

ON THE STREET: A “Radical Change” in Urban Fiction Featuring Youth



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RESEARCH ON URBAN STREET TEXTS has focused on debates related to street literature's use for leisure and school-sanctioned reading (e.g., in classrooms and school libraries). For instance, Brooks and Savage (2009) and Marshall et al. (2009) outline several controversies around urban street fiction fueled by objections to its literary quality and typical focus on questionable cultural messages, ideologies, stereotypes, excessive violence, gritty language, and moral values, including focus on sex and sexuality. However, many scholars agree that despite the controversy and concerns, street literature is widely read and should be considered for classroom and school library use (Jones, 2015). For instance, researchers suggest the books are ripe for instructing students on how to view this literature through several lenses, including critical literacy, feminism, and social justice (Haddix & Price-Dennis, 2013; Hill, Periz & Irby, 2008; Jones, 2015).

Gangs, guns, drugs, sex, and poverty are all “aesthetics” of urban street fiction, which are texts popular with adults and young adults (Brown, 2011; Hill et al., 2008; Ribay, 2013; Van Orman & Lyiscott, 2013). Morris (2011) maintains titles written for adults such as Paul Laurence Dunbar's *The Sport of Gods* (1902), Langston Hughes' poem “The Ballad of the

Landlord” (1940), and Ann Petry's *The Street* (1946) mark the beginnings of urban street fiction. The 1960s saw an increase in attention to the literary type through the publication of adult titles by Robert “Iceberg Slim” Beck, Eldridge Cleaver, and Donald Goines. Fiction featuring youth in realistic urban settings also emerged with Hinton's *The Outsiders* (1967) and Lipsyte's *The Contender* (1967), recognized as novels that sparked the birth of new realism in young adult literature (Donelson & Nilsen, 1997).

Dresang (2008) maintains Radical Change theory is a “spatial/temporal theory, rooted in the belief that authors and illustrators are influenced by the time and place within which they write” (p. 294). Hence, recently, in the wake of such movements as black Lives Matter, immigration debates, and struggles of transgender youth, young adult literature has been changing and moving toward texts that we categorize as young adult street literature. This is reminiscent of the revival of street texts during the 1990s in the wake of hip hop music that describes urban experiences related to realities such as drug use and distribution, gang affiliation, and police brutality. Tyree's *Flyy Girl* (1993) and Souljah's *The Coldest Winter Ever* (1999), for instance, are novels marketed to adults that

represent not only the intimate world of youth in inner cities, but also through these texts, what becomes apparent is the migratory effects of what might be thought of as urban street culture appearing in suburbia. In this article, we acknowledge changes within young adult literature and suggest that street texts themselves are unstable in response to growing interactivity, connectivity, and access afforded by the digital world, which are principles highlighted within Radical Change theory (Dresang, 1999).

Rich debates around street lit grabbed our attention and reminded us that genres are unstable (Dresang, 1999; Nikoleva, 2005). We began to ask, Can Radical Change theory add anything worthwhile to a conversation about street literature? We argue, "Yes!" In this article, we report on a qualitative content analysis of selected novels that feature youth. The focus of the analysis centered on how main characters near the ages of 12 through 18 struggle against and within the polarizing pull of "the street" as they navigate their way through a marginalized world filled with poverty, homelessness, violence, and a strong need to survive. Here, we rely on both denotative and connotative understandings of the phrase "the street" that suggest a physical environment (i.e., Streets exist in cities, towns, and villages.) as well as a worldview or circumstance that might include destitution, crime, and a reliance on savvy survival skills. We situate our work alongside scholars who acknowledge literature for youth is subversive, radical, and reflective of reality (Dresang, 1999; Reynolds, 2007).

Conceptual Framework

Radical Change theory is a literary theory that makes ideologies about youth as readers and learners central to examinations of their texts. Dresang (1999) explores traditional and often competing ideologies of youth that include child-as-innocent and child-as-deprived before offering an empowering view of youth as readers and full participants in the digital world: "the-child-as-capable-and-seeking-connection" (p. 57). Dresang & McClelland (1999) state, "The best descriptors of the capable child of the digital age are: capably self-reliant, fiercely independent, curious, interactive, and 'multi-tasking'" (p. 160). Thus, Radical Change theory suggests texts are influenced by today's digital world and encompass at least three digital-age principles: interactivity (dynamic engagement with texts), connectivity (expanded relevant social reading for all, especially those who have been marginalized), and access (availability of diverse thought) (Dresang, 2003). Radical

Change theory posits that these digital-age principles—interactivity, connectivity, and access—are manifest in books by three changes: Changing Forms and Formats, Changing Perspectives, and Changing Boundaries.

Methods

Framed by Radical Change theory, our study is a qualitative content analysis (Berg, 2007; Cho & Lee, 2014; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) that examines seven novels: *How It Went Down* (Magoon, 2014), *The Coldest Winter Ever* (Souljah, 1999), *A Fighting Chance* (Meléndez Salinas, 2015), *Saint Iggy* (Going, 2006), *Tattooed Teardrops* (Workman, 2014), *Young God* (Morris, 2014), and *Yummy: The Last Days of a Southside Shorty* (Neri & DuBurke, 2010). When scrutinizing the novels for representations of experiences on the street, we read each book and recorded observable themes and ideas separately. This initial analysis enabled development of working codes based on emerging patterns that we placed alongside categories from Radical Change theory reflected in the novels. Next, we developed a content analysis tool for the purpose of this study (Bickford & Rich, 2014). Through further research on Radical Change theory, we operationalized definitions for the categories which included Dresang's (1999) three types of Radical Change (i.e., Changing Forms and Formats, Changing Perspectives, and Changing Boundaries) that served as a part of our framework to identify representations of street life in the seven novels. We then separately reread the novels and reevaluated each one using the content analysis tool we developed (Bickford & Rich, 2014).

To maintain trustworthiness in the study, we used three methods. The first was prolonged engagement (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) with the texts which allowed us to consider representations of street life in the novels while we examined literature on Radical Change theory. Second, we engaged in extensive dialogue to determine interpretation of category definitions (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Third, we used rich, descriptive quotes from the books to support the findings in this article (Cho & Lee, 2014; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

Selecting the Novels

In order to identify books, we read scholarship (e.g., Brooks and Savage, 2009; Hill et al., 2008; Marshall, Staples, & Gibson, 2009; Van Orman & Lyiscott, 2013) about urban street fiction to determine which texts seemed to be representative of recommended readings. We also examined publisher

Table 1
NOVELS EXAMINED IN STUDY

Title	Summary	Principal Character's GENDER	Principal Character's RACE	Principal Character's AGE	Setting
<i>Saint Iggy</i>	Recently suspended from school, sixteen-year-old Iggy Corso sets out on a journey to prove he can contribute positively to society.	Male	White	16	Urban
<i>How It Went Down</i>	The senseless murder of sixteen-year-old Tariq Johnson leaves the community baffled, angry, and distraught.	Male	Black	16	Urban
<i>Young God</i>	Thirteen-year-old Nikki is determined to revive her family's drug empire.	Female	White	13	Rural
<i>Yummy: The Last Days of a Southside Shorty</i>	Roger, a fictitious eleven-year-old boy, describes the events surrounding Robert "Yummy" Sandifer's life after he murders a fourteen-year-old neighbor.	Male	Black	11	Urban
<i>A Fighting Chance</i>	Seventeen-year-old Miguel Ángel wants a chance to box, finish high school, and avoid the gangs in his neighborhood.	Male	Latino	17	Rural
<i>The Coldest Winter Ever</i>	Since birth, Winter Santiago has enjoyed the comfortable life her father's drug business has provided, but on her seventeenth birthday they lose it all, leaving Winter striving to get back on top.	Female	Black	16	Urban
<i>Tattooed Teardrops</i>	When Tamara French is released from a juvenile detention center, someone from her past makes it difficult for her to carry out the terms of her parole.	Female	White	15	Suburban

and author websites and awards, and book lists that often consider young adult literature about marginalized youth (e.g., youth who are incarcerated, impoverished, ethnically/racially diverse, LGBTQ, and so on). We included Lee & Low Books, the In the Margins Award, the Coretta Scott King Book Award, Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award, and YALSA Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers. We utilized the Children's Literature Comprehensive Database to examine book reviews in order to assess reception.

These seven novels (See Table 1) were selected because they are closely aligned with definitions of urban street fiction posited by Hill et al. (2008) and Morris et al. (2010), and they were within established definitions of young adult literature. Less influenced by how texts are marketed, when selecting the novels examined here, we were guided by

Campbell (2000), who argues young adult novels are about "becoming an adult, finding the answer to the question 'Who am I and what am I going to do about it?' ... and ... the resolution of the external conflict is linked to a realization for the protagonist that helps shape an adult identity" (p. 485). Thus, while *The Coldest Winter Ever* (Souljah, 1999) and *Young God* (Morris, 2014) are marketed to adults, we included these texts because they feature young protagonists and are in line with Campbell's description of the thematic thrust of young adult literature. *The Coldest Winter Ever* has been consistently praised, and *Young God* is garnering good reviews as well. The range of novels discussed here are not intended to be comprehensive. Instead, they are sample texts that suggest that street fiction is not bound by age, race, ethnicity, or geographical spaces/places.

Findings

In this analysis, we found evidence of Radical Change in terms of Changing Forms and Formats, Changing Perspectives, and Changing Boundaries. Subcategories were needed. For example, Radical Change type 1, Changing Forms and Formats, was broken into subcategories borrowed from Dresang (1999) such as the formatting of words on a page and white space. What follows is a report of the findings of this qualitative content analysis.

Changing Forms and Formats: Type 1

According to Dresang (1999), books for youth that include meaningful changes in forms and formats are those that use nonlinear organization, bold graphics to convey meaning, words and pictures to create synergy, and multiple layers of meaning to express complex concepts. (See Table 2)

Experimentation with formatting words on the page.

Looking through the lens of Radical Change theory, the novels do not use nonlinear organization, but most of the books use font size, style, and placement on a page to express ideas. For instance, in the beginning of *Saint Iggy*, a news article headline announcing “HERO SAVES CHILD FROM CRACK DEALER” causes Iggy to envision a positive future, one in which he, too, makes a difference while simultaneously foreshadowing events in the novel’s conclusion (Going, 2006, p.35). The use of bold words in *Saint Iggy* calls readers to at-

tention while others increase or decrease in size to indicate whether the speaker’s words are a shout or a whisper.

Through italicized passages, readers see the world as Iggy does, yet six of the novels studied here use italics to indicate thought, though italics do serve additional purposes. For example, in *A Fighting Chance* (Meléndez Salinas, 2015), italics are used when characters speak Spanish, and in *Tattooed Teardrops* (Workman, 2014), italics convey communication via text messages. However, they indicate a lengthy letter exchange between Sister Souljah and Midnight in *The Coldest Winter Ever* (Souljah, 1999). In *How It Went Down* (Magoon, 2014), italics signify recalled or remembered speech and broadcast news reports, but when coupled with bold print, italics emphasize the sounds of the shots that killed Tariq (e.g., “BOOM” and “Pop-pop”).

Experimentation with forms. Various forms presented within several of the novels are important for moving the plot along in interesting, and often, suspenseful ways. For example, in *Saint Iggy*, notes written to several characters appear blocked-off in bold as are lists Iggy makes concerning his future. Equally compelling in *Saint Iggy* is the use of scripts, complete with stage directions, rendered throughout the novel to recreate past scenes and to reveal how Iggy imagines events. Similarly, *How It Went Down* (Magoon, 2014) includes a 911 call log to emphasize the action around Tariq’s death, which offers yet another opportunity for the reader, as if on a jury,

Table 2

BOOKS CONTAINING RADICAL CHANGE TYPE 1: CHANGING FORMS AND FORMATS

Title	Experimentation with formatting words on the page	Experimentation with forms	White space
<i>Saint Iggy</i>	✓	✓	✓
<i>How It Went Down</i>	✓	✓	
<i>Young God</i>	✓	✓	✓
<i>Yummy: The Last Days of a Southside Shorty</i>	✓	✓	✓
<i>A Fighting Chance</i>		✓	
<i>The Coldest Winter Ever</i>		✓	
<i>Tattooed Teardrops</i>		✓	

to gather and assess the facts. “The Incident,” a brief paragraph that serves as the book’s preface, offers, supposedly, the only “known facts” of the case while remaining sections of the book are organized by the nine days following the murder (Magoon, 2014, p. 1). Events are related from the perspectives of eighteen different characters, one of which is Tariq’s mentally challenged little sister Tina, whose perspective is presented as poetry. Each day revolves around topics that advance the plot and organize the perspectives presented. For example, “Ashes to Ashes” focuses on the narrators’ thoughts about the senseless death caused by gang violence and the death of different types of relationships before settling on Tariq’s tragic death and funeral.

When reflecting on the graphic novel, Dresang (2008) marveled, “I find that no change has been more dramatic than that of the graphic novel.... [they] demand complex, cognitive, interactive attention from the reader, who must create the part of the story/text that falls in the gutter between panels” (p. 297). This is seen clearly in *Yummy* where Neri & DuBurke rely on the graphic novel format to tell a version of the real-life events around eleven-year-old Robert Sandifer (Yummy), who murdered a girl and was later killed by members of his gang in Chicago. Text and images capture how marginalized protagonists navigate street life and conflicts associated with it, which often encompass grim and harsh circumstances. Some scholars argue that the combination of words and images in graphic novels position readers to identify with the characters in

a way that traditional novels do not (Lo-Fo-Wong, Beijaerts, deHaes, & Sprangers, 2014, p. 1555).

White space. White space is seen as central to digital-age readers because they require it to “pause and reflect” and connect with what has been written (Dresang, 1999, p. 24). This characteristic of radical literature is used to great effect in *Young God* (Morris, 2014). A sparsely written novel divided into five sections, it contains instances when one sentence or phrase is surrounded by an otherwise blank page. Sentences such as “NIKKI SCREAMS” (Morris, 2014, p. 69) and “FUCKING COY HAWKINS. Fuck him” (Morris, 2014, p. 185) appear alone on their respective pages and add a radical quality to the novel, allowing readers needed time to pause, think, and make sense of the plot while processing the violence. The white space also encourages active participation, as the reader fills in the blank page with his or her own visualizations/imaginings and predictions.

Changing Perspectives: Type 2

Within Radical Change theory, changing perspectives occur in books when multiple perspectives, previously unheard voices, and new perspectives are included (Dresang, 1999). (See Table 3)

Multiple intellectual perspectives. In *The Coldest Winter Ever*, Sister Souljah, the author, writes herself into the narra-

Table 3
BOOKS CONTAINING RADICAL CHANGE TYPE 2: CHANGING PERSPECTIVES

Title	Multiple intellectual perspectives	Previously unheard voices	New perspectives
<i>Saint Iggy</i>	✓	✓	✓
<i>How It Went Down</i>	✓	✓	
<i>Young God</i>	✓	✓	✓
<i>Yummy: The Last Days of a Southside Shorty</i>	✓	✓	✓
<i>A Fighting Chance</i>	✓	✓	✓
<i>The Coldest Winter Ever</i>	✓	✓	
<i>Tattooed Teardrops</i>	✓	✓	✓

tive, offering an opposing perspective with a social consciousness that is a reasonable assessment of events while rallying against Winter's opportunistic view of the world. For example, Winter reluctantly listens to Sister Souljah on the radio and reports, "[Sister Souljah] started talking about how young Black drug dealers are the strong Black men in the community, but need to change their line of business because it's destroying the community" (p. 33). Winter believes selling drugs is an acceptable form of employment, and concludes, "As far as I am concerned, Souljah ... obviously didn't know the time because the drug dealers don't destroy nothing. The niggas I know who sell drugs be tryna help the stupid crackheads" (p. 33). Including Sister Souljah's voice and presence in the novel has the potential to lead even less discerning readers to question Winter's perspective.

Something similar happens in *A Fighting Chance*. However, the author uses magical realism. Miguel Ángel's great-grandmother Ita appears five times to try to protect him against danger and to advise him. For instance, when Miguel Ángel is contemplating killing Gringo to avenge his friend Be-to's death, Ita tells him, "All you guys do is talk about this honor crap. Where's the honor in killing each other when there's practically nothing at stake?" (p. 275)

As previously mentioned, *How It Went Down* includes a multiple cast that encourages interaction, as readers have to connect the details and perspectives of the murder presented from eighteen different impressions of Tariq that are laced with ambiguity around whether he was a "good" and gang-free teen. Thus, the book's structure enhances its impact, encouraging readers to judge both the character of the murdered teenager, Tariq, as well as the circumstances around his death. Further, switching perspectives in this way allows readers to question preconceived notions and biases that can interfere with one's perceptions.

While *Yummy* does not include multiple narrators as *How It Went Down* does, Neri & DuBurke (2010) tell the story from the point of view of a fictitious eleven-year-old boy, Roger, who lives in *Yummy's* neighborhood and is determined to learn community members' opinions about *Yummy's* life. Frames show Roger with pen and notebook in hand talking to neighbors young and old. Thus, in both books we are offered the perspectives of the community, however conflicting, via interactions with neighbors, family members, and the media.

Previously unheard voices. The structure of some of the novels allow for multiple perspectives, but *Radical Change*

theory also makes visible rarely heard voices. The novels studied here include unheard voices largely influenced by social conditions such as the increased number of drug-addicted babies and senseless violence against blacks and Latino/a youth. For example, *Saint Iggy* is narrated by a character with social and learning challenges likely linked to being addicted to drugs in the womb. *How It Went Down* offers a story about the impact a race-based murder has on a teen's community while *A Fighting Chance* captures the plight of teens growing up in Salinas, an agricultural town where gang-related crime involving youth was at an alarming high during the early twenty-first century. Few books for youth offer these perspectives.

Within street literature in particular, the experiences of white characters are rarely included. Three of the novels studied here feature white protagonists, two of which are females who experience some of the same conflicts Winter, in *The Coldest Winter Ever*, arguably one of the most celebrated urban street novels, experiences. Homelessness, food insecurity, time in juvenile detention centers or under the custody of child protective services, and involvement with selling and/or using drugs are not conditions confined to black and Latino/a youth as definitions of traditional street literature suggests. Brittany, a white female, is also featured prominently in *A Fighting Chance*. Miguel Ángel sees boxing as his way out of poverty while imagining a future with Brittany. When Brittany's rich father learns she is dating Miguel Ángel, a Mexican young man, he becomes so angry he beats her, causing her to have a miscarriage, which prompts child protective services to get involved.

New perspectives. By positioning the media as an antagonist to be implicated in escalating fear and addiction to twenty-four hour news cycles around violent crimes involving black and Latino males, *A Fighting Chance*, *How It Went Down*, and *Yummy* present a perspective of the media that has rarely been explored in books for youth. In *Yummy*, for example, an account of the shooting and the aftermath is constantly in the media as illustrations show characters frozen in front of their television screens or near the front page of newspapers. In the media, *Yummy* becomes known as "Little Killer" and panels reminiscent of the spilt screens used by cable news networks, display pundits, attorneys, and professors as they debate *Yummy's* humanity (Neri & DuBurke, 2010, p. 49). Another panel shows the cover of *Time* magazine asserting, "So young to kill; so young to die" (Neri & DuBurke, 2010, p. 89).

Changing Boundaries: Type 3

The label street literature suggests that by its very nature it is a boundary pushing type of text filled with complex characters and subjects often avoided in literature for youth. As Dresang (1999) makes clear, unresolved endings and tough topics, including violence and sexuality have always been a part of teen novels, but the books studied here focus on murder, gangs, prostitution, abortion, and teen drug use and distribution in ways that seem vivid, realistic and, well, radical. (See Table 4)

Subjects previously forbidden. An intriguing change in boundaries takes place in *The Coldest Winter Ever* and *Young Gun* where the authors offer protagonists, Winter and Nikki respectively, with few, if any, redeeming qualities. Dresang (2002) has pointed out that often characters in Radical Change books are neither “saint nor sinner,” but Winter and Nikki appear pleased to be “sinners,” eager to make their fortunes by selling drugs and resorting to questionable moral behavior to get what they want (p. 112). For instance, Winter uses a pregnant friend to steal items she resells and is open to exchanging sexual favors for money or material possessions while Nikki’s behavior also includes physically violent acts such as murder and armed robbery. Similarly, Iggy is an anti-hero who is determined to do good in the world in one moment and confesses to stealing in the next.

The authors of the books studied broaden discussions

around a similar subject implied in the choices characters make: the pull of the street. In *The Coldest Winter Ever*, Winter boasts, “Those are my streets [Brooklyn],” while standing in her new suburban home in Long Island (Souljah, 1999, p. 35). Interestingly, in *How It Went Down*, Will, a graffiti artist who, like Winter, commutes to his old neighborhood, makes a similar argument: “I own these walls. I own this ‘hood” (p. 131). Yummy finds the streets a place where he can exert a modicum of power associated with committing violent crimes and being in a gang: “THE STREETS WERE FULL OF TOUGH SHORTIES LOOKING TO IMPRESS” (Neri & DuBurke, 2010, p. 38). The pull of the streets is also seen through the point of view of characters in *How It Went Down* who believe it is their destiny. Noodle, a gang member, sums it up: “I know I’m gonna get cut down someday, too. It’s the life, though. It’s just how it is” (Magoon, 2014, p. 150). Similarly, Tariq’s friend Tyrell, believing he has few options, considers joining the neighborhood gang despite his academic success and aspirations to attend college: “*It’s Underhill. That’s just how it goes*” (Magoon, 2014, p. 177). In *A Fighting Chance*, Miguel Ángel uses boxing to avoid the streets, but constantly feels its pull through his association with Beto, a gang member so close to the family, when he stops by for a visit, Miguel Ángel’s mother tells him, “This is your home, stay as long as you like” (p. 143).

Settings previously overlooked. One of the most radical aspects of the novels examined here is the way in which they

Table 4

BOOKS CONTAINING RADICAL CHANGE TYPE 3: CHANGING BOUNDARIES

Title	Subjects previously forbidden	Settings previously overlooked
<i>Saint Iggy</i>	✓	✓
<i>How It Went Down</i>	✓	✓
<i>Young God</i>	✓	✓
<i>Yummy: The Last Days of a Southside Shorty</i>	✓	
<i>A Fighting Chance</i>	✓	✓
<i>The Coldest Winter Ever</i>	✓	✓
<i>Tattooed Teardrops</i>	✓	✓

break barriers around setting. As we stated earlier, street literature is typically set in large urban cities (Brooks and Savage, 2009; Hill et al., 2008). The authors of these seven novels seem to be arguing that many of the situations and circumstances that engulf city dwellers can also be found in Appalachia (*Young Gun*) where Nikki runs what she hopes will be a drug dynasty; the suburbs (*Tattooed Teardrops* and *The Coldest Winter Ever*) where Tamara attempts to carry out the terms of parole while Winter's family hopes to find sanctuary outside the city where they sell drugs; and in the Upper East Side of Manhattan (*Saint Iggy*) where Iggy interferes with a drug deal. Similarly, agricultural towns are not often associated with street literature. Yet, the author of *A Fighting Chance* captures the impoverished conditions around farm workers in Salinas that led many to engage in drug distribution and other crimes more lucrative than farm work.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to draw upon Radical Change theory to examine the representation of the street in novels featuring youth. Our analysis of the seven books examined reveals street texts themselves are changing. While we realize urban street fiction with Latino/a authors and characters have existed for quite some time, most scholars refer to street fiction as a subgenre of African American literature. For example, Brooks and Savage (2009) maintain street fiction stems from African American literature and "typically consists of stories centered on African American protagonists between the ages of 16- 24 who struggle to survive despite immense obstacles including but not limited to abject poverty, overt and institutional racism, as well as violence in its various forms" (p. 49). Still others such as Bean, Dunkerly-Bean, and Harper (2014), in a book devoted to young adult fiction, describe street literature as a "body of work featuring powerful African American female characters actively resisting abuse and the controlling behaviors of their male counterparts" (p. 200). Though these definitions might have been apt in the past, today these books are being written by authors of various racial and ethnic backgrounds, and they also have the potential to attract diverse readers as well as invite greater attention to the influence of the African American literary tradition. These seven texts suggest street literature is changing in two other ways, too. One, texts are changing in terms of the age of possible readers. They no longer appear to be aimed solely at new adult women. And two, the settings of the stories are no longer confined to urban contexts. Texts that

might be read as street lit are set in various locales (e.g., rural, suburban, and so on). Previous research argues street fiction is a subgenre of young adult literature that has largely been ignored (Jones, 2015; Brooks and Savage, 2009). Traditionally, young adult literature depicts contemporary issues and focus on a protagonist's journey toward maturation. In young adult street lit, we posit that something similar happens, but the journey is compromised by the pull of the street. The protagonist has to decide if he or she will relent or resist usually while flirting with street life either actually (e.g., Beto, Miguel Ángel's friend in *A Fighting Chance*) or vicariously through other characters (e.g., Roger, the narrator of *Yummy*).

Nikoleva (2005) reminds us that genres are fluid. Radical Change theory suggests texts, including those that might be labelled street lit, will continue to change so that elements (e.g., gangs, guns, drugs, sex, and poverty) typically found in novels set in urban contexts will also exist in books set in other places. The change in perspective is particularly evident when viewed alongside the traditional children's literature plot of home/away/home (Wilson & Short, 2012), since the young people in young adult street lit typically experience home/the streets/incarceration (or death)—with finally ending at home only if they are fortunate. Further research with a larger sample is needed in this area.

Another key focus here is on connectivity, which Dresang says "refers to readers' increased sense of community and association with others through books that are more inclusive, more open to formerly marginalized or virtually invisible peer populations, more relevant to all youth" (p. 24). Non-urban youth are just as likely to benefit from these books about social issues as urban youth are. For instance, graphic novels are an interactive format that fosters dynamic engagement. Access to *Yummy* may be valuable to students in general, as it provides a depiction of marginalized youth that might enhance insight into the array of circumstances youth are in not only on the streets, but also in their homes and at schools. Teachers and librarians may make these books available to all students regardless of place or circumstances, as these books can be a springboard for discussion about current public debates such as gun laws, poverty, violence against youth, and so on. Educators can encourage students to look critically at the books, particularly at how characters' families are implicated in their demise with little interrogation of how systemic issues around race, class, and gender might have contributed. We agree with researchers who have pointed out that when handled respon-

sibly by school librarians and classroom teachers, street lit can encourage dialogue and better understandings amongst youth across place and socio-ethnic boundaries (Jones, 2015).

Final Thoughts

It is likely, as Morris, Hughes-Hassell, and Cottman (2006) assert, that street literature captures an “underserved young adult population: the urban African American teenager” (p.16). However, examining these seven novels through the lens of Radical Change theory suggests the subgenre has recently increased its potential to attract youth of various racial and ethnic heritages.

Radical Change theory illuminates experiences that might help readers consider “the many ‘faces’ of the human condition by reading and reflecting upon a wide variety of circumstances and by seeing how various characters react—often in complex ways—to chaos and distress” (Dresang, 1999, p. 205). Further, Dresang (1999) argues it is important for librarians and teachers to make books available to youth that “reveal perspectives not commonly presented” (p. 128) because it is possible the books will help youth “put together a more accurate picture of their world” (p. 126). *It seems to us that a growing number of young adult books that feature marginalized characters are being written to make this possible. •

*This is not meant to suggest that there is a plethora of these books or that the need for diverse books is not great.

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the *Dragon Lode*

VOLUME 35 // NUMBER 02 // SPRING 2017

CONTENTS

- 5 **LETTER FROM THE EDITORS**
- 6 **A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT**
- 8 **“IT’S PRETTY AND ALL, BUT I WANT IT TO BE REALISTIC”:
Exploring Children’s Situational Interest in Nonfiction Books**
Danielle Hartsfield
- 17 **ENGAGING YOUNG CHILDREN WITH GLOBAL LITERATURE**
Maria V. Acevedo, Dorea Kleker, Lauren Pangle & Kathy G. Short
- 27 **THE PLEASURE OF READING THE DIARY OF A WIMPY KID SERIES**
Alyssa Fox, Sara Gerhart, Ameena Khairat, Casey Sommers,
Vivian Yenika-Agbaw & Monica Wagner
- 38 **THE POET’S CORNER**
Janet Wong
- 41 **START THE CONVERSATION: Using Picture Books for Critical Literacy Discussions**
Kathryn S. Nelson
- 46 **READING OUTSIDE OUR COMFORT ZONE: The Dangers and Possibilities of Reading Globally**
Kathy G. Short
- 51 **2017 NOTABLE BOOKS FOR A GLOBAL SOCIETY AWARD:
Empathy, Caring, and Understanding from Multiple Perspectives**
Renita Schmidt, Fran Wilson, Seemi Aziz, Kelly Finan, Nancy Bo Flood, Tami Morton,
Yoo Kyung Sung, Sandip LeeAnne Wilson, Deborah Wooten & Sue Parsons
- 70 **MOCKINGBIRD MUSINGS: Advocacy and Activism in
Novels for Middle School Readers Featuring *To Kill a Mockingbird***
Linda T. Parsons & Caitlin Murphy
- 79 **ON THE STREET: A “Radical Change” in Urban Fiction Featuring Youth**
KaaVonnia Hinton & Sabrina Carnesi
- 89 **VITAL INFORMATION AND VISUAL TREATS: Exploring the Richness
of the Peritext in 21st Century Picturebooks**
Catherine Stier, Miriam Martinez & Lori Falcon
- 95 **CHILDREN’S BOOK REVIEWS: Our Favorite Books**
Lesley Colabucci, Deanna Day, Xenia Hadjioannou, René M. Rodriguez-Astacio,
Mary Napoli, Tadayuki Suzuki & Barbara Ward