

Pearson New International Edition



Literature for Today's Young Adults

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with new ways to write old stories. One of the most basic techniques is for an author to create a parallel universe, one which exists alongside the regular world. J. K. Rowling was clever in the Harry Potter books to make her alternate universe the main one, with our world of *muggles* being the odd one out. See Focus Box 1, “Alternate Universes in Fantasies,” for books that illustrate alternate universes.

Animal Fantasies Animal stories aimed at instructing humans are as old as Aesop and as recent as today’s book review. Many teenagers have fond memories of such books as E. B. White’s *Charlotte’s Web*, Jane Langton’s *The Fledgling*, Robert C. O’Brien’s *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*, Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows*, and Richard Adams’s *Watership Down*. They may be ready to read Walter Wangerin, Jr.’s, *The Book of the Dun Cow*, a delightfully funny theological thriller retelling the story of Chauntecleer the Rooster. Supposedly the leader for good against evil (the half-snake, half-cock—Cockatrice—and the black serpent—Wyrm), Chauntecleer is beset by doubts. He is aided by the humble dog Mondo Cani, some hilariously pouting turkeys, and assorted other barnyard animals. In *The Unseen* by Zilpha Keatley Snyder, Xandra Hobson feels that she is unloved by her family, but the fun of the story is the way she finds this to be untrue after she rescues a bird from some hunters and it leaves her a feather, which is really a key to another world.

By viewing dragons as animals, we can include Jane Yolen’s *Dragon’s Blood*, *Heart’s Blood*, and *A Sending of Dragons*, which comprise a series with two extraordinarily likable young people fighting for their lives and for their dragons. Patricia C. Wrede’s *Dealing with Dragons* and *Talking to Dragons* are funny adventure stories. Her best work can be found in *Book of Enchantments*. And as Anne McCaffrey has said, she purposely set out to give dragons some long-overdue positive PR. It is interesting that in stories from the Far East, dragons are considered friends, while in traditional stories of European descent, the dragons are feared.

Clare Bell sets her *Ratha’s Creature* books twenty-five million years ago. Ratha leads a group of intelligent wild cats who have developed their society and who have learned to herd and keep other animals. Erin Hunter’s *Warriors: Into the Wild* portrays four clans of wild cats living in a loose harmony with each other as they share a forest, but when one clan becomes too powerful, the equilibrium is threatened. *Warriors: Fire and Ice* continues the saga. *Fire Bringer* by David Clement-Davies is about intelligent deer who have developed a complex society predicated on their own myths. He later wrote *The Sight*, about an intelligent wolf society. The birth of two pups, Fell, who is black, and Larka, who is white, leads to the acceptance of an ancient myth about foreseeing the future. A 2007 sequel, *Fell*, tells the story of one of the grown-up pups, his betrayal of the family, and then his redemption. For his *A Glory of Unicorns*, Bruce Coville collected twelve stories about his favorite creature, the unicorn, and how it works with and affects people.

In Patricia McKillip’s *The Forgotten Beasts of Eld*, the great-granddaughter of a wizard controls enchanted beasts, but she fears men who come into her private world. In *Soul Eater*, Book Three of *The Chronicles of Ancient Darkness* by Michelle Paver, Torak is a gifted boy, who lives 6,000 years ago in



Focus Box 1

Alternate Universes in Fantasies

Beautiful Darkness by Kami Garcia and Margaret Stohl.

Little Brown, 2010. Ethan, Link, and Liv go into the tunnels under Gatlin to save Lena from becoming a Dark Caster. This is a romantic sequel to the 2009 *Beautiful Creatures*.

Betrayed by Gillian Shields. **HarperCollins, 2010.** In this sequel to *Immortal* (Catherine Tegen Books, 2009), the boarding school that sixteen-year-old Evie returns to is named Wyldcliff, an appropriate name for a place where Evie must fight the demons to rescue Sebastian.

Bone Chiller by Graham McNamee. **Random House, 2008.** An evil demon has bitten Danny, so Danny and his friends are hunting down and trying to kill the creature before the venom kills Danny. They corner the demon, but it's not an easy fight.

Daughter of Smoke and Bone by Lani Taylor. **Little, Brown, 2011.** The hero of this romantic thriller is seventeen-year-old Karou, an art student in Prague, who was raised by demons. She makes her living by running errands for Brimstone, her foster parent who is a supernatural chimera. She sets out on a quest to rescue her demon family and to figure out where she belongs, and uncovers so many complications that readers will be eager for a follow-up book.

Destined by P. C. Cast and Kristin Cast. **St. Martin's Griffin, 2011.** *Destined* is a continuation of the highly popular House of Night series of paranormal romances, which includes *Awakened*, *Burned*, *Chosen*, *Dragon's Oath*, *Hunted*, and *Marked*. P. C. Cast, who writes with her college-age daughter, taught high school English for fifteen years. She has also edited a collection of essays written by teachers and other readers interested in providing a guidebook to the series, *Nyx in the House*

of Night: Mythology, Folklore and Religion in the PC and Kristin Cast Vampyre Series, Smart Pop, 2011.

Draw the Dark by Ilisa J. Bick. **Carolrhoda, 2010.**

Christian sees a "sideways" place in his mind. He can also see into the minds of other people. He's looking for his missing parents, and uncovers the past and present of the small town where he lives.

Entwined by Heather Dixon. **Green Willow, 2011.** After her mother's death, Princess Azaela and her sisters are forbidden to dance, court, laugh, or even step outside. Finally, Azaela finds a magic space in the castle, thanks to a silver-threaded handkerchief that once belonged to her mother.

Extraordinary by Nancy Werlin. **Dial/Penguin, 2010.**

In this urban fairy tale, Faerie Mallory enters the human world in hopes of ensnaring Phoebe in a trap that will save the faerie realm.

Fever Crumb by Phillip Reeve. **Scholastic, 2010.** Reeve wrote *Fever Crumb*, the first of a trilogy, as a prequel to his *Hungry City Chronicles*. *Fever Crumb* is a girl orphan raised in the Order of Engineers. She escapes her cloistered life with the help of a theater troupe travelling to London where she thinks she will help on an archaeological dig. Instead she faces all kinds of new challenges. The second book, *A Web of Air* (Scholastic, 2011) finds her in Mayda-at-the-World's-End, a community built on cliffs among frightening mountains. Some of the chapter titles hint at what's ahead: "An Engineer Calls," "Aeroplane," "Wings of the Future," and "Lost Maps of the Sky." Fever's knowledge of engineering is sought by both the evil and the good forces that are envisioning something like a train in the sky.

Northern Europe. He can inhabit the souls of animals, and when one of his best friends, Wolf, is captured by the Soul Eaters, Torak must save him. In *Listening at the Gate* by Betsy James, Kat falls in love with a seal/man, not at all like her father's repressive fellow merchants. The starred review in *School Library Journal* gives James credit for "redrawing the pattern of the classic hero's quest."

In many fantasy books, the animals play only small parts, but they still contribute to the book's success. In Zilpha Keatley Snyder's *The Unseen*, the heart of the story is Xandra Hobson's feeling that she is unloved by her family, but the fun of the story is the way she finds this to be untrue after she rescues a

Foundling (from Monster Blood Tattoo Series, Book No. #1) by D. M. Cornish. Putnam, 2006. In this new and refreshing series, Rossamünd Bookchild ventures out of the orphanage and into the fascinating but dangerous world of Half-Continent. *Lamplighter* followed in 2008 and *The Foundling's Tale Part Three: Factotum* in 2010.

Leviathan by Scott Westerfeld, illustrated by Keith Thompson. Simon & Schuster, 2009, followed by Behemoth, 2010, and by Goliath, 2011. These three beautifully illustrated books are the ultimate example of fantastic technology as World War I is fought in a world divided into Clankers (those who use technology) and Darwinists (those who use DNA to create helpful animals).

Lies: A Gone Novel by Michael Grant. HarperCollins, 2010. All the grownups have disappeared from the FAYZ, leaving the kids to fend for themselves. Two leaders emerge from the kids, Caine's group plans to escape by boat to an island mansion, while Orsay's followers plan to wait until they're fifteen, at which time they think they can join their families wherever they have ended up.

London Calling by Edward Bloor. Knopf, 2006. When an old radio takes Martin back in time to London during World War II, he makes some startling discoveries.

The Lost Conspiracy by Frances Hardinge. HarperCollins/Bowen Press, 2009. Two sisters are the heroines in this fantasy set on a lush, but treacherous, island world. One girl is viewed as being a Lost, i.e., an oracle with special abilities. Her sister is her attendant. Both girls play vital roles in the future of the island.

Magic or Madness by Justine Larbalestier. Penguin/Razorbill, 2005. A girl named Reason grows up in the Australian bush fearing and avoiding her grandmother,

but when she is fifteen, her mother goes insane and Reason is sent to live with her frightening grandmother. She escapes through a magic door, only to find herself in New York City.

Reckless by Cornelia Funke. Little Brown, 2010. When his little brother follows Jacob, who has been slipping through his mirror into another realm, all kinds of complications occur in this text for middle schoolers. Funke is the author of the popular *Inkspell* books, which provide a wonderful example of an alternate universe.

Skeleton Man by Joseph Bruchac. HarperCollins, 2001. Young teens may get nightmares from this story based on a Mohawk legend about a man so hungry that he eats himself.

Stork by Wendy DelSol. Candlewick, 2010. When Katla's parents divorce, and she moves with her mother from California to her parents' home town in Minnesota, she is surprised to find that she is not only a member of the Icelandic Stork Society, but that she has been awarded the prestigious second chair of this mysterious society that guides unborn souls to the correct mothers.

Summerland by Michael Chabon. Hyperion/Talk Miramax, 2002. In this original story, a Little League baseball player is recruited by an old-timer from the Negro leagues to play in a game that has the potential to save the world.

Un Lun Dun by China Miéville. Del Rey, 2007. The title is really an allusion to a London that is not quite normal. Twelve-year-olds Zanna and Deebea find themselves in this alternate reality where typewriters "seep," umbrellas are sentient, and milk cartons make endearing pets. It is recommended to readers who liked Norton Juster's *The Phantom Tollbooth* and Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*.

bird from some hunters and it leaves her a feather, which turns out to be a key to another world.

Surely a large part of the pleasure in Philip Pullman's Golden Compass trilogy comes from the animal daemon that each human has, while much of the fun in the Harry Potter books comes from the animals, including Fang, Hedwig, Scabbers, Greyback, Pigwidgeon, and Crookshanks. The animages, Prongs, Padfoot, Moony, and Wormtail, play important parts in the plot, while a good joke is when Hagrid's hippogriff, Buckbeak, is on the Ministry's "Wanted" list and Hagrid thinks he can hide or at least disguise this huge flying creature by changing his name from Buckbeak to Witherwings.



Young Scholars Speak Out

Alaya Swann on Exploring Serious Problems with Parents in Dark Young Adult Literature

I recently attended *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part I* with my thirteen-year-old brother. As we exited, he crowed enthusiastically, “It actually *earned* its PG-13 rating.” Then he explained, “That part with the scary old lady before she turned into the snake was the creepiest part, and it was awesome!” At the age of thirteen, my brother thought the scariest part was also the coolest part.

The desire to push against boundaries that adults have set is nothing new, but it is new to find authors leading children to think about and explore deeply emotional problems with their parents. For example, Neil Gaiman’s *Coraline* leads readers (and later, viewers of the film) to contemplate Coraline’s recognition of her mother as “other.” This is a key psychological development that is valuable to both a child, who is just beginning to confront the task of growing up, and to an adult, who has vivid memories of that same process.

This kind of dark young adult fantasy has become more common in recent young adult literature. The premise of the first book in Suzanne Collins’s *Hunger Games* trilogy is a government-orchestrated fight to the death by specially chosen children. Katniss, the sixteen-year-old protagonist, curtly tells the readers about her father’s death in a coal mine explosion and the lingering psychological effects this event had on her: “There was nothing even to bury. I was eleven then. Five years later, I still wake up screaming for him to run.” Katniss also describes the trauma she experienced during her mother’s deep depression following the death of her husband. Katniss tries to remember how much her mother must have loved her father to give up her home in an affluent district and follow him to this poor coal-mining district. But still “all I can see is the woman who sat by, blank and unreachable, while her children turned to skin and bones. I try to forgive her for my father’s sake. But to be honest, I’m not the forgiving type.”

Dark and Gothic Fantasy It is almost impossible to separate dark literature into fantasy as opposed to science fiction because there are often technology-related contributing factors. An example is Rick Yancey’s 2009 horror story, *The Monstrumologist*, which is supposedly the diary of a man, William Henry, who lived to be something like 130 years old, perhaps because of the chemicals he came in contact with when as a boy he worked as an assistant to a self-educated “doctor” in 1888 New England. This doctor, Pellinore Warthrop, hoped to become as famous as Charles Darwin; however, his fame would come not from the study of living creatures, but of horrible creatures from the afterlife that he and Will would collect from graveyards.

If you are listening to these kinds of horror stories as a way of going to sleep and having pleasant dreams, you will probably be motivated to get up and change the CD. This happened to the Nilsens when we were listening to James Dashner’s 2010 *The Scorch Trials*. In this sequel to his 2009 *The Maze Runner*, Dashner created a grim and terrifying picture of young people who at first can communicate with each other through mind-think, but then lose this ability when

Katniss's remarks demonstrate how deeply wounding this exposure to parental depression was for her, and how intensely she regards this depression as parental failure. This passage is a far more open confrontation with the effects of parental depression than one might expect in a book for young adults, even in a realistic YA "problem novel." Katniss becomes a caretaker and manages to support her mother and her sister, but her relationship with her mother remains bitter. This psychological scarring provides a backdrop for the dark and horrifying events of the trilogy.

Philip Pullman also deals with strained parent-child relationships and mental illness in his Dark Materials trilogy. In the first book of the series, *The Golden Compass*, Lyra's parents are first absent, then manipulating and immoral. In the second book, *The Subtle Knife*, Will Parry's father is missing and his mother shows signs of paranoid schizophrenia. Early on in the book, a flashback reveals seven-year-old Will's first realization of his mother's mental illness when his mother becomes terrified and paranoid after losing her purse: At first Will thinks that there is a real external danger, but over the next few months he "slowly and unwillingly" comes to understand that "those enemies of his mother's were not in the world out there, but in her mind." He concludes that the enemies are "no less real, no less frightening and dangerous; it just meant he had to protect her even more carefully."

Unlike Katniss's response to her mother's debilitating depression, Will is not angry with his mother for failing her parental duties, and he willingly becomes her caretaker. Will's determination to keep his family together despite his mother's mental illness provides a framework for Will's character development during the rest of the story, and his experiences reflect a real and serious problem that children do encounter.

Pullman's and Collins's candid discussions of these problems reflect a growing desire on the part of authors to face serious real-world problems through fantasy. Just as my brother appreciated the dark moments in the *Harry Potter* film, readers also demonstrate an increasing interest in engaging with young adult fantasy that does not shy away from serious situations. Perhaps fantasy provides a kind of freedom for both authors and readers to dig more deeply into such serious issues and confront the emotional challenges that arise.

- Alaya Swann is a Ph.D. student at Arizona State University, where she studies medieval English literature. Her research focuses on female mystics in the late Middle Ages, and she also teaches composition and literature to college students. She has always loved fantasy and young adult literature, and she continues to read it every chance she gets. Her goals include becoming a professor and teaching at the college level, and she hopes to engage as many students as she can in the joys of literature.

they are imprisoned in a large oval-shaped building where the windows are suddenly bricked up and all communication with the outside is cut off. They have access to water but not food, and so all they can do is wait to see what happens.

We knew from reading a preview that the young prisoners were going to be forced to run through one hundred miles of Scorch, with its solar flares, severe storms, and "cranks." The cranks are diseased and deformed people who have been driven mad from earlier contacts with those now in control. We were eager to finish listening to the book, but in the light of day rather than as a soporific.

We probably should not be so surprised to see how fascinated young people are with the afterlife. Since none of us want to die, we naturally want to envision an afterlife. Whether we do it seriously through religion or playfully through jokes and Halloween costumes, or through false bravado by subjecting ourselves to really scary movies and fiction, we are all tiptoeing around the question of "What's next?" Today's authors have provided a wealth of imaginative books for a generation that grew up reading R. L. Stine's Fear Street books and watching *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* on television.

In Michael Grant's *Lies: A Gone Novel*, all the grownups have disappeared from the FAYZ, leaving the kids to fend for themselves. Two leaders emerge. Caine leads a group who plans to escape by boat to an island mansion. Orsay's followers plan to wait until they're fifteen at which time they think they can join their families wherever they are.

Bliss by Lauren Myracle is about the daughter of two hippies, who gave her the name Bliss in the Morning Dew. The story begins when they drop her off at her grandmother's house in Atlanta so they can be free to go north to Canada. Her grandmother enrolls Bliss in an elite prep school, but when Bliss begins to hear the voice of a long dead student, she finds herself in the midst of a plan to release and empower the girl's spirit. Myracle softens some of the chills with humor, but the book is still pretty dark.

Some of the new books are so dark that adults are seriously worried about young people reading them. In her September 14, 2010, blog, Valerie Straus wrote about an interdisciplinary conference being held at Cambridge University on "The Emergent Adult—Adolescent Literature and Culture." The questions being asked by literary scholars, psychologists, and sociologists circled around the differences in teenage and adult minds and whether teenagers are more vulnerable to suggestions. In answer to Straus's question of "Are kids' brains really changed after they read the 'Twilight' saga or 'Harry Potter,' and what does change mean anyway?" conference director Maria Nikolajeva wrote back:

We have always known that encounters with art and literature affect our senses. We feel joy, sorrow, fear, anxiety, grief. We empathize with the characters. We learn from them about ourselves and about other people. What we know today from neuroscience is that there are spots in the brain that are responsible for these feelings, that it is possible to identify parts of the brain affected by reading or watching a film. The adolescent brain goes through a significant and rapid change, everything that affects it leaves deep imprints. Very dark fiction creates and amplifies a sense of insecurity, which is typical of adolescence; but it can also be a liberation when readers "share" their personal experience with that of fictional characters. So yes, all readers' brains are changed after they have read a book, but teenage brains are especially perceptive and therefore vulnerable. (Downloaded, Sept. 4, 2010)

In a 2008 book, *The Gothic in Children's Literature: Haunting the Borders* (Edited by Anna Jackson, Karen Coats, and Roderick McGillis, Routledge Press), Roderick McGillis has an essay, "The Night Side of Nature: Gothic Spaces, Fearful Times," in which he praises M. T. Anderson's writing ability, but is very critical of Anderson's 1997 book *Thirsty* and the description of Chris (a teenage vampire) cutting himself so as to get the blood he desperately wants. We had not seen reviews of the book when it first came out, which was a few years before the teen vampire craze, but when we looked it up on Amazon.com in August of 2011 we saw that it had been reissued by Candlewick as a paperback in 2008. No review was given from *School Library Journal*, but there was a *Publisher's Weekly* quote saying it was "a cut above" most other books on the subject.

Education Week (April 4, 2007) published a front page story on "Dark Themes in Books Get Students Reading" by Kathleen Kennedy Manzo. The