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**BEITRÄGE**

# The Compulsion to Repeat

## Introduction to *Seriality and Texts for Young People*<sup>1</sup>

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### I.

There is a curious gap in the scholarship on texts for young people: while series fiction has been an important stream of publishing for children and adolescents at least since the last decades of the nineteenth century,<sup>1</sup> the scholarship on these texts has not been central to the development of theories on and criticism of texts for young people. The focus of scholarship is much more likely to be on stand-alone, high-quality texts of literary fiction. Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), for example, has occupied critics in the field far more often and more significantly than all of the 46 popular novels about schoolgirls with similar plots that were published by Grahame's contemporary, Angela Brazil (beginning in 1904 with *A Terrible Tomboy*). Literary fiction such as Grahame's tends to be defined in terms of its singularity – the unique voice of the narrator, unusual resolutions to narrative dilemmas, intricate formal designs, and complicated themes – often specifically as distinct from the formulaic patterns of series fiction. Yet, curiously, scholars typically use examples from literary fiction to illustrate the common characteristics of books directed to young readers: it was Grahame's book, and not Brazil's books, that appeared in the Children's Literature Association's list *Touchstones* as one of the »distinguished children's books« the study of which »will allow us to better understand children's literature in general,« according to Perry Nodelman, who chaired the committee that produced the list. (Nodelman 1985, p. 2)

**1** This essay is an updated version of the introduction to an edited collection published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2014. *Seriality and Texts for Young People. The Compulsion to Repeat* was the result of an international, invitational symposium on the topic of Narrative, Repetition, and Texts for Young People that took place in June 2011 at The University of Winnipeg in Canada. The symposium was hosted by a graduate class in Cultural Studies, which was studying theories of repetition alongside narratives for young people. Participants developed their presentations into full, scholarly essays after the symposium, making use of the lively, cumulative discussions to hone their arguments. A selection of those essays is published in the book.

In addition to Mavis Reimer, who taught the course, the editors of the collection and the authors of the introduction were all among the graduate students who first wrestled with a number of major philosophical and theoretical statements about the principle of repetition as part of their course, then acted as facilitators and respondents for the

presentations at the symposium. Those students who elected to carry on with the project collaborated with Reimer to bring the essays together into a book collection. They worked closely with the logic of the essays as editorial readers and returned to the theoretical formulations to frame an introduction that asks whether repetition is an obvious fact or an impossible idea, or somehow both at once, and what any of this might have to do with texts designed for an audience of young people.

In response to the request from *Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft für Kinder- und Jugendliteraturforschung* (GKJF) to reprint it, the authors have revised and in some cases updated the introduction for publication in this medium. We are grateful to our many collaborators on this project – to the contributors to the volume, whose excellent chapters we briefly introduce here, to the participants at the symposium, to the other graduate students who were members of the class, and to the editors of the GKJF Yearbook for the opportunity to revisit our work for this issue.

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Traditionally, few titles from series appeared on lists of awards, honours usually decided by professional readers. Kathleen Chamberlain has demonstrated, in fact, that one group of professional readers – children’s librarians in the United States in the early twentieth century – established their cultural authority through their campaigns against series literature for young people as worthy of inclusion on library shelves, much less on prize lists. Since the mid-1990s, this exclusion of series from prizes has been less prevalent, although award-winning titles – such as, for example, Philip Pullman’s *Northern Lights* (which won the *Guardian* Children’s Fiction Prize in 1996) or Kenneth Oppel’s *Sunwing* (which won the Canadian Library Association’s Book of the Year Award in 2000) – are often titles in limited progressive« series, a type of series defined by Victor Watson as sequential narratives »in which a continuous and developing story is told in instalments«. (Watson 2004, p. 532) Over the same period of time, the interest in series books among common readers has exploded. Beginning in the 1980s, there was an exponential increase in the titles from series for young people dominating the bestseller lists, with such American series as *Choose Your Own Adventure* (1979–1998), *The Baby-sitters Club* (1986–2000), *Goosebumps* (1992–1997), and *Animorphs* (1996–2001) leading the way. Mapping the »political economy« of children’s literature at the end of the twentieth century, Joel Taxel reports one of his informants in the book business as characterizing the decade of the 1990s as being all about »series, series, series«. (Taxel 2002, p. 168) Indeed, in the spring of 1994, when *The New York Times* produced a list of children’s bestsellers for the first time since 1978, editors found that a major change was that the most popular books on the new lists were series titles, »overwhelmingly, the new ›Goosebumps‹ series«. (Lipson 1994)

While most of the popular American series of this period are what Watson calls »successive« series, »in which the characters show few signs of growing older or changing in any significant way« (Watson 2004, p. 533), it was a »progressive« series that confirmed the enhanced status of the series in publishing for young people. J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series (1997–2007) – a blockbuster, international success discussed by Eliza Dresang and Kathleen Campana in our volume<sup>2</sup> – has reconfigured the field of young people’s texts and cultures. Rebekah Fitzsimmons observes that »[t]he phrase ›Harry Potter effect‹ has been used to explain everything from the books’ effect on the [*New York Times*] [bestseller] list ..., to Scholastic stock prices ..., to children’s reading habits ...«. (Fitzsimmons 2012, p. 102, note 1)<sup>3</sup> In her historical survey of »the convergence points between children’s literature and the bestseller list« (ibid., p. 80), Fitzsimmons focuses on the radical restructuring of the *Times* lists in 2000 that was provoked by the popularity of Rowling’s series and outlines the ways in which this restructuring »made visible« the roles of such a list »as a mechanism for book promotion and management« (ibid.) and as an instrument of category maintenance (particularly categories of class and age). Seriality has long been suspected by taste-making critics of exploiting children’s untutored desires, as Laurie Langbauer demonstrates in her essay on the *Oz* series in our volume; a consequence of the extravagant popularity of the Potter series seems to be the unsettling of the authority of those tastemakers. (Ibid., p. 103, note 5) Indeed, the credentialing system

<sup>2</sup> Editors’ note: »In our volume« refers to contributions in *Seriality and Texts for Young People. The Compulsion to Repeat*, edited by Mavis Reimer, Nyala Ali, Deanna England and Melanie Dennis Unrau (see Note 1). They are all listed in the bibliography at the end of this essay.

<sup>3</sup> Deidre Johnson identifies the first series for children as Jacob Abbott’s *Rollo* books, the first of which was published in the United States in 1835, but observes that the new form was not widely taken up by writers until the 1860s (Johnson 2002, p. 150).

of prizes for books for young people appears to have been inverted in response to the contemporary popularity of series texts: one of the results of the high praise accorded to David Almond's 1998 literary novel *Skellig* by professional readers,<sup>4</sup> for example, was the production and distribution of a prequel in 2010, *My Name is Mina*.

In the twenty-first century, to talk about seriality is necessarily to talk about texts in multiple forms and modes. Shane Denson and Andreas Jahn-Sudmann have observed that seriality and the digital, »as intimately connected perspectives on media,« must be thought together, although »relatively few attempts have been made« (Denson/Jahn-Sudmann 2013, p. 1) to date to do so. They note in particular the effect of the database on engagement with all kinds of series in contemporary culture. (Ibid., p. 2) At our symposium in Winnipeg, Dresang suggested that the era of searchable texts, online fan communities, and digital new media can fuel new kinds of inter- and intra-textual reading. This idea sparked lively discussion, which continues among the chapters in our book. The essays by Debra Dudek, Margaret Mackey, and Larissa Wodtke in our volume explore the transmutation of texts for young people across media platforms and the ways in which such shifts affect the marketing of texts to young people and the reception of those texts.<sup>5</sup> To find new audiences through the use of new media is an obvious objective of films produced as spin-offs from print series, films which are themselves typically produced in series. Publishers clearly assume that the effect can also be reversed, that film series can secure readers for print series: the trilogy of films based on C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* series (2005, 2008, 2010), for example, renewed interest in those post-World-War-II books and resulted in the rerelease of the novels with covers featuring the Pevensie children as depicted by the movie franchise.<sup>6</sup> Television series for young people have developed along parallel tracks, often defining the shared textual heritage of a generation of young people and inspiring the production of supplementary print and film series. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the subject of Dudek's essay, is one example of such a multiplying text. *Buffy* was a film (1992) before it was a television series (1997–2003), a series which spawned a second television series (*Angel*, 1999–2004), a series of novels, a card game, magazines, role-playing game books, video games, and a series of comic books, among other cultural objects. Indeed, there so many kinds of Buffy texts that fans simply refer to the whole interconnected system as *the Buffyverse*.<sup>7</sup>

4 *Skellig* won the Whitbread Children's Book of the Year Award, the Carnegie Medal, the Lancashire Children's Book of the Year Award, and the Stockton Children's Book of the Year Award in 1998 and was shortlisted for the *Guardian* Children's Fiction Prize. It has also subsequently been named a *New York Times* Bestseller, a *Publishers Weekly* Best Book, a *Booklist* Books for Youth Editors' Choice – Top of the List, a *HornBook* FanFare, a *School Library Journal* Best Book, and an ALA Notable Children's Book.

5 Recent publications by Rob Allen and Thijs van den Berg (2014) as well as Kathleen Loock (2014) acknowledge that these new media platforms, including streaming services, do not only create new forms of consumption such as »bingeing« and the utilization of »second screens« (e.g., participating on online forums while watching on a primary screen); the series themselves also serve as catalysts for the popularization of newly emerging mass media technology.

6 Naomi Hamer, in »Re-mixing The Chronicles of Narnia: The Reimagining of Lucy Pevensie through Film Franchise Texts and Digital Cultures,« (2015) discusses the »trans-media storytelling« of Lewis's texts.

7 Yet, despite the seeming newness of transmedia adaptations, Roberta Pearson reminds us that »vast and expansive fictional storyworlds built upon an accumulation of multiple texts have existed for millennia.« She gives the example of the story of Christ, told using »successive periods' available media, from painting to sculptures to illuminated manuscripts to stained-glass windows and eventually to analog and digital screens« (Pearson 2017, p. 113), as well as *Tarzan*, the *Oz* stories, *Frankenstein*, and Greek mythology.

Critics of texts for young people have begun to respond to the market trends, although it is still common for scholars to begin essays on series texts by noting the general critical dismissal of these narratives by other scholars. For example, writing about *A Series of Unfortunate Events* in 2010, Danielle Russell observes that, despite the popularity of series texts with readers and the »sheer volume of series fiction« (Russell 2010, p. 36), critical responses to series texts remain, as they have been since the nineteenth century, »often condescending, if not condemning«. (Ibid., p. 22) Our analysis of prize lists and criticism since the 1990s suggests the emergence of a more nuanced picture. Undoubtedly there is a residual tendency for some adults to assume that series books are low-quality reading for the young, but recent conferences in the field are likely to feature many papers on popular series beside papers on literary texts, and an increasing amount of the space in scholarly journals is taken up by such discussions. To take one specific example, in the 1990 issue of the annual *Children's Literature*, eight of the nine scholarly articles focus on literary texts,<sup>8</sup> while the ninth considers the centrality of the idea of home to children's literature, using examples from five literary children's novels as evidence.<sup>9</sup> Series texts appear only in the book review section, where an essay considers three recently published critical studies about historical series books; by way of introduction, reviewer Anita Susan Grossman observes that the research represented by the studies »serves a real need ... created by decades of silence ... about these books,« but also regrets that most of the writers who address series books are not »literary scholars, and much of their prose has a fanzine quality«. (Grossman 1990, p. 173 f.) In contrast, of the nine scholarly articles published in the 2012 annual, six focus on series texts and their authors and, of those six, three are about popular contemporary series, including Fitzsimmons's account of »the Harry Potter effect.«<sup>10</sup> Journal editors know that essays about popular series attract readership, not an insignificant matter in an era in which articles, disaggregated from the issues in which they originally appeared when they are uploaded to Internet databases, can be an important source of revenue. In 2013, for example, readership metrics from *Jeunesse. Young People, Texts, Cultures* revealed that the most frequently downloaded article from that journal, by a large margin, was an essay about Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight Saga*. In 2017, that essay remains among the top ten of essays downloaded from the journal, with first place now taken by an article about the »binge watching« of series in the era of on-demand digital media.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the amount of discussion about series texts, relatively little has been said about the principle of seriality itself as an aspect of the meaning of these texts. Of the 198 volumes and essays about the *Twilight Saga* indexed in the Modern Languages

**8** These are Margery Williams Bianco's *The Velveteen Rabbit*, Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*, Maurice Sendak's *In the Night Kitchen*, William Steig's *Dominic and Abel's Island*, Michel Tournier's *Pierrot ou les secrets de la nuit*, and E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web*, with two essays about James Barrie's *Peter Pan*.

**9** These are Randall Jarrell's *Animal Family*, Mary Norton's *The Borrowers*, Penelope Lively's *House in Norham Gardens*, Paula Fox's *One-Eyed Cat*, and Ann Schlee's *Ask Me No Questions*.

**10** In addition to Rebekah Fitzsimmons's study of the effect of the *Harry Potter* series on children's publishing, these essays consider Kate Douglas Wiggin's *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* in the context of

ideas of the New Woman; attitudes toward sexuality and female friendship in the journals of L. M. Montgomery, best known as the author of the *Anne of Green Gables* series; gender in Louise Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series; challenges to American »frontier thinking« evident in Aaron McGruder's comic strip and television series *The Boondocks*; and the ethical paradigms of the *Harry Potter* series.

**11** Larissa Wodtke, the Managing Editor of *Jeunesse*, supplied these statistics on 6 March 2013 and on 5 June 2017. The essays are Rachel Hendershot Parkin's piece about Meyer's conflicts with her readers over ownership of the story and Sidneyeve Matrix's piece on »the Netflix effect.«

Association database by July 2017, for example, only two listed seriality and none repetition as subject terms. Many of these studies note the popularity of the series and the archetypal resonances of the Saga's plot and characters – both ideas that imply forms of repetition – but much of the scholarly discussion focuses on the conflicts that might be said to be the manifest content of the Saga, most obviously, on the central problem of Bella's choice between vampire Edward Cullen and werewolf Jacob Black as heterosexual male partner. What is characterized as the Team Edward–Team Jacob contest in the marketing organized to promote the purchase of such spin-off merchandise as necklaces, shirts, buttons, and tote bags is seen, not surprisingly, as a more complicated and significant choice by the scholars. For the most part, however, scholarly work on *The Twilight Saga* is interested in the same issues as those exploited by the commercial campaigns, and does not explicitly consider how the repetitions and variations of the scene of Bella's choice – staged over a sequence of texts across a span of time – might frame, open, or limit the meanings of that choice.

The relative lack of attention to seriality as a formal principle is true not only of the study of series texts directed to audiences of young people but also of the study of series texts generally. Denson observes that cultural studies has been »less interested in the *seriality of popular forms* than in the *popularity of serial forms*,« with research »characteristically directed towards understanding what kinds of (typically innovative, unforeseen, and subversive) things audiences were doing with mass-produced series«. (Denson 2011, p. 1) Emergent theoretical and critical work on series, according to Denson, moves away from audience studies to what he considers to be »larger questions« »about the discursive construction and sociocultural negotiation of value in, through, and around serial forms«; about the relation of serial forms to industrial and post-industrial forms of production; and about the roles of various media »in shaping the narrative and aesthetic characteristics of serial entertainments in particular and, more generally, the modern lifeworld that informs and is informed by them«. (Ibid., p. 1f.) The context of Denson's comments is his summary of the proceedings of a graduate student conference that took place in Amsterdam in 2011 under the title »What Happens Next: The Mechanics of Serialization«, one of a cluster of conferences that have occurred since the beginning of the twenty-first century on repetition and serial forms.<sup>12</sup>

**12** Recent conferences on seriality and repetition include two sister conferences at the University of Florida in March 2007 called, respectively, »World Building: Seriality and History«, and »World Building: Space and Community«; a graduate student conference called »Repetition and Return« at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario in March 2008; a conference entitled »Serielle Formen« held in June 2009 at the University of Zurich; the inaugural conference of the research unit Popular Seriality: Aesthetics and Practice that took place in April 2011 at the University of Göttingen; the graduate conference »What Happens Next: The Mechanics of Serialization« at the University of Amsterdam in March 2011; the International Symposium on »Narrative, Repetition, and Texts for Young People« at the University of Winnipeg in June 2011; the conference »Engaging the Other: Breaking Intergenerational Cycles of Repetition« at the University of the Free

State in South Africa in December 2012; the University of Toronto's May 2013 Department of English graduate conference entitled »Repetition with a Difference?«; and another conference at the University of Göttingen in June 2013 on popular seriality. Updating this list in 2017, we found evidence of continued and perhaps growing interest in these themes, including an interdisciplinary conference titled »Thinking Serially: Repetition, Continuation, and Adaptation« at CUNY in New York in April 2015; a graduate student conference entitled »On Seriality« hosted by the Department of German Studies at Cornell University in May 2015; the Popular Seriality Research Unit conference »Popular Culture – Serial Culture: Nineteenth-Century Serial Fictions in Transnational Perspective, 1830s–1860s« at the University of Siegen in April 2016; the Academia Europaea conference on »Symmetry, Proportion and Seriality: The Semantics of Mirroring and Repetition in Science

It was the objective of our volume to begin to explore the ways in which investigating seriality as practice and form in the field of young people's texts might point not only to the meanings of particular series texts but also to the cultural functions of series texts for young people and, more generally, to the ways in which young people's texts function within culture. We hoped that our volume would help to shape a critical conversation in the field. Clearly, it would have been possible to organize the conversation in a variety of ways – historically, by national context of production, by genre, or by medium. We chose, rather, to begin by asking, what principle or principles distinguish series texts from literary texts? The characteristic that presented itself as the most obviously distinctive is the extent of repetition supported by the serial form.

There is a widespread understanding among critics of series texts that, as Denson puts it, »a system of repetition and variation« is »the basic stuff of seriality itself«. (Ibid., p. 5) Catherine Sheldrick Ross, reviewing a century of »dime novels« and series books for children, similarly notes that »a key problem of seriality« is »how to achieve both continuity and variety«. (Ross 2011, p. 200) Scholars who study series fiction for young readers often emphasize repetition rather than variation in their descriptions. Watson, for example, locates the importance of series fiction for young readers in its demonstration of »the most important reading-secret of all,« namely that the »profoundly private pleasures« of fiction »are repeatable and entirely within the reader's control«. (Watson 2000, p. 1) In her annotated bibliography of teen series, Silk Makowski uses the analogy of performance to suggest that single texts of fiction are like »one-night stand[s],« while series aim to provide the reader with »that same grand experience night after night, week after week, year after year, ad infinitum«. (Makowski 1998, p. 2) At the beginning of an article that eventually explores the differences inherent in repetition, Jane Newland summarizes Makowski's observation by detailing some of the ways in which series fiction can be said to provide »more of *the same*« for young readers in its »repetition of theme and character, coupled with a coherent storyline across the multiple volumes«. (Newland 2013, p. 192) Elsewhere, Newland asserts that the repetitions of series shape the characteristic reading style of »the series reader,« a style which she defines as »surfing« the texts in search of »links« that occur »in the form of repetitions«. (Newland 2007, p. 149 f.) Suman Gupta uses a depth metaphor derived from painting to describe the reader's experience of repetition in series, specifically in the *Harry Potter* series: as »[p]ast explanations are repeated and expanded« through the series, the »picture comes together ... retaining all the layers of past efforts«. (Gupta 2009, p. 96)

Repetition is not found only in the texts of narrative series, of course, being generally regarded as one of the principles through which language generates meaning. J. Hillis Miller begins his study of the »recurrences« in seven Victorian and modern novels, for example, by observing that »[a]ny novel is a complex tissue of repetitions and of repetitions within repetitions, or of repetitions linked in chain fashion to other repetitions«

and the Arts« at the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies in May 2016; »Seriality Seriality Seriality: The Many Lives of the Field That Isn't One«, the final conference of the Popular Seriality Research Unit, held June 2016 in Berlin; the Annual Meeting of Postgraduates in Ancient Literature with a theme of Repetition at Oxford University in September 2016; also in September 2016, in Ljubljana, Slovenia, »Repetition/s: Performance and Philosophy«;

»Repetition/s: Performance and Philosophy«; and »Critical Recursions«, a UCLA Friends of English Southland Graduate Conference, in June 2017 in Los Angeles. »The Shape of Return: Progress, Process, and Repetition in Medieval Culture« is planned for September 2017 at the ICI Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry, and the Interdisciplinary Nineteenth-Century Studies 2018 US Conference, »Serials, Cycles, Suspensions«, for March 2018 in San Francisco.

(Miller 1982, p. 2 f.). Peter Brooks claims that »the constructive, semiotic role of repetition« (1984, p. 25) is at the heart of narrative attempts to make meaning of the world. If »[n]arrative is one of the large categories or systems of understanding that we use in our negotiations with reality, specifically, in the case of narrative, with the problem of temporality« (ibid., p. XI), then, he argues, plot, which organizes narrative in temporal sequence, must be understood to be at the centre of narrative, and plot, in Brooks's words, is »the active repetition and reworking of story in and by discourse«. (Ibid., p. 25) Miller's and Brooks's analyses are informed by structuralist methods, methods that study the »[r]elational regularities« of a system in order to describe its underlying structure or »grammar« (Rowe 1995, p. 27): whether in anthropological studies of cultures or aesthetic theories of art, structuralists use the metaphor of language to organize their observations of the patterns of meaningful repetition in systems. The role of repetition in language systems has been considered at another level by rhetoricians, with many of the figures of speech they identify based on repeated, inverted, and transposed elements. Repetitions in language are not only persuasive but also pleasing. The resonance and memorability of poetry, for example, are consequences of its patterned language: rhythms, rhymes, assonance, and alliteration, among many other common poetic effects, are built on repeated sounds. These repetitions are notable in poetry for children, and in the form Joseph T. Thomas Jr. calls children's »own« poetry, the »poetry of the playground,« made up of skipping-rope rhymes and other chants. This oral mode, »a carnivalesque tradition that signifies on adult culture, even while producing poetry that rewards repeat listenings« (Thomas 2004, p. 152), includes sometimes sophisticated elements of parody and double-meanings.

The function of repetition as mnemonic aid in oral forms is one way to account for its centrality to children's literature, which, like poetry, is often assumed to derive from oral traditions, specifically, in the case of children's literature, from fairy tales and fables. In addition to the volume of work on versions and revisions of the most popular fairy tales for young people, there has been considerable interest among critics in retold stories as a special feature of the field. Introducing a collection of essays on adaptations, for example, Benjamin Lefebvre observes that »textual transformations have for a long time been the norm rather than the exception« (Lefebvre 2013, p. 2) in children's literature. He provides a long list of types of transformed texts, from series written by corporate authors to adaptations, remakes, and extensions of classic texts, recontextualizations of familiar characters in new texts, and textual franchises that include films, toys, and other commodities. (Ibid.) John Stephens and Robyn McCallum similarly begin their study of retellings for young people by noting »the volume and persistence of retold stories as part of the domain of children's literature« (Stephens/McCallum 1998, p. IX), a persistence they see as symptomatic of the function of children's literature »to initiate children into aspects of a social heritage«. (Ibid., p. 3) From the perspective of these critics, it would appear that series fiction might be said to be an intensive version of all children's literature. Nodelman's observation of the »apparent sameness« (Nodelman 1985) of so many literary novels for children would seem to corroborate this view: this observation was the beginning of his articulation of the argument that children's literature is a distinct genre, with characteristic plots, stylistic elements, and themes, and with a shared situation of enunciation. (Nodelman/Reimer 2003) In his chapter in our volume, Nodelman draws a relation between popular texts and texts for young people: in both, there is an impulse to serial redoing that resists closure (or the end of childhood). He argues that the nature of repetition from one unit to another (a comic-book panel, a novel in a



series, a TV episode, and so on) is also a form of recontextualization. Glenna Davis Sloan, developing a program to put literature at the centre of the development of literacy in an era when basal readers were the norm in many primary classrooms, also emphasized the repeated patterns of children's literature. For Sloan, these texts are part of a larger »interrelated body of imaginative verbal structures,« which she sees as most clearly defined in Northrop Frye's theory of archetypes: proposing correlations among natural seasons and literary genres, modes, and tropes, Frye demonstrates, she notes, that literature is »a coherent structure in which works are related to each other like members of a large, extended family, with a family tree traceable to the earliest times«. (Sloan 1984, p. 35) Also using Frye's metaphor of the family of stories, Anita Moss and Jon C. Stott produced an anthology of interrelated tales – beginning with folktales, hero tales, and myths – intended to give students of children's literature and schoolteachers a basis for understanding the recurrent patterns of story and for developing literature curricula for primary schools.

Introducing the program for literacy education Sloan built on his theories of archetypal repetition, Frye approvingly cites her opposition to a »skills and drills' approach, which frustrates and stunts all genuine imaginative growth«. (Ibid., p. XV) Similarly, Moss and Stott are careful to position the »frameworks« provided by an understanding of repeated story patterns as a context for the enjoyment of each story as unique. (Moss/Stott 1986, p. 5) While the vocabulary of these educators might obscure the fact, repetition is central to most pedagogical methods, invoked as a demonstrably effective practice in establishing and confirming desired attitudes and behaviours in learning subjects. Consider the many versions of repetition that appear in educational manuals and teaching guides as descriptors of learning processes and outcomes: *dictation, drill, imitation, inculcation, tracing, transmission, copying, memorization, practice, quotation, reinforcement, routine, schema, habit, mimicry, recitation, recognition, reiteration, remembering, representation, reproduction, and replication* are just some of the most common. Despite the long list of repetitive activities used to secure and to test the effectiveness of teaching, repetition as a pedagogical technique is more often assumed than theorized by contemporary educators, no doubt at least partly because of the negative association of repetition with rote learning evident in Frye's preface: the Oxford *Dictionary of Education*, for example, glosses *rote learning* as »[l]earning which does not necessitate understanding, but is undertaken systematically and mechanistically, usually through repetition«. (Wallace 2009) Contemporary (Western) practices of education are also based on repetition, philosopher Claire Colebrook points out, but on the repetition of method rather than content, a method that produces a kind of thinker she describes as »the monitor of originality who identifies the new as the simple other of repetition«. (Colebrook 2009, p. 48) In other words, we may have systematically taught ourselves not to recognize the many ways in which we are formed by repetition.

Historically, texts for young people have been bound up with education systems and pedagogical theories. The idea of a separate literature for children began, arguably, in schoolbooks. In the English-language tradition, it became a recognizable enterprise distinct from schoolbooks in the mid-eighteenth century, as changing ideas about childhood and the education proper to childhood took root. As articulated by English philosopher John Locke in his influential *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, these ideas were grounded in »a concern for the development of the individual child«. (Cunningham 2005, p. 59) Paradoxically, because the end of education is the individual's ability to reason autonomously and not to be governed by the opinion of others, the child must be

encouraged, in Locke's words, to »submit his Appetite to Reason,« and »by constant practice,« to settle this reasonable behaviour »into Habit«. (Locke 1968, p. 314) Not only is reason made reliably available to a child through repeated use (or practice) but also repetition (in the form of habit) is the basis for the emergence of autonomy.

Encouraging children to learn the habit of reason was also the basis of Locke's view of effective practices for teaching them to read and of identifying desirable reading material for them. A child should not be »driven« to learning to read, nor rebuked »for every little Fault,« nor »shackle[d] and tie[d] up« with rules, but, rather, provided with »Stories apt to delight and entertain a Child, [which] may yet afford useful Reflections to a grown Man«. (Ibid., p. 258, 259) Writing in 1693, Locke regrets that he knows no books beyond *Aesop's Fables* that meet these criteria, but, by the 1740s, the publisher John Newbery was supplying books for the express purposes of both delighting and instructing young people. Peter Hunt observes that the »tradition of didacticism, which holds that children's books must be moral and educational« is not only longstanding but also persistent. (Hunt 2001, p. 5) These assumptions about print texts have been readily transferred to discussions of television shows, films, and other media texts aimed at youth.

Given the close association of pedagogy and texts directed to young people, it might seem little wonder that repetition generally, and series and serials specifically, should figure so largely in this system: simply put, seriality must be an effective teaching tool, for series texts are a concentrated form of repetition. Indeed, this assumption underlies both the alarms about the dangers of series texts raised by some professional readers and the sometimes grudging acceptance of series texts as primers for learning readers by other guardians of the young. But the agreement that repetition is an obvious effect or category of experience forecloses the ongoing theoretical inquiries into a complex phenomenon.

The most conventional narrative series, serials, and sequels for young people are characterized by a constant narrative presence, a common set of characters, the same or similar settings, recurring plot structures, and familiar themes. While such groups of narratives might be said to be the strongest example of seriality in young people's culture, other kinds of serial productions – such as magazines or TV shows – also rely on repeated elements to be recognizable as related texts. Even in the case of narrative series, however, the ways in which series repeat are not always obvious, as Rose Lovell-Smith demonstrates in her discussion in our volume of the *Howl's Moving Castle* series by Diana Wynne Jones in the light of Søren Kierkegaard's theory of repetition.

The problem of repetition – what constitutes repetition, whether repetition is possible or impossible, and why the answers to these questions might matter – has preoccupied analysts, theorists, and philosophers since at least the mid-nineteenth century and the publication of Kierkegaard's novella *Repetition: An Essay in Experimental Psychology* (1843). Historians of philosophy generally agree that it was in this text that the notion of repetition »in its modern form« first appears. (Jameson 1979, p. 135) In Kierkegaard's novella, the narrator, the ironically named Constantin Constantius, repeats a journey he previously took to Berlin, and, in the course of recalling his memories of the first journey, formulates what Fredric Jameson calls »the philosophical paradox of repetition,« namely, that repetition »can as it were only take place ›a second time‹«, that there is »no ›first time‹ of repetition«. (Kierkegaard 1941, p. 137) Kierkegaard puts it this way: »what is has been, otherwise it could not be repeated, but precisely the fact that it has been gives to repetition the character of novelty«. (Ibid., p. 52) Alenka Zupančič contends that the discovery of this modern notion of repetition – that is, the view of repetition »as

an independent and crucial concept« and »as fundamentally different from the logic of representation« – was one of the »events that inaugurated so-called contemporary philosophy and gave this designation its specific meaning«. (Ibid., p. 27)

In the course of articulating this distinctive view of repetition and of disarticulating repetition from representation, philosophers and theorists since Kierkegaard have considered a wide range of effects and affects commonly associated with repetition. Among these are the experiences of repetition as consolatory, repetition as confirmatory, repetition as unsettling, and repetition as a setting in motion. In the section that follows, we rehearse a number of important theoretical explanations of these effects of repetition and point to some of the ways in which critics of series texts, especially series texts for young people, have taken up these formulations in their studies. While these theories are well known to scholars of children's literature, by reviewing them together under the rubric of repetition, we hope to provoke our readers to look again at how these ideas might permit new readings of seriality in young people's culture.

## II.

One of the obvious senses in which repetition is consolatory is that it provides us with confidence in the world that supports human life. As philosopher Marc Rölli observes, »many of our everyday experiences are embedded in a structure of repetition: we believe in the world, we believe that the world will continue to exist even when we close our eyes«. (Rölli 2012, p. 98) That »the everyday« is the »special province« of the series form is the opening observation of Langbauer's book-length study of the series in Victorian and early twentieth-century fiction. (Langbauer 1999, p. 2) Recalling the comfort she felt in reading series during her unsettled adolescence, she reframes her youthful response through this theoretical understanding: »those linked novels that are part of extended series seem to mirror and carry properties often defined as essential to everyday life: that it's just one thing after another, going quietly but inexhaustibly on and on«. (Ibid.) In *The Limits of Interpretation*, Umberto Eco asserts that the consolatory role of the series (and the narrative constancy of a series) stems from the fact that it »responds to the infantile need of always hearing the same story, of being consoled by the ›return to the Identical‹ superficially disguised«. (Eco 1990, p. 86)

The confidence in the continuing existence of an inexhaustibly meaningful world was a focus at a larger scale of many of the theories of archetypes, myth, and ritual developed at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. For these theorists, recognizing the operations of repetition (in the sense of cyclical return) enabled an understanding of human beings as connected to a whole system of life. For example, Mircea Eliade, who followed in this tradition, observes that the conceptualization of time as linear is the cause of modern anxieties. In *Cosmos and History. The Myth of the Eternal Return*, he maintains that rituals are expressions of the human longing to escape linear or secular time and vehicles of the return to sacred time in which each new year is not only a reenactment of the mythical beginning of the cosmos but is the beginning of the cosmos, since ritual or sacred time flows in a closed circle. The sacred for Eliade, Douglas Allen says, is the »permanent, universal, dynamic structures of transcendence, expressing what is transhistorical, paradigmatic, meaningful«. (Allen 1993, p. 307)

Theorists of myth and ritual influenced such literary critics as Frye, whose work in turn has been so influential in general for critics of children's literature. In critical work

on series texts for young people, more specifically, the emphasis on the capacity of serial fiction to develop spacious and meaningful textual worlds in which readers can find themselves at home might be aligned with the view of repetition as consolatory. It is this feature that seems to nurture the fan clubs that have long flourished around serial texts. The girls' school stories popular from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century are an instructive case study. Elinor Brent-Dyer, for example, wrote 59 books in the *Chalet School* series beginning in 1959, with the first fan club started by her publisher in the same year. Two fan clubs with »enthusiastic« worldwide memberships continue to organize themselves around the series, building a virtual female-centred world that corresponds to and extends the »world of girls« created within the texts but unavailable to many girls and women in everyday life. (Sims/Clare 2000, p. 75)<sup>13</sup> Contemporary practices of online fandom have multiplied opportunities for young series readers »to engage actively with texts,« (Tosenberger 2008, p. 185) Catherine Tosenberger notes, quoting Henry Jenkins's metaphor for fandom as an »egalitarian, cross-generational space ›outside the classroom and beyond any direct adult control««. (Ibid., p. 186)

Relieving anxiety (if not achieving consolation) through the management of memory is fundamental to Sigmund Freud's theoretical explanations of the struggle for mastery. »[A] person is only condemned to repeat something when he has forgotten the origins of the compulsion,« (Evans 1996, p. 167) according to Lacanian scholar Dylan Evans. In »Beyond the Pleasure Principle« (1920), Freud explicates this »compulsion to repeat« (Freud 1964c, p. 19) as resulting from a trauma, with the patient's symptomatic repetition of the traumatic event as the attempt to overcome or master it by reducing the level of stimulation or excitation incited by the original event. As Samuel Weber explains, in this sense, »the repetition compulsion« might be said to serve »the pleasure principle by providing the I ... with the sentiment of being prepared for that which in the past actually overwhelmed and traumatized it«. (Weber 2011, p. 6) The example Freud uses to illustrate this possibility is his grandson playing *fort-da*, a game Freud initially understood as the child's expression of distress whenever his mother left him. Freud goes on to speculate, however, that »the child turned his experience into a game from another motive«: »At the outset he was in a *passive* situation – he was overpowered by the experience; but, by repeating it, unpleasurable though it was, as a game, he took on an *active* part. These efforts might be put down to an instinct for mastery«. (Freud 1964c, p. 16) Freud believed that patients could overcome repeated, compulsive behaviour and ultimately be liberated from the trauma that provoked such behaviour through the »talking cure« of psychoanalysis,<sup>14</sup> a repetition of the trauma in words rather than behaviour.

Some critics of series texts have understood striving for mastery as one of the activities that is encouraged by the serial form and that is particularly significant for young people. Two critics of *The Twilight Saga*, for example, have discussed Meyer's books in these terms. Heather Anastasiu observes that adolescence is a liminal period during

**13** Mavis Reimer has explored the metaphor of *world* commonly used to discuss school stories in her essay »Traditions of the School Story« (2009). *A World of Girls* was the title of L. T. Meade's first girls' school story (1886). Many critics have commented on the resonance of this title for girls' school stories in general, with Rosemary Auchmuty using it as the title of her study of the genre. See also Reimer's essay about Meade entitled »Worlds of Girls« (2005).

**14** This phrase was coined by Josef Breuer's patient »Anna O.«, who also described Breuer's particular method of therapy as »chimney sweeping«. These descriptions are cited by Breuer in the book he co-authored with Sigmund Freud, *Studies in Hysteria* (1895) (Breuer/Freud 1964); »talking cure« was later adopted by Freud in his »Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis« (1909) to refer more broadly to psychoanalytic practice (Freud 1964a).

which young people experience and rehearse transformations of various kinds. Through the *Twilight* novels, she suggests, »adolescents are able to explore their fears and desires in a safe place« via identification with the heroes of the narratives. (Anastasiu 2011, p. 50) For girl readers, identification with Bella can »empower« them »to embrace their emerging sexuality« and to explore romance in the »non-threatening place[s]« of the fantasy series and the fan fiction communities attached to the series. (Ibid.) Rachel DuBois, beginning from a similar assumption about readers' positioning in relation to the narratives, suggests that, by identifying with the characters, readers experience »a series of recursive emotional crises throughout the reading and rereading process,« but that this process »feels manageable because of the promise of a happy ending«. (DuBois 2012, p. 132) Through repeated episodes of rereading, readers confirm Freud's theory of mastery by playing an active role in reducing the tension produced by narrative moments of trauma and uncertainty. David Rudd suggests that series can take the form of traumatic repetition because the central child characters do *not* achieve mastery: using Enid Blyton's *Famous Five* series as example, he observes that, while the children satisfyingly solve the mysteries posed in each book, they are denied complete victory because they require the affirmation of adult others, others who are positioned as oppressive keepers of the symbolic order at the beginnings of their adventures. This is a compromise that can only be allayed by »engag[ing] in another adventure, ... mov[ing] once again from being passive, marginal beings into the realm of active agency«. (Rudd 2001, p. 94)

Karen Coats proposes that the series form itself should be understood as »of the order of the symptom« of cultural trauma, with each book in a series »a repetitive gesture or phenomenon« that calls us »to pay attention to something we cannot see, or have forgotten or denied«. (Coats 2001, p. 198) Coats distinguishes between two different serial responses to cultural trauma: the first, the modern response, is exemplified for her by the Stratemeyer Syndicate's *Nancy Drew* series, which cultivates »a stance of ... ›knowingness« with respect to the world« (ibid., p. 186), attempting to keep from readers the knowledge »that human reason will not save us« (ibid., p. 187); the second, the postmodern response, is exemplified by R. L. Stine's *Goosebumps* series, which »adopts a playful stance regarding world-making and boundary-crossing« that »calls into question the status of the rational world«. (Ibid., p. 192)

Freud's essay on trauma and the »unpleasure principle« falls into two parts. In the second section of »Beyond the Pleasure Principle,« Freud explicitly turns to consider the origins of the »compulsion to repeat« that, as Weber puts it, »seems to take over [or override] the role of the pleasure principle in determining psychic activity«. (Weber 2011, p. 5) In his attempt to solve his perplexity, Freud introduces the notion of the death drive. The death drive, he speculates, is a »more primitive element« than the pleasure principle and »the most universal endeavour of all living substance,« that is, »to return to the quiescence of the inorganic world«. (Freud 1964c, p. 62) This condition, which Catherine Malabou calls »the pure neutrality of inorganic matter« (Malabou 2009, p. 43), is the ultimate lowering of tension and, therefore, the ultimate achievement of pleasure.

Brooks, in his engagement with psychoanalytic theory in thinking through design in narrative, proposes that »[t]he desire of the text is ultimately the desire for the end, for that recognition which is the moment of the death of the reader in the text«. (Brooks 1984, p. 108) If we apply this observation to series texts for young people, we might conclude that such texts offer repeated opportunities to rehearse the cycle of beginnings, trauma, mastery, and death, perhaps providing young readers a training ground not only for the experience of the vicissitudes of human life but also for its ultimate con-

solution, its ending in the quiescence of death. Both Langbauer (2007) and Kim Hong Nguyen discuss Lemony Snicket's *Series of Unfortunate Events* as this kind of therapy for readers – whom they characterize, respectively, as adolescents and Generation Xers without hope, and post-9/11 mourners. Nguyen writes, »this text teaches its readers to find their own situated means to come to terms with loss and to mourn the series of unfortunate events in which we, too, may be embedded«. (Nguyen 2012, p. 280)

That repetition can be more than consolatory and also an experience of the confirmation or consolidation of beliefs and assumptions seems evident from its centrality to pedagogical practices. In studies of texts and cultures, the most important approaches to the question of repetition as confirmatory have been developed through Marxist theories of production and reproduction. Karl Marx opens *Capital* (1867) by observing that »[t]he wealth of societies in which the capitalist method of production prevails appears as an »immense accumulation of commodities«; the individual commodity appears as its elementary form«. (Marx 1976, p. 125) The image of a pile of things gestures to a specific kind of repetition that he finds at work in capitalism. Since he contends that the representation of commodities obscures their fundamental nature, Marx's first concern is to determine the values that lie beneath the appearance of the commodity: these he identifies as use-value, the »usefulness of a thing« (ibid., p. 126); value, or »the human labor embodied [or congealed] in commodities« (Harvey 2010, p. 18); and exchange-value, »the necessary mode of expression« of value in the marketplace. (Marx 1976, p. 128)

But while exchange-value is »the most immediate economic relation under capitalism« (Bottomore 1983, p. 155), it is the production of surplus-value that allows for capitalist accumulation. Surplus-value is understood by Marx as the difference between the amount of labour-power the worker needs for subsistence and the amount of labour-power the worker has contracted with the capitalist; in this relation, a surplus is regularly extracted and appropriated by the capitalist, so that, over the long term, all capital is made up of surplus-value created by the worker. The relation between labour and capital »is veiled by the wages system and is not readily discernible when the analysis focuses only on the individual worker,« (Harvey 2010, p. 247 f.) as David Harvey notes, but, taken as a class and repeated over an extended period of time, »the worker« can be seen to produce the »objective wealth« that is the »alien power that dominates and exploits him«. (Marx 1976, p. 716) Marx concludes that, »seen as a total, connected process,« »[t]he capitalist process of production ... produces not only commodities, not only surplus-value, but it also produces and reproduces the capitalist relation itself«. (Ibid., p. 724) Commenting on this passage, Étienne Balibar observes that, »[o]n the plane instituted by the analysis of reproduction, production is not the production of things, it is the production and conservation of social relations«. (Balibar 1970, p. 269) Frank Kelleter proposes that the problem that »lies at the heart« of the capitalist production of culture is the difficulty of »translating repetition into difference,« and that this is precisely the problem that serial storytelling explores. Serial media, according to Kelleter, are the embodiment of the capitalist »desire to practice reproduction as innovation and innovation as reproduction«. (Kelleter 2017 a, p. 104)<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> This argument appears in a 2017 article published in *The Velvet Light Trap* and is extended in »Five Ways of Looking at Popular Seriality,« the first chapter in *Media of Serial Narrative* (2017). Kelleter has demonstrated the grounds of this argument in a detailed analysis of the productions and reproduc-

tions of *The Wizard of Oz* (»Toto, I Think We're in Oz Again«). Kelleter was the lead researcher of »Popular Seriality. Aesthetics and Practice« (»Ästhetik und Praxis populärer Serialität«), a large collaborative project based at Freie Universität Berlin, that investigated seriality from 2010 to 2016.

It is on the plane of the analysis of reproduction – or the analysis of the production of ideology – that Marxist theories have been most influential for cultural and textual critics. Ideological analysis sometimes focuses quite narrowly on what Susan Himmelweit describes as »processes outside that of [economic] production itself, which are seen as necessary to the continued existence of a model of production,« such as, for example, »ideological processes which justify the freedom of the individual to exchange and own property«. (Bottomore 1983, p. 418) The dominance of serial publication of novels during the Victorian period has been explained as such a necessary process by a number of materialist critics. As Langbauer notes in reviewing this work, »the mode of part-publication not only reflected the ideological assumptions of the time but did the work that installed and consolidated that ideology,« with the »most important ideological work« of the serial being »to produce and determine an audience« that could »afford to buy fiction on [an] installment plan« and thus enter »an effective arena for ideological schooling«. (Langbauer 1999, p. 9) In her essay in our volume, Michelle Smith finds that the *School Papers* created just such an arena for producing national citizens from the generations of Australian schoolchildren for whom the serial was required reading. In cultural studies, the workings of ideology have also been theorized more broadly. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has extended the idea of capital to include social, cultural, and symbolic capital as channels through which the dominant classes maintain their priority; and theorists such as Pierre Macherey, Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, and Jameson have developed the terms of Marxist critique to describe not only the ways in which cultural objects and texts encode ideologies that sustain the dominant interests of a society, but also the ways in which, as Douglas Kellner puts it, texts »can rework, exhibit and possibly disturb ideologies«. (Kellner 1993, p. 98)

Criticism on series texts for young people has often addressed the way in which these texts sustain the dominant interests of market capitalism. Richard Flynn, for example, argues that L. Frank Baum »deliberately aroused the cupidity of the child consumers« he addressed in his *Oz* books, and that the sequels that continued to be produced after Baum's death remained true to this original economic motivation. (Flynn 1996, p. 124) In his reading of the *Goosebumps* series, Nodelman demonstrates that both the behaviour of the protagonists of the novels and the themes of the marketing copy affirm characteristics that are »normal«, even desirable, ... in the market-oriented consumer society contemporary children are growing up in,« namely, to »be egocentric, be fearless, be a winner«. (Nodelman 1997, p. 123) Dan Hade observes that the corporate owners who now dominate the field of children's book publishing invest in series because these books are easily turned into a »brand« that can be extended across many kinds of merchandise: »[i]n this world there is no difference between a book and a video or a CD or a T-shirt or a backpack«. (Hade 2002, p. 512) In her essay in our volume, Mackey tests Peter Lunenfeld's theory of the »aesthetic of unfinish« and notes that »narrative franchises« are a significant generator of repetition in young people's cultures. Discussing Disney's *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise, Carolyn Jess-Cooke comments that Disney not only extends narratives spatially »across several mediums, commodities, texts, and cultural events« (Jess-Cooke 2010, p. 208 f.), but also temporally, by removing titles from circulation and rereleasing them several years later, a serialization strategy through which Disney »facilitates generational memory-making and transference«. (Ibid., p. 220)

Nodelman remarks about the *Goosebumps* books that books in series are like other collectibles, in that each »looks similar enough to the others to be part of what is clearly a set, but is different enough to make the set incomplete without it« (Nodelman 1997, p. 118),

comments that recall Jean Baudrillard's analysis of the impulse to collect in *The System of Objects*. Using both Marx and Freud as theoretical pre-texts, Baudrillard describes collecting as a symptom of the seriality of consumer culture. We obsessively collect objects without use-value, Baudrillard notes, since it is never enough to own just one object: »a whole series lies behind any single object, and makes it into a source of anxiety«. (Baudrillard 1996, p. 92) At bottom, collection is a narcissistic process, »[f]or what you really collect is always yourself«. (Ibid., p. 97) It is from this observation that Kristine Moruzi begins her reading of *Atalanta*, a Victorian serial for girls, in our volume. The collection is always incomplete for Baudrillard, and so, necessarily, is the project of the self. While a collection might allow the consumer to imagine that he or she is in control of such uncontrollable factors as death and the passage of time (managed, as Baudrillard ironically notes, through the *pastime* of collection), such accumulation is never sufficient.

Like Baudrillard, Judith Butler conceptualizes repetition as integral to the ways in which subjects are formed. More explicitly than Baudrillard, she also theorizes the way in which repetition, while *seeking* to consolidate identity, fails to do so and becomes rather an undoing or unsettling of identity.

Building on the notions of feminine and masculine sexual dispositions articulated by Freud in »Mourning and Melancholia,« Butler argues that »gender identity appears primarily to be the internalization of a prohibition [against homosexuality] that proves to be formative of identity,« an identity that »is constructed and maintained by the consistent application of this taboo«. (Butler 1990b, p. 63) In subsequent work, she situates gender in the realm of performance: instead of functioning as a cultural expression of one's sexual dispositions, gender is »a stylized repetition of acts«. (Butler 1990a, p. 270) Gender, rooted in repetition, is temporally oriented, relying on the cumulative manifestation of stylized, social acts. Butler turns to anthropologist Victor Turner to explain that »social action requires a performance which is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established«. (Ibid., p. 277) In short, repetition in a social context is necessary for the performance of gender.

The understanding of gender as socially constructed is well established within the criticism of series books directed to young people. From the beginning of the popularity of this form within the field, series books were divided into the categories of boys' books and girls' books by writers, publishers, marketers, and reviewers: both the production and the reception of the books, in other words, instantiated the re-enactments of a socially established set of meanings. The field also presents many opportunities to consider the relational but uneven quality of traditional gender roles, in the paired, but not quite parallel, series for boys and for girls that continue to be published. An obvious example is the production of the *Hardy Boys* and *Nancy Drew* series by Stratemeyer, about which much has been written. Perhaps because there was a robust, historically informed discourse about gender in the field of children's studies long before Butler's work appeared, she has not been much used to date by critics working with series texts. M. Sean Saunders, however, points to Butler's description of the »chain of interpellating calls« through which gender is constructed as particularly useful for the reading of seriality in his analysis of Martine Bates's *Marmawell* trilogy. (Saunders 2002, p. 42)

For Butler, these repetitions do not succeed. In the second move of her theory of performativity, Butler theorizes the way in which the repeated performance of one's gender necessarily exposes the categories of »man« or »woman« as unstable constructs. Although these repeated acts do congeal to produce gendered bodies, they also produce



the illusion of coherence, and so point to gender as »a kind of imitation for which there is no original; in fact, it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an *effect* and consequence of the imitation itself«. (Butler 1993, p. 313) In this reading, Butler clearly invokes and extends the modern notion of repetition introduced by Kierkegaard: there is no first time of repetition, no original time that is re-presented in performance. In particular, »there is no ›proper‹ gender, a gender proper to one sex rather than another, which is in some sense that sex's cultural property« (ibid., p. 312): the notion of gender, then, is located on a spectrum of the queer. Nat Hurley's analysis in our volume of transgender youth who are seeking new scripts for personhood assumes and builds on Butler's theoretical formulations.

Repetition in Butler's thought is associated with the negotiation of selfhood through the destabilization of socially constructed gender categories, and, so, with a striving to preserve an open-ended notion of what constitutes the self. Repetition is both a cultural and a countercultural act: because culture tries to make use of repetition, counterculture can subvert dominant culture through parody and insubordination (intentional failures to repeat). While Tosenberger does not cite Butler in her study, the young writers of slash fan fiction she discusses clearly exploit the repetitions and gaps in Rowling's series to insert their encounters and experiments »with alternative modes of sexual discourse, particularly queer discourse,« into conversations about the *Harry Potter* texts. (Tosenberger 2008, p. 186) It seems fitting that the theory of performativity Butler developed – both the centrality of the performance of repetitions and the constitutive failure of repetition – has been borrowed and modified by theorists and critics to think through many other kinds of identity categories. In our collection, for example, Brandon Christopher's essay on comic books (Neil Gaiman's *Black Orchid and Sandman*, Mark Waid and Leinil Yu's *Superman: Birthright*, and Alan Moore's *Swamp Thing*) and Laura Robinson's essay on L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* series both demonstrate the adaptability of Butler's theory of performativity to readings of genre.

Butler's use of Freud as a basis for her notion of the subject as process suggests the continued importance of his explorations of the human subject for contemporary philosophy and theory. This is also true of his investigations of the place of repetition in both the constitution and the unsettling of the self. At the same time as Freud was complicating his early theories of the primacy of the pleasure principle in psychic life through his observations of the »traumatic neuroses« he saw in the patients he treated after World War I (Freud 1964 c, p. 12), he also developed his analysis of the uncanny. For Freud, the uncanny arises from the encounter with a double. It is an experience »related to what is frightening – to what arouses dread and horror« and causes »feelings of repulsion and distress« (Freud 1964b, p. 219), but also an experience provoked by »something which is secretly familiar, which has undergone repression and then returned from it«. (Ibid., p. 245) The uncanny, in other words, is that which is experienced simultaneously as familiar and as strange, a return of the repressed that undoes the distinctions between the imaginary and the real, such as, for example, »when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes«. (Ibid., p. 244) In her chapter in our volume Langbauer explores such an uncanny moment in the *Oz* series when the Tin Man comes face to face with his own severed head, one of several pieces he will find of an earlier, organic iteration of himself. Judith P. Robertson, conceptualizing the uncanny as »that interior place in which one can get lost in signs of strangeness,« sees the *Harry Potter* series as built on the repetition of moments when »the familiar ground of the self gets lost ... going unsecured precisely in order to find or remake itself«. (Robertson 2002, p. 204)

In her genealogy of the uncanny in poststructuralist thought, Anneleen Masschelein suggests that the uncanny is not only a category of psychic life but also, more generally, of cultural life: among its important functions in culture has been »to signify the fundamental difficulty or even the impossibility of defining concepts as such« (Masschelein 2002, p. 55) and to disturb »the ideological closure of definitions and concepts«. (Ibid., p. 62) Reading Joseph Delaney's *The Wardstone Chronicles*, Chloe Buckley suggests that keeping questions open might be one of the functions of the fantasy series form. In the case of Delaney's series about the young witch Alice Deane, Buckley concludes that »[t]he witch child is uncanny because it reveals what ought to have remained hidden: there is no real child«. (Buckley 2014, p. 85) In constructing the figure of the child, we »conjure that object into existence«: »we always invent the child, never discover it«. (Ibid., 106)

It is the unresolvable ambiguity of Freud's theories of repetition – simultaneously a figure of the struggle toward mastery, a sign of the desire of organic life to return to the state of the inorganic, and evidence of the haunting of the present by the past – that recommended his phrase »the compulsion to repeat« (Freud 1964c, p. 19) to us as the title of this essay.

While much of Marx's analysis focused on the dynamics of economic and social life under the system of industrial capitalism current at the time of his work, he also, importantly, posits a moment when the present is no longer haunted by the past, when the terms under which human beings labour will be transformed into a new life. This new life will set into motion new conditions of production from which new forms of social consciousness can be expected to emerge. In the theories of Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze, both of whom were engaged by Marx's ideas, the new is the inevitable companion of the movements of repetition.

For Derrida, repetition, or iteration, is not a consolidation but a setting in motion of meaning. Like Butler and other poststructuralist thinkers, Derrida was fascinated with repetition, but, in his case, with the fundamental repetitions of language. Indeed, according to Derrida, iteration makes language itself possible, whether that language is spoken or written. This is the argument in *Of Grammatology* and, in abbreviated form, the essay »Signature Event Context« as well, explains Leslie Hill, for »repetition always brings ... something different, singular, and other«. (Hill 2007, p. 27) No matter how often you come across a word, even one as ubiquitous as »the,« there is always something different about it, whether that difference has to do with inflection, placement, or the circumstances of your encounter with the word. And yet, it is also the case that the word is not anchored to a first instance or origin, so that its repeatability is its ability to break with any context and its citationality is its generativity.

Derrida's interest in repetition is both theoretical and methodological. Theoretically, Derrida shows that language is not possible without repetition and that it generates the contexts for language use: »Every sign ... spoken or written ... can be *cited*, can be put between quotation marks; in doing so it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable«. (Derrida 1988, p. 12) In terms of his methodology, Derrida repeatedly adopts the rhetoric of other philosophers. As Colebrook points out, this practice enables »a new position« to emerge »that displays the impossibility of the commitment to absolute origins«. (Colebrook 2009, p. 45) By extensively citing others, Derrida disrupts authorship and other kinds of authority, too, including that of the intentional subject. A strategy beyond intention, deconstruction employs and implores a tactics of risk: playfully intervening in »the general *displacement* of the system«, Derrida's deconstruction demonstrates that »there

are only contexts without any center or absolute anchorage« and that this applies to everything, including the self. (Derrida 1988, p. 21; 12)

Derrida's theory of citationality has not been much used by critics of series texts for young people, although Christopher's discussion of the construction of narratives of origin in comic books in our volume suggests how productive his ideas and methods might be for the exploration of seriality.

In contrast, the theories of Deleuze have proven to be of considerable interest in the field. A contemporary of Derrida's, Deleuze also affirms the setting in motion that infinite difference makes possible. Is the repetition of the same possible? Deleuze says no. He argues in *Difference and Repetition* that the same is an effect of an underlying, masked repetition of the always-different (or of absolute difference). The very possibility of the same thing happening twice is an illusion. The only thing that is sure to repeat – in what Deleuze argues is the true form of eternal return and the ultimate death drive, beyond-beyond the pleasure principle in a death not only of the self but of the possibility of identity – is difference.

If we were to ask a group of children to bring us their teddy bears, we could line them up: Sam's bear, Aubrey's bear, Katie's bear, and so on. We could even line them up in a progression, from smallest to largest or darkest to lightest, so that each bear would be closest to the other bears that are, in one respect at least, most similar to it. The bears would illustrate several of Deleuze's observations about repetition. First, repetition as sameness is impossible: even if Sam and Aubrey have the »same« bear, the differences of time and space, plus wear, tears, smells, missing eyes, and so on, make their resemblance imperfect. Second, the concept »teddy bear« is what seems to repeat: this is the repetition effect. Third, the »spirit« of the repetition – what generates its movement from one bear to another – is difference, not sameness. Fourth, the differences between the bears are »difference without concept,« external to the identity-concept of »teddy bear« (the logic of the Same sees only bear, bear, bear) but internal to what Deleuze would call the Idea – the »eternally positive differential multiplicity« (Deleuze 1994, p. 288) – that affirms all of the variations in what a teddy bear (blue, dirty, eyes closed, floppy, not-bear) might be. Fifth, repetition is not static but a form of movement; the series smallest to largest, for example, illustrates an evolutionary trajectory that is produced from one repetition (difference) to another.

If we think of repetition as sameness, any difference from a standard of what a teddy bear should be is perceived as negative, as lack. Representation assumes that concepts, identities, and selves remain stable. It seeks to contain difference through the »four iron collars« of identity, opposition, analogy, and resemblance, always forcing a relation with the standard, the origin, or what is apparently the same. »Every other difference, every difference which is not rooted in this way, is an unbounded, uncoordinated and inorganic difference: too large or too small, not only to be thought but to exist«. (Ibid., p. 262) From the perspective of repetition-as-difference, however, difference is affirmed as productive excess: Gordon C. F. Bearn has observed that, for Deleuze, »swarms of untamed difference are the beating heart of repetition«. (Bearn 2000, p. 447)

Deleuze's later work on »becoming« with Félix Guattari develops the affirmation of difference and of multiplicities he began in *Difference and Repetition* while further unhinging repetition from series and evolutionary trajectories. (Ansell Pearson 1999, p. 10; Parr 2005) In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari model a movement of becoming that never happens in a series like a line of teddy bears. Instead, the teddy bears are a pack of multiplicities (because each one is different), infecting one another

through proximity and symbiosis. Change occurs through involution rather than evolution, through contagion and mutation, following the unpredictable and erratic »lines of flight« of becoming, which James Williams equates with the roll of a dice, a movement of creative destruction that follows two conflicting principles: »Connect with everything« and »Forget everything«. (Williams 2013, p. 5) For example, if a child adds a toy that is not a teddy bear to the »pack,« the logic of the Same would insist that Fern's sheep does not belong. In a Deleuzian affirmation of difference and becoming, however, the sheep enters the assemblage and becomes the agent of a deterritorialization: the teddy bears become-sheep, the sheep becomes-teddy bear, and all of the toys are changed.

The preference for sameness is at the root of all forms of domination and violence – racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and xenophobia – and it is for revolutionary purposes that Deleuze engages in a »conceptual war« against representation. (Zupančič 2007, p. 28) To embrace Deleuzian repetition is to take on the problem of how to mobilize the affirmation of difference for social change. Interest in Deleuze's work is not confined to academics, but was also taken up by activists in such popular applications as the rhizomatic (leaderless, grassroots) theories and tactics of the Occupy movement. (Nail 2013)

In critical studies of series texts for young people, a Deleuzian reading can attend to the differences even in the most formulaic of series. Newland, for example, has used Deleuzian theory to validate series reading by arguing that »repeated and repetitive series reading is not a reading of the same but a reading of and for difference« (Newland 2013, p. 202), and by emphasizing the »rhizomic« out-of-order readings that she sees as characteristic of series readers. (Newland 2007) Kevin Mitchell finds an example of an anti-capitalist, productive series in the text of Chuck Palahniuk's novel *Fight Club* (a text often taught to young people in secondary schools) and the film adaptation by David Fincher. Tyler Durden, the anarchic alter ego of the unnamed narrator, is »a manifestation of repetition with a difference« (Mitchell 2013, p. 116), the remainder of difference generated through the humdrum repetitions of the narrator's everyday life. A Deleuzian reading of any series, according to Mitchell, »understands the series to be multiple, heterogeneous, open, and above all in ceaseless motion«. (Ibid., p. 127) Philip Thurtle and Robert Mitchell use Deleuzian theory to argue that comic books as a genre function through a »logic of the anomalous« that exposes the difference inherent in the repetitions of everyday life. (Thurtle/Mitchell 2007, p. 296) Focusing on the role of the disaster in comics, they observe that, in comic books as in real life, there is always the potential for the power grid to shut down, for a terrorist to attack, or for an informed person literally to stand in the way of an injustice – in other words, for the new to arise. In our volume, Charlie Peters explores the possibility that assemblages of cross-temporal and cross-species communities might resist the force of the nation-state through her reading of several of the novels in the *Dear Canada* series. As these readings suggest, Deleuzian theories of repetition offer openings for creative criticism and scholarship on series texts and the socio-cultural-political work of becoming.

### III.

We have attempted to show in our review of theories of repetition and the critical engagement with them in textual scholarship that the work of many of the essayists in our collection speaks to and extends the existing criticism on series texts. Taken as a group, the essays demonstrate the historical and continuing importance of the principle of

repetition and the practice of seriality within the system of young people's texts. A clear line of argument that runs through a number of chapters is that series and serials often seek to produce the child subject they address as a »normal« subject, and to solicit the child to participate in this self-production, often through the inherent pleasures of repetition. Because young people are typically positioned as learning subjects, such texts can be read as manifesting core cultural imperatives. A second thread that can be traced through these essays is an account of the many ways in which repetition as reproduction, replication, or reiteration can and does fail. It is at some of these moments – when generic closure is resisted, when consolidated formations are deterritorialized, when sequence is disordered, when difficult knowledge is admitted – that the heady possibilities of change can be glimpsed.

Postscript, June 2017: We closed our introduction on a hopeful note in 2014. Beginning revisions for a reprint in early 2017, we wondered whether such hope seemed naïve. Some things have changed in the few years since the publication of *Seriality and Texts for Young People: The Compulsion to Repeat*. For one thing, there is now more work available on seriality. The German research unit on Popular Seriality (»Ästhetik und Praxis populärer Serialität«, 2010 to 2016) produced a number of conferences and publications, several of them concerned with texts for young people. The researchers sought out »instruments of description« that are adequate to »the evolving, interactive, and auto-adaptive character of serial narratives« (Kelleter 2017b, p. 16); they have done much to shape and advance the field of seriality studies. Our volume, too, has begun to see citations in journal articles and dissertations on related topics. Since 2014, series texts for young people have continued to proliferate and to move into new media, viral forms, and cultural practices like bingeing. There are new instalments of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, film adaptations of *Goosebumps* and *Captain Underpants*, and new TV adaptations of *The Wizard of Oz* and *Anne of Green Gables*. The genres of dystopian fiction series for young people, represented in our 2014 introduction by *Twilight* and in 2017 perhaps by *Divergent* or *The 100*, continue to resonate with young people facing uncertain futures of their own. The urgency of our moment of global warming, peak oil, and refugee crises (exemplified for many by the image of a drowned child, Alan Kurdi) speak to those of us accustomed to highly consumptive ways of living of the need to stop an addictive form of repetition that makes human life precarious around the globe. Yet, the necessary changes are slowed by corporations, governments, and individuals reluctant to believe the evidence and to act on it. After the election of Trump and the Brexit referendum in 2016, however, came the rejection, this year, of far-right candidates in France and the Netherlands. In 2017, the repetition of the neoliberal modes of empire and of extractive relationships to the earth clearly are not desirable, yet neither is a nostalgic return to an imagined past of uniform nation-states before neoliberal globalization. We have seen, here in Canada and around the world, an upswing in Indigenous movements resisting the repetition and reproduction of colonial violence that is at last, in our country and elsewhere, losing legitimacy and coming into question in all areas of public life. The decision made by the Standing Rock Sioux and their allies in the fall of 2016 to favour the language of water protection rather than the language of pipeline blockade in their efforts to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline in North Dakota models a cautious optimism that we mirror as we end here, confident that paying attention to repetition and its inevitable failure continue to be useful tools for tracking both threat and promise, in social and political life as in cultural texts.

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