Yan Du, Locating Girl Writers Then and Now: The Emily of New Moon Trilogy and the Beginning of the Modern Girl Writer Story

The figure of the aspiring girl writer has haunted our imagination ever since Alcott introduced Jo, the first heroine to establish the classic model of girlhood authorship in juvenile fiction. However, little attention has been paid to how narratives depicting girl writers have traditionally participated in, and were shaped by, the historical development of girls’ literature. Tracing girl writer narratives from the latter half of the 19th-century through to early 20th-century, this paper probes the origins of the girl writer discourse, particularly its roots in the sentimental domestic genre of the 19th-century Anglophone girls’ literature and culture. It then highlights Lucy Maud Montgomery’s Emily of New Moon trilogy as a text that could be regarded as a modern turning point for the girl writer discourse since Alcott and others popularized it in the past century.

This paper begins with a contextual survey of young women’s intellectual and creative culture within Victorian girls’ literature, underlining authors such as Yonge, Ewing and Alcott, all of whom describe the complex literacy practices and artistic apprenticeship that define (fictional) girls’ private lives. Siding with scholars such as Sanders (2011) and Emmett (2016), I will then turn to Montgomery’s Emily books. Published in 1923, L.M. Montgomery’s autobiographical series deeply engages with 19th-century conventions of fictional girlhood authorship, while also revising them in several important aspects. I unpack how the Emily books signal a departure from the sentimental mode of affective discipline upheld in girls’ fiction of the previous decades, allowing the girl writer to challenge ideas of sympathy and self-censorship, especially when it comes navigating the tensions between her creative freedom and adult authority. Having considered Montgomery’s revision of 19th-century sentimental rhetoric, I examine how Montgomery reshapes the girl writer narrative by introducing the writer heroine’s diary voice. By analysing Emily’s highly idiosyncratic diary entries, I evoke a dialogue between Montgomery’s text and late Victorian young women’s diary culture (Hunter, 2002), arguing that Emily’s private writings make an important comment on the role of diaries as a playground for negotiating gendered consciousness and girlhood subjectivity in literature for girls. They also respond to attitudes toward girlhood writing in the past century, especially issues concerning privacy and the function of writing in girls’ coming of age processes. Finally, I end the paper with a brief note on how the Emily books influenced girl writer narratives that came after.

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Voice has the power to incite rebellion. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss uses her voice to speak up against the Capitol and as her connection to her family, but what happens when the choice to remain silent is just as powerful as the one to speak up? Silence and voice are major themes in Patrick Ness’s *Chaos Walking* trilogy. In this paper, I will consider how the discrepancy between female silence and male ‘noise’ (the audible nature of men’s thoughts), represents power and agency for Viola in these texts.

In these novels, men’s thoughts are broadcast to everyone around them, creating an ever present and inescapable “Noise”. Women, however, do not suffer this transparency, and can remain silent. Silence then, becomes both a privilege and a threat. For men, the feminine silence is a natural privilege and a threat. For the women, when men gain control of their noise and become able to be silent, it acts as a threat to established power structures of the society, making the right to be silent a marker of power. On a narrative level the silencing of women’s voices through both discourse representation and mental suggestion privileges one discourse with devastating consequences to those whose voices are disenfranchised. The control of voice is thus directly linked to power, diegetically and extradiegetically.

For girls, voice is pivotal in considering maturation and agency as Carol Gillighan explores in her study *In a Different Voice* (1982). Modelling my analysis of power after Roberta Trites, I intend to explore the power of voice and wilful withholding of it. With this notion of choosing to speak or remain silent, I will consider the power Viola gains in having this choice. Further to this, the “Noise” can be read as a performance of social media within the text. I will expand this reading into sociocultural ramifications of movements like #MeToo, #MeAt14 along with movements such as ‘No I will not debate you’ and #silenceisviolence.

The trilogy brings to light the importance of personal privacy and the importance of having the right to remain silent, particularly for girls. However, it also highlights the dangers of remaining silent, particularly in the face of the manipulation of information by those who speak the loudest. As such, reflections on the roles of both the ‘noise’ and silence are essential to our navigation of issues of agency. Academic work which explores how these issues are represented in children’s literature can aid us in our navigation of real-world problems of control over feminine silence and voice, and its impact on male-female power relations.

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Hanna Liljeqvist, Speaking Up by Writing Down: Diary Writing and Empowerment in Meg Cabot’s The Princess Diaries

Diary writing has long been considered a feminine form of writing, and as such it has often been dismissed as a trivial activity of little value. The notion of diary writing as girls’ or women’s writing is reflected in children’s and young adult literature, where the diary frequently is linked to femininity. However, these works tend to present the diary as anything but trivial. Instead, it is often depicted as a safe space for introspection and for exploring issues of voice, agency, and control. One example of this is Meg Cabot’s young adult series The Princess Diaries (2000–2009) that tells the story of the teenager Mia who learns she is a princess. Written in diary form, these teen chick lit novels describe Mia’s struggles with high school drama, princess lessons, and a never-ending quest for self-confidence. By the end of the series, however, the insecure girl introduced in the first novel has turned into a young woman comfortable in her own skin – a transformation that can be linked to Mia’s diary writing.

Drawing on previous research on Cabot’s novels by Sara K. Day and Valerie Bherer, I will outline the ways in which The Princess Diaries novels not only highlight positive aspects of diary writing, but also subvert traditional notions of the diary as trivial. I argue that Mia’s diary becomes a portable “room of her own,” in which she learns to express herself and speak up for herself through writing. Using Roberta Seelinger Trites’ theories on the links between voice and writing in children’s literature as my starting point, I argue that by repeatedly drawing attention to the diary’s empowering functions in Mia’s life, the novels suggest a wish to inspire young female readers to keep diaries of their own – and learn to speak up by writing down.

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