

“The (Im)possibility of Being Both and Neither: Multiracial Characters in Speculative Fiction”

Abstract

This paper explores representations of multiracial characters in young adult (YA) literature. Specifically, I will highlight a gap between the growing population of multiracial people in the United States and the troubling experiences of multiracial characters in YA speculative fiction. If speculative fiction, at its best, has the potential to push against an established, Eurocentric, hegemonic system, and if young adult literature has the potential to promote new forms of justice for future leaders, then the intersection of these ideals—at least in representations of multiracial young adults—still falls appallingly short. While the visibility of multiracial characters in YA speculative fiction seems to be on the rise—which suggests a positive paradigm shift—the actual experience of multiracial characters within the texts shows that an underlying monoracial/oppressive value system is often reinforced in these texts, rather than challenged. I hope to spark a conversation around the need for more critical scholarship on multiracial characters in YA speculative fiction in several ways. First, I will address the existing scholarship to show that a key gap exists between young adult literature, speculative fiction, and critical race scholarship. Next, I will discuss a useful study conducted on multiracial characters in realistic YA fiction and suggest their framework as a point of embarkation for examining speculative fiction. Finally, I will examine several texts to explore how multiracial characters function within the narratives. In order to fully understand and deconstruct this value system, we need a serious engagement with multiracial characters in YA speculative fiction.