

## **“You Saved My Sanity a Hundred, Thousand, Million Times”: Diary as Oasis and Mirage in *Go Ask Alice***

Few books have inspired as much controversy—for their content or for their origin story—as 1971’s *Go Ask Alice*. The young adult novel claims to be the “anonymous” diary of a teen girl and is narrated through entries chronicling the diarist’s drug use and ultimate death. In many ways, *Go Ask Alice*’s melodramatic depiction of addiction resembles a typical problem novel; however, while most problem novels quickly went out of print, *Go Ask Alice* has held the attention of teens across generations. This staying power is perhaps the result of the book’s elaborate façade of truth. In order to avoid being dismissed as sensationalized trash, the book is written, designed, and sold with a veneer of veracity, a construction built through the author’s attempts at writing in a “true” adolescent voice, the publisher’s efforts to censor the book’s paratexts of any information that suggests inauthenticity, and, most pertinent to my focus, the diary form itself. Within this paper, I explore the multiple, contradicting purposes of the diary form within *Go Ask Alice*.

In *Go Ask Alice*, the diary entries, which chronicle day-to-day moments in the writer’s life, are essential for creating a semblance of truth, a mirage intended to entice readers and evade critique. At the same time, the diary serves a different purpose for the protagonist. In the world of the story, the diarist’s writing is an oasis, a space for contemplation in the midst of drug-addled delusion and the way that she survives multiple brushes with death. Indeed, the book’s epilogue reveals the protagonist’s death within weeks of deciding she no longer needs to write in her diary. On a larger scale, Beatrice Sparks, the author who stepped forward as the so-called “editor” of this text, openly intended the book to be a navigational tool for teen readers, guiding them toward a safe haven of idealized adolescence, free of drug use. Ultimately, I argue that this examination of the seemingly conflicting purposes of the diary form helps to explicate the complicated relationship between author and reader and the potential appeal of the didactic narratives of problem novels.