

TEEN LITERATURE FOR... ADULTS?

– Book Series Reviewed by Aleksandra IRIMIE-ANA –

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During my sessions with adolescents, I have a habit of asking those who are passionate about reading about their book reading preferences. Most of the times the titles are unfamiliar yet intriguing, so I go looking for them at the library – I like to think that I am taking the fast lane to creating a therapeutic relationship by connecting to the adolescent by having common subjects to talk about. There is a distinct department entitled “Young adult fiction” (YA) dedicated to readers from 12 to 18 years of age where a wide variety of topics is covered: love, friendship, gender identity, sexual orientation, conflict between generations, addiction, equality, mental health, and the list goes on. I am only a newbie to the field of YA so I can’t select the masterpieces, but I want to entice you to discover for yourselves, by writing three short reviews for “*They both die at the end*” by Adam Silvera, “*Go ask Alice*” by Anonymous writer and “*Să nu ne facem de râs în fața furnicilor*” by Iv cel Naiv.

The first book kept me alert from the title, hoping it is only a metaphor where death is the transformation occurring at the passage between adolescence and adult life, a transformation that happens at the end of a very confusing period of search of one’s identity and place among others. It is about an alternate world in which a company calls people to announce them they only have 24 h to live. In this world people seem to be very accustomed to this way of things, they have adapted and created mobile applications where the dying person can find a

“last friend”, also there are restaurants with discounts for “deckers” (the name for people going to die), there is even an allowance for them to spend. *Mateo* and *Rufus* are the protagonists of this book, two very different adolescents that get the call letting them know they are going to die in the following 24 hours and that get to know each other through the online application. They start spending the remaining time together and get to experience emotions they never knew they were capable of: anger, despair, deepest fear, trust, love, courage, generosity.

The second book, “*Go ask Alice*”, pretends to be the diary of an adolescent girl whose life changes when she moves along with her family to another city and she starts taking drugs as a way to fit in the group of teens. The struggle caused by the rapid alternations between commitments to never again take substances and the noisy relapses are very well captured in the diary, maybe to well for a person actually being involved in such a carousel of experiences. There is a discrepancy though between the insight the main character has on the situation, the perfect family support she receives, the improbable events of fleeing home at age 15 and starting a business in another state, of being drugged in an unlikely manner, the in-take in a psychiatric service, and the abrupt ending. In my opinion, by trying to raise awareness about the effect drugs can have in someone’s life, the author somehow manages to also transmit the idea that there is nothing we can do to help a teenager recover from addiction,

not even a very supportive and understanding family isn't enough. Nevertheless, there are valuable ideas one can take from the book and reflect upon: adolescents are willing to cross even the most dangerous lines in order to belong to a group of peers; most of the times adults are unaware of the problems their adolescents are facing; in the beginning, people that start taking drugs don't realize they have a problem and think they are in control; addiction is not seen by the society as a medical problem but rather as a personal choice while addicts are not perceived as vulnerable people but on the contrary, they are seen as dangerous (in the sense that they can corrupt others), weak, and lost for the society.

I found the third book by accident and the fact that its author is an engineer made me extremely curious about the content. I read it and after that, I bought it for other friends as well...it is that good! Amanda, the main character, is an adolescent girl who is puzzled by the differences between she and her parents and who starts to raise proofs of she being adopted. The book made me realize that it is precisely the combination between intelligence and naiveite, characteristic of

typical adolescence, that never seize to raise my enthusiasm whenever I recognize it in the person in front of me. I advise parents to read it, they will have a more precise overview of their adolescent.

In the end I have one more confession to make. I was worried that children and adolescents grow up with a sweetened version of reality due to a selection of happy ending stories and movies and that this turns them into vulnerable adults, adults that cannot accept loss, death, medical problems, abuse, abandonment as part of our lives and that we have resources to deal with them. Stories like "The Little Match Girl", "Bluebeard", "Sans Familie" and "Perrine" by Hector Malot, "The little mermaid" – the original version, "The happy prince", "The piper from Hamelin" – all these books and many other are opportunities for children to project their fears and to process them. I was afraid that the offer has excluded this type of books. I was wrong. YA literature is complex, profound, and doesn't strip adolescents of the occasion of discovering that they can handle difficult emotions! And, to answer the question in the title....definitely yes to teen literature for adults!