

Turbulent Times: Life, Death, and Social Media Use in Recent Young Adult Fiction

In this paper, I will consider the ways that social media use is being depicted in recent YA fiction as a reflection of Katherine Hayles's vision of a posthuman era "that embraces the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality... and that understands human life is embedded in a material world of great complexity, one on which we depend for our continued survival. (*How We Became Posthuman* 1999: 5). As a genre that sometimes functions as a barometer of the turbulent social and cultural status of young people, YA fiction provides an imaginary space in which to consider how human lives can be simultaneously "embedded" in, threatened by, and enhanced by technology.

I will discuss several provocative texts that explore the connections between young adults and the social media-enhanced communities by which they live and potentially die: *Butter* (2012) by Erin Jade Lange, *The Hate U Give* (2017) by Angie Thomas, and *Turtles All the Way Down* (2017) by John Green. The intent of my textual analyses will not be to recycle danah boyd's claim that "[t]echnology makes the struggles youth face visible, but it neither creates nor prevents harmful things from happening even if it can be a tool for both. It simply mirrors and magnifies many aspects of everyday life, good and bad" (*It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens* 2014: 212). Rather, I use boyd's research to frame my analysis of narratives that integrate use of social media in ways that enhance the representation of "everyday life," rather than functioning as narrative gimmicks or distractions. Unlike in speculative fiction, in realistic fiction technology is not represented as ahead of our time; rather, our relationship with technology is the defining feature of our time. Because they depict social media use as an organic, integrated component of young adult identities, communities, and relationships, texts like these narrate the ways that we are already posthuman.