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Editors: Ollie Taylor and Kostas Boyiopoulos

*Review of Bernice E. Cullinan, Bonnie
Kunzel and Deborah Wooten, eds.
Continuum Encyclopaedia of Young Adult
Literature*

Pamela Knights*

* Durham University

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With the burgeoning of university Children's Literature Studies, and the high profile of young people's books in best-seller and award lists, new reference guides are appearing at full spate. Alongside Peter Hunt's revised Routledge International Companion Encyclopaedia (currently £225 on Amazon), or the recent four-volume Oxford Encyclopaedia, edited by Jack Zipes (£220), this volume, at a mere £95, might seem positively affordable. Nevertheless, it is still way out of reach for the individual reader or researcher, and is clearly destined for libraries. That is a pity, as it presents itself as a desk-top companion—for dipping, browsing and quick name-checks—rather than an authoritative academic tome. Young Adult ('Y/A', 'Teen', or 'Adolescent') literature has become a prominent marketing label, and one audience for this book is the adult trying to navigate new territory—the concerned teacher or parent. As a counter to the often alarmist publicity about the new realism (swearing . . . sex . . . drugs . . . abuse . . . self-harm in books for the young...?!), the contributors here seek to reassure, or—more emphatically—to celebrate. The accompanying illustrations all display Y/A authors (especially the more photogenic) smiling warmly at camera, or exhibiting a comforting gravitas: the implied message is that these are responsible writers, not the perverts or filth-mongers of the scariest headlines. They are the confidant(e)s, friends, and non-judgemental listeners, often at the centre of the genre's narrative self-constructions.

The textual entries, too, are largely author-centred, and descriptive, with a smattering of thematic, geographical, or historical overviews. In a genre related to the Bildungsroman, identity-and ethnic-classifications also, of course, feature

strongly; and popular forms and formats—the Graphic Novel, anime and manga—are represented. As with any encyclopaedia, those who are already interested in the topic will pick quarrels with the selectors. Why, for instance, in the British entries, no Jane Gardam (*Bilgewater, A Long Way from Verona*), Sue Townsend (for *Adrian Mole*), Catherine Storr, Robert Swindells, or Louise Lawrence? Why is there no separate entry for Beverly Cleary, whose *Fifteen* (1956) is one of the genre's progenitors? However, while omissions are inevitable, some of the inclusions are perhaps more surprising. Although the Y/A category (a mid-to-late twentieth-century development) tends to appropriate writers retroactively or even posthumously, I was initially puzzled to see, for example, Homer, Sophocles and Chaucer, Austen and Dickens, Thoreau, Stowe and Frederick Douglass enlisted in the ranks of authors for teens. The realization that these were grouped under 'The Canon' (here of authors assigned in schools) clarified that mystery; but, elsewhere, similar inclusions threatened to make the genre so all-encompassing that taxonomic distinctions become redundant. For those being introduced to this literature, the length of an entry bears little correspondence to the writer's standing or influence. Jacqueline Wilson, for example, rates less than a column; and readers will have to sift through the discrete items to arrive at a broader sense of relative significance.

In keeping with the celebratory tone, the editorial policy (not fully articulated in the introduction) is ecumenical—representatives of the entire constituency of Y/A literature, from publishers to professors, have a place in this volume. The demotic voice of a number of the contributions is recognizably that of the web, the reader's list, the fan-site, even My Space, where school students input items on their favourites. If this makes the volume seem closer to Wikipedia, this is not necessarily a bad thing. In Zipes's Oxford volume, Robyn McCallum ends her account of Y/A literature with the reminder that adolescence itself is a state without agency: 'Ultimately, it is adults who write and interpret adolescence for young people, by offering a site of enunciation, a subject position that attempts to situate adolescents within the formations of the producing culture' (The

Oxford Encyclopaedia of Children's Literature, ed. Jack Zipes, Vol. IV, New York: Oxford U P, 2006, p. 219). The Continuum Encyclopaedia attempts to give adolescents themselves a voice in that process. For teachers or parents, such enthusiasm offers the note of authenticity: that teenagers still read, and are prepared to recommend their reading, presents a counter-view of adolescents to that of the problem-ridden, cynical, or despairing narcissists, constructed within many of the texts themselves. For the academic researcher, looking for a way to circumvent the deadening passive 'MLA' note, some of these younger writers give refreshing models of an alternative style.

I would, however, warn any of my own undergraduate students to be wary; and to gain confidence in a more academic discourse first, before experimenting with such seemingly more naïve departures. I would also suggest that they supplement these accounts with the different perspectives offered by other guides. Robyn McCallum's theoretically nuanced entry on 'Young Adult Literature' in Zipes's Oxford volume (above), focused on strategy, would complement Michael Cart's more specifically historical essay here. Further, I would urge them to double-check any information. Errors have crept in, some of which should have been spotted at copy-editing (the publication of *Little Women* in 1968, for instance); others needed correcting at an earlier stage: David Almond's *Heaven's Eyes* [for *Heaven Eyes*], for example, or Sandra Beckett (for *Beckett*) in the bibliography of 'Fairy Tale Retellings'.

However, few individuals, even specialists in the field, would claim to be able to keep up with the numerous books and new authors appearing each year; and the Encyclopaedia will be useful for anyone tutoring in this area. Even with its eccentricities and omissions, for pointing undergraduate students, or more advanced researchers, to some exciting new writers, for stretching their sense of a particular topic and its treatment, and, above all, for reminding academics that Y/A literature renews itself within complex cross-currents—literary, cultural, commercial; ethical and aesthetic—I would certainly recommend this volume.