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LGBTQIA+ YA literature needs to represent queer youth authentically. It should depict positive representations of queerness, and it ought to include images of sexually assured young people who, simultaneously, “just happen to be” queer (see Michael Cart and Christine Jenkins’s “The Heart Has Its Reasons” and Rob Bittner’s “(Im)Possibility and (in)visibility: Arguing against ‘just happens to be’ in Young Adult literature” for more discussion about representations of queerness and assimilation). These types of expectations are just a few examples of two things: 1) critiques of queer YA literature from both inside and outside children’s literature scholarship and 2) projections of adult anxieties about queer youth at which Derritt Mason takes aim in his compelling and necessary book, *Queer Anxieties of Young Adult Literature and Culture*. The aforementioned examples lead Mason to indict neoliberal calls for visibility and straightforward growth; instead, he argues convincingly that there is much to be gained from an analysis of queer YA literature and culture that revels in the anxious: the negative, the failure, the delay, and the instability that queerness and queer YA texts can offer. Mason’s work—situated at the intersection of queerness, adolescence, and affect—asks important questions that address heteronormative assumptions in queer YA literature scholarship and children’s literature scholarship more generally. In so doing, *Queer Anxieties* provides a nuanced and fresh approach that will shape future (queer) children’s literature scholarship for the better.

Mason’s methods in this book are a unique addition to children’s literature scholarship insofar as he resists the “models of childhood development and visibility privileged by queer YA critics” to instead attend to the “invisible, subtle, latent, and sideways queernesses” that present themselves when scholars “prioritize affect over subject matter and form” (6). In his introduction, “Notes on an Anxious Genre: Queer Young Adult Literature,” Mason claims that the anxieties surrounding queer youth and the literature for them cannot be entirely addressed.

However, these anxieties can prove to be productive sites of critique that ultimately provide examples of queer reading practices and relationality. Thus, after detailing a thorough history of the links between anxiety, temporality, and the history of adolescence, Mason makes the case that queer YA literature (a genre filled with and surrounded by various anxieties) is itself an anxious genre—one that he defines not by content, but rather as “a set of affects and effects” (16). Significant to his argument is Mason’s commitment to move beyond solely print-based critique and into a transmedial approach that proves the potential breadth of children’s literature scholarship. This transmedial approach, combined with his reclamation of texts that have long since been discarded as problematic, result in a convincing claim that there is much more to be gained from queer YA texts than what might be initially visible.

Mason’s first chapter, “Visibility: Growing Sideways in *I’ll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip*,” relies heavily on Kathryn Bond Stockton’s theory of delay and “growing sideways” and argues that *I’ll Get There* is “a lot queerer than it may initially appear” (28). Significant to Mason’s focus on the productivity of anxious affect is that this text is often seen as an outdated, stereotypical, and a hopeless problem novel. Mason wants his readers to “consider the potential queerness of *not* growing into a coherent gay identity” instead of focusing on the assumed pedagogical impact of *I’ll Get There* specifically, and queer YA literature more generally (30, italics in original). Indeed, with Mason’s approach of foregrounding affect, scholars can (re)engage with this novel—and, by extension, other novels deemed “too negative”—in a way that invites subversive and meta reading practices, and models what it can mean to “dwell in the pleasurable perversions of queer childhood” (42).

Chapter Two, “Risk: The Queer Pedagogy of *The Man Without a Face*,” asserts a more robust conception of risk that is not only and always associated with harm. Instead, Mason takes

time to consider the “pleasurable risks offered by queerness,” as demonstrated through Isabelle Holland’s novel *The Man Without a Face* (45). In so doing, he shows clearly the interconnectedness of pleasurable risk, relationality, and ambiguity. One might risk their “coherent, transparent, ‘resolved’ self,” but that risk can, in return, open a mesh of possibilities, to invoke Eve Sedgwick—possibilities that include sideways relationships, groundedness in the body, and an ever-developing relationship to sexuality (Mason 50). In keeping with his theorization of ambiguity and openness in and with texts, Mason is careful not to flatten or essentialize anxiety as it relates to queer YA texts; indeed, he accounts for the ways that anxiety is at once a “pinning down and undoing” even while it works to resist teleology and fixedness (49).

Chapter Three, “HIV/AIDS: Playing with Failure in *Caper in the Castro* and *Two Boys Kissing*,” begins with important context that YA texts that portray HIV/AIDS construct distance between the child and the disease in an effort to preserve the child’s ostensible innocence. Both *Castro* (a video game) and *Two Boys Kissing* (a novel) invoke HIV/AIDS, and, central to the argument in this chapter, “failure is crucial” to each (67). While *Two Boys Kissing* fails to integrate the past HIV/AIDS crisis and the ghostly chorus of narrators with the present-day characters, *Castro* forces players “to feel, repeatedly, negative affect typically associated with failure: powerlessness, frustration, and the sensation of loss” (67). This failure is important for two key reasons: it leads to relationality, and it resists a linear teleology. Particularly convincing in this chapter is Mason’s anecdote of his own experience playing (and failing) *Castro*. Through this anecdote, he articulates his own process for reaching out to online communities for help amid failure—a very tangible example of his point that negative affect can beget positive outcomes.

Mason returns to critics who worry that YA abounds with too many “dark themes” in his fourth chapter, “Dystopia: Queer Sex and the Unbearable in *Grasshopper Jungle*.” He argues here that *Grasshopper Jungle* responds to anxious adult concerns through satire and tongue-in-cheek accounts of some of the adult assumptions about adolescence. Namely, Mason theorizes the “unbearable of children’s literature” through the silences and excesses of *Grasshopper Jungle*, particularly regarding queer sex and sexuality (88). Austin, the protagonist, narrates everything to excess except, crucially, queer sex. Mason acknowledges the possibility that the text’s elision of queer sex could be based in censorship and homophobia; however, his attention to the possibilities of negative affect come to bear in his assertion that such elisions can also be reframed. In Austin’s case, the unbearable becomes affectively overwhelming and leads him to “reorien[t] his approach to relationality” (101). Like previous chapters, Mason again points to the ways that negative and anxious affect—in this case, the unbearable—can lead to kinship.

Mason once again uses a transmedial approach in Chapter Five, “Horror and Camp: Monsters and Wizards and Ghosts (Oh My!) in *Big Mouth*,” this time focusing on television. *Big Mouth* is a Netflix original animated comedy that focuses often on topics like puberty and hormones. As Mason explains, “*Big Mouth* has been almost universally praised by critics for masterfully balancing shockingly lewd humor with a sympathetic, nuanced, and sensitive portrayal of its young protagonists” (107-08). This chapter successfully illustrates the strand of Mason’s argument that queer YA literature and culture need not be defined by content or specific characters’ sexualities and genders. Instead, he posits that *Big Mouth* portrays “childhood queerness and polymorphous perversity as universal” by “uniting horror with camp to represent and deflate anxieties that circulate around and within queer YA literature and culture” (105). Indeed, while the monsters in the show can be interpreted as traditional horror tropes about

queerness, there exists a “symbiotic relationship between child and monster, where both monster and child are continually figured as perverse and deviant” (122). In this way, the negative is once again repurposed into a relational framework. Moreover, the function of “dark camp” invites viewers to at once laugh at and bond over shame, thus rendering shame silly and communal rather than scary and oppressive (126).

Chapter Six, “Getting Better: Children’s Literature Theory and the *It Gets Better* Project,” delineates the ways that *It Gets Better*, a project ostensibly created to reassure queer youth of a promising future, centers adults and neoliberalism in almost every way. The greatest strength of this chapter lies in the parallels Mason draws between critiques of *It Gets Better* and the field of children’s literature scholarship, and how both sets of critics seem overly invested in discerning the “right” and “wrong sets of stories to be circulating among its imagined audience” (137). Relying and building on Jacqueline Rose’s theories of children’s literature, he goes on to critique *It Gets Better* as a work of children’s literature that “anxiously invents the youth it seeks to address,” and in so doing, fails politically (139). However, that failure allows for the project to succeed as both critical cultural discourse and a development in the field of children’s literature scholarship. Specifically, Mason argues that the political-failure-turned-cultural-success of *It Gets Better* troubles Rose’s initial theory and reveals “sideways growth that brings adults and youth into contact with one another” (139). I find this argument particularly salient because it advances not only how we think about a queer YA text, but also does the field of children’s literature scholarship as a whole.

Mason’s final full-length chapter, “Not Getting Better: Sex and Self-Harm in *It Gets Better/Glee* Fanfiction,” builds from themes he establishes in Chapter Six as he considers a slash-fiction mash-up of *It Gets Better* and *Glee*. For Mason, slash is a space for trying on

different identities and selves, including self-harm, via created narratives. Slash is also a way to bring sex into graphic focus in a way that is otherwise maligned in or omitted from conventional queer YA texts. In slash sex scenes, readers are allowed to linger and experience pleasure and discovery rather than barreling toward a singular, neoliberal teleology. Mason also shows that the existence of slash fiction like the one detailed in this chapter “invites us to take new approaches to children’s literature that call for different conceptions of temporality, circulation, and the relationship between author, text, and audience” (168). Like the previous chapter, Mason again demonstrates the ways that children’s literature theories and methods can be used in and beyond our field in productive and provocative ways—in ways that expand thought and center relationality.

In his conclusion, “Immaturity: Reflections on the ‘Great (Queer) YA Debate,” Mason describes the anxiety of immaturity as it relates to adults reading YA novels, and how such anxieties reinforce the existence of the other, broader anxieties about YA that he has developed throughout this book. Indeed, there is no shortage of anxious critical discourse regarding YA literature, and as Mason reiterates, “when sexuality enters the picture, so does a whole new series of anxieties” (177).

In a transparent and vulnerable moment of the conclusion, Mason shares his own anxiety that *Queer Anxieties of Young Adult Literature and Culture* might offer nothing new and might instead be his own “anxious rehearsal of generic conventions” (177). I think all scholars can resonate with this anxiety. As a scholar who is particularly invested in queer YA texts, though, I believe Mason’s book should be required reading for anyone interested in the field. While there were times I wished for a wider survey of texts to serve as further examples of the uses of anxious affect in queer YA texts, I nonetheless consider Mason’s work a necessary, complex,

and comprehensive addition to our field—one that will certainly reshape the thoughts of future readers as surely as it has reshaped mine.

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