

*Research on Diversity in Youth Literature*

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## **Editors' Introduction: Queer Futurities in Youth Literature, Media, and Culture**

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## Editors' Introduction: Queer Futurities in Youth Literature, Media, and Culture

### Erratum

The co-editors have made a few corrections to this introduction: 1) Shortened the title in the header; 2) revised "conceptions" to "conceptualizations"; 3) revised "the effects" to "its effects"; 4) eliminated a line break after the Dan Savage and Terry Miller quote; 5) reversed order for Christine A. Jenkins and Michael Cart; 6) revised "paranoid" to "too suspicious."

“Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queerness’s domain.”

— José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia* (1)

The future, a time on the horizon, a projected becoming of the not-yet-here, is quite a contentious temporal mode in the study of youth literatures, cultures, and media. The stakes and cultural significance of futurity increase drastically when examining youth texts that focus on queer thought, experience, aesthetics, and politics.<sup>1</sup> These amplified stakes manifest mostly because it is debatable whether certain models and frameworks of futurity are applicable to the real and imagined lives of queer folk and youth. We can further identify more tensions and difficulties when examining approaches to futurity vis-à-vis children and the figure of *the Child*, especially since they often reify both conservative and progressive attitudes toward temporality and activism. But in order to examine how this temporal mode operates in contemporary youth texts, we first need to develop an understanding of the specific politics of futurity that inform youth literature and media, the diverging ethical perspectives toward queer futurism, and the real-world issues that pressure longings for a utopian, queerer future (and that simultaneously highlight the *need* for these utopian longings).

In North American contexts, children’s and young adult (YA) literature, media, and culture typically mobilize a future-oriented purview, and many scholars have highlighted the visionary and utopian frameworks that inform the creation of aesthetic objects geared towards younger audiences. For instance, in her exploration of the transformative qualities of children’s literature, Kimberley Reynolds celebrates the field’s ability to push readers to envision new worlds and possibilities in addition to developing an understanding of present-day attitudes toward society, culture, and aesthetics. As she argues, the stories we share with children “are blueprints for living in culture as it exists, but they are also where *alternative* ways of living are

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<sup>1</sup> In order to avoid dynamics of inclusion and exclusion found in common acronyms such as LGBTQIA and LGBTQ+, we use queer as a deliberately broad and inclusive umbrella term when alluding to nonheterosexual and noncisgender people, cultures, and experiences. In this sense, we are using the term queer as Michael Warner frames it, as a “capacious way” of approaching the “many ways people can find themselves at odds with straight culture” (38).

often piloted in recognition of the fact that children will not just inherit the future, but need to participate in shaping it” (14). Other scholars have pointed out that this shaping of the future and the capacity to envision a time in which conditions differ from current realities are directly intertwined with the temporal dimensions of childhood itself. Focusing on the notion of “unrealized time” present in the symbolic construction of children, Clémentine Beauvais argues that younger people have a unique positionality in regard to notions of futurism. Children own “a longer future in which to act” when compared to adults, the latter of which own “a longer time past with its accumulated baggage of experience, knowledge, and therefore didactic legitimacy” (19). Youth, in contrast to adults, thus possess a type of power that Beauvais refers to as “might,” which can be traced in their “potent, latent future to be filled with yet-unknown action” (19). Because children have not been restricted, hampered, or defined by the influences of knowledge and experience, their futures are therefore more open—full of promise, potentiality, and the ability to imagine a place and time different from the present.

These perspectives on children, their literatures, and futurity simultaneously mesh and contrast with prevalent theorizations on queer temporalities circulated in both social and antisocial approaches to queer theory. The articles in this special issue draw from the work of many cultural critics and queer theorists, but by far the most prevalent theorizations of futurity addressed in them are those developed by Lee Edelman and José Esteban Muñoz, which were published during the mid and late 2000s. Since both of these theorists are integral to many of the articles in this issue, we will briefly break down the major ideas circulated in their interventions. In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Edelman highlights how queer people, through reproductive ideologies and the symbolic figure of the Child, are framed in opposition to the future. Keep in mind that Edelman refers to the *idea* of the child—a figurative and ideological configuration—when mobilizing his argument. Edelman claims that futurity is reliant on the perpetuation of normative practices through a veneration of the Child—a figure or symbol that must be protected, for it contributes to the continuation of the status quo. According to Edelman, normative ideologies reject anyone or anything that violates the ideals of “reproductive futurism,” which can be described as a concept that elevates the cultural centrality of heteronormativity by reifying and elevating “the reproductive mandate inherent in the logic of futurism itself” (117). Through this configuration, queerness becomes a societal “hazard” because it challenges the principles of futurism imposed upon the Child, and because it is not

*typically* associated with reproduction, but rather, with “selfish” and “self-centered” gratifications. As Edelman points out,

“If there is a baby, there is a future, there is redemption.” If, however, there is *no baby* and, in consequence, *no future*, then the blame must fall on the fatal lure of sterile, narcissistic enjoyments understood as inherently destructive of meaning and therefore as responsible for the undoing of social organization, collective reality, and inevitably, life itself. (12-13)

Futurity, in this sense, can be approached as a temporal mode reified people, events, practices, or ideas that “impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable... the possibility of queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations” (2). Due to this privileging of heteronormative thought in dominant cultures, the engagement in practices that are not deemed “productive”—such as the refusal to have children, and even the refusal to view children as enablers of the future—are labeled as “queer” because they refute ideals that are valorized in such contexts.

Let us put it bluntly: Edelman rejects normative conceptualizations of the future and insists that queer people should instead develop a present-oriented mode of being and thinking, one that refutes the oftentimes conservative logics attached to futurism. He suggests that queer people should embrace the “death drive” that defines their existence rather than trying to desperately assimilate into the parameters of a heteronormative system of futurity that refuses to make space for us. We must be mindful, however, that Edelman’s theorizations were generated and circulated before more recent changes in the social circumstances of queerness, especially when it comes to the reproductive realities that queer people had to deal with at the time. For instance, joint adoption by queer parents was illegal in the United States until this began to change during the mid-1990s. Furthermore, the reproductive science scene and reproductive options such as surrogacy were limited when compared to our current moment, further framing past queer generations as incompatible with the normative demands and possibilities of reproduction. In spite of contemporary social changes, where options such as adoption, surrogacy, and other means are now more of a possibility for queer folk, Edelman’s theorizations remain quite useful in examining children’s and YA texts, especially when we realize how they frequently implement normative idealizations of both the Child and futurism.

While Edelman advocates for the rejection of futurity and the embrace of queer presentism, Muñoz, in his book *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, approaches queerness as future-oriented in its scope (as suggested by the opening passage of this introduction). His approach is one that meshes quite effectively with the temporal frameworks that frequently inform the creation and distribution of children's literature as well as YA criticism and scholarship. Muñoz suggests that queerness inhabits the domain of futurity. It is a "structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present," a desire that involves "not simply a being but a doing for and toward the future" (1). Queerness, in Muñoz's theorization, thus entails a rejection of the present to actively strive for the potential of a utopian, queerer world in the future. Queerness becomes "a temporal arrangement in which the past is a field of possibility in which subjects can act in the present in the service of a new futurity" (16). By tracing the historical materiality of past and contemporary queer texts, Muñoz validates how aesthetic objects and performances can reframe queerness into a longing for a utopian culture that is currently out of reach.

But are these future-oriented, utopian sentiments practical and realistic, or are they simply misguided? Muñoz avoids engaging with problematic forms of utopian thinking by establishing a distinction between concrete and abstract utopias, drawing mostly from the work of Ernst Bloch. Concrete utopias, Muñoz argues, are a more effective approach to utopianism because they can be linked to "historically situated struggles," and also because they are informed by a sense of hope that is politically and culturally viable. Concrete utopias are thus based on "the hopes of a collective, an emergent group, or even the solitary oddball who is the one who dreams for many. Concrete utopias are the realm of educated hope" (3). Muñoz's temporal approach to queerness also draws from the work of Giorgio Agamben, for he approaches futurity as a *potentiality* rather than a possibility. Whereas possibility implies a degree of incertitude, potentiality is a forthcoming mode of existence: "a certain mode of nonbeing that is eminent, a thing that is present but not actually existing in the present tense" (9). Queerness is thus a potentiality on the horizon. Although it may be unreachable, its warmth, influences, and resonances can still be channeled and felt in our current moment.

Both social and antisocial approaches to futurism come into play in examinations of contemporary queer youth texts, and these examinations become particularly fruitful when approaching them through an intersectional lens. Although Muñoz in particular is wary about the



extent to which ideologies of race, ethnicity, gender, and class come into play in theorizations of queer futurism, oftentimes, approaches to this temporal mode and the figure of the Child are contingent on White, middle-to-upper-class frameworks. We must be wary of being too hasty when creating strong ties between contemporary youth, futurity, and the texts that are crafted with these audiences in mind. Even more so, analyses on queer futurities in youth literature must be especially mindful of how these texts and their temporal modes address intersectional forms of oppression. Many of the articles in this special issue question which children and young adults have the capacity, or better put, the *privilege* of envisioning and working toward a queerer future in the first place. Although the yet-to-be-known can be approached as a temporal construct full of hope and promise, it can also be one full of dread and terror, especially when considering that the present does not always offer the most effective platform in which to develop an optimistic, utopian approach toward tomorrows. This interrogation especially comes to light when focusing on the experiences (both real and representative) of minoritized children and YAs, who often contravene or challenge normative approaches to growth, experience, innocence, and time. Kathryn Bond Stockton discusses this notion in her examinations of childhood innocence in light of children who are queered by experience and/or by color:

children, as an *idea*, are likely to be both white and middle-class. It is a privilege to need to be protected—and to be sheltered—and thus to have a childhood. Not in spite of privilege, then, but because of it, the all-important feature of weakness sticks to these markers (white and middle-class) and helps to signal innocence. (31)

Which children, which young adults, both literal and symbolic, have the privilege of being protected? Which youth have the privilege of tomorrows that are open, utopic, or even possible? Simply put, many queer, non-white, gender nonconforming, Indigenous, disabled, and lower class youth simply do not have access to the material, aesthetic, practical, and ideological means to exist and thrive in the present—much less to envision realities different from the ones in which they currently live. Queer futurities are contentious here, especially since there have recently been many cultural and institutional developments that might mislead people into thinking that queer liberation or futurism has been achieved, or even worse, that both queerness and queer liberation are goal-oriented, teleological projects.

Consider, for instance, some of the global sociocultural developments that have taken place in the past decade, where we have seen a rise and implementation of changes that have altered the legal, cultural, and socioeconomic status of queer people worldwide. In the United States, we have witnessed the unconstitutionality of Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) in 2013 thanks to the results of the *United States v. Windsor* case, and the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2015 thanks in part to the Supreme Court's ruling of the *Obergefell v. Hodges* case. Through a 2015 referendum, the Republic of Ireland began to recognize all marriages regardless of the sex of the partners. Two years later, same-sex marriage became legal in Australia. In September 2018, India's Supreme Court made changes to section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, eliminating the language that criminalized homosexual sex between adults. While these are certainly important landmark victories, not to mention that there have been countless other global developments that have improved the conditions of queer folk globally, we must not buy into the fiction that full progress has been achieved. Nor can we ignore the extent that queer people continue to encounter discrimination, bullying, violence, and death based on their gender identity and/or sexual orientation. Institutional changes do not always correlate to progress, revolution, and liberation. Even more so, we cannot ignore past and present events that pressure the utopian, normative, at times misguided sense of futurism that haunts contemporary cultures and the youth texts generated within them.

Unfortunately, we do not need to look too far back in order to fully understand how and why utopian futurism can be so problematic when examining queer youths and the texts crafted for them, especially in North American contexts. In the 2010s, for instance, the U.S. began to receive international attention with the rise of an "epidemic" of queer teen suicides—a worrisome trend that saturated U.S. media and new outlets throughout this decade. Critical attention to this issue became unavoidable during the latter half of 2010, in which an alarming number of teens and YAs who identified as queer committed suicide after facing bullying, ridicule, and harassment. The most well-known of these cases was perhaps that of Tyler Clementi, a student at Rutgers University who jumped to his death after finding out that his encounter with another man was broadcasted live through his roommate's webcam. Although this issue reached peak critical attention earlier in the decade, we are still feeling its effects today. As recently as April of 2019, Nigel Shelby, a fifteen year-old gay teen of color, committed suicide after experiencing both depression and anti-queer bullying. Throughout our recent past

and present, there have been other events and circumstances that have further challenged the ability to create a safer, queerer future, including the rise of murders and acts of violence toward transgender people of color, Donald Trump's recent transgender military ban and the circulation of his blatantly antqueer ideologies through press conferences and social media, and the 2016 Pulse nightclub shooting—which at the time was the deadliest mass shooting by a single perpetrator, and which had especially devastating ramifications for both queer and Latinx communities. How can we view tomorrows as times that are so full of potential and promise when the past and present are riddled with hurt, oppression, and violence?

It was also during this time that the “It Gets Better” project began to achieve widespread media attention, a project geared toward queer youth that was inherently utopic, optimistic, and future-oriented in its scope. Created and proliferated by columnist Dan Savage in response to the rise of queer teen suicides in the United States, the project consisted of adults (including celebrities, authors, teachers, and everyday people) sharing stories where they discussed how they grappled with their sexual identities, how they faced bullying, and how their lives ultimately “got better” and more bearable as time passed by. Based on the information disclosed above, we can already sense how this project mobilizes major concerns for queer youth, especially since queer *adult* life is framed as progress-driven and liveable: queer children and teens were being assured that their lives would undoubtedly improve with time, but these assurances were circulated by adults who survived, adults who are in many ways fortunate.<sup>2</sup> While the project ultimately had good intentions and circulated narratives of queer people who have been able to succeed and thrive in normative, antqueer cultures, we cannot help but ask: what about the queer people who cannot or do not want to succeed and thrive within the normative parameters of their respective cultures? What about the children and teens whose lives have *not* gotten better or more bearable with time? In his novel *Jonny Appleseed*, Joshua Whitehead (one of the contributors of this special issue) focuses on the experiences of a young, Two-Spirit/Indigiqueer protagonist. Through this character, he mobilizes critiques of the “It Gets Better” project, especially in terms of the deep-seated problems of class and race that inform it:

When I got a little older, I think I was fifteen, I remember watching Dan Savage and Terry Miller on the internet telling me that *it gets better*. They told me that they knew

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<sup>2</sup> For more information and critiques on the “It Gets Better” project, please refer to Derritt Mason's article “On Children's Literature and the (Im)Possibility of *It Gets Better*.”

what I was going through, that they knew me. How so, I thought? You don't know me. You know lattes and condominiums—you don't know what it's like being a brown gay boy on the rez. (7-8)

The narratives circulated through this project typically gave spectators a very narrow and limited approach toward queer futurity, therefore implementing a monolithic narrative of what it means for queer youth to thrive, succeed, improve, and survive in our current sociopolitical climate. And while we do desire a world that is better, a world in which the conditions of queer life are at least bearable and possible, we believe that this will not be achieved by simply retelling and celebrating a single story or a single method for reaching out toward a queerer future. As scholars, critics, and educators, we have to be wary of elevating and celebrating youth literature and media that elevates such a narrow and normative vision of what a queer future can and should look like.

What then is the role and potential of futurity in queer youth literature, media, and culture? To what extent do youth-oriented cultural productions have a responsibility to remind readers of historical and contemporary realities, even when these realities are steeped in violence and oppression? Why is there such an impulse to consistently distance contemporary youth texts from these histories and realities? Here, it is worth putting perspectives on youth literatures in conversation with queer theory approaches. Take, for instance, the work of Christine A. Jenkins and Michael Cart, two important, pioneering scholars in the field of queer YA literature. They have suggested that contemporary queer YA texts should “abandon the traditional and too-easy equation between homosexuality and violent death” (222). In due course, Cart and Jenkins are making a call for a multiplicity of stories—narratives that challenge the negative affect and deathly resonances present in the larger tradition of queer cultural production. Do not get us wrong: to some extent, this is an important call for action. However, to suggest that we should *abandon* this equation entirely is not only suspect, but could ultimately be framed as a claim that does a disservice to marginalized communities given that death, violence, and oppression are elements that queer folk and queer youth, especially queer youth of color, continue to grapple and deal with on an everyday basis.

As Heather Love suggests in her discussion on loss and the politics of queer history, “the history of queer damage retains its capacity to do harm in the present” (9). And this is certainly the case of contemporary queer youth texts. However, Love also advocates for the importance of

maintaining focus on this history of queer damage, and centering more critical attention on feelings of negativity, in order to better understand their effects in our contemporary moment: “Backward feelings serve as an index to the ruined state of the social world; they indicate continuities between the bad gay past and the present; and they show up the inadequacy of queer narratives of progress. Most important, they teach us that we do not know what is good for politics” (27). Framed in another way, which youths have the privilege of abandoning the ramifications and effects of the equation between queerness and feelings of backwardness? By abandoning the equation between queerness, violence, and negative affect, are we not doing a disservice or injustice to people, readers, and communities who cannot escape the negative and harmful experiences commonly tethered to queer life and representation? Even more so, how do we even begin to balance the act of crafting texts that offer queer readers a sense of hope about the future without diminishing the effects of the historical and contemporary realities that people have and will continue to face in a time that has yet-to-come?

These questions are just a selection of the ones that led us to explore the use, validity, and viability of future-oriented thinking in queer youth texts circulated in contemporary cultures. We suggest that this exploration is imperative, especially when considering the extent to which homo- and heteronormative attitudes have muddled understandings of queer progress and the direction of queer thought and activism today. The need for an examination of representations of queer futurities in youth literature, media, and culture becomes even more immediate when we consider the extent to which these texts have been partially responsible for circulating and elevating these misdirections and muddled understandings. At the same time, and in the lines of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick advocates for in her discussion of reparative reading, we want to avoid being too suspicious about queer futurism in children’s and YA texts, and instead, yearn for the unexpected and the surprising. This form of reading also enables us to channel hope as a viable form of reading and thinking through queer youth texts:

to read from a reparative position is to surrender the knowing, anxious paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to the reader *as new*; to a reparatively positioned reader, it can seem realistic and necessary to experience surprise. Because there can be terrible surprises, however, there can also be good ones. Hope, often fracturing, even a traumatic thing to experience, is among the

energies by which the reparatively positioned reader tries to organize the fragments and part-objects she encounters or creates. (Sedgwick 146)

While texts crafted for younger audiences can certainly offer limited and normative perspectives toward queer futurity, we absolutely believe that they can offer readers alternative, unexpected, surprising methods and models of thinking through the maybe, the perhaps, the uncertain, and the yet-to-arrive. Perhaps it is through children's and YA literature, media, and culture that we can begin to untangle the knotty tensions between pessimism and hope, assimilation and countercultural resistance, and a focus on a damaged past and present vis-a-vis a future that can offer us queer alternatives for livability, for being.

In his examination of queer theory and children's literature studies, Kenneth Kidd ponders not only the shapes that a queer theory of children's literature might assume, but he also questions whether we can envision "children's literature not simply as a field of literature but also as a theoretical site in its own right—even, perhaps, as an unconscious of sorts for queer theory" (186). This special issue is partially an attempt to address these musings, especially when it comes to assessing how youth literatures and media either reaffirm or pressure common approaches to queer futurities, and whether we can begin to theorize temporal models that are exclusive to the study of children's and YA aesthetic productions. The articles included in this issue—written by emerging and established scholars in the field—interrogate the role of this temporal mode in a variety of queer cultural productions geared at younger audiences. Ranging from novels, comics, television shows, and mainstream music, they not only assess how youth texts frame and enable envisionings of a queer future, but also examine the political, affective, and countercultural viability of these texts. The diverse approaches that these articles advance vary in their scope, ethical frameworks, and attitudes. Some articles advocate for forms of queer futurity that remind readers of the historical and cultural damage that continues to haunt contemporary society, whereas others push for envisioning tomorrows distinct from the present—tomorrows full of promise that enable different possibilities for existing, dwelling, and thriving in the world as queer people.

Opening the special issue, Katherine Slater in her article "*Here and Not Now: The Queer Geographies of This One Summer*" explores the intricacies of childhood growth and development through Mariko Tamaki and Jillian Tamaki's graphic novel *This One Summer*. Underscoring how Tamaki's characterization of Windy—a central protagonist in the text—is

queerly “in a different place,” Slater illuminates how difference characterizes the novel’s composition in form and function. Thinking through the twin lenses of Stockton’s sideways child and Sara Ahmed’s slant, the article highlights how the child’s horizon is queered through its refusal of teleological coherence. In *This One Summer*, according to Slater, Rose and Windy both grow slantwise. The slant, read here as a conceptual apparatus of futurity, questions not only if and how the so-called child might grow, but where. Capturing the geographies of queer children who live within the question mark, Slater argues that the spatiality of the text remains tremulous, tilted, and conditional. Embracing what she names as a politics of maybe, Slater concludes by arguing that readers of Tamaki and Tamaki’s text have traveled along a slant that destabilizes Rose’s heteronormative predictions, and that bends Windy’s uncontainable body into a queer question. Queer futurity, as Slater shows, is shaped by a geography of doubt.

In the second article, Derriit Mason and Joshua Whitehead partner to examine the promise and precarity of horror as a genre forwarding futurity in queer YA literature. In their essay, “When Everything Feels like the Horror Movies: The Ghostliness of Queer Youth Futurity,” Mason and Whitehead argue that the vision of queer futurity is always horrific and spectral in and of itself. Understanding Jude—a central protagonist in Raziel Reid’s novel *When Everything Feels Like the Movies*—as an amalgam of Lee Edelman’s “*sinthomosexual*” and the slasher film “final girl” (an avatar of queer negativity), Mason and Whitehead argue that Reid mobilizes horror to describe the vicious consequences of homophobic culture while simultaneously critiquing the genre that categorizes his novel. Postulating a countercultural approach that situates itself against the dominant, normative trends of children’s and YA literature, Mason and Whitehead ultimately show how Reid’s novel pushes readers and scholars to confront the fantasies of futurism that lurk in normative engagements with youth literature.

In a similar vein to the work of Mason and Whitehead, James Joshua Coleman advocates for readings of youth media and literature that challenge not only our conceptions of futurity, but also the normative understandings of childhood innocence present in our contemporary moment. Reading Troye Sivan’s “Bloom” next to Jeff Garvin’s YA novel *Symptoms of Being Human*, Coleman demonstrates how representations of queer virginity reinforce narratives and tropes endemic to Romantic era conceptions of the innocent child. In his article, “Digital Innocence: Queer Virginity, Painful Histories, and the Critical Hope of Queer Futurity” Coleman argues that these conceptions, when grafted onto queer bodies in the digital world, invite queer young people

to cordon themselves off in the myopia of the present. Such presentism, Coleman contends, comes at great cost. Through a cross-cutting analysis of the two texts under study, Coleman suggests that queer youth must reject digital innocence. Instead, he argues, the so-called future of queer lies in its ability to craft new stories that fundamentally challenge narratives of childhood innocence. Furthermore, drawing from the work of Love, Coleman pushes us to rethink the role of the past in queer youth texts, and suggests that erasures and sidelinings of painful representations of the past could potentially lead to the erasure of society's vulnerable and non-normative communities.

Like Coleman, Mandy Elizabeth Moore takes up a popular culture text—Cartoon Network's *Steven Universe*—to query the utopic construction of the queer child. In her article, "Future Visions: Queer Utopia in *Steven Universe*," Moore responds to Edelman's assertion that the Child belongs solely to a heterosexual future and that queerness thus belongs in the present. Analyzing *Steven Universe* through Gubar's kinship model of childhood, she argues for a child who acts alongside adults in the present to imagine a queer/er future. Illuminating how the central protagonist demonstrates a queer child activism that positions children not as the reason for the future but as co-authors of it, Moore suggests that we need "kid stuff" to build a queerer future. Additionally, Moore implements both reparative and paranoid readings of this children's cartoon show. While she argues that *Steven Universe* develops a sense of queer utopianism that provides a generative space for theorizing how children can participate in queer forms of world-building, she also points out the show's failures, in that it does not fully consider the role of intersectionality in constructing a queerer and more utopian future.

Closing the special issue, Michelle Ann Abate provides a reparative reading of the 2013 Pura Belpré award-winning YA novel *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*. While other recent reparative readings of this novel, such as those written by Matos, examine the politics of futurity through an examination of this novel's anachronisms and affective/narrative dimensions, Abate focuses her attention on the absence of AIDS as site of reparative work. In her article, "Out of the Past: *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*, the AIDS Crisis, and Queer Retrosity" Abate argues that the author's disavowal of and lack of reference to the AIDS crisis provides a reflective reimagining of queer life for LGBTQ youth and gay men of color in particular. In what she coins as "queer retrosity," Abate contends that "the YA narrative ponders what life in the LGBTQ community might have been like had AIDS not taken such a



powerful hold and devastating toll.” Reading *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* as a reparative project, one that is speculative in character, Abate concludes that Benjamin Alire Sáenz’s silence is not a retreating from history. Rather, it signals a revisiting, reimagining, and redeeming of what queer could be.

Each of the articles presented in this special issue mobilizes a queer impulse, or what Muñoz describes as an instance “to stand out of time together, to resist the stultifying temporality and time that is not ours” (187). In doing so, they work collaboratively and independently to issue an invitation to be taken out of the precarity of the present and instead be transported to a queer future that is not-yet-here. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that the work we curated in this special issue represents only a fraction of the incredibly robust work being done with regards to queer futurity in young adult media, arts, and literature. As editors we find it important to recognize the politics of (in)visibility and acknowledge the work that is *not* here.

Whereas the larger vision for *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature (RDYL)* forwards interdisciplinary conversations concerning youth texts across fields (i.e., librarianship), the authors featured here, largely faculty and/or graduate students in English departments and/or colleges of education, represent but one part of the disciplinary conversation. Similarly, although some of the featured authors identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and Two-Spirit, the issue suffers from a lack of racial and ethnic representation. We do not have, for instance, authors who identify as Black or Asian. Nor do we have authors outside of North America. We recognize that this work is being done, and thus see its omission as a limitation.

In addition to the dearth of demographic diversity in this issue’s contributors, this special issue also lacks a variation of theorists used to advance futurity as a concept and method for analyzing youth texts. Instead of a limitation, however, we see this as a provocation for future scholarship concerning queer futurity. How might, for example, Afrofuturism or speculative design come to intersect with queer theory? What, if anything, do these seemingly divergent theories come to tell us about the future of queer youth, queer texts, and queer futures? Outside of these more theoretical conversations and queries, we also recognize that the issue does not take up the teaching of queer futurity. In other words, our pedagogies do not orient us towards a queerer future (or past for that matter) with regards to youth literature. Although not the primary purpose of the issue, we recognize this tension.

In spite of these shortcomings, we hope that this special issue of *RDYL* will lead you, the reader, to discover innovative and surprising ways of approaching and examining queer representation in youth literature, media, and culture. Even more so, we hope that this special issue will inspire you to consider the role of queer futurities and temporalities in your readings, your examinations, and your teachings of queer youth texts in the classroom. We anticipate that this introduction, and many of the articles included in this issue, will open up new possibilities for thinking through contemporary representations of queer thought and experience, and for complicating current understandings of the possibilities, potentialities, and limitations present in youth literature, media, and culture.

In his YA novel, *Two Boys Kissing*, David Levithan contemplates the importance of the future in the formation of queer political thought, a contemplation that meshes beautifully with the work of Muñoz:

What a powerful word, *future*. Of all the abstractions we can articulate to ourselves, of all the concepts we have that other animals do not, how extraordinary the ability to consider a time that's never been experienced. And how tragic not to consider it. It galls us, we with such a limited future, to see someone brush it aside as meaningless, when it has an endless capacity for meaning, and an endless number of meanings that can be found in it.  
(155)

We hope that you will continue to consider futurity as a realm of potentiality, as a temporal mode in which we can consider alternatives to our lived realities, to the cultural hurt and damage that continues to circulate in our communities, to the forms of violence and oppression that continue to haunt us on an everyday basis. As Levithan points out, there is an infinite number of meanings that can be found in the future. We cannot wait to see the meanings that will be circulated in queer youth literature, media, culture, scholarship, and criticism in a place and time far beyond the here and now.

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