



## BENDING AND BRIDGING BORDERS

Tatiana **Chiquito**  
Alejandro **Restrepo**  
with  
Raúl Alberto **Mora**



# Now, New, Next:

A Look at YAL from the South through the Eyes and Words of Our Younger Teachers

*This article is also available in an online format that allows direct access to all links included. We encourage you to access it on the ALAN website at <http://www.alan-ya.org/publications/the-alan-review/the-alan-review-columns/>.*

**W**e welcome once again our readers to this column, which highlights issues in young adult literature (YAL) from a global, international perspective. We intend to continue the trend we started in our previous column (Aziz, Wilder, & Mora, 2019) of refocusing our attention to the Global South and the insights on YAL that are coming from this region. As always, a great deal of gratitude to the Editors for believing in this proposal and to the two authors who lead this column. These two columns share the common thread of opening spaces for dialogue to voices we may not usually hear in order to bring light to the new directions that YAL needs to embark upon, especially as a new decade is just around the corner.

For this column, we took a different approach. Whereas the first column sought the voices of experienced teacher educators engaged in work in the Global South, this article features the voices of younger teachers. It is critical to listen to younger teachers and the pressing needs they see in the field of YAL relative to teaching and learning around the world. Their insights are incredibly valuable as we redesign how we think about YAL in the years to come.

Specifically, this column features the voices of two brilliant, young English teachers. One is already a familiar voice for some *TAR* readers, as Tatiana

has shared some of her ideas about YAL in a recent article on booktubing (Semingson, Mora, & Chiquito, 2017). After her initial inquiries, Tatiana has not stopped exploring issues of YAL in her own work as a teacher—issues she will soon continue to explore as a graduate student. The second author, Alejandro, is a new voice in our field. Tatiana and Alejandro work at the same school, and some of the ideas that they share in this article are the result of their collective teaching experiences.

## What's Now in YAL: What We Have Learned about the Colombian YAL Landscape

Following up on the first column, “YAL provides diverse opportunities for cross-cultural consciousness and encourages readers to learn to appreciate other English varieties and literary expressions as worthy” (Aziz et al., 2019, p. 74). In the case of our nation (Colombia), we need to look at the emergence of YAL as part of the massive cultural and educational shifts resulting from the multiple sociopolitical movements that have taken place, especially over this past decade. In this time, Colombia has experienced a broadening of its cultural interests. The effects of globalization, free-trade agreements, and rising interest in international entertainment options, such as TV shows, movies, gaming, and YAL itself, have created the conditions for readers and teachers to explore alternative genres. These changes have also appeared in a language shift through which our society, if not at a fully multilingual stage (Mora, Pulgarín, Ramírez, &

Mejía-Vélez, 2018), has opened itself to the presence of more languages in our cities, an increasing infusion of English instruction across the P-16 curriculum, and different language initiatives at the national and regional levels (Mora, Chiquito, & Zapata, 2019).

The influx of YAL in our country has become more evident as renowned YAL authors proliferate: Cassandra Clare with the *Shadowhunter Chronicles* (2012), Sarah J. Maas with the *Throne of Glass* series (2014), John Green with *The Fault in Our Stars* (2011), or Veronica Roth with the *Divergent* series (2011), among others. We have noticed that authors such as these tend to appear more often on the bookshelves of our local bookshops, both as Spanish versions and, more often lately, in their original English versions (Mora, Mejía-Vélez, Ramirez, & Pulgarín, 2016). This increasing interest in YAL has also emerged, as Tatiana previously shared (Semingson et al., 2017), in the growing cadres of local booktubers sharing their insights on social media, YouTube, and Instagram. Booktubers have assumed the mantle to promote local YAL and are becoming literacy advocates in their own right.

This YAL impetus has grown in our country, as Tatiana and Alejandro have experienced firsthand. In the context of second language teaching (where Tatiana and Alejandro operate) and teacher education (where Raúl operates), the influence of YAL has exploded in our classrooms. Through the aforementioned local markets, young teachers have been exposed to the myriad genres and narratives present in YA texts. As a result, the popularity of these texts is a significant phenomenon in Colombia (see Stallworth, 1998, for an illustration), as is, of course, their inclusion in lesson plans. Consequently, just like Tatiana and Alejandro, they wonder how to integrate these texts into their language classrooms in ways that will motivate their students to learn language, and they look to teacher education programs to provide an answer.

Over the last couple of years, Tatiana has become an active participant in local book fairs in Medellín. She and Alejandro have also kept track of what local booktubers are doing on YouTube and Instagram. Specifically, they have analyzed imagery and advertisements from YAL, reviews, and boxes with book collectable items. From this analysis, they have identified three specific forms that have become increas-

ingly popular: comics, graphic novels, and books for creative writing.

## What's New in YAL

### Graphic Novels as Innovative Approaches to Literature

Authors and graphic novel artists are transforming reading because, as Wolk (2009) argued, authors write so readers can enjoy

a good story, and the combination of illustrations and text add value to the work itself. In the case of second language learners, such pairings allow readers to engage in deeper connections with the stories and their own backgrounds (Chun, 2009), as well as find connections to different concepts and vocabulary. Two salient

examples of this are found in *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien, 1999) series and *Game of Thrones* (Martin, 2011) and their specific vocabulary about armors, kinds of horses, and medieval expressions.

More specifically, when we look at graphic artists and their work, we see that they create different narratives about myths, book characters, or legends. As we explored examples of graphic novels, we were struck by the emergence of books being transformed into graphic novels, as well as the presence of graphic artists (in countries such as Mexico, Spain, Argentina, and Israel) who have devoted their time to producing stories using comics on social media, especially Instagram. Some of those artists include Yehuda and Maya Devir (<https://www.yehudadevir.com/>), Raquel Riba (<https://lolavendetta.net/>), and Alejandra Gámez (<http://mountainwithteeth.com/>). Some books that have been transformed into graphic novels include *Frankenstein* (Cobley & Shelley, 2009; Reed & Shelley, 2005); *Dracula* (Cobley & Stoker, 2006; Reed & Cloonan, 2006); and *Gabo: Memorias de una vida mágica* [Gabo: Memoirs of a magical life], a text about Gabriel García Márquez's life (Pantoja, Bustos, Camargo, Córdoba, & Naranjo, 2014).

These artists materialized their alter egos, creat-

---

**When we look at graphic artists and their work, we see that they create different narratives about myths, book characters, or legends.**

---

---

**Graphic novels and comics have been used for decades to express disagreement and to raise people's consciousness about diverse societal matters.**

---

ing easy to understand narratives to which most YAL readers can relate. For example, Yehuda and Maya

Devir, a real-life couple from Israel, draw comics about common aspects of their life together. Some of these comics take what would seemingly look like an inside joke and create narratives that most couples anywhere in the world would find highly relatable. Raquel Riba's online stories introduce her alter ego, Lola Vendetta, a fictional character who enacts real-life situations that have happened to Riba or

to women she knows. Alejandra Gámez, a graphic novelist from Mexico, has taken a different approach. She has chosen to reinterpret some myths and legends (such as mermaids, Medusa, and ghosts, to name a few), adding her personal imprint to the already existing story.

Another rising phenomenon is that of graphic artists, comic writers, and game designers choosing to complete the narrative gaps that readers might find in other written narratives. An example of this phenomenon appears in Italian fantasy writer Licia Troisi's (<http://liciatroisi.it>) saga about elves and dragons, *Chronicles of the Emerged World* (Troisi, 2016). Troisi's novels have inspired different graphic artists and filmmakers to revise the source material and build from the gaps they have found to create their own fanfiction, both as graphic novels and short films.

### **Adapting Comics and YAL to the English Language Classroom**

The powerful interactions that people have with comics (Goldstein & Phelan, 2009) and graphic novels (Garcia, 2013; Sousanis, 2012, 2018; Yang, 2008) demonstrate the great potential that exists for YAL in the language classroom (Brozo, Moorman, & Meyer, 2013; Eckert, 2010). YAL, when introduced in these formats, may support critical literacy and reading comprehension. Students like to interact with forms that reflect their particular interests, such as gaming, television

and Internet shows, pop culture, and music. Teachers must be aware of the need to adapt such forms in their classrooms, and thus must remain current with the trends of entertainment among children and young people.

In the case of reading in a second language classroom, for example, we must always take into account the inherent difficulties that language learners encounter when facing literature, specifically long passages, and therefore we must consider alternative genres and texts for our classrooms. In this sense, we are advocating for the extended use of comics and visual novels to promote student reading (Bucher & Manning, 2004). The combination of text and images (Schwartz & Rubinstein-Ávila, 2006) that are present in comics and graphic novels and their interplay with the text help language learners develop wider and deeper interpretations of reading materials that are more appealing and contextualized within their realities.

Comics are often bound to pop culture (Bongco, 2015, and young learners are aware of this type of YAL from an early age. Since comics may often mix real-life issues with fictional elements, which makes them quite appealing for young readers, second language teachers can introduce them as resources for developing reading comprehension skills and critical thinking (Williams, 2008). Graphic novels and comics have been used for decades to express disagreement and to raise people's consciousness about diverse societal matters. Paré and Soto-Pallarés (2017) stated that comics are a good choice for young learners' education; they can improve reading comprehension and provide opportunities for creative expression while still promoting reading.

There are already plenty of websites from which teachers can choose appropriate texts for classroom use, such as *Comics English* (<https://www.comicsenglish.com/>), *Kids Comics* (<https://www.kidscomics.com/Home/1/1/60/1046>), and *Comixology* (<https://www.comixology.com/free-comics>). In addition, teachers can choose comics and graphic novels tailored to different audiences. Beginning-level students may benefit from stories such as *Sketch Monsters* (Williamson & Navarrete, 2011), which introduces them to vocabulary and expressions related to feelings, or *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (Kinney, 2008) and related discussions around school and growing

up. Another comic with plenty of potential for critical conversations in the language classroom is *Calvin and Hobbes* (Watterson, 1992). This classic comic, featuring the conversations between Calvin and his pet tiger Hobbes, provides plenty of social commentary about the world, growing up, childhood, and the meaning of life itself.

More advanced learners may gravitate toward graphic novels with deeper content, some referencing historical events. Two salient examples that teachers can use in their classrooms are the celebrated graphic novels *Maus* (Spiegelman, 1997) and *Watchmen* (Moore & Gibbons, 2013). These two novels provide advanced learners with a launchpad for in-depth critical discussions about history (in the case of *Watchmen*, an alternative version of history), society, and language use, thus expanding on Greene's (1995) idea of "social imagination" as "the capacity to invent visions of what should be and what might be in our deficient society, on the streets where we live, and in our schools" (p. 5).

### **Creative Writing as a Form of YAL**

Some recent texts related to creative writing have been aimed at bilingual writers. Books such as *Finish This Book* (Smith, 2011) or *Wreck This Journal* (Smith, 2012) (<http://www.kerismith.com/>), *Este Libro lo Escribe Tú* (*You Write This Book*; García Miranda, 2015), or *Cosas que Piensas Cuando te Muerdes las Uñas* (*Things You Think about When You Bite Your Nails*; Andrade, 2017) and *You Always Change the Love of Your Life (for Another Love or Another Life)* (Andrade, 2018) by bilingual/Spanglish writer Amalia Andrade (<https://amaliaandrade.com/>), are interactive and invite young writers to participate in different activities about life, character creation, landscapes, or stories. Second language teachers are using these kinds of creative writing exercises to help their language learners improve their own writing in English. Some examples of those exercises include writing about an imaginary class (What would it be about? What kind of school?), imagining who lives in mountains, writing about what they think life after death looks like, or drawing their own fears.

Comics, creative writing books, and graphic novels in the classroom provide alternatives to traditional writing lesson plans, whether as warm-up writing

exercises or as full-fledged activities where students may engage more actively with their own writing processes. This, in turn, enables teachers and students to explore multiple disciplines and important social issues because students can generate empathy with what they read and be intrigued enough to continue inquiring further about certain topics. For instance, the topic of war can be examined through three graphic novels: *Footnotes from Gaza* (Sacco, 2010), *Journalism* (Sacco, 2013), and *Palestine* (Sacco, 2014) (<http://www.fantagraphics.com/artists/joe-sacco>).

---

**As writers around the world continue to explore writing in both their native languages and English, this becomes an invitation to rethink how we even conceive of what we mean by "English" and what new texts will work best in our classrooms.**

---

### **What's Next in YAL: A Call for Action in and from the Global South**

As Tatiana and Alejandro shared, YAL is a global affair. Authors all over the world are exploring new frontiers in YAL, with comics and graphic novels as two salient examples. As writers around the world continue to explore writing in both their native languages and English, this becomes an invitation to rethink how we even conceive of what we mean by "English" and what new texts will work best in our classrooms. The YAL community is now at a crossroads, where those students we once taught using YAL are now growing up. Some of them are returning to our classrooms as teachers. They wish to explore further the same genres and forms they read themselves and want to bring them to their classrooms. Teachers like Tatiana and Alejandro have spent a good portion of their lives exposed to comics and graphic novels. As a result, they and other younger teachers today tend to be aware of these forms, so it makes sense that this is a focal point for their class designs.

In this article, we have considered English language learners in particular because that is our target audience. However, this is also a call for the YAL community at large to consider that we need



to expand our views of YAL as a multilingual issue where English may play the role of mediator. Second language YAL writers, such as the Devirs, Licia Troisi, and Angela Andrade, are already doing this by using English in YA texts to mediate issues of language and culture. Andrade goes even further, using Spanglish as a regular form to express her thoughts. How we conceive of YAL in the incoming decade will be less about traditional views of English texts and more about how English can really help break the traditional boundaries of what we validate as a readable text. Even in the case of English language arts, these boundaries continue to expand as more English language learners are included in those classes. As a result, teachers need to interrogate what forms of English beyond the traditional standard forms (see Aziz et al., 2019, for an illustration) need to appear in their curricula and their selection of YA texts.

Finally, this article (and the preceding column) are an invitation for readers to expand their inquiries in relation to what happens in the Global South. The traditional relationships usually operate from the perspective of the South as a consumer and recipient of second language texts stemming from the North. The examples we shared in this article, however, should provide a paradigm shift: The South is increasingly becoming a creator of its own texts in multiple languages, English being one of them. More narratives keep emerging, and teachers, scholars, and students in the South are appropriating English and YAL by extension as conduits. This is a good time to broaden our horizons and listen to alternative voices that are writing in English, with their own contributions to the genres, the forms, and the language itself. This is an invitation, through the emerging styles in YAL, to really embrace that global potential of the English language and learn from teachers all over the world. The South is speaking and writing; this is a good moment to listen and read those thoughts.

*Tatiana Chiquito is a language teacher at the Language Center at Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana in Medellín, Colombia. She is a teacher researcher in the Literacies in Second Languages Project (LSLP) research lab, has engaged in field work on English literacies in urban spaces in Medellín, and is a member of the Aquenarre literature study group at the same university. She has participated in several teacher training workshops by the British Coun-*

*cil and literature events in Medellín. Tatiana has coauthored several international conference presentations and book chapters and is interested in developing frameworks to implement culturally responsive pedagogy and critical literacy in the learning and teaching of second languages. You can follow Tatiana on Twitter (@tatianachiquito), Instagram (@taty\_smalls), and Facebook (Tatiana Chiquito Gomez).*

*Alejandro Restrepo is an English teacher at the Language Center, SILECS program at Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana in Medellín, Colombia. He is a researcher at the Reading-Writing Process in Foreign Language Research training group at Luis Amigó Catholic University in Medellín. As a teacher, he implements different literature styles into the EFL classroom, including pop culture such as comics, visual stories, and young adult literature, to foster the use of a second language through appealing activities in the classroom. You can follow Alejandro on Facebook (Alek Silvertongue) or contact him by email (alejandro.restrepo@funlam.co).*

*Raúl Alberto Mora is an associate professor at the School of Education and Pedagogy at Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana in Medellín, Colombia, where he teaches courses on language teaching methods, qualitative research, literacy, and critical theory. He currently chairs the Literacies in Second Languages Project (LSLP) research lab. Raúl has been a visiting and guest lecturer at several universities in Colombia and abroad, as well as an education consultant for the Colombian Ministry of Education and the Colombian Fulbright Commission. His research interests include the study of second language literacy practices in urban spaces and gaming communities in Medellín, the translation of alternative literacies to second language instruction and teacher education (all with LSLP researchers), the use of critical theory in education, and transmedial discourse in sociocultural studies. You can follow Raúl online through his personal website (<http://elpatronhimself.net>), the LSLP website (<http://literaciesinl2project.org>), and on Twitter (@elpatronhimself and @lslp\_colombia).*

#### **Fiction Cited**

- Andrade, A. (2017). *Cosas que piensas cuando te muerdes las uñas* [Things you think about when you bite your nails]. Bogotá, Colombia: Planeta.
- Andrade, A. (2018). *You always change the love of your life (for another love or another life)*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.
- Clare, C. (2012). *Shadowhunters chronicles*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Cobley, J., & Shelley, M. (2009). *Frankenstein the graphic novel*. Towcester, UK: Classical Comics.

- Cobley, J., & Stoker, B. (2006). *Dracula the graphic novel*. Towcester, UK: Classical Comics.
- García Miranda, C. (2015). *Este libro lo escribes tú: 78 retos de escritura creativa [You write this book: 78 creative writing challenges]*. Madrid, Spain: Espasa Libros.
- Green, J. (2012). *The fault in our stars*. New York, NY: Penguin.
- Kinney, J. (2008). *Diary of a wimpy kid*. New York, NY: Amulet.
- Maas, S. J. (2014). *The throne of glass novellas*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury.
- Martin, G. R. R. (2011). *A game of thrones*. New York, NY: Bantam.
- Moore, A., & Gibbons, D. (2013). *Watchmen*. Burbank, CA: DC Comics.
- Pantoja, O., Bustos, M., Camargo, F., Córdoba, T., & Naranjo, J. (2014). *Gabo: Memorias de una vida mágica [Gabo: Memoirs of a magical life]*. Bogotá, Colombia: Rey+Naranjo Editores.
- Reed, G., & Cloonan, B. (2006). *Bram Stoker's Dracula: A graphic novel*. London, UK: Puffin.
- Reed, G., & Shelley, M. W. (2005). *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein: The graphic novel*. London, UK: Puffin.
- Roth, V. (2011–2013). *Divergent series*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Sacco, J. (2010). *Footnotes in Gaza*. New York, NY: Metropolitan.
- Sacco, J. (2013). *Journalism*. New York, NY: Metropolitan.
- Sacco, J. (2014). *Palestine*. Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics.
- Smith, K. (2011). *Finish this book*. New York, NY: Penguin.
- Smith, K. (2012). *Wreck this journal*. New York, NY: Penguin.
- Spiegelman, A. (1997). *The complete Maus*. New York, NY: Pantheon.
- Tolkien, J. R. R. (1999). *The lord of the rings*. London, UK: HarperCollins.
- Troisi, L. (2016). *Le cronache del mondo emerso—La saga completa [The chronicles of the emerged world—The complete saga]*. Milan, Italy: Mondadori.
- Watterson, B. (1992). *The indispensable Calvin and Hobbes* (Vol. 4). Kansas City, MO: Andrews McMeel Publishing.
- Williamson, J., & Navarete, V. (2011). *Sketch monsters vol. 1: Escape of the scribbles*. Portland, OR: Oni Press.
- Eckert, L. S. (2010). Beyond the comics page: Pedagogical opportunities and challenges in teaching graphic novels. In J. Alsop (Ed.), *Young adult literature and adolescent identity across cultures and classrooms: Contexts for the literary lives of teens* (pp. 133–148). New York, NY: Routledge.
- García, A. (2013). *Critical foundations in young adult literature: Challenging genres* (Vol. 4). Boston, MA: Sense Publishers.
- Goldstein, L., & Phelan, M. (2009). Are you there God? It's me, manga: Manga as an extension of young adult literature. *Young Adult Library Services*, 7(4), 32–38.
- Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the imagination: Essays on education, the arts, and social change*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mora, R. A., Chiquito, T., & Zapata, J. D. (2019). Bilingual education policies in Colombia: Seeking relevant and sustainable frameworks for meaningful minority inclusion. In B. G. G. Johannessen (Ed.), *Bilingual education: Politics, policies, and practices in a globalized society* (pp. 55–77). Basel, Switzerland: Springer.
- Mora, R. A., Mejía-Vélez, M. C., Ramírez, N., & Pulgarín, C. (2016). Reflecting on second language literacies in Medellín: An exploration of English in physical spaces. In L. Gómez Chova, A. López Martínez, & I. Candel Torres (Eds.), *INTED2016 Proceedings* (pp. 2791–2799). Valencia, Spain: IATED Academy.
- Mora, R. A., Pulgarín, C., Ramírez, N., & Mejía-Vélez, M. C. (2018). English literacies in Medellín: The city as literacy. In S. Nichols and S. Dobson (Eds.), *Learning cities: Multimodal explorations and placed pedagogies* (pp. 37–60). Singapore: Springer.
- Paré, C., & Soto-Pallarés, C. (2017). El fomento de la lectura de cómics en la enseñanza de las lenguas en Educación Primaria. *OCNOS: Revista de Estudios Sobre Lectura*, 16(1), 134–143.
- Schwartz, A., & Rubinstein-Ávila, E. (2006). Understanding the manga hype: Uncovering the multimodality of comic-book literacies. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 50, 40–49.
- Semingson, P., Mora, R. A., & Chiquito, T. (2017). Booktubing, or when reader response meets 21st century literacies. *ALAN Review*, 44(3), 61–66.
- Sousanis, N. (2012). The shape of our thoughts: A meditation on & in comics. *Visual Arts Research*, 38(1), 1–10.
- Sousanis, N. (2018). Frames of thought. *PMLA*, 133, 154–159.
- Stallworth, B. J. (1998). The young adult literature course: Facilitating the integration of young adult literature into the high school English classroom. *The ALAN Review*, 26(1), 25–30. Retrieved from <https://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ALAN/fall98/stallworth.html>.
- Williams, R. M. C. (2008). Image, text, and story: Comics and graphic novels in the classroom. *Art Education*, 61(6), 13–19.
- Wolk, S. (2009). Reading for a better world: Teaching for social responsibility with young adult literature. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 52, 664–673.
- Yang, G. (2008). Graphic novels in the classroom. *Language Arts*, 85, 185–192.

## References