



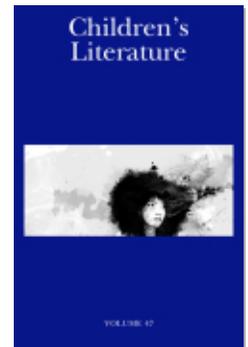
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Ethics, and Queer Latinx Futurity in *Aristotle and Dante*
Discover the Secrets of the Universe

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A Narrative of a Future Past: Historical Authenticity, Ethics, and Queer Latinx Futurity in Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe

Angel Daniel Matos

Set in El Paso, Texas, during the late 1980s, Benjamin Alire Sáenz's *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* represents the romantic developments between its queer Latinx titular characters.¹ *Aristotle and Dante* might be described as a Bildungsroman set in the not-so-distant past, yet the narrative seems curiously familiar and contemporary, making it relatively easy to overlook the fact that it is set in 1987. *Aristotle and Dante* is not only vague in terms of its spatial and temporal logics, but it also conflates a historical narrative with contemporary affective and ideological frameworks. Is the merger between ideologies of the past and present-day sensibilities necessarily a problem? To what extent does a Young Adult (YA) novel situated in the past have an ethical responsibility to prioritize frameworks that incorporate current sociopolitical and affective perspectives when representing minority thought and experience?

In this article, I highlight the challenges and contradictions present in YA narratives situated in the past, focusing on the uneasy conflation of historical narrative with contemporary ideologies of queerness and current sociopolitical sensibilities. I then examine *Aristotle and Dante*'s temporal and reparative frameworks to demonstrate how it artfully negotiates the tensions between historical authenticity and ethical contemporary engagement through the use of queer affective and temporal frameworks. I explain how *Aristotle and Dante* deliberately exploits the seams between the historical realities of a 1980s US context and the potentialities of queer fiction to imbue a past-oriented narrative with optimistic discourse and positive affect, thus offering readers a story that challenges our expectations of historical and queer Latinx representation in YA novels. More specifically, my discussion examines how *Aristotle and Dante* toys with temporality in order to provide emotional sustenance to minority people and communities—readers who often have difficulties obtaining this sustenance from YA literature in the first place, given that narratives set in the present often implement tropes such as parental authority and machismo to foreclose the overlap between Latinx and queer identity.²

This discussion makes a case for how *Aristotle and Dante* challenges the expectations of queer Latinx narrative through its approach to time, in that it uses the past as a temporal mode that activates new and unprecedented avenues for kinship. Furthermore, I show how this novel subverts YA expectations for historical precision to challenge our understanding of Latinx representation in queer YA literature. Sáenz's novel creates a recuperative temporal framework through its narrative conventions, providing readers an opportunity to contemplate how historical narratives can offer a reparative representation of the past in which queer Latinx characters can thrive in ways that they do not in other genres and narrativizations centered on adolescent experience. By exploiting the ontological seams between reality and fiction, *Aristotle and Dante* not only repairs problematic tropes commonly found in queer Latinx stories, but it also aspires toward contemporary ideological frameworks while being mindful of the ways in which certain people and communities are still haunted by historical and cultural damage.³

Several scholars have pointed out the temporal and narrative inconsistencies that emerge in YA historical narratives, particularly since authors must deliberate the tensions between offering an "accurate" representation of historical facts and channeling present-day ideologies and attitudes. Joanne Brown and Nancy St. Clair suggest that a quintessential feature of YA historical fiction is its tendency to offer "a revised perspective of the past" in which authors imbue a past-oriented narrative with current developments and outlooks on society, culture, and identity (13).⁴ YA historical novels are Janus-like in their temporal scope in that they focus on the "before" in order to make claims about the "after." In addition to offering a take on historical representation, the genre also informs readers "about the period in which the fiction was written, revealing writers' concerns about and attitudes towards the cultural tensions of their own times" (14). Brown and St. Clair consider this aspect to be a valuable strength of YA historical fiction, not only because it invites readers to develop a sense of historical awareness, but also because it assists them in acquiring a more nuanced "understanding of the present" (15). This tendency of YA historical literature overlaps effectively with how Latinx historical literature envisions and reimagines the past. As pointed out by Theresa Delgadillo, recent Latinx historical literature creates "multilayered histories of the Americas" (602). These novels commonly criticize "exclusionary paradigms of race and ethnicity as well as normative gender and sexuality," and often include queer characters as a way of challenging anti-queer ideologies and "the

erasure of non-normative sexuality from history's actors and events" (601–02). Thus historical narrative commonly constitutes a reimagining of the past, one that either filters historical representation through contemporary ideologies and frameworks, or one that recuperates a history that has been omitted through patriarchal and normative pressures. Other critics such as Mike Cadden, however, suggest that adverse effects may arise through these temporal disjunctures, in that ethically minded authors have to sacrifice "the historical narrative in order to keep readers' empathy while still persuading readers to reject positions morally offensive to contemporary society." Cadden argues that YA historical narratives do not necessarily have to "condescend" to older worldviews "any more than we need to write contemporary consciousness into historical fiction." He further suggests that when books present balanced and competing perspectives on particular events, "the book will likely avoid being judged either quaint or historically suspect" (149).

An examination of Sáenz's motivations behind the creation of *Aristotle and Dante* further emphasizes the tensions one may encounter in reading a historical representation that overlaps with contemporary sensibilities. Sáenz came out as gay at the age of fifty-four. It took him decades to come to terms with his queerness, and he aspired to craft a novel for young readers that dealt with the complexities of the queer life in a 1980s Southern United States context—an act that in many ways constituted a coming out process for the author: "I was more than a little afraid of writing the novel because I didn't feel comfortable coming out in the literary world in such a public manner. I almost told myself to 'forget it'" (qtd. in R. J. Rodriguez 258). Despite these hesitations, Sáenz published *Aristotle and Dante* in 2012. The novel has been celebrated for its trailblazing representation of queer Latinx teens and has won several prestigious literary awards including the Pura Belpré Award for Latinx Fiction and a Michael L. Printz honor. Sáenz discloses that he wrote *Aristotle and Dante* to help him cope with the tensions and fears that were tied to his own belated sexual awakening: "I think I wrote this book as a gift to myself. To heal myself. The inspiration for Ari and Dante, in the end, was my own hurt" (qtd. in R. J. Rodriguez 259). In a sense, *Aristotle and Dante* is Sáenz's attempt to approach and conciliate the tensions that come along with his own "backward birth," a concept developed by Kathryn Bond Stockton to describe the queer child who is "born" through hindsight. An adult who comes out later in life commonly "makes the hunt for the roots of queerness a retrospective

search for amalgamated forms of feelings, desires, and physical needs that led to this death of one's straight life" (7). *Aristotle and Dante* can therefore be framed as a creative approach to this backward birth; it is a text that has helped Sáenz to sort through and negotiate the affective dimensions of his "belated" queer becoming. This YA novel was thus crafted with a recuperative mission in mind, which is why it is worth considering how this novel mobilizes a reparative process through its historical representation of queer Latinx adolescence.⁵

Sáenz envisioned *Aristotle and Dante* as a text that was designed to heal both himself and his readership. It is a fictional text written with the partial purpose of helping him to sort out years of self-negation, and even more so, helping him to imagine a queer adolescence that was in many ways inaccessible to him. This reparative agenda is crucial in understanding the novel's chronotope,⁶ its approach to historicization, its affective and political ambitions, and its attempts to subvert tropes found in Latinx YA literature. *Aristotle and Dante* is a product of merging a representation of the past with a contemporary understanding of sexual identity and politics. At what point does a text's emotional framework supersede matters of historical accuracy, and what does this tell us about historical narratives focused on representations of minority thought and experience? With this question in mind, I use *Aristotle and Dante* as a case study to assess the conceivable value of using fictional representations of the past to enable more egalitarian, open, and emotionally nourishing ways of thinking about the world we inhabit in the present, and the queer futures that have yet to arrive.

*"someday I want to marry a boy": Rethinking Historical Suspicion in
Aristotle and Dante*

Aristotle and Dante's introduction establishes a sense of historical grounding by alluding to past events and popular cultural artifacts. Ari wakes up to the sound of a radio DJ announcing the date after playing Heart's "Alone": "Wake up, El Paso! It's Monday, June fifteenth, 1987! 1987! Can you believe it?" (Sáenz 6). The repetition of the year in which the novel takes place heavy-handedly conveys a sense of historicity, which is augmented when the radio DJ plays the theme for *The Lone Ranger*, a tune that Ari himself describes as "retro" (5). The novel's historical framing increases in intensity as the radio DJ discusses events that occurred decades before the year in which the novel is set, such as the 1959 plane crash that led to the deaths of Buddy Holly and Richie

Valens. After mentioning these deaths, the radio DJ plays a remake of “La Bamba” performed by Los Lobos. These allusions and intertextual references emphasize the novel’s introductory focus on the past, in that the text attempts to foster a disjuncture between the temporality of the novel and the contemporary moment in which the reader is placed.

Notwithstanding the references to songs and events circulated during and before the 1980s—including Madonna and U2—Sáenz’s allusions to historical events, objects, and ideas dwindle as the novel develops. Occasionally, the protagonist deals with “relics” such as cassette players and corded telephones. The novel offers other subtle cues that situate the novel’s historical setting, such as the fact that the two main characters communicate with each other using postal mail rather than e-mail. The novel’s generic settings and lack of physical spatial descriptions in addition to its contemporary ideological frameworks further contribute to its historically vague chronotope. The narrative’s core developments, for instance, take place at locations such as a public swimming pool, kitchens, burger joints, deserts, and bedrooms. Most of these locations, with the exception of Ari’s and Dante’s bedrooms, are not described in much detail. This can be attributed partially to the fact that *Aristotle and Dante* concentrates more on its characters’ psychological and mental development rather than their physical and environmental surroundings. Furthermore, by writing a YA novel situated in the past, Sáenz must inevitably tackle the problem identified by Hayden White, in which writers of contemporary historical narratives have to sort through a surplus of informational sources made available in the digital age: “the problem is precisely what to exclude from consideration” (151). Sáenz either consciously or unconsciously channels the elusiveness of a vague chronotope to enable the implementation of contemporary frameworks into a representation of the past.

When writing a story situated in the past, authors must negotiate the boundaries that exist between the real world and the fictional world. Historical narrative, despite its fabricated elements, strives to convey a mimetic sense of “realism” that grounds readers, leading them to approach the events of the novel as ones that could have ostensibly occurred in the time-space that it represents. Authors must not only conduct rigorous research to grant the novel a sense of historical “authenticity,” but they must also be mindful of constructing a narrative framework that metaphorically transports the reader back in time. Even when authors acknowledge these problems, it is virtually impossible to write a historical narrative that does not in some way contravene realism

or historical authenticity—not to mention the fact that some authors use fiction as a way of challenging the notion of historical authenticity in the first place. Brian McHale argues that novels situated in the past “typically involve some violation of ontological boundaries” (16). He also points out that many traditional historical novels try to “hide the ontological ‘seams’ between fictional projections and real-world facts,” and they achieve this “by tactfully avoiding contradictions between their versions of historical figures and the familiar facts of these figures’ careers.” McHale discusses how some postmodern novels disregard this expectation because of their interest in becoming “a medium for raising ontological issues” (17). Sáenz’s novel fits within this tradition of novels because it breaches generic expectations by rendering visible the ontological seams between real-world facts and fictional projections. The novel is not necessarily designed to raise an ontological issue about the state of YA literature that takes place in a time before and different from the experiences of twenty-first-century teens (although it certainly does), but it indisputably disrupts the constructed boundaries between the world of the text and the contemporary world in order to accommodate positive affect in a space-time where destructive attitudes toward queerness were widespread. The novel’s historically suspect chronotope thus facilitates the infusion of contemporary ideologies that are in tension with the space-time of the novel to prioritize emotional dimensions over accurate historical representation.

The novel acutely ruptures these ontological seams when Dante, Ari’s counterpart, feels the burden of what Lee Edelman refers to as anxieties arising from “reproductive futurism.” This futurism refers to the ways in which acts such as reproduction and childrearing are linked not only to the continuation of humans as a species, but also to the preservation of conservative aspirations and ideals. Anything that contradicts these conservative aims are therefore cast as queer:

“If there is a baby, there is a future, there is redemption.” If, however, there is *no baby* and, in consequence, *no future*, then the blame must fall on the fatal lure of sterile, narcissistic enjoyments understood as inherently destructive of meaning and therefore as responsible for the undoing of social organization, collective reality, and, inevitably, life itself. (Edelman 12–13; emphasis in original).

Because of this blame placed on queer people and communities, the engagement in practices that pressure reproductive logics is framed

as non-normative because they refute ideals and practices that are valorized in heteronormative contexts.⁷ In one of the many letters that Dante sends to Ari, he discloses his attraction to other boys. While Dante effortlessly reveals his queerness to Ari, and while he openly admits his attraction and feelings toward his best friend, he has concerns about disclosing his sexual orientation to his parents because of his fear of infringing upon the heteronormative and reproductive logics of Latinx—and in this particular case, Mexican-American—cultures. As Dante discusses in one of his letters: “*The thing is I love my dad. My mom too. And I keep wondering what they’re going to say when I tell them that someday I want to marry a boy. I’m the only son. What’s going to happen with the grandchildren thing? I hate that I’m going to disappoint them, Ari*” (Sáenz 227; emphasis in original). Embodying a queer life in the 1980s would suggest a potential recognition of the “failures” that this embodiment often incites, particularly the inability of many queer people to comply with the normative demands of parenthood and the nuclear family. This failure is aggravated by the fact that full joint adoption by queer parents was impossible until it became legal in some states during the mid-1990s. Not to mention that the reproductive science scene and options such as surrogacy were comparatively limited and bleak during this time, further casting queer people as antithetical to the impulse of reproductive futurism in the 1980s.

Dante’s inability to disclose his queerness to his parents mirrors these expectations—demands particularly salient in the context of *la familia*—and thus the possibility of his parents’ acceptance becomes unthinkable to him at the time. This powerlessness echoes a history of violence and ridicule experienced by queer Chicano and Latinx men who have grown up in misogynist and homophobic contexts. As discussed by Richard T. Rodríguez, queer Chicano men have been historically “exiled,” silenced, and marginalized through attempts to uphold the supremacy of notions such as manhood, nation, and the family—they have traditionally and problematically been “seen as failed men, literally and figuratively converted into failed women, subjected to a nonreproductive, sexually submissive (that is, anally receptive) role, simultaneously branded as confused men who require a sex change to become women. In either case they thwart the generation of *la familia* and its heteronormative codification” (131). Given the history of homophobic, misogynist, and transphobic ideologies that have haunted how Chicano and Latinx men are approached and imagined by normative culture and its upholders, it is unsurprising that the effects of reproduc-

tive futurism possess such a hold on Dante's feelings toward his parents and his queerness. The effects of this reproductive impulse on Dante's sexuality become even more substantial when, as the novel progresses, he discovers that his parents are expecting another child. Dante not only hopes that his mother will have a boy, but he goes as far as to assert that his yet-to-be-born brother "better like girls. Because if he doesn't, [he'll] kill him" (Sáenz 252). This salient moment in the story exudes severity, especially since the novel depicts Dante as a pacifist who has adverse reactions to Ari's occasional use of violence to assert power, control, and domination (53). The pressures of reproductive futurism compel Dante to envision vicious and counterintuitive possibilities to alleviate the dyadic tension between his queer identity and the heteronormative, patriarchal, machista pressures of his specific space-time.

Dante's quandary with reproductive logics and demands is a moment where a seam between real-world historical facts and fictional projections becomes tangible. When Dante shares the difficulties of trying to come out to his parents, he explicitly wonders how they will react when he reveals that he wants to "marry a boy." The notion of marriage between two boys is particularly jarring given the novel's historical context. First, same-sex marriage was not lawful in any jurisdiction in the United States until it became legalized in Massachusetts in 2004, nearly sixteen years after the novel's events take place. Second, coming out prior to the legalization of same-sex marriage in the United States commonly involved a realization of the possibility that one would not be able to marry a person of the same gender. Studies on the coming out process among adolescents that were published during the late 1980s and early 1990s—such as those developed by Bernie Sue Newman and Peter Gerard Muzzonigro in 1993—point out the difficulty for adolescents to "integrate a [queer] identity into preexisting cultural beliefs," including the expectation for them to marry and have children. Those who attempted to achieve this integration "experienced conflicts within themselves, their family, and their community" (216). Remarkably, Dante experiences no tension or apprehension when disclosing his desire to *marry* a boy, which becomes significant since marriage was neither a legal nor a cultural possibility for many queer people at the time.

Queer YA novels that were published during the 1980s, such as Nancy Garden's *Annie on My Mind*, have emphasized the disjuncture that exists between queerness and the ideals of marriage and the nuclear family. This tension becomes palpable in a conversation that its protagonist,

Liza, has with her father after coming out, in which he describes queerness as hostile to heteronormative hallmarks and aspirations:

I know it's not fashionable to say this, but—well, maybe it's just that I love your mother so much and you and [your brother] so much that I have to say to you I've never thought gay people can be very happy—no children, for one thing, no real family life. . . . I want you to be happy in other ways, too, as your mother is—to have a husband and children. (Garden 191)

As Liza processes the information discussed by her father, she claims that her love interest, Annie, “*and [her] work are all that [she'll] ever need*” (191; emphasis in original). Liza asserts that she has found happiness, but by claiming that Annie and work are the only things necessary in her life, she ends up affirming her father's suspicions regarding the incompatibility between queerness, marriage, and children. In *The Promise of Happiness*, Sara Ahmed points out that this scene in *Annie on My Mind* highlights not only how queerness is constructed as an “unhappy” mode of existence, but also how people often assert that happiness can only be achieved through a mimetic, normative yearning for a spouse and children (93). When one examines the apprehensions that come up as Dante confronts the demands of reproductive futurism, a noticeable anxiety surfaces: while he fully acknowledges his powerlessness regarding children, a marker of normative happiness, he disregards the fact that marriage is a marker of normative happiness that is also inaccessible to him in a late 1980s United States historical context.

Given the uneasy relationship between marriage, queerness, and the image of the nuclear family, particularly during the 1980s, Sáenz's historical discrepancy can initially be read as Dante's inability to imagine life fully outside of heteronormative structures and constructions of happiness. Given Sáenz's reparative agenda and the YA historical novel's penchant for conflating contemporary attitudes with past settings, however, it can also be read as an attempt to exploit the ontological seams between historical facts and fictional projections; it is the text's attempt to retroactively insert a contemporary, utopic voice into the novel's discourse. Although aware of his inability to fully comply with the cultural demand to have children, Dante still expresses a yearning to engage in a relationship that is institutionally and legally recognized. This yearning can partially be attributed to the fact that his parents' marriage is often framed as an idyllic union—a mutually supportive relationship in which two different people complement and support

each other. For instance, as Ari and Dante watch Dante's parents gleefully going on a joy ride in Ari's red pickup truck, the two boys cannot help but note how "happy" and childlike these parents are. Dante then discloses that his reserved mother married his playful and extroverted father because he "drags it out of her, all those feelings she has" (247). The resonances between the parents' relationship and Ari and Dante's relationship are uncanny, in that Dante is often framed as the more extroverted character who drags out many of the feelings that Ari suppresses. While Dante uses his parents' marriage as a model for gauging his own relationship with Aristotle, his yearning for an institutionalized union between two men remains incongruous given the novel's space-time. Since marriage among many queer people was still illegal in most states in 2012 (the year in which this novel was published), this instance, although historically suspect, ruptures the boundaries that exist between historical representation and fictional projections.

Aristotle and Dante does not entirely reject the common historical ideologies and frameworks present in the late 1980s, as seen through its reinforcement of the normative demands of reproductive futurity, and the fact that both the progressive and conservative queer characters struggle with their sexual identities. Through the partial sacrifice of its historical precision, however, *Aristotle and Dante* enables a future-oriented queer purview imbued with positive affect. Although Dante's desire to marry can be approached as a sloppy, incongruous, or historically suspect statement, it is more constructive to approach it as a queer, affect-driven prognostication of the potentialities held by the future. In *Cruising Utopia*, José Esteban Muñoz approaches queerness as future-oriented in its temporal scope. In his view, queerness is an "educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present. . . . it is not simply a being but a doing for and toward the future" (1). According to this approach, queerness is thus a rejection of presentist modes of thinking, a striving for a future with different possibilities and outcomes—even though one recognizes that this future may always be out of reach. Through this lens, queerness is "a temporal arrangement in which *the past* is a field of possibility in which subjects can act in the present in the service of a new futurity" (Muñoz 16; emphasis mine). Muñoz's view of queerness as a future-oriented temporal mode grounded in the past pushes one to assess the value of YA historical narratives, even when it possesses anachronistic or historically suspect moments. YA historical narrative can potentially function as a glimpse into a fictionalized past that allows

one to envision a more open and democratic future, and this notion is key in understanding Dante's future-oriented aspiration to "marry a boy." Furthermore, it is important to note that Dante's status as a child-becoming-adult implies that he possesses a temporally influenced power (or in the words of Muñoz, potentiality) that contrasts significantly with the temporal frameworks of adulthood, further allowing this utopian, future-oriented purview to manifest. Clémentine Beauvais, for instance, argues for the potentiality and power of "unrealized time" inherent in the symbolic construction of children, in that they are owners "of a longer future in which to act" whereas adults possess "a longer time past with its accumulated baggage of experience, knowledge, and therefore didactic legitimacy." This power, which Beauvais calls *might*, is one that contrasts with and challenges the authority embedded in adult power—children's might can be traced in their "potent, latent future to be filled with yet-unknown action" (19). It is precisely Dante's liminal status between childhood and adulthood that bestows upon him the might to envision a future that cannot be foreseen by those who possess the knowledge and didactic "legitimacy" of adulthood.

Dante may be seen as delusional, anachronistic, or contradictory in his longing for a husband. However, his rejection of his current conditions and his future-oriented longings illustrate the emancipatory potential and the might that can be fostered through YA historical narratives. The beauty and significance of Dante's aspiration rests not on its realism or its historical exactness, but rather on his attempt to reach out to potentialities that were not available to him at the time—his insistence on envisioning a future that is unknown but full of possibility. Although haunted by the demands of reproductive futurism, Dante looks beyond the predicaments of his present, and instead foresees promises and outcomes not readily available in his cultural milieu. On one hand, the desire for marriage can be seen as an assimilative aspiration, for Dante wants his future relationships to comply with the relational models that he admires and is familiar with in his current time and place. On the other hand, the very fact that Dante desires a life that is *unavailable* to him makes this aspiration particularly queer, especially when we apply Muñoz's and Beauvais's future-oriented frameworks to this reading. From an affective viewpoint, Dante's hope for possibilities unavailable to him at the time is aspirational, optimistic, and emotionally sustaining—it is a moment in which a queer character is able to see, and more important, *feel* beyond the constraints of normative culture and temporality.

“you’re in love with him”: Parental Power and a Return to La Familia

Aristotle and Dante’s chronotope provides the novel with the means to disrupt many of the expectations that readers have of queer YA literature, especially in terms of the genre of the coming out novel, or more precisely, the queer Bildungsroman. Besides Dante’s desire to marry another boy, one of the most notable reconfigurations implemented by Sáenz is the restructuring of the role of the family in the coming out narrative. In his account of the historical development of gay literature, Gregory Woods approaches coming out novels as the “gay equivalent of the *Bildungsroman*,” a genre of literature that focuses on a protagonist’s literal and psychological “move away from the family.” Woods asserts that coming out stories often focus on queer protagonists’ attempts to negotiate their developmental process in spite of “parental power and its related instruments of discipline” (346). In other words, queer characters commonly develop a sense of self, and a sense of their queerness, only when departing from the confines of the home.⁸

Woods’s views on the gay Bildungsroman highlight two central notions. First, these narratives are in some way connected to or dependent on familial structures: even when they are focused on a protagonist’s abandonment of their families in their search for alternative models of kinship and belonging, the family nonetheless serves as the element by or against which queer protagonists define their subjectivities. Christine Jenkins attributes this tension to the complex relationship between queer people and their families, which exemplifies a paradoxical case of simultaneously belonging and not belonging. Queer teens and their families “share the same gene pool and perhaps the same last name, but many [queer teens] feel that their sexual orientation places them outside even their own families of origin” (“From Queer to Gay” 320). Secondly, Woods discloses how secrecy fuels the negotiation between queer protagonists and their families—a secrecy that is epitomized through the trope of the closet.

Many YA novels can be approached as a genealogical extension of the Bildungsroman, in that they center on “the developmental and life phase issues associated with adolescence” (Jenkins, “From Queer to Gay” 298), and they discuss the processes of self-cultivation and the negotiation between personal and social demand. Jenkins has argued that earlier YA novels with queer content narratively place “the gay community and nuclear families at opposing—and seemingly irreconcilable—sides of a conflict” (321). However, *Aristotle and Dante*, through

its infusion of contemporary ideology into a historical representation, mends the fractures created through the clash between queer Latinx teens and their families, and illustrates the centrality of the protagonist's family and home-space in queer development. In this novel, the family enables "the shaping of the individual self from its innate potentialities through acculturation and social experience to the threshold of maturity" (Sammons 41). It presents readers with a case in which family, and, more specifically, *la familia*, serves as a conduit for, rather than an obstruction to, a child's emerging queerness.

In spite of the looming pressures of reproductive futurism, the novel represents Dante as a character who embraces uncompromising queerness. The ease of this embrace potentially stems from many factors, including the color of Dante's skin, his class, and even the locations in which he lives and dwells. First, it is important to note that Dante reads as white to other people, which invokes notions of privilege prevalent in many Latinx communities. In their study on within-group racial discrimination, Nayeli Y. Chavez-Dueñas, Hector Y. Adames, and Kurt C. Organista point out how colorism is a deep-seated issue present in Latinx cultures, and how lighter skinned Latinx people often experience a greater degree of privilege than their darker counterparts: lighter skin Latinx folk often experience higher educational attainment, higher incomes, and less racial- and sexual-based discrimination (4). In addition to the color of his skin, it is crucial to note that Dante is raised in a middle-to-upper-class household, and he even lives in Chicago for a year when his father accepts a visiting professorship in that city. As Scott Herring has suggested, major cities and urban spaces often serve as loci of queer identity, even though this categorization often comes at the cost of a hierarchical line of thought that inevitably casts the rural as anti-queer. Such cities are thus "framed—naturalized—as the epicenter of contemporary queer life," thus leading to "the implicit assumption that the metropolis is the final destination point for queer kids of any gender, class, race, or region" (4). This especially holds true in the novel, since Dante first explores his queer sexuality while living in Chicago, a highly populated city known for its large queer communities and for the presence of spaces that embrace and nourish queer life. Dante's upbringing and social circumstances facilitate an embodiment of queer identity in ways that are not exactly possible for Ari. Ari not only reads as brown due to his darker skin, but he is also raised in a lower-middle-class household with parents who are not exactly open to having personal conversations, much less about sexuality and identity. When

Dante discloses his sexuality, Ari finds it quite difficult to comprehend why Dante would “choose” queerness over heterosexuality, as he makes clear when he questions Dante’s sexual orientation: “Well, maybe you don’t really like kissing guys. Maybe you just think you do.” Here, Ari fails to realize the extent to which heteronormative thinking prevents him from coming to terms with his own latent queer desires—to the extent that he denies feeling any attraction or pleasure after kissing Dante in a moment of questioning: “Didn’t work for me” (Sáenz 255).

Ari is forced to grapple with his feelings for Dante after the latter is brutally assaulted when caught kissing another boy. Jenkins has discussed the problematic trope of gay male endangerment in queer YA literature, and how many queer YA novels represent the personal, mental, emotional, and physical costs of being openly queer, while giving little attention “to the strategies and skills minority group members develop in order to survive” (Jenkins, “Young Adult Novels” 155). *Aristotle and Dante* problematically falls into this trap, in that the realities of anti-queer violence are made concrete in the novel, but little attention is given to the aftermath of this violence, and to the strategies for livability, healing, and survival that said representations of violence necessitate. Ari points out that Dante did not disclose his sexuality to his parents because he was afraid of disrupting the expectations for a normative nuclear family, to which Dante’s father responds: “I don’t care about grandchildren. I care about Dante” (303). Here, Dante’s father sidelines heteronormative expectations in favor of notions of livability, thus indicating that Dante’s fears regarding his inability to comply with the demands of reproductive futurism were unfounded in terms of his familial context. Nonetheless, one must be wary about approaching the father’s acceptance as purely positive. Ahmed suggests that “[i]t is always paradoxical to say something does not matter . . . it usually implies that it does” (*Promise of Happiness* 94). The fact that Dante might not have grandchildren perhaps *does* matter to the father, but he nonetheless prioritizes Dante’s happiness and well-being over his ideals of what a family should be or look like.

Even though Ari encounters an instance in which a Latinx father accepts his son’s queerness, he is unable to come out and admit his feelings for Dante. Even when authority figures explicitly question whether Ari has feelings for Dante, he is unable to articulate his feelings through language, as made apparent in the following excerpt of the novel:

I wanted to tell them that I'd never had a friend, not ever, not a real one. Until Dante. I wanted to tell them that I never knew that people like Dante existed in the world, people who looked at the stars, and knew the mysteries of water, and knew enough to know that birds belonged to the heavens and weren't meant to be shot down from their graceful flights by mean and stupid boys. . . . I wanted to tell them that he was the first human being aside from my mother who had ever made me want to talk about the things that scared me. I wanted to tell them so many things and yet I didn't have the words. (Sáenz 308–09)

This moment of inarticulateness illustrates a disconnect between action and desire, and it highlights the emotional weight that anchors Ari to the inside of the closet. This emotional weight can be attributed to an affective barrier induced by the intersection of racial, ethnic, and queer identities that block potential connectivity between Ari and other people. In his article “Feeling Brown, Feeling Down,” Muñoz suggests that affect “is not meant to be a simple placeholder for identity . . . it is, instead, supposed to be descriptive of the receptors we use to hear each other and the frequencies on which certain subalterns speak and are heard or, more importantly, felt” (677). Ari, in addition to being unable to channel his emotions into language, is also unable to use his emotions to achieve a sense of (queer) relationality with other people. Ari feels, *craves* to express how much Dante means to him, but he is unable to convey this affective frequency through spoken words or actions. These interior frequencies are muddled by historical, cultural, and family-oriented pressures, mostly because Ari is unable to envision his own family accepting his queerness in the same way that Dante's family has accepted Dante's queerness.

Ari eventually channels this frequency through connectivity with other people and, more specifically, through his family. In a move that is unusual in representations of Latinx parental figures (especially fathers) in queer YA literature, it is Ari's father who pushes him to come to terms with his latent queerness. Ari demonstrates awareness of Dante's romantic feelings toward him, but he claims that he has little control over what Dante feels. Ari's father responds by saying: “the problem isn't just that Dante's in love with you. The real problem—for you, anyway—is that you're in love with him” (Sáenz 348). Ari's father does not want to see his son consumed by loneliness and self-loathing, so rather than letting Ari go through the difficulty of

identifying ways to come out—not only to others, but to himself—his father urges Ari to embrace and express his love for Dante. Here, Ari *finally* articulates the shame that has haunted him throughout most of the novel: “I’m a guy. He’s a guy. It’s not the way things are supposed to be” (349). Ari’s parents respond to his shame by urging him to stop running from Dante.

This instance is revolutionary. It is particularly groundbreaking in the context of Latinx YA literature not only because of its departure from historical patriarchal pressures, but also because of its subversion of tropes often found in queer Latinx YA literature. Here, the Latinx father figure disrupts patriarchal stereotypes by catalyzing and nurturing, rather than suppressing, his son’s queerness. Amanda Haertling Thein and Kate E. Kedley have pointed out the complicated layers found in this moment, claiming that this interaction between Ari and his father not only pathologizes Ari’s sexual uncertainty, but it also thwarts Ari’s agency to come out on his own terms: “rather than being allowed to make his own choices and come to his own realizations (or lack thereof), Ari is literally *told* how he feels and provided with evidence meant to convince him of his feelings” (17; emphasis in original). While these claims regarding the relegation of sexual ambiguity and Ari’s agency as a character are absolutely valid, it is also worth thinking through the ways in which this scene challenges the tired tropes of queer Latinx YA literature, in that it attempts to imagine a historical moment in which Latinx parents cultivate, rather than encumber, their child’s queerness.

In the few YA narratives focused on queer Latinx teenagers struggling to come out in contemporary settings and contexts,⁹ parents are too frequently represented as figures that react violently and harshly to their child’s attempts to come out, as seen in novels such as Gloria Velásquez’s *Tommy Stands Alone* (1995), Alex Sanchez’s *Rainbow Boys* (2001), Mayra Lazara Dole’s *Down to the Bone* (2008), and more recently, in Adam Silvera’s *More Happy Than Not* (2015). In *Tommy Stands Alone*, for instance, Tommy’s father is represented in a stereotypical and melodramatic fashion: a womanizer, an alcoholic, and a homophobic patriarch. Both of Tommy’s parents reject him, mostly because they believe that queer life clashes with church teachings. While Tommy is able to mend his relationship with his mother, the novel is unclear in terms of whether his father will ever accept his queerness. *Rainbow Boys* offers a similar version of the alcoholic, machista father who responds violently when his son, Jason Carrillo, comes out to him. Jason’s father not only attempts to punch his son after he comes out, but he ultimately

abandons their home, claiming that he is “not staying [t]here with no faggot” (Sanchez 199). Jason’s father views his son’s queerness as antithetical to notions of the home and *la familia*, to the point where he is unwilling to even dwell in a space that houses queer adolescent life.

Representations of Latinx mother figures can also perpetuate this narrative of violence and prejudice. For instance, when Laura, the protagonist of *Down to the Bone*, is outed to her family, her mother highlights how their reputation will be tarnished. She even frames Laura’s lesbian identity as a threat to the image of the normative family, claiming that her current husband will abandon her if Laura’s queerness is unveiled: “He better never find out or he’ll divorce me. . . . Don’t you *dare* ruin my chances of staying with him” (Dole 20; emphasis in original). The narrative closure of *Down to the Bone* culminates with Laura attempting to mend her relationship with her mother, yet her parent shows no signs of budging from her traditionalist views: “I don’t understand how someone like you came out of me. I’m embarrassed about you, Laura. I can’t have you being a *tortillera* in this house” (340; emphasis in original). Although this mother acknowledges her genealogical connection to her daughter, Laura’s queerness is viewed as an impediment to social or emotional connection. Not to mention that, once again, the Latinx household is represented as a domestic, normative, family-oriented space that is unable to accommodate queer life.

Perhaps the most severe representation of the trope of the bigoted and unaccepting Latinx parent can be found in Silvera’s *More Happy Than Not*. When Aaron, the novel’s protagonist, comes out to his family, his father attempts to throw him out of the house, and then strangles Aaron’s mom when she tries to protect her child from harm. In a horrifying turn of events, the father ends up committing suicide, leading Aaron to later encounter him lifeless in a bathtub, surrounded by blood. This scene is not only represented in an exceedingly graphic fashion, but Aaron’s reaction to his father’s suicide further emphasizes the disjuncture between the Latinx home and queer existence:

The water is a deep red, stained by the blood spilling from his slit wrists.

He came home to kill himself.

He came home to kill himself before I could bring a boy here.

He came home to kill himself because of me. (Silvera 193–94)

The verse-like repetition of the phrase “He came home to kill himself” brings notions of domestic space and family to the forefront. Since

Aaron's father was not successful at banishing the queer presence from his dwelling, he proceeds to remove himself from this space in an intense, violent fashion—regrettably pushing Aaron to create ties between the negative affect induced by his father's death and his own emerging queerness.

These representations of the coming out process in Latinx contexts demonstrate a concerning trend in which the enmeshment of Latinx and queer life is cast as incompatible and mutually destructive. The present is consequently framed as a temporal mode that forecloses possibilities for living and being in the world, especially in the case of queer Latinx characters. Jon M. Wargo has suggested that many YA texts focused on queer Latinx experience document a fictionalized journey toward queer selfhood that prompts a shedding of Latinx characters' ethnicity: "Whiteness stains the pages of these Latino LGBT young adult classics, purporting a version of queer that at first fractures Latino protagonists for not measuring up" (187–88). Wargo further argues that *Aristotle and Dante* is one of the very texts that promotes this fracturing, in that its narrative closure "positions the reader to understand that Dante, the seemingly more effeminate and bookish of the two boys whose 'feelings' and affective capacity of brownness is heavier, will unfortunately never perform 'true' Mexican like Ari" (181). While Wargo is right in asserting that Dante's representation further fuels the conceptual and affective divide between Latinx and queer being, the novel's representation of Latinx fatherhood and Mexican-American queerness opens up a potential for a more reparative reading of the novel. Ari's coming out journey, ultimately enabled by his Latinx parents, highlights how important *Aristotle and Dante* is from both a political and narrative perspective, and further emphasizes the reparative framework and agenda of Sáenz's historical novel. Given that narrative representations set in a contemporary chronotope shut down efforts to overlap queer and Latinx identity through the use of parental power and authority, *Aristotle and Dante* revisits the past and reconfigures both temporality and queer Latinx narrative in surprising and emotionally sustaining ways. It approaches the past and history as temporal modes that open up new avenues of kinship and connection, and it subverts historical representation to redirect the course of Latinx representation in queer YA literature.

Indeed, one must be mindful that the narrative closure of *Aristotle and Dante* pressures Ari's agency as a queer character and disparages any sense of sexual ambiguity. Furthermore, as highlighted by Wargo,

characters such as Dante demonstrate how the novel occasionally compromises and outweighs ethnicity through the exploration and identification of queer identity. Nonetheless, it is important to keep in mind the reparative aims of the novel and its queer chronotope. Various Latinx YA texts set during the contemporary moment often stress the incompatibilities between queerness and Latinx familias—and the tensions between these two domains are often left unresolved by the end of the narratives. *Aristotle and Dante*, however, offers readers an alternative to this worn-out narrative, framing *la familia* not as a force that drives queer characters away from the parameters of the home, but rather as a force of kinship and affinity that is capable of catalyzing and sustaining queer life. *Aristotle and Dante's* status as a novel situated in the past amplifies the stakes and reparative aims of its overarching goals and arguments. Historical narrative, in this case, is not necessarily used to offer an “accurate” or historically sound representation of queer life in a 1980s Southern US setting, but rather, it is used as a way of reorienting the path that queer Latinx stories generally take. *Aristotle and Dante* shifts the narrative expectations of queer Latinx representation not by focusing on the present or the future, but by using the past as a pipeline for future-oriented thinking.

“beyond the quagmire of the present”: A Narrative of a Future Past

In an examination of John Donovan’s 1969 novel, *I’ll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip* (arguably the first YA text with overt queer content), Derritt Mason calls for the importance of “creative and potentially subversive reading practices” in examinations of YA novels with queer content, paying close attention to how dynamics, interactions, and affinities present in the text can be queerer than they seem on a surface level (“Phallic Dog” 308). Critics are often right to point out the problems with *Aristotle and Dante's* approach to queerness, race, and agency, but, in doing so, they frequently sideline the broader temporal and reparative goals of the novel, and furthermore, they commonly ignore the novel’s status as a *historical* narrative centered on the imagined lives of queer Latinx teens. The goal of this novel is not to represent a historically accurate chronotope, nor is the novel concerned with ameliorating the historico-literary issues that arise through the combination of different temporal phenomena. The novel is also not concerned with adhering to the common generic expectations and tropes commonly found in queer and Latinx YA texts. Through Dante’s desire to marry another

boy, and through using parental power as a catalyst for Ari's queerness, *Aristotle and Dante* manipulates the seam between historical realities and fictional projections to activate a potentiality that allows readers to, in the words of Muñoz, acknowledge the affective frequencies of minority people, and *feel* them. In this sense, *Aristotle and Dante* is very much aligned with the cultural and political goals of recent Latinx YA texts, which question the normative perspectives toward historical documentation and knowledge production present in a contemporary United States context. As argued by Marilisa Jiménez García in her examination of the longings and possibilities of contemporary Latinx representation in the Trump era, many of today's authors are shaping Latinx YA literature "into a medium that questions the limitations of established history and institutional knowledge and advocates for the necessity of counter-stories and alternative modes of literature and education" (240). *Aristotle and Dante* participates in this project of offering a counter-story and exposing the limitations of historical accuracy by mobilizing affective dimensions and by offering an alternative, more reparative take on the limits and possibilities of queer Latinx life in Texas during the late 1980s.

Here, it is worth thinking through the utopian dimensions of *Aristotle and Dante*, and how they respond to the idealistic, somewhat misguided frameworks of the "it gets better" narrative that has been circulating through YA literature and culture since 2010.¹⁰ To some extent, *Aristotle and Dante* is subject to the same critiques as the "it gets better" narrative, especially in regards to authorship, its expectations, and its audience. In his analysis and critique of the *It Gets Better* project and narrative as it pertains to the examination of children's literature, Mason maintains that both the project and children's literature are demarcated by their impossibility, in that they highlight "the messy ways in which adult authorship, fantasies, desires, and anxieties are inextricably enmeshed with how children's literature produces meaning" ("On Children's Literature" 98–99).

Saénz himself is connected to and aware of these tensions, as can be observed through his admission of the healing and reparative goals of crafting *Aristotle and Dante*, and his apprehensions in writing the novel in the first place. But to approach *Aristotle and Dante* as a purely utopian work that aligns itself entirely with the "it gets better" narrative would also entail an exclusion of the ways in which the novel offers a reparative representation of the past that nonetheless channels the historical resonances of violence and cultural hurt that continue to haunt people

today. This can particularly be noticed through the aforementioned event near *Aristotle and Dante*'s conclusion, in which Dante experiences physical anti-queer violence that ultimately lands him in the hospital. The world of this novel is a reimagined space and history, a counternarrative, in which queer Latinx life could flourish and thrive in a 1980s Southern context. But even within this healing, reparative counter-story, the threat of anti-queer sentiments and violence is explicitly present. It is too simplistic to state that the positive affect and hope inherent in *Aristotle and Dante* is conducive to a perpetuation of the "it gets better" narrative, or to state that the novel fetishizes the ideological frameworks of the present or minimizes the precariousness of queer Latinx history. It is more productive to approach *Aristotle and Dante* as a text that actively tries to negotiate the tensions between historical representation and contemporary ethical and ideological sensibilities. It is a text that is wary of the challenges of offering an optimistic take on a queer Latinx past without minimizing the risks and dangers of queer life present during the specific space-time being represented and the space-time of the novel's readership. Although this YA novel is ultimately a text for young audiences that is a product of an adult's pain, desires, and anxieties, it is vital to note that it nonetheless challenges many of the universalizing grand narratives found in other representations of queer Latinx life, historical or contemporary.

Ari does not need to escape from his family to enable an acknowledgment and cultivation of his queerness, but rather his parents become the element that prompts him to acknowledge and articulate his queer desires. Both Ari's and Dante's families reject the demands of heteronormativity and reproductive futurity in favor of an affective model reliant on love, support, and connection. While this novel is reparative in scope, it is still particularly aware of how historical and cultural struggles have affected, and continue to affect, queer people who do not align with normative models of identity due to their race, ethnicity, culture, and/or class. Once again, Sáenz's historical novel uses the past as a conduit for future-oriented connectivity and possibility. This is precisely why the novel's affective frameworks overcome and overshadow its historically suspicious moments. *Aristotle and Dante* advances a historical representation where queer life is bearable—where queer Latinx teens can find emotional support and nourishment even when their respective space-time provides little to no means of sustaining a livable (and bearable) queer life. As Sara Ahmed argues in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*,

For those whose lives have been torn apart by violence, or those for whom the tiredness of repetition in everyday life becomes too much to bear, feeling better does and should matter. Feeling better is not a sign that justice has been done, and nor should it be reified as the goal of political struggle. But feeling better does still matter, as it is about learning to live with the injuries that threaten to make life impossible. (201)

Aristotle and Dante instantiates a past in which queer Latinx adolescence is able to flourish and thrive. In which queer life is not only bearable, but full of hope and potentiality. It is a novel that is mindful of injustice and that highlights the injuries that threaten to make life intolerable, but that nonetheless carves out a chronotope that heals cultural and social injuries within the confines of fictional historical representation.

If the field of possibility found in the past enables beneficial and proactive ways of approaching and understanding futurity, as Muñoz suggests, then it is no wonder that Sáenz turns to historical narrative as a way of enabling an aesthetic and reparative conversation centered on the struggles that queer Latinx teens have and will continue to face. In his important discussion on queer theory and children's literature studies, Kenneth Kidd asks whether critics can and should approach queer youth literature as a vital and nourishing group of texts—a corpus that is imaginable mostly after childhood, ghostly in its scope and creation, “that nevertheless sustains us” (187). I propose that the answer to Kidd's question is a resounding *yes*, and that an examination of *Aristotle and Dante's* temporal and affective dimensions emphasizes the emotional and reparative potentiality of queer youth literature. This novel's chronotope opens up a space that permits Sáenz to infuse present ideologies and attitudes within the cultural context of the late 1980s—an infusion that not only allows him to heal himself in light of his own upbringing and social circumstances but that also mends the cultural and historical damage that continues to trouble contemporary queer lives, queer teens of color, and queer YA narratives. While, on an ontological level, this merger exposes the seams that exist between historical representation and fictional projection, from a performative level, the disruption of these seams becomes nothing short of utopic. Moreover, the novel's chronotope assists in subverting some of the expectations of the gay Bildungsroman posited by Woods, in which he asserts the centrality of familial deviance in queer developmental processes. This, in turn, illuminates how YA narratives are able to comply

with the parameters of a genre while simultaneously expanding and queering said constrictions.

In agreement with Amy Elias, Hayden White has argued that the historical novel has resurfaced in contemporary society for the same reasons other genres reappear periodically: they reemerge “as symbolic responses to historical situations that render canonical modes and means of representation, explanation, and understanding irrelevant” (151). At a time in which queer people continue to face oppression and violence on both personal and institutional levels, in which many people continue to be ashamed of their queerness, and in which queerness is often cast in opposition to familial structures, perhaps it is time to stop being overly suspicious of historical representations with contemporary ideological frameworks and sensibilities. Perhaps it is time to start thinking more rigorously about the ways in which historical YA narratives provide readers with the means to “see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present,” as Muñoz would put it. *Aristotle and Dante* imbues a queer Latinx narrative with optimistic discourse and positive affect by highlighting and disrupting the boundaries that exist between historical realities and fiction. It uses the past as a platform to redirect both the future of a genre and the future of queer Latinx YA narratives, thus offering what Sedgwick would call a “reparative” representation of the “before” in order to enable a more open and egalitarian “after.” *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* is ultimately a narrative of a future past: a story fixated on a past that has not necessarily occurred, but on a past that could only achieve representation in a not-so-distant future.

Notes

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¹In order to avoid the problems of inclusion and exclusion found in the use of acronyms such as LGBTQIA+ (and others), I consciously use the umbrella term “queer” to

refer to nonheterosexual characters, events, people, and communities. The term queer is particularly fitting for this examination of *Aristotle and Dante* since many of the novel's characters do not necessarily fit within the parameters of traditional markers of sexual identity such as gay or bisexual. Additionally, I use the term "Latinx" as an inclusive, gender-neutral, nonbinary alternative to the term Latina/o.

²Please refer to Laura M. Jiménez's article for an in-depth examination on issues of representation in queer YA literature that includes important data regarding publishing numbers, trends, and areas in need of improvement.

³I have previously examined *Aristotle and Dante* through a reparative lens in my 2016 dissertation, *Feeling Infinite: Affect, Genre, and Narrative in Young Adult Queer Literature*. Michelle Ann Abate has also approached this novel using a reparative framework in her 2018 MLA conference presentation "Out of History," where she focuses on the absence of AIDS discourse in the novel, and ultimately approaches *Aristotle and Dante* as a speculative text. *Aristotle and Dante*, she argues, reimagines the possibilities that queer teens could experience without the pressures or gravitas of the AIDS epidemic in the late 1980s. While the absence of AIDS is indeed a pressing issue in Sáenz's novel, my discussion is more interested in examining how concrete textual elements in the novel highlight its reparative, narrative, and historical frameworks. Although there may be some disagreement as to whether *Aristotle and Dante* should be categorized as historical fiction, I argue that scholarship on historical YA literature is nonetheless useful in examining the novel's temporal and historical frameworks, and highlight the queer potentialities of this text.

⁴I am aware that there is some disagreement in terms of the parameters needed for a YA novel to be categorized as historical fiction. Brown and St. Clair point out that there are varying and disagreeing definitions of historical fiction that have emerged. Some critics suggest that historical novels should be set more than "two generations back in time" and others suggest that these novels should be "set outside the time of living memory" (Brown and St. Clair 10). Others have suggested that historical novels are simply ones in which the past is featured as an integral part of the story's narrative. Brown and St. Clair argue that historical novels are those in which specific historical detail is "crucial to plot or character development or some experimental representation of these narrative attributes" (11). Regardless of whether *Aristotle and Dante* can and should be approached as historical fiction, I argue that it is still useful to draw from scholarship on YA historical fiction to examine the novel's temporal and reparative frameworks.

⁵According to Sedgwick, paranoid reading is an anticipatory and oftentimes combative way of approaching a text that is quite prominent in critical readings. Through this approach, readers examine a text anticipating that there is something faulty about it. Reparative reading, conversely, is a generous method of critiquing texts. As Sedgwick points out in *Touching Feeling*, it involves an openness to surprise, an attempt to counteract the impulse to read in a paranoid fashion, and a contemplation of how certain people and communities can obtain "sustenance from the objects of a culture—even a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them" (150–51).

⁶Literally meaning "space-time," Bakhtin broadly characterizes the chronotope as "the intrinsic interconnectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (15). In other words, the chronotope is a concept for thinking through and measuring the ways in which matters of temporality and space coalesce in order to advance a literary text's arguments, its aesthetic merits, its tensions (both in terms of form and content), and even its genre.

⁷Examples of practices and attitudes that pressure or dismantle the logics of reproductive futurism include the refusal or inability to have children, and the dismissal of the figure of the Child as a harbinger of futurity. More specifically, Edelman argues that the label reproductive logics and the figure of the Child "impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable . . . the possibility of queer resistance to this

organizing principle of communal relations" (2). It is important to note, however, that Edelman's figuration of the Child often relies on white middle-to-upper-class ideologies, as pointed out by scholars such as Kathryn Bond Stockton and José Esteban Muñoz.

⁸Representations of parental power are often front and center in most YA novels. Scholars such as Roberta Seelinger Trites have suggested that these narratives often position adolescent characters as figures who must align themselves against parental figures (whether real or imaginary) "so that they can fully enter into the Symbolic Order" (83). Therefore, the trope in which queer characters abandon the space of home and the family can be approached as an instance of this symbolic murder of the parent figure in order to enable the processes of coming out and self-actualization.

⁹While there has been a rise in the amount of queer YA novels published every year, these novels often center on the experiences of white, cisgender, middle-to-upper-class characters. Sonia Alejandra Rodríguez has explored the lack of queer representation in Latinx YA literature, especially narratives that focus on lesbian, trans, and bisexual representation. For an exploration of the major trends and issues found in this body of literature, please see S. Rodríguez.

¹⁰*It Gets Better* is a digital activist project spearheaded by columnist Dan Savage during the 2010s in response to the wave of queer teen suicides occurring during this time. The popular and widespread initiative encouraged adults—from everyday people to celebrities and prominent cultural figures—to share videos and stories in which they discuss how they grappled with the issues that arose in their youth due to their sexuality and/or gender. Most of these narratives are problematically framed using the utopian notion that lives and conditions of queer people improve with time and age. For more information on the project and an in-depth examination of the initiative's aims and shortcomings vis-à-vis youth literature, please refer to Mason, "On Children's Literature."

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