

McAlister, Jodi. *New Adult Fiction*. Cambridge University Press, 2021. Part of the Cambridge Elements series. Pp. 84. US \$17.99 (paperback). ISBN 978-1-108-82788-1.

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Jodi McAlister's *New Adult Fiction* traces the history of the new adult publishing category since its inception in 2009. This Cambridge Element book provides one of the only comprehensive looks at New Adult literature since there is very little scholarship on its history other than Amy Pattee's 2017 *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* article. Unfortunately, though, new adult literature has lived and died, and the boom of such literature is behind us. This concise eighty-four-page book provides a real-world example of the genre worlds theory, and describes new adult to be much like young adult literature in that they are both publishing categories and genres. While this book offers a succinct case study of the new adult label as a genre phenomenon, it leaves the reader wishing for more in-depth analysis of new adult's genre conventions—how they are different from young adult and adult texts—and of books that have become successful under this label.

St. Martin's Press, an imprint of Macmillan, wanted to fill a gap that it saw in the publishing field: engaging readers in their twenties who related more to the narratives of young adult literature than the divorce, parenthood, mid-life crisis, and romantic affairs narratives of adult fiction. The imprint hired Dan Weiss who, along with his assistant S. Jae-Jones, created a submissions contest for pitches and name ideas for a content category for this group of readers. New adult literature is wholly manufactured; it did not organically grow from material already in print. Like young adult literature, new adult is a publishing category. Unlike young adult literature, new adult does not have a set of rhetorical parameters it must adhere to other than that the characters be just that—newly adults. Many, though, believe that to demarcate this group of readers thus infantilizes their needs. McAlister's book is divided into the three distinct eras of new adult's life over the last decade: 2009, 2011-2013, and the present.

The first chapter, "2009—New Adult at St. Martin's Press," lists the eighteen (out of 382 submissions) contest winners and the titles of their pitches. Some of these manuscripts went on to be published by traditional publishers and some were self-published, but none

were actually published by St. Martin's. The first new adult books published by St. Martin's were in 2012 and 2013, four years after their contest. In announcing their contest, St. Martin's used the terms "twenty-somethings" and "emerging adults" in order to impress upon entrants the age of readers in this untapped market. McAlister argues that "essentially, what Weiss and St. Martin's were attempting to do was to name the market—the ideal reader and presumed addressee—and thus reverse engineer the literary category" (14), and their "hope was that the category would grow large enough that it would receive its own shelf space in bookstores," like that of children's, young adult, and cookbooks (17). While new adult did not receive much buy-in from booksellers, which McAlister contends contributed to its inability to catch on, it did garner popularity on shelves on Goodreads and other social media sites. Interested readers can easily find new adult titles on shelves created by Goodreads users; one cannot say as much about capitulation in libraries and bookstores. McAlister concludes that outside industrial and social factors play(ed) a huge role in the creation of the new adult category and genre.

The second chapter, "2011-2013—The New Adult Boom," positions the slow process of publishing as a reason why new adult did not catch on when St. Martin's presented their contest in 2009. As Goodreads users were making the term more and more popular, authors began to reclassify their own already published works, "suggesting that their books were not necessarily intentionally being written to satisfy the concept of new adult" (McAlister 38). Of the books written during this period that McAlister refers to as a boom for new adult, the majority were contemporary romance, and the two authors who were most influential during this period were Colleen Hoover and Jamie McGuire, both self-published authors. Hoover's books were the first to be considered new adult prior to publication. Primarily, new adult flourished in the ebook market. Through the boom, new adult books officially became a subsidiary of the romance genre in 2013 when the Book Industry Standards and Communications organization gave its formal designation under Fiction > Romance > New Adult. The publication of books categorized as new adult began to taper off after 2013.

Chapter three, "2020—New Adult, a Decade On," considers new adult's "ongoing identity crisis" (73). While many believe that the tapering off signifies the category's death, McAlister contends that its current iteration (as of this book's 2021 publication) which includes more genres than romance is more aligned with the original vision St. Martin's had in 2009. Still, genres are ever evolving parameters and are highly influenced by outside factors, like readers and shelvees. McAlister concludes by offering ideas about how to fully revive the new adult market should anyone wish to.

McAlister's 2021 *New Adult Fiction* is a case study of the new adult label. She provides numerous tables and data collected from Amazon, Goodreads, and the *New York Times* Bestseller lists, among other sites and sources, to bolster her points. Cambridge's mission with its Elements imprint is to provide readers and scholars with brief reference, which means that the format does not allow McAlister much space for cultivating her central arguments with much depth. Additionally, she does not provide close readings of any text mentioned to emphasize tenets of the new adult label. Maybe there would have been space for either more arguments or textual analysis by omitting some of the included tables and charts. I do believe, however, that this book is worthy of one's time and provides insight into how the literary marketplace works, as all too often scholars think about texts and authors without also contextualizing the publishing industry as a stakeholder and a vital role in choosing consumer options. Since *New Adult Fiction* was published in 2021, I wonder how,

and I think it is worth looking at how, Colleen Hoover's recent burst in popularity might be affecting and/ or helping other new adult authors (re)gain traction, with readalikes and reader's advisory from booksellers and librarians. Because new adult's life, at least its initial life, was so quick, not much scholarly reflection has been given to it, as if its short life meant that attention was not warranted. As a document that traces literary history, McAlister's *New Adult Fiction* has succinctly synthesized a decade's worth of turbulence in a market that still largely remains unexplored.