

Performing Christianity: “Doing,” Not Doing, and “Undoing” Christian Ideologies in Young Adult Novels

Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Gender* posits “that gender is performative” and “that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body” (xv). She also advances the view that “performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration” (xv). In other words, gender—as with so many other things—is a cultural construction and production and one that changes depending on circumstances and context. For Butler, gender is not a matter of essence; rather, it’s a matter of the way we have internalized the notion of gender and then believe it to be self-evident because of the way our culture nearly demands that we reproduce and perpetuate those naturalized notions.

While Butler has been taken to task for some of her formulations, her work nevertheless remains useful in terms of gender but in other ways as well. Considering the ways in which the US has been progressing toward a more divisive nation regarding “conservative” versus “liberal” views and family and national values grounded in religious versus secular humanist principles, this presentation will map some of the various manifestations of religious foundations and currents in contemporary literature for adolescent and young adult readers. Specifically, I will analyze the ways in which characters “perform,” “do,” don’t do, and “undo” Christianity in literature for teens wherein Christianity plays a significant role in their lives either in the foreground or background. As I illustrate, Butler’s observations regarding gender performativity provide some useful starting points in understanding the way in which characters assume the language and actions and meet (nor not) Christian expectations in adolescent and young adult literature.

Texts Consulted

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