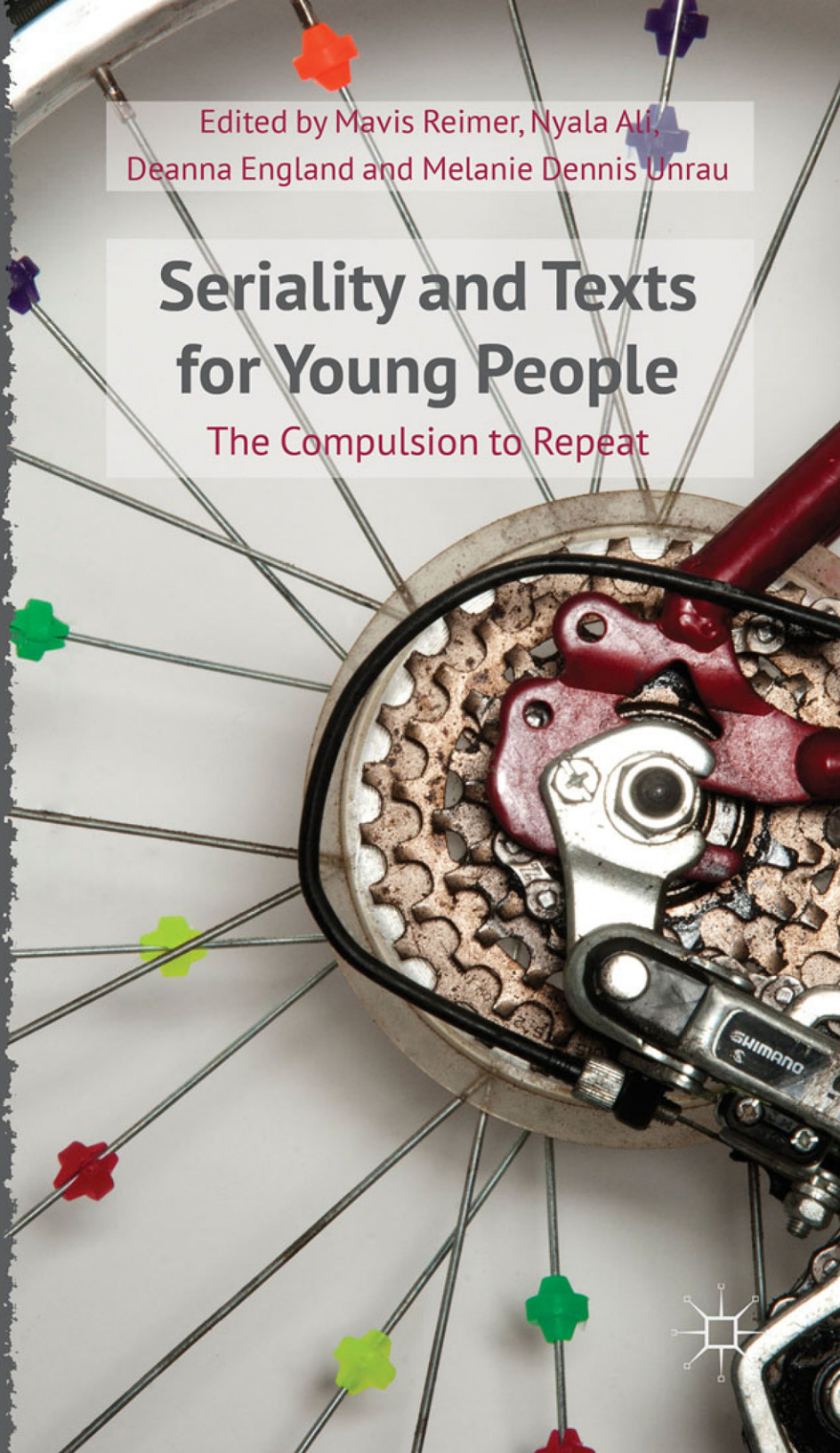
CRITICAL APPROACHES TO CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Edited by Mavis Reimer, Nyala Ali,
Deanna England and Melanie Dennis Unrau

Seriality and Texts for Young People

The Compulsion to Repeat



Critical Approaches to Children's Literature

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Critical Approaches to Children's Literature is an innovative series concerned with the best contemporary scholarship and criticism on children's and young adult literature, film, and media texts. The series addresses new and developing areas of children's literature research as well as bringing contemporary perspectives to historical texts. The series has a distinctive take on scholarship, delivering quality works of criticism written in an accessible style for a range of readers, both academic and professional. The series is invaluable for undergraduate students in children's literature as well as advanced students and established scholars.

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The Compulsion to Repeat

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Summary: "Seriality and Texts for Young People is a collection of thirteen original, scholarly essays about series and serial texts directed to children and youth. Each begins from the premise that a basic principle of seriality is repetition and explores what that means for a range of primary texts, including popular narrative series for children, comics, magazines, TV series, and digital texts. Contributors featured include internationally recognized scholars such as Perry Nodelman, Margaret Mackey, and Laurie Langbauer, and the essays cover texts such as the Harry Potter novels, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, and Anne of Green Gables. The introduction provides a framework for the detailed explorations, reviewing some of the most important contemporary theories of repetition, pointing to some key criticism on series, and speculating on the significance of the series form for the field of young people's texts"—Provided by publisher.
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Dedicated to the memory of
Dr. Eliza T. Dresang
(1941–2014)
whose presentation about young readers of series texts
set this collection in motion

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Series Editors' Preface

The *Critical Approaches to Children's Literature* series was initiated in 2008 by Kerry Mallan and Clare Bradford. The aim of the series is to identify and publish the best contemporary scholarship and criticism on children's and young adult literature, film, and media texts. The series is open to theoretically informed scholarship covering a wide range of critical perspectives on historical and contemporary texts from diverse national and cultural settings. Critical Approaches aims to make a significant contribution to the expanding field of children's literature research by publishing quality books that promote informed discussion and debate about the production and reception of children's literature and its criticism.

Kerry Mallan and Clare Bradford

Preface and Acknowledgements

Seriality and Texts for Young People: The Compulsion to Repeat is the result of an international, invitational symposium on the topic of Narrative, Repetition, and Texts for Young People that took place in June 2011 at The University of Winnipeg in Canada. The symposium was hosted by a graduate class in Cultural Studies, which was studying theories of repetition alongside narratives for young people. Participants developed their presentations into full, scholarly essays after the symposium, making use of the lively, cumulative discussions to hone their arguments. A selection of those essays is published here. The process of development of this project has meant that the essayists in this collection have made use of one another's work, with the result that there are overlaps, resonances, and tensions among the chapters.

In addition to Mavis Reimer, who taught the course, the editors of this collection and the authors of the introduction were all among the graduate students who first wrestled with a number of major philosophical and theoretical statements about the principle of repetition as part of their course, then acted as facilitators and respondents for the presentations at the symposium. Those students who elected to carry on with the project collaborated with Reimer to bring the essays together into a book collection. They worked closely with the logic of the essays as editorial readers, and returned to the theoretical formulations to frame an introduction that asks whether repetition is an obvious fact or an impossible idea, or somehow both at once, and what any of this might have to do with texts designed for an audience of young people.

The editors would like to acknowledge their colleagues who were unable to follow this project through to completion: thanks to Justin Girard, Angela Sylvester, Amalia Slobogian, Nicole Necsefor, and Jocelyn Sakal Froese for their contributions to our thinking. Thanks, too, to the participants whose scholarly contributions and lively presence at the symposium were critical to the developing conversations but whose finished work will appear in other contexts: Kate Behr, William Ganis, Kevin Mitchell, Andrew O'Malley, and Catherine Tosenberger. The support of the Office of Research Services at The University of Winnipeg and the Canada Research Chairs program of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada made it possible for the Centre for Research in Young People's Texts and Cultures to host the

symposium and to prepare this collection. Larissa Wodtke and charlie peters, in addition to authoring chapters in this volume, have provided research, administrative, and technical assistance throughout the project. Thanks to Kevin Mitchell for his initial exploratory research for the symposium and to Josina Robb for her work with the manuscript.

The images from *Superman: Birthright*, *The Saga of Swamp Thing* #28, *The Saga of Swamp Thing* #33, and *The House of Secrets* #92 are used with the permission of DC Comics. The images from *Red: A Haida Manga* are used with the permission of Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas.

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Melanie Dennis Unrau is a contributing editor at *Geez* magazine. Her academic work has been published in the *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement*. Her new poetry collection is *Happiness Threads: The Unborn Poems* (2013). She has an MA from The University of Winnipeg.

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Introduction: The Compulsion to Repeat

Mavis Reimer, Nyala Ali, Deanna England, and Melanie Dennis Unrau

I

There is a curious gap in the scholarship on texts for young people: while series fiction has been an important stream of publishing for children and adolescents at least since the last decades of the nineteenth century,[1] the scholarship on these texts has not been central to the development of theories on and criticism of texts for young people. The focus of scholarship is much more likely to be on stand-alone, high-quality texts of literary fiction. Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), for example, has occupied critics in the field far more often and more significantly than all of the 46 popular novels about schoolgirls with similar plots that were published by Grahame's contemporary, Angela Brazil (beginning in 1904 with *A Terrible Tomboy*). Literary fiction such as Grahame's tends to be defined in terms of its singularity – the unique voice of the narrator, unusual resolutions to narrative dilemmas, intricate formal designs, and complicated themes – often specifically as distinct from the formulaic patterns of series fiction. Yet, curiously, scholars typically use examples from literary fiction to illustrate the common characteristics of books directed to young readers: it was Grahame's book, and not Brazil's books, that appeared in the Children's Literature Association's list *Touchstones* as one of the "distinguished children's books" the study of which "will allow us to better understand children's literature in general," according to Perry Nodelman, who chaired the committee that produced the list (2).

Traditionally, few titles from series appeared on lists of awards, honours usually decided by professional readers. Kathleen Chamberlain has demonstrated, in fact, that one group of professional readers – children's librarians in the United States in the early twentieth century – established

their cultural authority through their campaigns against series literature for young people as worthy of inclusion on library shelves, much less on prize lists. Since the mid-1990s, this exclusion of series from prizes has been less prevalent, although award-winning titles – such as, for example, Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights* (which won the *Guardian* Children's Fiction Prize in 1996) or Kenneth Oppel's *Sunwing* (which won the Canadian Library Association's Book of the Year Award in 2000) – are often titles in limited, "progressive" series, a type of series defined by Victor Watson as sequential narratives "in which a continuous and developing story is told in instalments" ("Series Fiction" 532). Over the same period of time, the interest in series books among common readers has exploded. Beginning in the 1980s, there was an exponential increase in the titles from series for young people dominating the bestseller lists, with such American series as Choose Your Own Adventure (1979–98), The Baby-sitters Club (1986–2000), Goosebumps (1992–97), and Animorphs (1996–2001) leading the way. Mapping the "political economy" of children's literature at the end of the twentieth century, Joel Taxel reports one of his informants in the book business as characterizing the decade of the 1990s as being all about "series, series, series" (168). Indeed, in the spring of 1994, when *The New York Times* produced lists of children's bestsellers for the first time since 1978, editors found that a major change was that the most popular books on the new lists were series titles, "overwhelmingly, the new 'Goosebumps' series" (Lipson).

While most of the popular American series of this period are what Watson calls "successive" series, "in which the characters show few signs of growing older or changing in any significant way" ("Series Fiction" 533), it was a "progressive" series that confirmed the enhanced status of the series in publishing for young people. J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series (1997–2007) – a blockbuster, international success discussed by Eliza Dresang and Kathleen Campana in this volume – has reconfigured the field of young people's texts and cultures. Rebekah Fitzsimmons observes that "[t]he phrase 'Harry Potter effect' has been used to explain everything from the books' effect on the [*New York*] *Times* [bestseller] list … to Scholastic stock prices … to children's reading habits …" (102n1). In her historical survey of "the convergence points between children's literature and the bestseller list" (80), Fitzsimmons focuses on the radical restructuring of the *Times* lists in 2000 that was provoked by the popularity of Rowling's series and outlines the ways in which this restructuring "made visible" the roles of such a list "as a mechanism for book promotion and management" (80) and as an

instrument of category maintenance (particularly categories of class and age). Seriality has long been suspected by taste-making critics of exploiting children's untutored desires, as Laurie Langbauer demonstrates in her essay on the Oz series in this volume; a consequence of the extravagant popularity of the Potter series seems to be the unsettling of the authority of those tastemakers (*cf.* Fitzsimmons 103n5). Indeed, the credentialing system of prizes for books for young people appears to have been inverted in response to the contemporary popularity of series texts: one of the results of the high praise accorded to David Almond's 1998 literary novel *Skellig* by professional readers,[2] for example, was the production and distribution of a prequel, *My Name is Mina*, in 2010.

In the twenty-first century, to talk about seriality is necessarily to talk about texts in multiple forms and modes. The essays by Debra Dudek, Margaret Mackey, and Larissa Wodtke in this volume explore the transmutation of texts for young people across media platforms and the ways in which such shifts affect the marketing of texts to young people and the reception of those texts. To find new audiences through the use of new media is an obvious objective of films produced as spin-offs from print series, films which are themselves typically produced in series. Publishers clearly assume that the effect can also be reversed, that film series can secure readers for print series: the trilogy of films based on C. S. Lewis's The Chronicles of Narnia series (2005, 2008, 2010), for example, renewed interest in those post-World-War-II books and resulted in the rerelease of the novels with covers featuring the Pevensie children as depicted by the movie franchise.[3] Television series for young people have developed along parallel tracks, often defining the shared textual heritage of a generation of young people and inspiring the production of supplementary print and film series. Buffy the Vampire Slayer, the subject of Dudek's essay, is one example of such a multiplying text. *Buffy* was a film (1992) before it was a television series (1997–2003), a series which spawned a second television series (Angel, 1999–2004), a series of novels, a card game, magazines, role-playing game books, video games, and a series of comic books, among other cultural objects. Indeed, there are so many and so many kinds of Buffy texts that fans simply refer to the whole interconnected system as "the Buffyverse."

Critics of texts for young people have begun to respond to the market trends, although it is still common for scholars to begin essays on series texts by noting the general critical dismissal of these narratives by other scholars. For example, writing about A Series of Unfortunate Events in 2010, Danielle Russell observes that, despite the popularity of

series texts with readers and the "sheer volume of series fiction" (36), critical responses to series texts remain, as they have been since the nineteenth century, "often condescending, if not condemning" (22). Our analysis of prize lists and criticism since the 1990s suggests the emergence of a more nuanced picture. Undoubtedly there is a residual tendency for some adults to assume that series books are low-quality reading for the young, but recent conferences in the field are likely to feature many papers on popular series beside papers on literary texts, and an increasing amount of the space in scholarly journals is taken up by such discussions. To take one specific example, in the 1990 issue of the annual *Children's Literature*, eight of the nine scholarly articles focus on literary texts,[4] while the ninth considers the centrality of the idea of home to children's literature, using examples from five literary children's novels as evidence.[5] Series texts appear only in the book review section, where an essay considers three recently published critical studies about historical series books; by way of introduction, reviewer Anita Susan Grossman observes that the research represented by the studies "serves a real need … created by decades of silence … about these books," but also regrets that most of the writers who address series books are not "literary scholars, and much of their prose has a fanzine quality" (173–74). In contrast, of the nine scholarly articles published in the 2012 annual, six focus on series texts and their authors, and, of those six, three are about popular contemporary series, including Fitzsimmons's account of "the Harry Potter effect."[6] Journal editors know that essays about popular series attract readership, not an insignificant matter in an era in which articles, disaggregated from the issues in which they originally appeared when they are uploaded to Internet databases, can be an important source of revenue. For example, readership metrics from *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures* reveal that the most frequently downloaded article from that journal, by a large margin, is an essay about Stephenie Meyer's Twilight Saga.[7]

Nevertheless, despite the amount of discussion about series texts, relatively little has been said about the principle of seriality itself as an aspect of the meaning of these texts. Of the 53 volumes and essays about The Twilight Saga indexed in the Modern Languages Association database as of March 2013, for example, none lists seriality or repetition as a subject term. Many of these studies note the popularity of the series and the archetypal resonances of the Saga's plot and characters – both ideas that imply forms of repetition – but much of the scholarly discussion focuses on the conflicts that might be said to be the manifest content of the Saga, most obviously, on the central problem of Bella's choice

between vampire Edward Cullen and werewolf Jacob Black as heterosexual male partner. What is characterized as the Team Edward–Team Jacob contest in the marketing organized to promote the purchase of such spin-off merchandise as necklaces, shirts, buttons, and tote bags is seen, not surprisingly, as a more complicated and significant choice by the scholars. For the most part, however, scholarly work on The Twilight Saga is interested in the same issues as those exploited by the commercial campaigns, and does not explicitly consider how the repetitions and variations of the scene of Bella's choice – staged over a sequence of texts across a span of time – might frame, open, or limit the meanings of that choice.

The relative lack of attention to seriality as a formal principle is true not only of the study of series texts directed to audiences of young people but also of the study of series texts generally. Shane Denson observes that cultural studies has been "less interested in the *seriality of popular forms* than in the *popularity of serial forms*," with research "characteristically directed towards understanding what kinds of (typically innovative, unforeseen, and subversive) things audiences were doing with mass-produced series" (1). The emergent theoretical and critical work on series, according to Denson, moves away from audience studies to what he considers to be "larger questions" "about the discursive construction and sociocultural negotiation of value in, through, and around serial forms"; about the relation of serial forms to industrial and post-industrial forms of production; and about the roles of various media "in shaping the narrative and aesthetic characteristics of serial entertainments in particular and, more generally, the modern lifeworld that informs and is informed by them" (1–2). The context of Denson's comments is his summary of the proceedings of a graduate student conference that took place in Amsterdam in 2011 under the title "To be continued": Seriality and Serialization in Interdisciplinary Perspective, one of a cluster of conferences that have occurred since the beginning of the twenty-first century on repetition and serial forms.[8]

It is the objective of this volume to begin to explore the ways in which investigating seriality as practice and form in the field of young people's texts might point not only to the meanings of particular series texts but also to the cultural functions of series texts for young people and, more generally, to the ways in which young people's texts function within culture. We hope that this volume will help to shape a critical conversation in the field. Clearly, it would have been possible to organize the conversation in a variety of ways – historically, by national context of production, by genre, or by medium. We chose,

rather, to begin by asking, what principle or principles distinguish series texts from literary texts? The characteristic that presented itself as the most obviously distinctive is the extent of repetition supported by the serial form.

There is a widespread understanding among critics of series texts that, as Denson puts it, "a system of repetition and variation" is "the basic stuff of seriality itself" (5). Catherine Sheldrick Ross, reviewing a century of "dime novels" and series books for children, for example, notes that "a key problem of seriality" is "how to achieve both continuity and variety" (200). Scholars who study series fiction for young readers often emphasize repetition rather than variation in their descriptions. Watson, for example, locates the importance of series fiction for young readers in its demonstration of "the most important reading-secret of all," namely that the "profoundly private pleasures" of fiction "are repeatable and entirely within the reader's control" (*Reading Series Fiction* 1). In her annotated bibliography of teen series, Silk Makowski uses the analogy of performance to suggest that single texts of fiction are like "one-night stand[s]," while series aim to provide the reader with "that same grand experience night after night, week after week, year after year, ad infinitum" (2). At the beginning of an article that eventually explores the differences inherent in repetition, Jane Newland summarizes Makowski's observation by detailing some of the ways in which series fiction can be said to provide "more of *the same*" for young readers in its "repetition of theme and character, coupled with a coherent storyline across the multiple volumes" ("Repeated" 192). Elsewhere, Newland asserts that the repetitions of series shape the characteristic reading style of "the series reader," a style which she defines as "surfing" the texts in search of "links" that occur "in the form of repetitions" ("Surfing" 149–50). Suman Gupta uses a depth metaphor derived from painting to describe the reader's experience of repetition in series, specifically in the Harry Potter series: as "[p]ast explanations are repeated and expanded" through the series, the "picture comes together … retaining all the layers of past efforts" (96).

Repetition is not found only in the texts of narrative series, of course, being generally regarded as one of the principles through which language generates meaning. J. Hillis Miller begins his study of the "recurrences" in seven Victorian and modern novels, for example, by observing that "[a]ny novel is a complex tissue of repetitions and of repetitions within repetitions, or of repetitions linked in chain fashion to other repetitions" (2–3). Peter Brooks claims that "the constructive, semiotic role of repetition" (25) is at the heart of narrative attempts to

make meaning of the world. If "[n]arrative is one of the large categories or systems of understanding that we use in our negotiations with reality, specifically, in the case of narrative, with the problem of temporality" (xi), he argues, then plot, which organizes narrative in temporal sequence, must be understood to be at the centre of narrative, and plot, in Brooks's words, is "the active repetition and reworking of story in and by discourse" (25). Miller's and Brooks's analyses are informed by structuralist methods, methods that study the "[r]elational regularities" of a system in order to describe its underlying structure or "grammar" (Rowe 27): whether in anthropological studies of cultures or aesthetic theories of art, structuralists use the metaphor of language to organize their observations of the patterns of meaningful repetition in systems. The role of repetition in language systems has been considered at another level by rhetoricians, with many of the figures of speech they identify based on repeated, inverted, and transposed elements. Repetitions in language are not only persuasive but also pleasing. The resonance and memorability of poetry, for example, are consequences of its patterned language: rhythms, rhymes, assonance, and alliteration, among many other common poetic effects, are built on repeated sounds. These repetitions are notable in poetry for children, and in the form Joseph T. Thomas Jr. calls children's "own" poetry, the "poetry of the playground," made up of skipping-rope rhymes and other chants. This oral mode, "a carnivalesque tradition that signifies on adult culture, even while producing poetry that rewards repeat listenings" (152), includes sometimes sophisticated elements of parody and double-meanings.

The function of repetition as mnemonic aid in oral forms is one way to account for its centrality to children's literature, which, like poetry, is often assumed to derive from oral traditions, specifically, in the case of children's literature, from fairy tales and fables. In addition to the volume of work on versions and revisions of the most popular fairy tales for young people, there has been considerable interest among critics in retold stories as a special feature of the field. Introducing a collection of essays on adaptations, for example, Benjamin Lefebvre observes that "textual transformations have for a long time been the norm rather than the exception" in children's literature (2). He provides a long list of types of transformed texts, from series written by corporate authors to adaptations, remakes, and extensions of classic texts, recontextualizations of familiar characters in new texts, and textual franchises that include films, toys, and other commodities (2). John Stephens and Robyn McCallum similarly begin their study of retellings for young

people by noting "the volume and persistence of retold stories as part of the domain of children's literature" (ix), a persistence they see as symptomatic of the function of children's literature "to initiate children into aspects of a social heritage" (3). From the perspective of these critics, it would appear that series fiction might be said to be an intensive version of all children's literature. Nodelman's observation of the "apparent sameness" of so many literary novels for children ("Interpretation") would seem to corroborate this view: this observation was the beginning of his articulation of the argument that children's literature is a distinct genre, with characteristic plots, stylistic elements, and themes, and with a shared situation of enunciation (Nodelman and Reimer). Glenna Davis Sloan, developing a program to put literature at the centre of the development of literacy in an era when basal readers were the norm in many primary classrooms, also emphasized the repeated patterns of children's literature. For Sloan, these texts are part of a larger "interrelated body of imaginative verbal structures," which she sees as most clearly defined in Northrop Frye's theory of archetypes: proposing correlations among natural seasons and literary genres, modes, and tropes, Frye demonstrates, she notes, that literature is "a coherent structure in which works are related to each other like members of a large, extended family, with a family tree traceable to the earliest times" (35). Also using Frye's metaphor of the family of stories, Anita Moss and Jon C. Stott produced an anthology of interrelated tales – beginning with folktales, hero tales, and myths – intended to give students of children's literature and schoolteachers a basis for understanding the recurrent patterns of story and for developing literature curricula for primary schools.

Introducing the program for literacy education Sloan built on his own theories of archetypal repetition, Frye approvingly cites her opposition to a "'skills and drills' approach, which frustrates and stunts all genuine imaginative growth" (Frye xv). Similarly, Moss and Stott are careful to position the "frameworks" provided by an understanding of repeated story patterns as a context for the enjoyment of each story as unique (5). While the vocabulary of these educators might obscure the fact, repetition is central to most pedagogical methods, invoked as a demonstrably effective practice in establishing and confirming desired attitudes and behaviours in learning subjects. Consider the many versions of repetition that appear in educational manuals and teaching guides as descriptors of learning processes and outcomes: *dictation, drill, imitation, inculcation, tracing, transmission, copying, memorization, practice, quotation, reinforcement, routine, schema, habit, mimicry, recitation,*

recognition, reiteration, remembering, representation, reproduction, and *replication* are just some of the most common. Despite the long list of repetitive activities used to secure and to test the effectiveness of teaching, repetition as a pedagogical technique is more often assumed than theorized by contemporary educators, no doubt at least partly because of the negative association of repetition with rote learning evident in Frye's preface: the Oxford *Dictionary of Education*, for example, glosses *rote learning* as "[l]earning which does not necessitate understanding, but is undertaken systematically and mechanistically, usually through repetition" (Wallace). Contemporary (Western) practices of education are also based on repetition, philosopher Claire Colebrook points out, but on the repetition of method rather than content, a method that produces a kind of thinker she describes as "the monitor of originality who identifies the new as the simple other of repetition" (48). In other words, we may have systematically taught ourselves not to recognize the many ways in which we are formed by repetition.

Historically, texts for young people have been bound up with education systems and pedagogical theories. The idea of a separate literature for children began, arguably, in schoolbooks. In the English-language tradition, it became a recognizable enterprise distinct from schoolbooks in the mid-eighteenth century, as changing ideas about childhood and the education proper to childhood took root. As articulated by English philosopher John Locke in his influential *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, these ideas were grounded in "a concern for the development of the individual child" (Cunningham 59). Paradoxically, because the end of education is the individual's ability to reason autonomously and not to be governed by the opinion of others, the child must be encouraged, in Locke's words, to "*submit his Appetite to Reason*," and "by constant practice," to settle this reasonable behaviour "into Habit" (314). Not only is reason made reliably available to a child through repeated use (or practice) but also repetition (in the form of habit) is the basis for the emergence of autonomy.

Encouraging children to learn the habit of reason was also the basis of Locke's view of effective practices for teaching them to read and of identifying desirable reading material for them. A child should not be "driven" to learning to read, nor rebuked "for every little Fault," nor "shackle[d] and tie[d] up" with rules, but, rather, provided with "Stories apt to delight and entertain a Child, [which] may yet afford useful Reflections to a grown Man" (258, 259). Writing in 1693, Locke regrets that he knows no books beyond *Aesop's Fables* that meet these criteria, but, by the 1740s, the publisher John Newbery was supplying books for

the express purposes of both delighting and instructing young people. Peter Hunt observes that the "tradition of didacticism, which holds that children's books must be moral and educational" is not only longstanding but also persistent (5). These assumptions about print texts have been readily transferred to discussions of television shows, films, and other media texts aimed at youth.

Given the close association of pedagogy and texts directed to young people, it might seem little wonder that repetition generally, and series and serials specifically, should figure so largely in this system: simply put, seriality must be an effective teaching tool, for series texts are a concentrated form of repetition. Indeed, this assumption underlies both the alarms about the dangers of series texts raised by some professional readers and the sometimes grudging acceptance of series texts as primers for learning readers by other guardians of the young. But the agreement that repetition is an obvious effect or category of experience forecloses the ongoing theoretical inquiries into a complex phenomenon.

The most conventional narrative series, serials, and sequels for young people are characterized by a constant narrative presence, a common set of characters, the same or similar settings, recurring plot structures, and familiar themes. While such groups of narratives might be said to be the strongest example of seriality in young people's culture, other kinds of serial productions – such as magazines or TV shows – also rely on repeated elements to be recognizable as related texts. Even in the case of narrative series, however, the ways in which series repeat are not always obvious, as Rose Lovell-Smith demonstrates in her discussion in this volume of the Howl's Moving Castle series by Diana Wynne Jones.

The problem of repetition – what constitutes repetition, whether repetition is possible or impossible, and why the answers to these questions might matter – has preoccupied analysts, theorists, and philosophers since at least the mid-nineteenth century and the publication of Søren Kierkegaard's novella *Repetition: An Essay in Experimental Psychology* (1843). Historians of philosophy generally agree that it was in this text that the notion of repetition "in its modern form" first appeared (Jameson 135). In Kierkegaard's novella, the narrator, the ironically named Constantin Constantius, repeats a journey he previously took to Berlin, and, in the course of recalling his memories of the first journey, formulates what Fredric Jameson calls "the philosophical paradox of repetition," namely, that repetition "can as it were only take place 'a second time,'" that there is "no 'first time' of repetition" (137). Kierkegaard puts it this way: "what is has been, otherwise it could not be repeated, but precisely the fact that it has been gives to repetition the

character of novelty" (52). Alenka Zupančič contends that the discovery of this modern notion of repetition – that is, the view of repetition "as an independent and crucial concept" and "as fundamentally different from the logic of representation" – was one of the "events that inaugurated so-called contemporary philosophy and gave this designation its specific meaning" (27).

In the course of articulating this distinctive view of repetition and of disarticulating repetition from representation, philosophers and theorists since Kierkegaard have considered a wide range of effects and affects commonly associated with repetition. Among these are the experiences of repetition as consolatory, repetition as confirmatory, repetition as unsettling, and repetition as a setting in motion. In the section that follows, we rehearse a number of important theoretical explanations of these effects of repetition and point to some of the ways in which critics of series texts, especially series texts for young people, have taken up these formulations in their studies. While these theories are well known to scholars of children's literature, by reviewing them together under the rubric of repetition, we hope to provoke our readers to look again at how these ideas might permit new readings of seriality in young people's culture.

II

One of the obvious senses in which repetition is consolatory is that it provides us with confidence in the world that supports human life. As philosopher Marc Rölli observes, "many of our everyday experiences are embedded in a structure of repetition: we believe in the world, we believe that the world will continue to exist even when we close our eyes" (98). That "the everyday" is the "special province" of the series form is the opening observation of Langbauer's book-length study of the series in Victorian and early twentieth-century fiction (*Novels* 2). Recalling the comfort she felt in reading series during her unsettled adolescence, she reframes her youthful response through this theoretical understanding: "those linked novels that are part of extended series seem to mirror and carry properties often defined as essential to everyday life: that it's just one thing after another, going quietly but inexhaustibly on and on" (2).

The confidence in the continuing existence of an inexhaustibly meaningful world was a focus at a larger scale of many of the theories of archetypes, myth, and ritual developed at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. For these theorists,

recognizing the operations of repetition (in the sense of cyclical return) enabled an understanding of human beings as connected to a whole system of life. For example, Mircea Eliade, who followed in this tradition, observes that the conceptualization of time as linear is the cause of modern anxieties. In *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*, he maintains that rituals are expressions of the human longing to escape linear or secular time and vehicles of the return to sacred time in which each new year is not only a reenactment of the mythical beginning of the cosmos but *is* the beginning of the cosmos, since ritual or sacred time flows in a closed circle. The sacred for Eliade, Douglas Allen says, is the "permanent, universal, dynamic structures of transcendence, expressing what is transhistorical, paradigmatic, meaningful" (307).

Theorists of myth and ritual influenced such literary critics as Frye, whose work in turn has been so influential in general for critics of children's literature. In critical work on series texts for young people, more specifically, the emphasis on the capacity of serial fiction to develop spacious and meaningful textual worlds in which readers can find themselves at home might be aligned with the view of repetition as consolatory. It is this feature that seems to nurture the fan clubs that have long flourished around serial texts. The girls' school stories popular from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century are an instructive case study. Elinor Brent-Dyer, for example, wrote 59 books in the Chalet School series beginning in 1959, with the first fan club started by her publisher in the same year. Two fan clubs with "enthusiastic" worldwide memberships continue to organize themselves around the series (Sims and Clare 75), building a virtual female-centred world that corresponds to and extends the "world of girls" created within the texts but unavailable to many girls and women in everyday life.[9] Contemporary practices of online fandom have multiplied opportunities for young series readers "to engage actively with texts," Catherine Tosenberger notes (185), quoting Henry Jenkins's metaphor for fandom as an "egalitarian, cross-generational space 'outside the classroom and beyond any direct adult control'" (186).

Relieving anxiety (if not achieving consolation) through the management of memory is fundamental to Sigmund Freud's theoretical explanations of the struggle for mastery. "[A] person is only condemned to repeat something when he has forgotten the origins of the compulsion," according to Lacanian scholar Dylan Evans (167). In "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920), Freud explicates this "compulsion to repeat" (19) as resulting from a trauma, with the patient's symptomatic repetition of the traumatic event as the attempt to overcome or master it by

reducing the level of stimulation or excitation incited by the original event. As Samuel Weber explains, in this sense, "the repetition compulsion" might be said to serve "the pleasure principle by providing the I … with the sentiment of being prepared for that which in the past actually overwhelmed and traumatized it" (6). The example Freud uses to illustrate this possibility is his grandson playing *fort-da*, a game Freud initially understood as the child's expression of distress whenever his mother left him. Freud goes on to speculate, however, that "the child turned his experience into a game from another motive": "At the outset he was in a *passive* situation – he was overpowered by the experience; but, by repeating it, unpleasurable though it was, as a game, he took on an *active* part. These efforts might be put down to an instinct for mastery" ("Pleasure Principle" 16). Freud believed that patients could overcome repeated, compulsive behaviour and ultimately be liberated from the trauma that provoked such behaviour through the "talking cure" of psychoanalysis,[10] a repetition of the trauma in words rather than behaviour.

Some critics of series texts have understood striving for mastery as one of the activities that is encouraged by the serial form and that is particularly significant for young people. Two critics of The Twilight Saga, for example, have discussed Meyer's books in these terms. Heather Anastasiu observes that adolescence is a liminal period during which young people experience and rehearse transformations of various kinds. Through the Twilight novels, she suggests, "adolescents are able to explore their fears and desires in a safe place" via identification with the heroes of the narratives (50). For girl readers, identification with Bella can "empower" them "to embrace their emerging sexuality" and to explore romance in the "non-threatening place[s]" of the fantasy series and the fan fiction communities attached to the series (50). Rachel DuBois, beginning from a similar assumption about readers' positioning in relation to the narratives, suggests that, by identifying with the characters, readers experience "a series of recursive emotional crises throughout the reading and rereading process," but that this process "feels manageable because of the promise of a happy ending" (132). Through repeated episodes of rereading, readers confirm Freud's theory of mastery by playing an active role in reducing the tension produced by narrative moments of trauma and uncertainty. David Rudd suggests that series can take the form of traumatic repetition because the central child characters do *not* achieve mastery: using Enid Blyton's Famous Five series as example, he observes that, while the children satisfyingly solve the mysteries posed in each book, they are denied complete victory because they require the affirmation of adult others, others who

are positioned as oppressive keepers of the symbolic order at the beginnings of their adventures. This is a compromise that can only be allayed by "engag[ing] in another adventure, … mov[ing] once again from being passive, marginal beings into the realm of active agency" (94).

Karen Coats proposes that the series form itself should be understood as "of the order of the symptom" of cultural trauma, with each book in a series "a repetitive gesture or phenomenon" that calls us "to pay attention to something we cannot see, or have forgotten or denied" (198). Coats distinguishes between two different serial responses to cultural trauma: the first, the modern response, is exemplified for her by the Stratemeyer Syndicate's Nancy Drew series, which cultivates "a stance of … 'knowingness' with respect to the world" (186), attempting to keep from readers the knowledge "that human reason will not save us" (187); the second, the postmodern response, is exemplified by R. L. Stine's Goosebumps series, which "adopts a playful stance regarding world-making and boundary-crossing" that "calls into question the status of the rational world" (192).

Freud's essay on the "unpleasure principle" falls into two parts. In the second section of "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," Freud explicitly turns to consider the origins of the "compulsion to repeat" that, as Weber puts it, "seems to take over [or override] the role of the pleasure principle in determining psychic activity" (5). In his attempt to solve his perplexity, Freud introduces the notion of the death drive. The death drive, he speculates, is a "more primitive element" than the pleasure principle and "the most universal endeavour of all living substance," that is, "to return to the quiescence of the inorganic world" ("Pleasure Principle" 62). The condition that Catherine Malabou calls "the pure neutrality of inorganic matter" (43) is the ultimate lowering of tension and, therefore, the ultimate achievement of pleasure.

Brooks, in his engagement with psychoanalytic theory in thinking through design in narrative, proposes that "[t]he desire of the text is ultimately the desire for the end, for that recognition which is the moment of the death of the reader in the text" (108). If we apply this observation to series texts for young people, we might conclude that such texts offer repeated opportunities to rehearse the cycle of beginnings, trauma, mastery, and death, perhaps providing young readers a training ground not only for the experience of the vicissitudes of human life but also for its ultimate consolation, its ending in the quiescence of death. Both Langbauer ("Ethics") and Kim Hong Nguyen discuss Lemony Snicket's Series of Unfortunate Events as this kind of therapy for readers – whom they characterize, respectively, as adolescents and