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**“Ungrown-up Grown-ups”:
the Representation of Adolescence
in Twentieth-Century
New Zealand Young Adult Fiction.**

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presented in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
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Abstract

Behaviouralists consider adolescence a time for developing autonomy, which accords with Michel Foucault's power/knowledge dynamic that recognises individuals' assertion of independence as a crucial element within society. Surprisingly, however, twentieth-century New Zealand Young Adult (YA) fiction tends to disempower adolescents, by portraying an adultist version of them as immature and unprepared for adult responsibilities.

By depicting events through characters' eyes, a focalising device that encourages reader identification with the narratorial point-of-view, authors such as Esther Glen, Isabel Maud Peacocke, Joyce West, Phillis Garrard, Tessa Duder, Lisa Vasil, Margaret Mahy, William Taylor, Kate de Goldi, Paula Boock, David Hill, Jane Westaway, and Bernard Beckett stress the importance of conforming to adult authority.

Rites of passage are rarely attained; protagonists respect their elders, and juvenile delinquents either repent or are punished for their misguided behaviours. "Normal" expectations are established by the portrayal of single parents who behave "like teenagers": an unnatural role reversal that demands a return to traditional hegemonic roles. Adolescents must forgive adults' failings within a discourse that rarely forgives theirs. Depictions of child abuse, while deploring the deed, tend to emphasise victims' forbearance rather than admitting perpetrators' culpability.

As Foucault points out, adolescent sexuality both fascinates and alarms adult society. Within the texts, sex is strictly an adult prerogative, reserved for reproduction within marriage, with adolescent intimacy sanctioned only between couples who conform to the middle-class ideal of monogamy. On the other hand, teenagers who indulge in casual sex are invariably given cause to regret. Such presentations operate vicariously to protect readers from harm, but also create an idealised, steadfast sense of adulthood in the process.

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