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Young adult fiction in Kenya: a genre struggling to be born

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Abstract

Young Adult Literature (YAL) is a relatively new development in Kenya, having been neglected both in research and production of books that promote the genre. The Young Adult Fiction (YAF) genre has been overshadowed by adult literature and, often submerged in and or mistaken for children literature, thus denying its existence. This thesis examines a selection of YAL produced over the last eleven years from 2005 to 2015 in Kenya. The selection is based on the prize-winners of two awards instituted to reward the genre. The first chapter features the background of the study thereby examining the concepts of YA, teenage, youth and age in the African setting. In this chapter I deconstruct the concept of YAL arguing it constitutes a separate and independent literature category from that of children and adult. Chapter two examines various institutions that are active in promoting the genre and hence giving it shape and substance. The third chapter interrogates the material aspects of book production. Using Genette's notion of paratexts, I explore the role of the paratexts as an important zone in the formation of the YA genre in Kenya. In chapter four I do a close reading of eleven award winning texts from JKPL and Burt Award. I examine the various genres displayed in this oeuvre. I also trace the YAF genre trends and establish how it is shaping up and likely to develop in future. The fifth and final chapter features the summary of the findings, recommendations and suggestions for future researches that could advance the YAF genre. I provide an appendix of a bibliographic list of the primary texts studied in this research for reference by those interested in understanding the YAF genre as currently being presented in Kenya.