

Failing Fathers: Bad Dads in *The Chocolate War* and *Harriet the Spy*

Upon reading and analyzing notable works of Young Adult (YA) literature, a trend emerges that often shows fathers as “man children,” self-centered, clueless, or hardworking yet emotionally unavailable parents who often fail their children. This trend appears within *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Chocolate War*, *Harriet the Spy*, *Peter Pan* and other YA literature. Each of these texts features a father who falls into a gender archetype, and many of these archetypes spill into other forms of media, such as film and television. By observing this trend of problematic fathers, it becomes clear that YA literature, although it does not often show parents as heroes, seems to cast unintelligent or unavailable fathers in a negative light consistently, while leaving children to fend for themselves as they do not have any stable father figures to protect, lead or teach the characters in these given texts. I argue that one of the many reasons that many *Catcher in the Rye*, *Peter Pan*, *Harriet the Spy*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Chocolate War* are protested stems from the portrayal of an absence of parental presence or lackluster parenting skills, which inevitably reveals a pathway that leads to the adolescent protagonists misbehaving or becoming caught up in bad situations. It could be argued that the authors are using satire to examine the decline in parenting over the twentieth century, or that the authors are using the characters to show how adult like and mature the adolescent generation featured in the texts are compared to their parents. In order to examine these fathers, the works of Clyde W. Franklin II will be used to examine fatherhood from a sociological and media studies perspective in order to view these fictional fathers and see how their experiences relate to that of the average father in America.