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Posthumanism in Young Adult Fiction: Finding Humanity in a Posthuman World ed. by Anita Tarr and Donna R. White
(review)

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(Review)

The cover of the journal 'The Lion and the Unicorn'. The title is written in a bold, serif font at the top. Below the title, it says 'Volume 44, No. 1' and 'January 2020'. The cover features a black and white illustration of three people in a room.



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practices may have featured among the children whose books she studies so well. It is this textual, literary dimension that may help further establish the hymn as an important genre within children's literature.

Nevertheless, the singing was, as Clapp-Itnyre argues, a crucial source of pleasure and agency for children, who often learned to sing better than their parents thanks to the charity schools, children's choirs, and reforming societies that gave children space and direction to sing their hymns. A chapter focused on the reforming societies in particular highlights not just children's engagement in political issues but the political and culture force children could wield through organized efforts of song and marching. From the temperance movement to missionary societies, and most compellingly in the context of animal rights-focused "bands of mercy," Clapp-Itnyre traces the ways in which topical collections gave children words to voice their opinions about the moral and social issues that affected them. Songs against animal cruelty, it turns out, facilitated new laws for the protection of children, a corollary result somewhat akin to the growth of the women's suffrage movement out of abolitionist societies. Hymns were indeed words of power for many children, and they provided ways for children to understand and direct their own power; Clapp-Itnyre has powerfully brought this history to our attention, and this book will be of great interest to anyone interested not just in poetry or religion or print culture, but in any childhood studies of the nineteenth century.

Christopher N. Phillips is Professor of English at Lafayette College, where he specializes in early American literature, transatlantic historical poetics, and book history. His recent work includes The Hymnal: A Reading History (Johns Hopkins, 2018) and, as editor, The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the American Renaissance (Cambridge, 2018).

Anita Tarr and Donna R. White, ed. *Posthumanism in Young Adult Fiction: Finding Humanity in a Posthuman World*. UP of Mississippi, 2018.

This new collection, edited by Anita Tarr and Donna R. White, represents the first full-length critical exploration of posthumanist theory in children's literature to be published since Zoe Jaques' 2015 *Children's Literature and the Posthuman*. Unlike Jaques' study, however, which explores a broad range of classic children's literature, this volume focuses only on contemporary and recently published works of speculative fiction for young adult readers,

including work on authors who are less well-represented in other critical explorations of speculative fiction, such as Michael Grant, Lev Grossman, and Marissa Meyer. This focus on recently published popular works is, in fact, one of the key strengths of this collection, as many of the existing critical explorations of posthumanism limit themselves to well-known and over-examined works, such as *The Hunger Games*, *Harry Potter*, or *Uglies*. Building on earlier exciting but shorter critical works such as chapters of Victoria Flanagan's *Technology and Identity in Young Adult Fiction* and Kerry Mallan's work in *New World Orders in Contemporary Children's Literature*, the volume focuses specifically on YA speculative fiction and is therefore a significant departure from Jaques' work. The volume focuses, as stated in the introduction, on exploring the "power inequities" represented by recent YA posthuman narratives, and especially the ways these inequities "serve as motivations for adolescent characters to question traditional social hierarchies and construct new moral values that reflect their personal experiences" (xvii–xviii). As such, this volume very much represents an expansion of the ground already covered by critics such as Flanagan and Mallan, rather than a new perspective or focus.

The volume opens with a comprehensive review of posthumanist theory, especially as it pertains to children's and YA literature; as such, it is a valuable source for anyone new to this field of theory. Covering areas such as the difference between posthumanism, the posthuman, transhumanism, and so on, the introduction clearly articulates the relevance of this theoretical perspective for YA speculative fiction in particular. The following chapters are divided into four sections: Part I, Networked Subjectivities; Part II, The Monstrous Other: Posthuman Bodies; Part III, Posthumanism in Climate Fiction; and Part IV, Accepting/Rejecting Posthumanist Possibilities. Broadly speaking, these sections cover most of the main theoretical perspectives on posthumanism: Part I aligns broadly to the work of theorists such as Donna Haraway and Katherine Hayles on posthumanism and the digital technological age, Part II aligns to the work of theorists such as Jack/Judith Halberstam and Elaine L. Graham on fluid and hybrid bodies, Part III reflects a growing interest among critics on the intersection between Cli-Fi and posthumanism, and Part IV engages with the work of writers such as Rosi Braidotti and Francis Fukuyama on the conflict between humanism and the posthuman. As such, the volume moves from the familiar to the less well-known reaches of posthumanist theory. The relationship between the posthuman and digital technology is a familiar concept from popular culture, drawing on iconic figures such as the cyborg. For those unfamiliar with posthumanism, therefore, this section will feel accessible and makes a good introduction to the more complex theoretical approaches represented by classic theorists such as

Haraway. Parts II and III then move into less familiar territory, demonstrating how theorists have expanded the insights of digital posthumanism to other theoretical explorations of the Other: intersections between the posthuman and feminism, queer theory, ecocriticism, and postcolonialism show the wider relevance of posthuman theory. Finally, Part IV introduces the most radical aspect of posthumanist theory: its contention that humanism and humanist society is fundamentally flawed.

A number of essays within the collection stand out as worthy of note. Angela S. Insenga's "Once upon a Cyborg: *Cinder* as Posthuman Fairytale" provides a close examination of Marissa Meyer's *Cinder* (2012). Her argument that the posthumanist themes so common to science fiction and dystopia are equally prevalent in ancient oral fantasy tales such as *Cinderella* is intriguing and serves to widen the discourse concerning posthuman bodies. Examining the relationship between foot and slipper, for example, Insenga demonstrates how the trope of embodiment runs through the Cinderella mythos and transitions almost seamlessly from fantasy to science fiction (55–59). Other essays, such as Patricia Kennon's "'Superpowers Don't Always Make You a Superhero': Posthuman Possibilities in Michael Grant's *Gone* Series," and Torsten Caeners' "Negotiating the Human in Ridley Scott's *Prometheus*," engage more explicitly with the stated focus of the book on the intersection between adolescence and posthumanism. Kennon, for example, focuses on the science fiction/fantasy tropes of super-powers and alien invasions in *Gone* (2009) as a metaphor for humanist constructions of the child/adult relationship and the process of growing up. She makes a convincing argument for the fact that engagements with posthumanist themes of embodiment and technology do not necessarily equate to a posthumanist rejection of humanist ideology. Also significant is the section devoted to climate change literature. Although this section contains only two chapters, both make the cogent argument that posthumanist perspectives may help develop the empathy young readers need to develop in order to avert a future ravaged by climate change and ecological disaster. Schmeink, for example, provides an in-depth exploration of how the intersection of dystopian tropes with a classic coming-of-age narrative in Paolo Bacigalupi's *Ship Breaker* (2010) and *The Drowned Cities* (2012) encourages young readers to understand their own identity quests as responses to the realities of environmental crisis. Phoebe Chen likewise argues that the dystopian setting of future environmental crisis provides the perfect backdrop against which "the protagonist's identity is contested and reconstructed on the ground of radical and speculative ecologies" (180); she examines Janet Edwards' *Earth Girl* (2012), Stacy Jay's *Of Beast and Beauty* (2013), and Sherri L. Smith's *Orleans* (2013), thus exploring speculative fiction from the fantasy, sci-fi, and realist perspectives. Chapters within the collection

as a whole range from close readings teasing out posthumanist representations, to critical appraisals of texts according to posthumanist agendas. As such, the collection highlights the broad variety of readings possible within a posthumanist framework.

Overall, the collection includes an impressive range of perspectives and approaches within the posthumanist focus, making it representative of the richness this critical lens can offer to the field of children's and YA literature.

It is slightly disappointing not to see any theoretical boundaries pushed in this collection. For example, there is now a substantial body of extant children's and YA criticism that demonstrates the relevance of posthumanist representations of the adolescent body; as of yet, however, few critics have engaged with the underlying question of whether posthumanist theory challenges the very the concept of adolescence. While this collection provides new readings applying posthumanist theory to a broader range of texts than has previously existed, it ultimately does not add to or expand posthumanist theory itself. Nevertheless, it does the important work of adding significantly to the body of text-based criticism utilizing posthumanist theory. The collection is essential reading for any scholar or student working in the field of young adult speculative fiction, and especially in the fields of cli-fi, dystopia, and futuristic fantasy; with its comprehensive theoretical overview, broad range of perspectives and approaches, and focus on newer texts it makes an excellent primer in posthumanist fiction as well as diversifying the critical discourse pertaining to YA literature as a genre in itself. As the authors themselves state, "applying posthumanist theory to children's and young adult literature is a recent undertaking that still needs a lot of work" (xvii). To this end, this volume has done an excellent job of pointing future children's literature and YA scholars in interesting new directions within the field of posthumanist thought.

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Jen Harrison is Instructor of English at East Stroudsburg University, with a Ph.D. in Children's Literature from Aberystwyth University in the U.K. Jen's current research focuses on ecocriticism, posthumanism, and children's literature and culture; she has a strong interest in digital texts and nonfiction for young people. Jen has recently published a monograph exploring posthumanism and the environment in young adult dystopia as well as articles and book chapters on Harry Potter, The Hunger Games, and Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children. She is the editor of a forthcoming centennial collection on Winnie the Pooh from the University of Mississippi Press and ChLA. She is also an editor for Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures and a reviewer for The Children's Book Review website.

Kia Jane Richmond. *Mental Illness in Young Adult Literature: Exploring Real Struggles through Fictional Characters*. Libraries Unlimited, 2018.

Kia Jane Richmond's *Mental Illness in Young Adult Literature: Exploring Real Struggles through Fictional Characters* provides an introductory overview to young adult (YA) novels that prominently feature representations of mental illness. As Richmond makes clear in her introduction, this study is a response to the influx of YA literature featuring mental illness; as such, it builds "on this renaissance of research focused on mental illness issues in young adult literature, categorizing and explaining how mental disorders (and the characters who have them) are portrayed in 21st-century young adult literature" (7). Although this book certainly appeals to a broad range of scholars interested in children's literature and disability studies, it is specifically tailored to readers who work with youth in schools, libraries, and psychiatric settings. Indeed, librarians and mental-health professionals who work with youth can use this book to find recommendations for young adult novels that they may share with youth or use to understand adolescent experiences with mental illness, not least because it includes a substantial list of texts for a classroom library, gives suggestions for curricular units, and offers specific lesson plans and activities to make starting such a unit accessible. Overall, this text provides an introductory overview to the topic of mental illness in