

Stock Stories and Professional Reviews: Reading Rita Williams-Garcia's *Fast Talk on a Slow Track* as Counter Narrative

Praised by reviewers as a novel with a “powerful message” (Garner 42) to deliver to “teens everywhere” (Royal 143) regarding the necessity of “humility” and “serious study” for success (“Fast Talk”), Rita Williams-Garcia’s second novel, *Fast Talk on a Slow Track* (1991), was critiqued in terms of what reviewers interpreted as its didactic purpose: “to foster in the child reader a positive apperception of some socio-cultural values” (Stephens 3)—here, the values of obedience and industry—identified and understood by its adult critics. As they advanced a singular, pedagogical interpretation of Williams-Garcia’s novel, the reviews reveal an institutional investment in a color-blind interpretation of the text that the novel, when read as a counter narrative, refutes and criticizes. The first person account of the effects of protagonist Dinizulu “Denzel” Watson’s experience in a remedial summer program for incoming Princeton students on his plans for future study, *Fast Talk* is an explicitly anti-racist counter story that confronts and questions the bootstrap “stock story” (Delgado) the reviewers have interpreted as the novel’s theme. Rereading Williams-Garcia’s novel as a counter narrative reveals the ways in which the text implicates adult critics, reviewers, and literary gatekeepers within the same system it criticizes, urging these readers to reassess their “adult investments in and mobilizations of children’s literature” (Kidd 431) and consider the ways in which these investments and mobilizations might reify the structural inequities—between adults and young people, between white people and people of color—the novel itself exposes.

Works Cited

- Delgado, Richard. "Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative." *Michigan Law Review*, vol. 87, no. 8, 1989, pp. 2411-2441.
- "*Fast Talk on a Slow Track*, by Rita Williams Garcia." *Kirkus Reviews*, March 1, 1999.
Retrieved from: <http://www.kirkusreviews.com>
- Garner, J. *Fast Talk on a Slow Track*, by Rita Williams Garcia. *Book Report*, vol. 10, no. 5, 1992, p. 42.
- Kidd, Kenneth. "On the Political Work of Children's Literature." *American Literary History*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2016, pp. 423-432.
- Royal, Pat. *Fast Talk on a Slow Track*, by Rita Williams Garcia. *School Library Journal*, vol. 37, no. 4, 1991, p. 143.
- Stephens, John. *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Longman, Ltd., 1992.
- Williams-Garcia, Rita. *Fast Talk on a Slow Track*. Lodestar Books, 1991.