

Reclaiming Weaponized Narratives:

The Power and Potential of Adolescent Monstrosity in Contemporary YA Genre Fiction

Narratively, a monster story is simple: a monster attacks a victim. The monster's assault poses both an existential and subjective threat, as the monster always has the power to either destroy or radically alter. The consumer of the tale is traditionally aligned with the victim, but the monster has the narrative agency. Outside of the narrative, however, these tales are often wielded to grant the victim-aligned consumers the ability to break the monster-aligned Other's power. The power dynamics of the narrative, therefore, are inverted in real life, but this inversion relies on the victim's ability to believe that the monster is still a threat.

Within YA genre fiction, the prevailing trend is to frame monster stories in such a way that the adolescent reader aligns not with the victim, but with the non- or post-human characters, as seen in texts such as Michael Buckley's *Undertow* (2015), Jon McGoran's *Spliced* (2017), and Eden Robinson's *Son of a Trickster* (2017). Building on the theories of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and W. Scott Poole, I explore emerging trends in YA genre literature against the backdrop of contemporary far-right populist rhetoric. I identify ways in which monstrous adolescents engage with political systems of oppression, both real and speculative, and I examine potentially problematic handlings of this juxtaposition. I also determine ways in which the monster's agency may or may not manifest within the traditional monster-versus-victim narrative framework. Finally, I analyze the ways YA authors position monstrosity as a site of empathy and adolescent resistance.