class. It fills immediately, and it fills from across the university, which is what we want. We want to entice people to take English classes and maybe become minors. I think it's a gateway class.

**DEL:** I have students in my children's literature class who are not in the teacher prep program. We have a Bachelor of Liberal Studies; the children's lit class is a 400-level class. Students need a

certain number of those to complete the program, so I get people who have no interest in teaching take the class, and it's really fun. They always say, "I haven't read a book in a really long time," which is depressing. But they also say, "I really loved all these books, and it was so fun." I think that's a value that YA brings; people remember, "I used to love reading, and it was something I did for fun." They rediscover their enjoyment of reading in it.

**TS:** That is interesting, because we hear about how many adults are aliterate, where they can read but just choose not to. As both of you note, young adult literature is a way to mitigate that. In your mind and from your experience, what is the appeal of adaptations when it comes to culture, particularly literature?

**DEL:** The idea that we mentioned in the introduction to *Adaptation in Young Adult Novels* is that adaptation just keeps stories going; these stories have relevance beyond the context in which they were written. Human nature doesn't change that much – the specifics change, but it's depressing to see how all the arguments from the past are still relevant in 2021. It's really sad, but it's also true. Adaptations open people up to these works that are considered literature with a capital L and that have a reputation for being stodgy, old dusty business, when something like *Frankenstein*, *Romeo and Juliet*...

**ALM:** *Medea*...

**DEL:** These stories stick around for a reason, and this is a way to bridge that divide and allow young people and not-so-young people to see that continuing relevance. They can consider the bigger questions that are at stake in *Frankenstein* and that continue to be the questions about science, the fear of science, the conflict between science and nature and faith, and all these things. In adaptations, we get to bring these questions back and make them make sense in this more contemporary context.

**ALM:** I just re-taught *Frankenstein* for my gothic literature class, and I started the semester by asking them for gothic memes. Half of the memes were about Frankenstein, which is the greatest thing ever.

In terms of adaptations, there's a line that we put in our prospectus that adaptations don't have to be vampiric and that they're not sucking the life away. Instead, they're, in fact, infusing new life into previously told stories. I mean, how many kids have to read *Great Gatsby*? How many have to read *Frankenstein*?

I used to teach for Duke TIP - Talent Identification Program. Super-genius kids would go to this nerd camp for three weeks and take classes, and they would ask, "Can we have secret homework?" because they weren't supposed to have homework. I had to take their books away from them so they wouldn't read. It was the most amazing teaching experience because of the kids and because I had free reign. For five years, I made my own classes. I did classes on zombies and vampires, I did a class on apocalypse, and I did a heroes class and a villains class. In my heroes class, we read *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, which is a 1,000-year-old text, and my students were absolutely fascinated with *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. And now there's an adaptation movie coming out.

I was teaching *The Hunger Games* in my teaching literature class when the movie came out; we went and saw the movie and then went to dinner and talked about the adaptation and how to teach adaptation. I think there's something really lively about adaptations – it's not just breathing life into older works, but it's literally lively. I think adaptation is something that inspires people.

**TS:** I was also going to say, from perhaps a more cynical perspective, that there is this sense of comfort in the familiar. When you're trying to market a book or shop a book to publishers, you can say, "Well, it's like *The Great Gatsby* but set in the modern-day Hamptons, or it's *Romeo and Juliet*, but it's set in this era," and immediately, people have a sense of what that story is going to be about and what the conflict is.

**ALM:** There's a lot of interesting adaptation literature about nostalgia. That comfort, it's something that the parents can share with their children too. For instance, the fact that Dana and [her son] Hayden were reading these books together. I love the idea of parents and children bonding over books and maybe even comparing a story with its adaptation. It's fascinating to me, the work that is being done at home even with adaptation.

**TS:** How did you first get the idea to edit a book on adaptation in young adult novels? I know that you mentioned in the book that it started out from a conversation at ChLA and went on from there, but how did you decide that this would make a good collection of essays and a good scholarly book?

**DEL:** Part of the reasoning was selfish, because we wanted to write about this topic. We thought, we can do a collection and then we can write about a topic that we love. However, we also found that a book on this topic doesn't exist anywhere else. Literally, every other collection of essays about literary adaptations focused on film or TV or video games or some combination of those. There was nothing that was looking at literary adaptations of classic texts, so it was exciting for us because there's this built-in hole that we could attempt to fill. Also, while there are journal articles, I think having a collection in a single text reveals the scope of what's out there. In our book, we barely scratched the surface in terms of the different literature with a capital L texts that are adapted and the variety of adaptations that exist. In terms of teaching, teachers use film a lot when teaching adaptation, and we wanted to show that there's this other way to look at adaptation that might even be more effective.

**ALM:** I encourage the pairing of capital L literary texts with young adult adaptations. It's something I encourage in my teaching literature class, and I have students who come back and say how effective this is in the classroom. That put a bug in my ear for a little while. Then Dana and I, at the same time, were doing research on literary tourism, and that research led into this project in a really interesting way.

I did a National Endowment for the Humanities Institute in 2017 on American material culture. We were in New York, and New York was our classroom, so we went all over the city. This is what inspired me to think about New York as a place of adaptation. For instance, how do we adapt 19<sup>th</sup> century New York when there's just not 19<sup>th</sup> century New York left? We started talking about putting together a book about literary tourism, and many years later, we're still talking about this book that will eventually happen. As we did that, I was reading these adaptations of 19<sup>th</sup> century New York at the same time, so that served as a spark.

Also, Dana is an amazing writer and an amazing thinker; she's my writing partner. If I need somebody to read something, I send it to Dana. We swap writing all the time, so writing the introduction together was seamless.

**DEL:** I think our styles merged well. I don't think our voices sound so different. I'm assuming you can't tell which one of us wrote which part.

**TS:** It really does seem like it was written in one voice.

**DEL:** Our voices really mesh well together, which helps a lot.

**ALM:** Dana has a really good eye. When we were doing the editing, if our contributors had a sticky part, Dana would break it apart and help them figure it out.

**TS:** This actually leads us into the next question. How did the two of you start collaborating and working together? Based on this conversation alone, it's obvious that you didn't reach out to each other randomly and say "Let's do this book together."

**DEL:** We went to grad school together at Texas A&M; we did our PhDs together, so we've known each other for almost 20 years.

**ALM:** We used to live across the street from each other.

**DEL:** We started in completely different fields, and our path into YA happened completely separately. Eventually, our paths converged, and we started talking about like our love of adaptations and how cool it would be to have a panel on this. We had the panel, and we thought, "You know what we should do? We should put together a collection on this topic." Working together on this project was organic which made the process easier.

**ALM:** I work in two fields; I work in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century British literature and I work in YA. I did a lot of work on Neo-Victorianism, which tied these two fields together. I had an article in

*Children's Literature Association Quarterly* about corsetry in young adult Neo-Victorian literature, and that got me to think about where my two fields converge and about how, in Neo-Victorianism, you're adapting an era. For both of us, this idea of adaptation has been in our heads for years now. As Dana said, we organically fell into it and decided "Let's put a book together."

**TS:** You're absolutely right that there is this gap in the research on adaptations in young adult literature. When the editors of *Study and Scrutiny* first told me about the theme for this upcoming issue, I worried that I wouldn't be able to find anything. It was hard even finding recent journal articles about adaptations and young adult literature, so when I stumbled upon your book, I was thrilled to have something recent and relevant to review, and I was also thrilled for the field in general because this is work that is desperately needed. How would you describe the response that you got when you first put out the call for abstracts and proposals for *Adaptation in Young Adult Novels*?

**DEL:** Honestly, it wasn't a mad avalanche of abstracts. Something that became quickly apparent is that the abstracts were being submitted by young scholars - a lot of people still in grad school as well as some post-docs - which we thought was exciting because it showed that this was a topic that's still developing. Maybe we're at the early end of this new attention to literary adaptations. This may reflect what you were finding when you were looking for work to review, this absence of scholarship on the topic. It's coming, I think, because the contributors have other projects about YA adaptations of literary texts happening. I feel like we might have lucked out by being on the early end of this developing area of interest.

**ALM:** And I feel that this might also be because YA is a relatively young genre. What I've observed in ChLA is that a lot of the older scholars are children's literature scholars and a lot of the younger scholars are YA scholars and children's literature, because there's tons of great work being done on picture books. This area is relatively young and exciting - in fact, some of the feedback we got on the collection was that people were excited to see that we were publishing such new scholars in the field. When we were reviewing the submissions, we looked solely at the abstracts and what was going to be the best fit for the collection and who was doing the most exciting work, so it ended up skewing very young.



**TS:** You write about some of the skepticism regarding young adult literature that you have gotten from colleagues or perhaps from some other scholars who are not focused on young adult literature. Did you get any pushback when putting together this book and shopping it around, or even just talking about it to other people?

**ALM:** Bloomsbury, our publisher, loved it. They were really excited by it, and they were really supportive of it. And I love our cover. In fact, we're on Bloomsbury's banner of new books because it's got such a striking cover. I think that people were just excited by it, though we haven't read any reviews yet, so (laughs) we don't know. However, our peer review was positive, and Bloomsbury was positive. I think we just found the right editor at the right time. When we wrote to them, they were eager to see what we had.

**TS:** Is there something about young adult literature that makes it particularly ripe or fitting for adaptation?

**ALM:** I think it's because it is so expansive. I think that the function of young adult literature is to show growth, and there are many ways of doing this. For instance, it can be done by focusing on the chosen one like Katniss Everdeen or Harry Potter or telling about what happens when the popular girl realizes that she's not so popular. I think that, ultimately, young adult literature is about character growth.

When thinking about young adult literature and capital L literature, what young adult lit can do is take characters, examine them, and explore them in different contexts. For instance, what would these characters look like if we put them in the Hamptons? Or what would Medea look like if we put her in the middle of Mississippi during Hurricane Katrina? For instance, the article on *Frankenstein* looks at the story and the characters through a multitude of texts and explores how these characters are interpreted and how young adult readers and adult readers can get something out of this story and these retellings.

Young adult books are talking about how it's hard to be an adolescent; you've got emotions, hormones, parents, and school. In the same way, it was hard to be a 19<sup>th</sup> century woman, and it was hard to be an Asian American in the 1930s. It was hard to be black during Hurricane Katrina. I think that pointing out how people face challenges is at the core of so much YA.

**DEL:** The more practical or cynical answer might be that there's this assumed built-in audience because the texts that are being adapted most frequently are the ones that are the most taught in high school and middle school. *Frankenstein*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Great Gatsby* are texts that everybody has to read in high school. Maybe there's an assumption that teachers will order young adult books that are adapted from the classics for their classes or incorporate them into the curriculum in some way.

Then there's this built-in recognition that you've already mentioned. I and other readers can understand what the basic structure of a story is going to be, such as *Romeo and Juliet* set in Harlem. There's also this sort of built-in authority that comes with the association with the original text (as original as any of them are), so that may be part of the appeal to publishers. I have 50 different adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* right now in all different genres; there's graphic novels, there's historical romance, there's zombie stories. It's everywhere, which I think is super-fun.

**TS:** I find it fascinating to see how you can take a core story, retell it, and complicate it and approach from different ways.

**ALM:** Terri, I want to grasp onto what you just said about complicating stories. I think that's exactly right, because the adaptations that don't necessarily work are the ones that are just a cut-and-paste adaptation. For instance, rewrites of *Pride and Prejudice* that open with lines that are very similar to Austen's opening can be too cutesy. *Epic Fail* by Claire LaZebnik, which is an update of *Pride and Prejudice*, does a good job of keeping the main arguments and points of the original story without falling into the trap of copying Austen beat for beat. There's also a *Jane Eyre* adaptation called *Re-Jane*, which is set in 2001 during the fall of the Twin Towers and 9/11, and then it spans America and Korea. I want adaptations to do something smart with the story, so complicating it is the right way to describe it.

I think adaptations that are good are the ones that make meaningful changes. For instance, *Great* by Sara Benincasa takes *The Great Gatsby* and makes the story about a lesbian couple in the Hamptons. I thought it was just genius.

**DEL:** For me, the best adaptations are the most engaging ones, the ones that really engage those complicated parts of the source text. I'm going to keep talking about *Romeo and Juliet* because that's

what's in my head right now (laughs). On the surface, it's about teenagers in love, and they can't be together because their parents don't like each other. However, there are multiple underlying conflicts going on in the play beyond just the two teenagers, and there are so many interesting ways to modernize that or to approach it from a different perspective. I also think the ones that just focus on the love story are super-boring (laughs) because I don't even think that's the point of *Romeo and Juliet*, even though that's what everybody knows about that tale.

**ALM:** Dana, if I remember correctly, you said some of your favorite adaptations are about Mercutio.

**DEL:** Yes, because Mercutio and Tybalt are complicated, and their struggles and internal conflicts are central to the story. However, they're not given that proper attention in a lot of the adaptations, they're just made into the bullies.

**TS:** Or the side characters that have to get in the way of the two lovers.

**DEL:** Yes, but without those two characters, you don't have *Romeo and Juliet* because they're crucial.

**TS:** We've started to touch on this, but are there any other limitations or drawbacks to adaptations or anything that literary adaptations should avoid? Obviously, we were just talking about avoiding retelling the story beat-for-beat, but is there anything else that you would say adaptations should avoid? What makes an adaptation less than successful?

**DEL:** Didacticism is the quickest way to turn someone off.

**ALM:** Yes, didacticism and gimmicks should be avoided. Something I hate the most is when people try to emulate the writing style of the original author. In a lot of Austen rewrites, they try to write like Jane Austen. I want to tell them, "You are not Jane Austen (laughs), just accept the fact that you are not Jane Austen and move on."

I think the best adaptations really think about the core of the text. I have another article on adaptation, which is on the Austen adaptation *Epic Fail*. It's a lot about surveillance culture, and so I actually read the young adult surveillance culture of being on screen all the time, is the same as being in a novel of manners and being in this sort of oppressive society that watches every move. The main character's love interest is the son of a famous couple, and he's super-beautiful because his parents are super-beautiful. Consequently, he's used to people using him, which connects him to Darcy in a way. What makes Darcy so removed is because people want him because he's so rich. I think that is what's so smart about that adaptation. Rethinking the core of the story and how the core can be updated for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is where some of the really good adaptations go.

**TS:** Are there any other hallmarks that either of you can think of when it comes to successful adaptations?

**ALM:** I love the ones that complicate the stories in terms of race, class, gender, or sexuality. I like the ones that don't just have the heterosexual love story, that it's thinking about other relationships, like *Great* being about two lesbians or *Salvage the Bones* being about Medea and talking about aspects like dogs and family. Movements like We Need Diverse Books, Me Too, and Own Voices have provided a path towards people being able to see themselves. I also think we can see a reverse. You see yourself in this adaptation of *Hamlet*; when you go back and read *Hamlet*, you might imagine yourself in *Hamlet* because you've seen yourself in this adaptation. What do you think, Dana?

**DEL:** I enjoy the adaptations that offer a critique of the source text and have a meta-approach. I like it when the adaptations are talking about the source text, such as when the characters reading it are familiar with it in some way, and then the adaptation problematizes it and turns it into a bit of literary analysis combined with adaptation. This demonstrates the ways in which readers can question these capital L literary texts, because sometimes young adult readers think, "I can't criticize this book because my teacher says it's important" or someone else says that it's important. However, we can and should criticize literary works, and I enjoy the adaptations that do this.

**ALM:** The Chaucer rewrite *Sometimes We Tell the Truth* by Kim Zarins, which we talk about in the introduction, gets that so well. For the introduction, it was clear that we should focus on the part

of the story that retells “The Wife of Bath’s Tale.” We didn’t want to write about the whole book because that would have been the entire introduction. Zarins takes the details from Chaucer, like the Wife of Bath being 12 years old when she’s first married, and makes her character 12 years old when she first has sex with someone older, and she’s got her Hello Kitty panties on and that embarrasses her. There’s this adult taking advantage and raping this child, and she’s trying to protect him and say, “I wanted it as much as he did,” but not fully understanding consent. We need to have those conversations about “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” and about the characters in contemporary books. It becomes easier for us to critique the originating source when we understand it, because a lot of people excuse behavior in the original stories with the mindset of “Oh, it’s the past.”

**TS:** Where would you like to see young adult literature adaptations go in the future?

**ALM:** I want to see less well-known texts adapted. For instance, I want to see more people adapting some of the lesser-known Shakespeare texts. I loved our chapter on Dickens and *A Tale of Two Cities*; I thought that was amazing that somebody was rewriting Dickens. We also had the chapter on adaptations of Edith Wharton’s short stories, which I thought was genius. I love all of our essays, by the way, so I’m going to say genius after all of them.

**DEL:** The essay on the Percy Jackson books, I thought, was perfect. The author [Saffyre Falkenberg] is brilliant. One thing she’s doing is looking at is how these books are attempting to incorporate diversity but are falling short in multiple ways. Her analysis is so smart. She also talks about Rick Riordan’s imprint and how it is pulling in non-Western mythologies. I would like to see more attention to that. It’s so easy to just replace a white character with a black character or a straight character with a gay character, but if that’s all you’re doing, and you’re not questioning the culture and the structure, that’s a problem. You can’t just plug in a different identity and then have everything else be the same. As Falkenberg argues, you can’t take Greek mythology, which is the mythology that informs the entire planet, put in some characters of color and some queer characters, and say that you’re totally diverse in your books.

**ALM:** It’s the difference between true diversity and token diversity.

**DEL:** Yes.

**TS:** What work in terms of research and criticism regarding young adult literature adaptations would you like to see in the future?

**ALM:** Sonya Sawyer Fritz and Sara Day put out an interesting book about adaptations of Victorian literature recently, and I thought they did a great job. I would also love to see more thematized adaptations. We did the novels; I would love to see an adaptation collection maybe on medieval literature or an adaptation collection on looking at strictly film or strictly video games. I love themes, so I would like to see some more thematized collections. For instance, it would be great to see medieval and young adult scholars talking together in interesting ways. How about you, Dana?

**DEL:** I would like to see more stuff about novels because there's not much. Also, as you said earlier, I'd like to see something focused on less canonized texts, so not the standard fare that you would find in high school curriculum but on more obscure texts that do also get adapted. The Wharton adaptations are probably the most obscure texts addressed out of the ones in our collection; I suspect those aren't being taught in most high schools, even though they sound awesome, and students would probably love them.

Also, as much as I love Shakespeare, there are other plays and other playwrights from that period who are amazing. With Restoration theatre, there's so much potential there, too.

**TS:** Something that struck me as I was reading the book was that I wanted it to be longer. I wanted the chapters to be longer, and I wanted there to be more chapters. In my review, I noted that some of the chapters could have been expanded. Also, I feel like each of the three parts could have been separate books. However, I recognize that publishers have length maximums to make the book viable to print. Given how rich the topics were, how did this help the process of editing the book and how did this complicate the process of editing the book?

**DEL:** We had a word limit that we had to stick to for the whole book.

**ALM:** We divided it up and gave everybody around 6,000 or 7,000 words.

**DEL:** Yes, we gave everybody the same word allotment for fairness. I won't be surprised to see any one of the contributors publish more on the same topic elsewhere, because I think in several cases, the chapter was part of a larger project. In some cases it might be part of a dissertation and in other cases there was just a longer essay that they had to cut down to meet our restrictions. The word count included the index and notes and everything, so that was just sort of the practical factors that affected it.

**ALM:** Some things got cut down, and some things were scripted a little differently. However, we were very happy with what came out of it, though we did wish it could have been longer. There were some essays that I definitely think would've benefited from ever more descriptive detail. But unfortunately, the length of the book was out of our hands.

**TS:** Ideally, how would you like your book to be used? Where do you see it in terms of classroom use, library use, and research use?

**DEL:** We intended it as a scholarly text to further the scholarship in the field, and we deliberately did not include any ideas on how to teach these texts. However, I do think that all of the writing is accessible enough that you don't have to be a scholar of adaptation theory or of these texts to read and understand the essays. I think the book could be useful to teachers in terms of introducing them to other adaptations that they may not have heard of and giving them different ways of thinking about presenting the adaptations. And of course, it would be great if college instructors incorporated the book into their classes at the undergraduate or graduate levels.

**ALM:** When I taught high school, I brought in some criticism, and I think all of our texts are accessible enough that high school students could read these and start to understand literary criticism. For me and Dana as writers, it was important to make sure that our work is accessible. I use a very casual voice in my writing, and there are some people who do not like that and have asked me to leave projects because they didn't like my voice. However, making sure that the writing and ideas are accessible is what we like most about a book. We don't want it to be jargony, and

adaptation theory itself is not jargony. I think adaptation theory makes sense in that people can get a lot out of it and it's accessible.

**DEL:** We've talked the ways in which YA is dismissed as "not real literature," but I think adaptation is treated the same way where it's seen as derivative, but it's not. It's doing lots of really smart things, and it's important to highlight that. When we were writing our introduction, we wanted to emphasize that adaptation isn't vampiric and that it is doing more with the text, it's not just retelling the same story in a different setting. With a book like this [on YA and adaptations], it's sometimes seen as doubly marginalized. However, adaptation does important things, and YA does important things, and here's how they're doing important things together.

**TS:** I mentioned in my review how accessible, in the best way possible, the book is, and one of my ideas was that could work as an introduction to literary criticism for high school, Amy, so I was excited that you mentioned that. However, because the term "accessible" is sometimes interpreted in academic circles as being code for overly simple, I was worried that you might see my comment not as the compliment I intended but as criticism.

**ALM:** No, we want people reading the book. I was a first-generation college student, and my dad didn't even graduate high school. When I got my PhD, he said, "High school dropout to PhD in one generation." It's very sweet. I write so that my dad could read what I write. Since my dad is very math-minded, he's never read a book for pleasure. He's read the tax code, he says, but he's never read a book for pleasure. He said he won't read a book until it's my book, so I write in such a way that my dad would be able to read it and understand it.

It is important to me as a writer that people can access my work. I don't believe in gatekeeping, and we see so much of that in academia, with this mindset of pulling the ladder up and that others should go through this horrible experience because I went through this horrible experience. I don't believe any of that; I believe that anyone should be able to get an education if they want to, and I believe anyone should be able to read this book.

**TS:** What are your plans for upcoming research and publishing?



**ALM:** I have a contract for my monograph, which was my dissertation from a long time ago. It's on material culture, and it's called *Dressing for England, Fashion and Nationalism in Victorian Novels*. There's a chapter on American literature, and then I'm doing a chapter on royal weddings, so I'm working on those two chapters this summer.

My next YA project is on fat girls in YA, which I came to via fashion, and looking at how YA approaches fatness and how so many fat YA stories are the tragedies. I'm looking at who's writing fat positive novels and why are we not writing more positive novels about characters who are fat. Those are where my projects are.

**DEL:** I was just going to interject that Amy is also writing a fat positive YA novel that I've been allowed to read, and it's great. I was telling her if I had had this when I was a teenager or a middle schooler, it would have been so helpful. The books I was reading in elementary school, middle school, and high school that were about fat girls focused on former fat girls who were terrified of getting fat again, or they were fat girls who were tormented until they lost weight. Amy's novel spoke to me, and I really hope that it gets published soon.

**TS:** That sounds fantastic and very much needed. Dana, what are you working on?

**DEL:** I have a long-postponed project that's not on a YA book, although arguably, it could be categorized as new adult. I am looking at Helen Oyeyemi and her book *The Icarus Girl*. It's her first novel, and I read it as a post-colonial adaptation of *Frankenstein*. Specifically, I'm interested in the children's text that the eight-year-old protagonist is reading and how Oyeyemi uses what the protagonist is reading and learning in school as commentary on the trauma inflicted by colonialism and the way that it is passed down through generations. The protagonist is reading *Little Women*, and it's her mother's copy of *Little Women*. Her mother is an immigrant from Nigeria, and the protagonist is half-Nigerian, half-white British, so she's having a physical and geographical and supernatural sort of struggle with her identity and who she is.

And, of course, I'm doing more work on *Romeo and Juliet* adaptations (laughs) and literary tourism, because I approach literary tourism from the perspective of adaptation studies. I have this hypothetical *Romeo and Juliet* project that incorporates not only YA novels but also adult novel adaptations too and looks at them through the lens of literary tourism.

**TS:** Is there anything else that you would like to share or anything that we haven't touched on that you wanted us to discuss?

**ALM:** I want to end just by saying like how happy we are with this collection and how much we appreciated our contributors. They were kind and enthusiastic, which helped because when you write a book, it's all in fits and starts. You have a lot of deadlines and then you don't hear anything for six months. We had really great contributors, and they were just really wonderful to work with. And of course, Dana was such a delight to work with, so I just really appreciate her as a scholar, a colleague, and a friend.

**DEL:** Well now, how can I follow that up?

**ALM:** By saying, "Amy, you are wonderful." (laughs)

**DEL:** You are wonderful. I'm irritated that you have these other projects that you have to finish before we can do another project together. This project was really fun, the contributors were really fun, and we have actually stayed in contact with a couple of them, and it's always nice to make personal connections with people through your scholarly work. It's been my experience that young adult scholars in general are nice people, and they are generous people. There's never a sense of, "You're not as important because you're a graduate student or because you haven't been in this field for that long, or you're just like entering it now." That never ever comes up, and so I love the field of young adult literature for that.

**TS:** Thank you both so very much for taking the time to talk to me. You're trying to ramp up for summer, so I know that time is incredibly precious. I appreciate having the opportunity to talk to you about your work and this book.

**REFERENCES**

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