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"A Friend, A Nimble Mind, and a Book": Girls' Literary Criticism in Seventeen Magazine, 1958-1969

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**“A Friend, A Nimble Mind, and a Book”:
Girls’ Literary Criticism in *Seventeen* Magazine, 1958-1969**

Abstract:

This article argues that postwar *Seventeen* magazine, a publication deeply invested in enforcing heteronormativity and conventional models of girlhood and womanhood, was in fact a more complex and multivocal serial text whose editors actively sought out, cultivated, and published girls’ creative and intellectual work. *Seventeen*’s teen-authored “Curl Up and Read” book review columns, published from 1958 through 1969, are examples of girls’ creative intellectual labor, introducing *Seventeen*’s readers to fiction and nonfiction which ranged beyond the emerging “young adult” literature of the period. Written by young people – including thirteen-year-old Eve Kosofsky (later Sedgwick)—who perceived *Seventeen* to be an important publication venue for critical work, the “Curl Up and Read” columns are literary products in their own right, not simply juvenilia. *Seventeen* provided these young authors the opportunity to publish their work in a forum which offered girl readers and writers opportunities for intellectual development and community.

In January 1964, an installment of *Seventeen* magazine’s regular book-review column “Curl Up and Read” was written by thirteen-year-old Eve Kosofsky. Kosofsky opened the column with a rhetorical question and a call for intellectual companionship which led directly into her first short review: “Is the literary argument obsolete? If so, what a shame—it’s one of the most stimulating sports around. To play, you need a friend, a nimble mind, and a book, perhaps *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*...” Kosofsky’s short reviews all concluded with questions for further discussion. Was Alan Sillitoe’s *Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* (1959) the British *Catcher*? “You can argue on that by the hour!” Kosofsky opened her treatment of Philip Barry’s déjà-vu play *Hotel Universe* (1930) with “Philosophical works are always controversial and therefore fun,” and closed the paragraph with “You’ll talk about this play for a long time to come—or was it a long time in the past?” About James Agee’s poem “Rapid Transit,” in Modern Library’s *New Anthology of Poetry* (1938), she wrote, “It’s a vivid, well-done poem, and one that’s fun to argue about. But then, what isn’t?” About teenager Caroline Glyn’s novel *Don’t Knock the Corners Off* (1963), about a girl artist navigating the conformist pressures of the British school system, Kosofsky concluded her column with: “I’ve lost a lot of sleep trying to decide whether Miss Glyn is pointing up a moral (that escapism is the best way to solve problems) or just indulging in some wishful thinking about ideal home life.... I wish I knew what to think. Discussion, anyone?”¹

¹ Eve Kosofsky, “Curl Up and Read,” *Seventeen*, Jan. 1964, 18.

Kosofsky had likely responded to a blurb that appeared at the bottom of sixteen-year-old Jean Savanyu's August 1963 "Curl Up and Read" column, inviting teenaged readers to contribute book reviews to *Seventeen*. From its first issue in September 1944, *Seventeen* had run a monthly book review column, written by editorial staff, along with music, film, and eventually some television reviews. In January 1953, an editorial announced that *Seventeen*'s January issues would be dedicated to readers' work, with all of the cultural review columns written by readers: *Seventeen*'s first fully teen-authored book review, appearing in that issue, was written by nineteen-year-old Audrey Lorde, who reviewed several science fiction texts.² After a brief hiatus in the mid-1950s, in July 1957 *Seventeen* reinstated the book review column, retitled "Curl Up and Read" and bylined by Helen G. First, an educator who received her MA in English from Columbia that same year. First's column ran monthly for six years, with her last column appearing in July 1963. Beginning in August 1963, when Savanyu's initial "Curl Up and Read" column appeared, "Curl Up and Read" was written entirely by teen reviewers. From January 1958 through May 1969, sixty teenagers—fifty-five girls and five boys—wrote individual "Curl Up and Read" columns.³

While early postwar *Seventeen* is known as the starting point for the literary careers of Sylvia Plath, Lois Duncan, and Audre Lorde, among others, it is less known as a platform for nonfiction writing. Yet mid-century issues included first-person essays by Paul Bartel, Laurel Thatcher [Ulrich], and Samuel Delany, all teenagers at the time their work appeared in *Seventeen*.⁴ Carley Moore, Tessa Mazey-Richardson, and Jennifer Helgren have focussed on girls' writings in postwar *Seventeen* with

² Audre Lorde's Jan. 1953 book review appeared under the byline "Audrey Lorde." Audrey Lorde, "On the Book Beat," *Seventeen*, Jan. 1953, 26, 44; Audrey Lorde, "Spring," *Seventeen*, Apr. 1951, 136-137.

³ Helen G. First, "Curl Up and Read," *Seventeen*, July 1957, 12; Helen G. First, "A Psychoanalytic Inquiry into the Creative Imagination," (MA paper, Columbia University, 1957). First was also the wife of Joseph First, *Seventeen* publisher Walter Annenberg's general counsel. John Cooney, *The Annenbergs* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 157, 176-80; Jean Savanyu, "Curl Up and Read," *Seventeen*, Aug. 1963, 79.

⁴ Sylvia Plath's first publication in *Seventeen* was her story "And Summer Will Not Come Again," in Jan. 1950, with her poem "Ode to a Bitten Plum" appearing in the Nov. 1950 issue. Sylvia Plath, "And Summer Will Not Come Again," *Seventeen*, Jan. 1950, 191, 275-6; Sylvia Plath, "Ode to a Bitten Plum," *Seventeen*, Nov. 1950, 104; Sylvia Plath, "Initiation," *Seventeen*, Jan. 1953, 64. Lois Duncan won third prize in *Seventeen*'s Short Story contest in 1951, second prize in 1952, and first prize in 1953, the first year that *Seventeen* began publishing winners' stories in their Jan. issues. See her biographical blurb in Lois Duncan, "Return," *Seventeen*, Jan. 1953, 60, 96-98. Audre Lorde published several poems (as Audrey Lorde) in *Seventeen*: Audre Lorde, "Spring," *Seventeen*, Apr. 1951, 136; Audre Lorde, "My World," *Seventeen*, Aug. 1955, 230.

Paul Bartel, "It's All Yours: I Make Movies: Young Film Enthusiast at Work," *Seventeen*, Nov. 1955, 94, 156-157.

Samuel Delany wrote later of his irritation with *Seventeen*'s editing of his work (a second piece was rejected as "too intelligent"), but did note his appreciation the \$200 he was paid for the cut-down version of the piece *Seventeen* did publish. Samuel Delany, "The Compleat Folk Singer," *Seventeen*, Jan. 1962, 32; Samuel R Delany, *The Motion of Light in Water: Sex and Science Fiction Writing in the East Village, 1957-1965* (New York: New American Library, 1989), 107.

Laurel Thatcher, "Sugar City Christmas," *Seventeen*, Dec. 1957, 57, 112; Ulrich also noted that her work was heavily edited. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "A Pail of Cream," *Journal of American History* Volume 89, No. 1 (June 2002): 43-44.

particular emphasis on how these writings reflects the girls' political awareness and activism. This article will focus on how girl authors used their "Curl Up and Read" columns to identify themselves publicly as literary critics and creative writers, roles which overlapped with but were not necessarily wholly congruent with political activism.⁵

Both the desire and the learned ability to move from reading a book to writing about it or discussing it—to function as a critic—are central aspects of Mary Kelley's *Learning to Stand and Speak*, a key text for girls' intellectual history; Kelley portrays nineteenth-century schoolgirls' learning to move from reading to critical thinking, instantiated in writing and speech, as a means of empowering them to shape public opinion as adult women. Attending to this move from reading to critical writing in the pages of *Seventeen* allows for the consideration of the magazine as a site for girls' intellectual history—a site where teenaged girls were able to represent themselves as cultural critics. Beginning in 1963, the "Curl Up and Read" columns moved from an adult educator's recommendations—loosely but not entirely tied to reading for school assignments—to a space where girls could publish book critiques and recommendations and introduce fellow readers to intellectual fare beyond the highly gender-demarcated junior novels being published specifically for teen girls and boys during the era. If, as Catherine Driscoll has noted, girls' magazines can be read as forums where girls measured and reported on their progress towards the self-production encouraged by the magazines—a kind of imagined community for girls—*Seventeen's* "Curl Up and Read" columns can be read as publication space for young people interested in demonstrating their critical acumen and connecting with like-minded readers. By locating Kosofsky and other literary-critically minded girls within the pages of *Seventeen* magazine, I am suggesting that postwar *Seventeen's* teen-

⁵ Carley Moore, "Writing Trouble: 'Seventeen' Magazine and the Girl Writer" (PhD diss., New York University, 2004). Moore's unpublished dissertation is the most comprehensive discussion of girls' writings in *Seventeen* magazine. See also Tessa Mazey-Richardson, "From Private to Public? Changing Perceptions of Young Women in *Seventeen* Magazine, 1955–1965," *Global Studies of Childhood* Volume 8, No. 3 (September 2018): 292–303; Jennifer Helgren, *American Girls and Global Responsibility: A New Relation to the World During the Early Cold War* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017). My thinking about *Seventeen* as a potential community for intellectual girls is influenced by Sarah Scripps' argument that early-twentieth-century magazines like *Boys' Life*, *Popular Science*, and toy manufacturers' magazines—texts designed to promote consumption—were also platforms for children's intellectual networks. Sarah Scripps, "Science Fairs Before Sputnik: Adolescent Scientific Culture in Contemporary America" (PhD diss., University of South Carolina, 2014), 52–65, accessed 25 Sept. 2020, <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd/3053>. My thinking about girl reviewers using *Seventeen* columns to introduce readers to more serious and even subversive texts is shaped by Julia Mickenberg's discussion of juvenile series as a genre turned to more radical purposes due to the devalued formulaicness of series novels. Julia L. Mickenberg, *Learning from the Left: Children's Literature, the Cold War, and Radical Politics in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

authored book review columns function as evidence of a history of girls' creative and intellectual activity during the postwar period.⁶

“Write A Better Book Review”

Seventeen magazine had actively sought to publish readers' work since March 1946, when editors announced a new “It's All Yours” section, to include readers' short stories, poems, first-person narratives, and original artwork; contributors would be paid for accepted work, and pay, according to this editorial, was the mark of a professional writer.⁷ Other publishing opportunities for readers appeared over time: the first annual Short Story and Art contests, with money prizes, were advertised in October 1946, with money prizes; beginning in 1953, the prizewinning stories and artwork were published in the January “readers” issues.⁸ First-person columns like “I Believe” (later, “In My Opinion”) began to appear in the early 1960s; the first “I Believe” column included a blurb offering \$100 for “portraits” and fifteen dollars for “suggestions... of teen-agers to interview.”⁹ In 1968, junior novelist Nan Gilbert's guide *Seeing Yourself in Print*, targeted to teen authors, identified *Seventeen* as a high-quality paying venue for publication, noting *Seventeen's* annual writing contests.¹⁰ The January 1953 editorial which announced the “readers' issues,” likely written by editor-in-chief Alice Beaton Thompson, stated:

We provide for you a place where only young voices are heard and where the faith, the trust, the strength and the courage of youth are never, never hushed by a too cautious, too careful,

⁶ Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill, NC: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, University of North Carolina Press, 2008). Cf. also Lucia McMahon, *Mere Equals: The Paradox of Educated Women in the Early American Republic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012); Jane H. Hunter, *How Young Ladies Became Girls: The Victorian Origins of American Girlhood* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002); Babette Faehmel, *College Women in the Nuclear Age: Cultural Literacy and Female Identity, 1940-1960* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2012); Helgren, *American Girls*; Rebecca Stiles Onion, “How Science Became Child's Play: Science, Technology, and the Culture of American Childhood, 1890-1970,” (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2012), 202-9, 255-81; Jill Anderson, “Dinny Gordon, Intellectual: Anne Emery's Postwar Junior Fiction and Girls' Intellectual Culture,” *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* Volume 7, no. 2 (Spring 2014), 243–66.

Catherine Driscoll, *Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 34, 74–77.

⁷ Wrote the editor in the 1946 announcement: “There's a long word—plagiarism—with an ugly meaning. It is the theft of someone else's written words. To an inexperienced writer, this may not seem as wrong as taking material things. But ideas-put-into-words are material things. The professional writer not only gets paid for the first time his words are printed, but often adds to his income when those are reprinted. If he doesn't get money, reprints make his future writing more valuable.” “It's All Yours,” *Seventeen*, Mar. 1946, 21, 23-24, quote on 21.

⁸ “A Story By...” *Seventeen*, Oct. 1946, 170-71.

⁹ “I Believe,” *Seventeen*, July 1960, 107.

¹⁰ Nan Gilbert, *See Yourself in Print: A Handbook for Young Writers* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1968), 38, 41, 70, 177.

too calm and too old person. For SEVENTEEN, we hope, is a room of your own, and while we are in it with you we feel you share it with us.

The editors must surely have intended to echo Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) with the gesture towards publication, pay and space for writing. At the same time, they framed this space as a community for girl writers as well as readers, in the tutorial presence of the adult (yet not "too old") editorial staff.¹¹

Seventeen has, quite rightly, been studied as a highly prescriptive source, its editorial and advertising content laced with white, middle-class heteronormativity, powerfully linking the consumption of teen-oriented products to gender normativity. As historians Kelly Schrum and Kelley Massoni have noted separately in their work on early *Seventeen*, founding editor Helen Valentine and the magazine's first marketing director, Estelle Ellis, created a persona named "Teena," the ultimate teen-girl consumer, designed to promote *Seventeen* to advertisers and manufacturers, while at the same time envisioning *Seventeen* as a service magazine, intended to prepare Teenas for world citizenship as well as for romance, domesticity, and shopping.¹² Wrote Valentine in a September 1945 editorial celebrating *Seventeen*'s first full year of publication:

You're interested in boys and books, clothes and current events, people and politics, cooking and careers... in fact, you're interested in everything. ... We like finding out that reprint orders for the Dumbarton Oaks article have kept pace with requests for dress patterns... that you like to read about both Toscanini and Harry James.¹³

Both Kelly Schrum and Kelley Massoni have pointed to the mixed messages that *Seventeen* itself offered about girls' intellectual possibilities and abilities, noting instances of girls' own voices asking for more intellectual fare, while at the same time contrasting these with *Seventeen*'s frequently negative representations of excessively brainy girls, who were portrayed in some cases as socially graceless

¹¹ [Alice Beaton Thompson], "It's All Yours," *Seventeen*, Jan. 1953, 9; "It's All Yours," *Seventeen*, Mar. 1946, 21, 23-4; "A Story By..." *Seventeen*, Oct. 1946, 170-71. Cf. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929; repr., New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989).

¹² On Helen Valentine's vision for *Seventeen*, see Helen Valentine, "Seventeen Says Hello," *Seventeen*, Sept. 1944, 32-33; Helen Valentine, "Happy 1st Birthday," *Seventeen*, Sept. 1945, 61; Kelley Massoni, *Fashioning Teenagers: A Cultural History of Seventeen Magazine* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2010); Kelly Schrum, "'Teena Means Business': Teenage Girls' Culture and *Seventeen Magazine*," in Sherrie A. Inness, ed., *Delinquents and Debutants: Twentieth-Century American Girls' Cultures* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 134-63; Kelly Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox: The Emergence of Teenage Girls' Culture, 1920-1945*, *Girls' History and Culture* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004). Cf. also Rachel Devlin, *Relative Intimacy: Fathers, Adolescent Daughters, and Postwar American Culture*, Gender and American Culture (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 93-102; Angela R. Record, "Born to Shop: Teenage Women and the Marketplace in the Postwar United States," in Eileen R. Meehan, ed., *Sex & Money: Feminism and Political Economy in the Media* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 181-95; Helgren, *American Girls*.

¹³ Helen Valentine, "Happy 1st Birthday," 61.

“grinds.”¹⁴ From its earliest publication, *Seventeen* did include intellectually-oriented content. In addition to its book review columns, *Seventeen* published monthly reviews of classical music in a separate column adjacent to the popular music reviews. Arthur C. Clarke contributed an occasional futuristic science-oriented column, “A Look at Tomorrow,” in the mid-1950s. Beginning in April 1959, a regular column, “Looking Ahead to College,” offered college profiles and later also added profiles of particular careers. In the mid-1960s *Seventeen* published a monthly “Talks to Teens” column, featuring artists, intellectuals, statesmen, and celebrities offering graduation-speech-type advice to *Seventeen* readers.¹⁵

The October 1945 “The Reviewing Stand” column offered readers insight into how books were selected: *Seventeen* staff sent review copies of books to Margaret Scoggin, director of the New York Public Library’s newly established Nathan Straus Branch for Children and Young People, who then circulated the books among “a rotating committee of Nathan Straus reviewers, a group of high school readers.” The teen readers sent their recommendations back to *Seventeen*, whose editorial staff then read the recommended books and wrote short reviews.¹⁶ The second “Books” column, in the October 1944 issue, included several brief, signed reviews written by boy and girl members of the Nathan Straus Library Club and a note to readers: “We had to face the fact that a high-school girl is most likely to ask her own friends to tell her which books to read.... Shall we turn our book column over to high-school reviews all over the country... or would you rather we do the job ourselves?”¹⁷ No letters on this topic appeared in the ensuing “Letters” columns, and the book review columns continued with short reviews initialed by editorial staff (or with no author information). By the time Helen G. First published her first “Curl Up and Read” column in 1957, the Straus Library had closed, and internal evidence suggests that First made her own selections.

¹⁴ Schrum, “Teena”; Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox*; Massoni, *Fashioning Teenagers*. On “grind” as a negative term for a young woman intellectual, usually associated with spinsterhood, inattention to beauty and hygiene (“greasy grind”), even developmental arrest, see Babette Faehmel, *College Women in the Nuclear Age: Cultural Literacy and Female Identity, 1940-1960* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 31-40.

¹⁵ Charles A. Bucher, “Looking Ahead to College,” *Seventeen*, Apr. 1959, 28-30; later columns were written by David Klein. “David Klein, 82, Ex-Professor and Writer,” *New York Times*, 28 May 2001. Cf. Arthur C. Clarke, “A Look at Tomorrow: Man vs. Machine,” *Seventeen*, Mar. 1955, 38-39; Arthur C. Clarke, “A Look at Tomorrow: Into the Abyss,” *Seventeen*, July 1955, 16. The “Talks to Teens” columns, which included essays written by Philip Roth, Pete Seeger, Marianne Moore, Igor Stravinsky, Roy Wilkins, and Glenn Seaborg of the Atomic Energy Commission, among others, were collected into a book published in 1966. Enid Haupt, ed., *In My Opinion: The Seventeen Book of Very Important Persons* (New York: MacMillan, 1966).

¹⁶ “The Reviewing Stand,” *Seventeen*, Oct. 1945, 10; Cf. Margaret C. Scoggin, “Fables They Shall Not Read,” *ALA Bulletin*, 1 Nov. 1952, 323-50; Amanda Kirstin Allen, “The Girls’ Guide to Power: Romancing the Cold War” (PhD diss., University of Alberta, 2010), 128-150, accessed 25 Sept. 2020, <https://doi.org/10.7939/R3RM0W>

¹⁷ “Books,” *Seventeen*, Oct. 1944, 6, 72, quote on 6.

As Helgren has noted, *Seventeen's* book selections reflected an emerging Cold War internationalism rooted in "one-world" friendship.¹⁸ At the same time, the magazine's early book review columns set those texts alongside lighter fare. The first "Books" column offered *Smarter and Smoother* (1944), an advice manual by Maureen Daly, author of the popular novel *Seventeenth Summer* (1942), along with a theater-career romance by Helen Dore Boylston, author of the Sue Barton books, under the respective headings "Growing Pain Cures" and "Cream Puff Department"—alongside the "Your World" category, which include Ray Josephs' *Argentine Diary* (1944) and Walter Lippmann's *US War Aims* (1944), and the "Slightly Cerebral" category, which included a 1944 biography of Elizabeth Blackwell, the first woman doctor in the United States.¹⁹ First's columns, however, included no junior novels, other than a one-line recommendation in December 1957 of Rosamond du Jardin's *Senior Prom* (1957) as a Christmas gift for "younger sisters." First's move away from teen-girl-focussed fiction marks a shift from Margaret Scoggin's emphasis on the junior novel as most appropriate for teen-girl readers.²⁰

First opened her inaugural "Curl Up and Read" column with a schoolgirl's question: "Why do we have to read this stuff?" a question she attributed not simply to "problem [case]" girls but to "the class 'brain,'" who "is not clowning for the gallery [but] wants a well reasoned, workable answer to that question." Individual columns by First addressed a wide range of topics, including the Holocaust and the United Nations (the latter in a *Seventeen* issue focussed on the UN), as well as on recommended books to help with school, "being understood," and similar issues. Though her role was clearly intended to be educational (First would earn a PhD in education from Bryn Mawr in 1966)²¹, she encouraged *Seventeen's* readers to read for both edification *and* pleasure. The purpose of literature, First stated in her first column, was:

to help us with our lives, to help us solve our emotional and spiritual problems, to help us grow up, to give our lives a sense of harmony, richness, meaning, and significance. ... With so many right books on library shelves and so many fresh and stirring ones coming each day

¹⁸ Helgren, *American Girls*, 32-33.

¹⁹ "Books," *Seventeen*, Sept. 1944, 6, 88. A review of *Seventeenth Summer* appeared several months later in the "Books" column. "Books," *Seventeen*, Feb. 1945, 117, 128.

²⁰ First's association of this book with "younger sisters" echoes junior novelist Anne Emery's statements about junior novels being aimed at younger teenage girls—while also suggesting an attempt to frame *Seventeen* as directed to "older" girls, which was not necessarily accurate, but would have flattered younger readers as being "older" and more mature than their "younger" sisters. Helen G. First, "Curl Up and Read," *Seventeen*, Dec. 1957, 20; Anne Emery, "Reaching the Young Readers," *Kentucky Library Association Bulletin*, Jan. 1959, 10-12. On Scoggin's promotion of the junior novel as most appropriate for girl readers, see Allen, "Girls' Guide to Power."

²¹ First earned a PhD in Education and Child Development from Bryn Mawr in 1966. Lorette Treese, Bryn Mawr College Archivist, email message to author, 12 Feb. 2014.

from the publishers, the only problem is matching the right book with the right person. This is the job we hope to do in these columns.²²

In her second installment, published in August 1957, First described books as potential relationships:

Reading is like friendship: a book has to “click” with you if your relationship is to be more than polite play-acting. You have to wrestle and argue and kiss and make-up with a book. There are feudin’-friends and kissin’-cousins books at every level—for the serious-minded who prefer deep waters, for the vast majority who venture knee-deep, and even for those just getting their feet wet. Choose with discrimination, but come on in—the water’s fine.²³

First’s swimming analogy addressed girls across a spectrum of intellectual curiosity. Though she asserts that the “knee-deep” girls are in the “vast majority,” she nevertheless acknowledged the “deep water” readers as well as the more reluctant readers “just getting their feet wet.”²⁴

First’s September 1960 column, subtitled “Write a Better Book Review This Semester,” suggested strategies for making a school assignment into a meaningful personal essay. First compared reading with falling in love, and reviewing a book to “writing a meaningful love letter of discovery to your beloved, a letter which shows what you have learned about yourself in reaction to your loved one, what secret charms and wonders you have discovered in him that you didn’t know existed before.” First urged readers:

Read as though you and the people in your book are the only inhabitants on a tiny desert island. When you part company to return to the world of reality to write your review, you will feel as emotionally attached to them as you do to the bunkmates you left behind after last summer’s camping experience.²⁵

Though she compared book reviewing to writing a love letter, First also identified it with other emotionally charged relationships, such as summer-camp friendships.²⁶ Love letters and book reviews were both the products of intellectual labor rooted in strong feelings of connection and affection. First’s essay on book reviewing suggested that girls could write *both* towards a school

²² Helen G. First, “Curl Up and Read,” *Seventeen*, July 1957, 12. During the postwar era, professional educators’ journals such as *English Journal* and *Clearing House* published many articles debating the value of the traditional book report assignment. First’s 1960 “Write a Better Book Review” column, though addressed directly to students rather than to educators, reflects the use of the book report/book review model in schools.

²³ Helen G. First, “Curl Up and Read,” *Seventeen*, Aug. 1957, 58.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

²⁵ Helen G. First, “Curl Up and Read: Write a Better Book Review This Semester,” *Seventeen*, Sept. 1960, 28.

²⁶ Cf. [Kelly Schrum], introduction to Helen G. First, “Write a Better Book Review This Semester,” reprinted in *Girls and Literacy in America: Historical Perspectives to the Present*, ed. Jane Greer (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2003), 196-97.

assignment *and* for their own pleasure and individual growth. At the same time, the book review became a relational technique, conveying emotional and intellectual information to an audience, who might then be motivated to read the book themselves.

A few months before *Seventeen* turned “Curl Up and Read” over entirely to teen reviewers, novelist Philip Roth published a “Talks to Teens” column on novel-reading. Like First, Roth suggested the need for challenging, mentally improving reading, even as he eschewed “good for you” or “normal”-izing reading. Roth wrote:

I should like to have the pleasure of presenting to you a list of ten novels that are decidedly not good for you—they won’t make you ‘normal’—and that is why I want to recommend them. If you want to read books showing that life is all honey and roses, and tra-la-la, it’s eternally spring, then you might just as well read no further.²⁷

The list: Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919); Evan Connell’s *Mrs. Bridge* (1959); F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925); Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1856); William Golding’s *The Lord of the Flies* (1954); Bernard Malamud’s *The Assistant* (1957); Brian Moore’s *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* (1955); William Styron’s *Lie Down in Darkness* (1951); Leo Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* (1877); and Thomas Wolfe’s *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929).²⁸ Roth continued:

I do not know if these are ‘books for teen-agers,’ because that is not how I think of books. I do not know if they are books for young men or books for young women, for I don’t think that in reading, that distinction is an important one, once you are on your way to majority. What I do know is that these are novels which deal with human beings seeking to discover (because life forces you to discover) what it is to be a human being. . . . I do not know if every single teen-ager is going to understand every single page of every one of these books; I seriously doubt it. If you want to understand every page of a book, your best bet is to go back and read over the books you read two years ago.²⁹

²⁷ Philip Roth, “Talks to Teens: They Won’t Make Your Normal,” *Seventeen*, Apr. 1963, 170, 208.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 208. Only two of the books listed by Roth were reviewed in “Curl Up and Read.” 19-year-old Jon Briggs reviewed both *The Great Gatsby* and *Look Homeward, Angel* in Oct. 1964. Jon Briggs, “Curl Up and Read,” *Seventeen*, Oct. 1964, 17. *Lord of the Flies* was mentioned frequently in *Seventeen*, functioning as a placeholder for “serious” intellectual reading, likely also read for a school assignment.

Seventeen published several letters to the editor responding to Roth’s suggestions, most of them favorable, but one, “M.S.,” wrote: “I admired Philip Roth until I saw his suggested list of books. The idea of mentioning *Madame Bovary*, one of the five greatest novels ever written, in the same breath as that mess of modern pseudo-psychological trash, *Lord of the Flies*, shows Mr. Roth to be a man of the shoddiest standards.” M.S., “Your Letters,” *Seventeen*, June 1963, 4.

²⁹ Roth, “Talks to Teens,” 170, 208.

Like First, Roth resisted the literary market's move towards books identified as "young adult" texts as well as the kind of text-oriented moralizing typical of teachers' journals during this era.³⁰ Roth favored a generic, un-raced, un-gendered "human" reader while proposing a reading list of books written by white men. Perhaps *children* needed gender-specific books, he implied, but *adults* did not. Roth flattered *Seventeen's* readers by attributing maturity to them—or at least, to those sophisticated few who were able to "understand every single page of every one of these books."³¹

Intentionally or not, the teen reviewers generally followed Roth's critical model and did not distinguish between "books for teen-agers" and adult books or "books for young women" and "books for young men."³² Additionally, the teen reviewers did not choose books explicitly targeted to teenage readers, though they did occasionally write about children's texts as nostalgic favorites. I note this not to dismiss the real popularity of junior novels during the postwar decades, but instead to underscore that by the late 1950s, *Seventeen*—a bastion of teen-girl-targeted consumption and purveyor of short fiction by both adult and teen authors—did not include reviews of books published specifically for a teen-girl audience. This is not to say that *Seventeen's* readers—and *Seventeen's* teen reviewers themselves—did not read such books, or even that they as a group looked down on such reading, but rather that the books they chose to recommend to "Curl Up and Read" readers tended to follow the examples set by First and Roth. The girl reviewers' willingness to grapple with challenging texts suggests that they did not share Roth's low estimate of their critical abilities. And at least one girl—seventeen-year-old Madge Hildebrandt—registered her resistance to 'teen-age' romances, opening her September 1965 column by asking "Are you tired of drippy 'teen-age' stories about Homely Hannah and Handsome Dan and the triumph of true adolescent love?"—a question which aligned Hildebrandt with Roth's dismissal of gender- and age-specific "tra-la-la" texts.³³

Jaime Loke and Dustin Harp have noted that during *Seventeen's* first ten years, boys and men were portrayed as socially and intellectually authoritative; editorial content and advertising emphasized male authority on academic and career topics as well as on dating and standards of appearance for girls. In addition to its regular dating column "From a Boy's Point of View" written

³⁰ Cf. Scoggin, "Fables They Shall Not Read;" Dwight L. Burton, "Teaching Literature to Our Youth Today: Helping Them to Grasp Its Meanings," *English Journal* Volume 44, no. 5 (May 1955), 274–79; Margaret A. Edwards, "Let the Lower Lights Be Burning," *English Journal* Volume 46, no. 8 (Nov. 1957), 461–74; Richard S. Alm, "The Glitter and the Gold," *English Journal* Volume 44, No. 6 (Sept. 1955), 315–50.

³¹ Roth, "Talks to Teens," 170, 208.

³² *Ibid.*, 208.

³³ Madge Hildebrandt, "Curl Up and Read," *Seventeen*, Sept. 1965, 22.

by one Jimmy Wescott (possibly a pseudonym), *Seventeen* often published features where young men offered their opinions about dating, beauty, and other related topics. Roth's essay echoed Loke and Harp's intellectually superior male, particularly in his somewhat patronizing implication that *Seventeen's* readers might not have the intellectual acumen or maturity to understand these books on first reading. The handful of "Curl Up and Read" columns written by teenage boys align in some cases with *Seventeen's* representations of male intellectual superiority.³⁴ In March 1964, eighteen-year-old David Zalkind opened his review of books on math with "To many girls, mathematics is a black word that means algebra, geometry, trigonometry—and low grades." James Stone wrote the only explicitly negative column, sharply rejecting *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) and proposing that *Seventeen's* readers instead try his favorite book, Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1961).³⁵

Although the teen reviewers did lean towards book written by men, unlike Roth, they (as well as First, who had a special fondness for the works of Israeli novelist Yaël Dayan, daughter of Moshe Dayan), did also include books by women, suggesting that at least some teen reviewers were able to view women writers as capable of "deal[ing] with human beings."³⁶ Brigitte Fitz (age eighteen, North Bellmore, New York) opened her May 1965 column on nonfiction books with a review of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of Her Own* (1928) and, after a brief discussion of Terence Rattigan's Lawrence of Arabia drama *Ross* (1960), praised the three volumes of Simone de Beauvoir's autobiography, noting, about *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* (1959), "it's fascinating to follow Miss de Beauvoir as she traces the influences which changed her from the demure, obedient child of a conventionally religious family into a rebellious adolescent challenger of bourgeois society."³⁷ With

³⁴ Jaime Loke and Dustin Harp, "Evolving Themes of Masculinity in *Seventeen* Magazine: An Analysis of 1945-1955 and 1995-2005," *Journal of Magazine and New Media Research* Volume 12, No 1 (Fall 2010), 1-21. For important treatments of highly paternalistic male/female dynamics in postwar American culture and media, cf. Ilana Nash, *American Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in Twentieth-Century Popular Culture* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006); Rachel Devlin, *Relative Intimacy: Fathers, Adolescent Daughters, and Postwar American Culture*, Gender and American Culture (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005). Anecdotal internal evidence suggests that there were boys who read *Seventeen*; *Seventeen's* earliest "Letters" columns reprinted letters from male readers, including several servicemen, who praised the magazine and in at least one case, expressed the wish that a similar magazine existed for boys. "Thank You for Your Letters," *Seventeen*, Jan. 1945, 4, 5; "Thank You for Your Letters," *Seventeen*, Feb. 1945, 116. Cf. the discussion of male servicemen's fan letters to Maureen Daly praising *Seventeenth Summer* in Amanda K. Allen, "Dear Miss Daly: 1940s Fan Letters to Maureen Daly and the Age-Grading and Gendering of *Seventeenth Summer*," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* Volume 41, No. 1 (2016), 24-40.

³⁵ David Zalkind, "Curl Up and Read," *Seventeen*, Mar. 1964, 80; James Stone, "Curl Up and Read," *Seventeen*, June 1964, 30

³⁶ First, who was Jewish, briefly reviewed Yaël Dayan's novels *New Face in the Mirror* (1959) and *Envy the Frightened* (1961) in her Feb. 1961 column and Dayan's later novel *Dust* in her May 1963 column, just a month after Philip Roth's "Talks to Teens" guest column on novel-reading was published. Quote from Roth, "Talks to Teens," 208. Helen G. First, "Curl Up and Read," *Seventeen*, Feb. 1961, 42; Helen G. First, "Curl Up and Read," *Seventeen*, May 1963, 56.

³⁷ Brigitte Fitz, "Curl Up and Read," *Seventeen*, May 1965, 70.

one exception, Patrick Coleman (age fifteen, of Montreal) reviewed all women authors: Katharine Anne Porter's *Ship of Fools* (1962) and *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* (1939), Carson McCullers' *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1940), and Elizabeth Bishop's poetry collection *Questions of Travel* (1965).³⁸ Space does not permit a full list of all the books reviewed, but other women authors discussed in the teen-authored "Curl Up and Read" columns included Anne Morrow Lindbergh, Mary Stewart, Emily Brontë, Daphne du Maurier, Jessica Mitford, Cornelia Otis Skinner, and Nancy Hale, among others.

The girl reviewers also treated books by a handful of African American writers. In August 1963, Maeve Kinkead reviewed James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* (1963) (see below).³⁹ Claude Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land* (1965) was reviewed by Ann McCoid, seventeen years old, from Omaha, Nebraska, in November 1967, who opened her review with "Have you ever wondered what it would be like to grow upon the streets of Harlem...?"⁴⁰ Susie Anker, seventeen, from Oakland, California, listed Dick Gregory's *What's Happening?* (1965), "a funny collection of photographs satirizing the incongruities of race prejudice in this country," in her Christmas-gift-oriented column as a book that she'd like someone to give to her.⁴¹ And Sharon Fujioka, also seventeen, of Chatteroy, Washington reviewed *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965) in a brief just-the-facts paragraph in the December 1967 issue.⁴²

If postwar *Seventeen* framed boys and men as experts and intellectual superiors, a series of book-review columns written by girls and focusing on more serious texts suggests a less hierarchical relationship to readers, while also presenting the girls as intellectual agents in their own right. Had David Zalkind's assumption that girls struggled with math been expressed by a girl, another girl reader might have experienced it as commiseration or empathy rather than as condescension. Though both First and Roth argued for critique and maturation, First placed additional emphasis on relationality and emotional expressiveness, in contrast with Roth's description of an isolated scholar struggling to master challenging texts, separate from intellectually or emotionally inflected relationships. First offered a model for reviewing which blended emotional and intellectual expressiveness, a model which the girl reviewers combined with Roth's emphasis on intellectual challenge and growth.

³⁸ Patrick Coleman, "Curl Up and Read," *Seventeen*, June 1966, 20

³⁹ Maeve Kinkead, "Curl Up and Read," *Seventeen*, Sept. 1963, 164.

⁴⁰ Ann McCoid, "Curl Up and Read," *Seventeen*, Nov. 1967, 32.

⁴¹ Susie Anker, "Curl Up and Read," *Seventeen*, Dec. 1965, 146

⁴² Kinkead, "Curl Up and Read," Aug. 1963; Susie Anker, "Curl Up and Read," *Seventeen*, Dec. 1965, 146; Sharon Fujioka, "Curl Up and Read," *Seventeen*, Dec. 1967, 138.

“Are You a Teen-ager Who Would Like to Review Books?”

In August 1963, Jean Savanyu, identified in the byline as sixteen years old and from Kenmore, NY, published *Seventeen's* first teen-authored, non-January book review column. A blurb at the foot of Savanyu's column asked “Are you a teen-ager who would like to review books for this column? For information on requirements, send name, address, birth date to Curl Up and Read, SEVENTEEN....”⁴³ I have not found these requirements; however, given the range of books reviewed and approaches taken by the reviewers, it is possible that the requirements focussed on general tone (with the exception of James Stone's treatment of *Catcher in the Rye*, none of the columns feature clearly negative reviews) and a standardized format. It is possible that the “New Books” included in a separate paragraph at the end of some of the “Curl Up and Read” columns were supplied by editors—occasionally, these were books published by *Seventeen* or written by authors who had been featured in the magazine. That the teen reviewers selected books with earlier publication dates, including some of that were out of print, suggests that the teen reviewers may have been able to choose their books—rather than being asked to read review copies supplied by editors.⁴⁴

Whether they responded to a blurb requesting reviewers or were approached by *Seventeen* staff (the girl book reviewer for January 1958 was Helen G. First's own teenage daughter Abigail),⁴⁵ the girls who wrote these reviews staked public claims to literary-critical identities. Each column represented effortful writing, towards a set of requirements, but also individualized responses to books that were meaningful to the reviewers.⁴⁶ Tensions exist within the reviews, as the

⁴³ Jean Savanyu, “Curl Up and Read,” *Seventeen*, Aug. 1963, 79.

⁴⁴ Several “Curl Up and Read” columns included books identified as “out of print, available in libraries,” including *The Diary of Selma Lagerlöf* (1936), Gwen Raverst's *Period Piece* (1952), Stratis Myrivilis' *The Mermaid Madonna* (1949), and Maria Flores' *Woman with the Whip: Eva Peron* (1952). Sherry Lauyans, “Curl Up and Read,” *Seventeen*, Feb. 1965, 174; Susie Anker, “Curl Up and Read,” *Seventeen*, Oct. 1965, 170; Kristine Anderson, *Seventeen*, Sept. 1966, 34; Penny Woolcock, “Curl Up and Read,” *Seventeen*, Feb. 1967, 96.

Seventeen's short-story collection *Seventeen from Seventeen* (1967) was reviewed in July 1967. Elizabeth Allen's novel *The Loser* (1965), an extension of a short story Allen had published in the Mar. and Apr. 1963 issues, was mentioned in May 1965. Ruth Jarmul, “Curl Up and Read,” *Seventeen*, July 1967, 38; Fitz, “Curl Up and Read,” 70.

⁴⁵ Abigail First, “Curl Up and Read,” *Seventeen*, Jan. 1958, 24. The 1940 census shows Helen and Joseph First living in Philadelphia with one-year-old Abigail, her older sister Elsa, and a 19-year-old African-American live-in servant, Christine Tate. US Census Bureau. Year: 1940; Census Place: Philadelphia, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Roll: T627_3723; Page: 3B; Enumeration District: 51-1103, in Ancestry.com, 1940 United States Federal Census, accessed 25 Sept. 2020.

⁴⁶ Karen Sánchez-Eppler has noted that many texts or objects created by children are created in response to specific prompts: write a thank-you note to Grandma, write a book report for English class. How the creator—child, teenager, adult—incorporates or even transcends those requirements is what allows us to read their work as individually

girls framed their intellectual responses and recommendations in terms that sometimes read as self-conscious or even self-deprecating. The reviews often drew on themes treated in *Seventeen*—consumption, boy/girl relationships, friendships. The girls who wrote these reviews represented themselves (or, in some cases, the fictional girls they created in these reviews) as girls who cared about relationships (platonic and romantic) and who used their columns to encourage girl readers to consider books out of an implied comfort zone.

In the September 1963 “Curl Up and Read” column, seventeen-year-old Maeve Kinkead (of Chappaqua, New York) opened by outlining plans for a Saturday shopping spree:

Suppose you suddenly realize you’ve never spent that small legacy you hid away in your jewelry box last year, and you wake up one Saturday morning with a craving for some brand-new books. What to do? Head for the local bookshop, of course, and start browsing among the bright jackets and bespectacled salesmen.⁴⁷

Kinkead’s spree involved purchasing newly published books which one might not associate with *Seventeen* readers: Kinkead’s shopper’s eye was drawn to the “bold black and red cover” of James Baldwin’s *The Fire Next Time* (1963). Kinkead described Baldwin as a “talented and embittered” author who wrote of “the hideous injustice and complexity of the Negro’s place in our society with tightly controlled verbal passion” while offering “indelible insights into the psychology of an injured race.” After a discussion of an adventure novel set during the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1950, Kinkead then moved on to Betty Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* (1963). Kinkead noted that Friedan’s theories were “strongly documented with statistics and with statements from seemingly serene matrons who have modeled their lives on the ‘feminine mystique’ and found the pretty dream of husband, home, and children unfulfilling and disappointing”—a striking statement in a column placed alongside an ad for Tuscan bone china patterns. Friedan, wrote Kinkead, “feels that women who are led to equate femininity with being a domestic do-it-all have destroyed their potential for becoming real human beings.” From the *Feminine Mystique*, Kinkead then turned to Gunther Grass’ *Tin Drum* (1959; first American edition, 1962), concluding, “You’ll hear faint beats long after you put the novel down; this drummer makes a haunting sound.” Kinkead closed on a somewhat more conventional note; in a brief review of “New Book” *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*, she wrote “I can’t resist telling one tantalizing fact—in this book, ‘007’ gets married.” Drawing on *Seventeen*’s

expressive. Karen Sánchez-Eppler, *Dependent States: The Child’s Part in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

⁴⁷ Kinkead, “Curl Up and Read,” 164.

emphases on shopping, feminine adornment, and manhunting (those salesmen!), Kinkead also used her review to introduce readers to current, controversial nonfiction as well as two contemporary novels that fell outside the “junior novel” category. Kinkead’s projected reading girl enjoyed shopping, jewelry, *and* engaging with sharp cultural critiques and serious fiction.⁴⁸

When sixteen-year-old Edwina Campbell (of Georgetown, Massachusetts) opened her September 1967 column about books about World War II by noting “Most girls I know would no sooner pick up a book about World War II than they’d spend an hour reading a dictionary—which is a pity, since so many good books on the subject are available,” she acknowledged that her tastes might differ from those of “most girls.” Campbell sought, however, to ally herself with “most girls” reading preferences by framing these nonfiction texts as being “as full of suspense, drama, adventure or romance as any novel—and far more engrossing, because they deal with real people and events.”⁴⁹ Campbell summarized Allan Bosworth’s account of the Japanese internment camps, *America’s Concentration Camps* (1967), linking Bosworth’s book to current events:

Moreover—and this is the most important part of the book—[Bosworth] tells why it is still possible for minority groups in America to be imprisoned for no greater crime than having a nonwhite skin. Bosworth admits that this could happen only during an emergency, but, as he points out, “To anybody who reads the news about Vietnam, the time of emergency may be tomorrow.”

Campbell then turned to Samuel Eliot Morison’s *The Two-Ocean War* (1963), an account of the US Navy in World War II which she identified as one of her “all-time favorites;” Campbell encouraged readers to try out one of her favorite books by framing the book as an emotionally gripping story with “that indescribable ‘something’ that makes a potentially boring and technical work read like the most fascinating novel.”⁵⁰

Again investing nonfiction with the emotional impact of fiction, Campbell closed with Gwen Terasaki’s *Bridge to the Sun* (1961), “the true story of a girl from Tennessee who married Japanese diplomat Hidenari Terasaki in 1931.” Campbell connects recent history and politics with typical *Seventeen* themes of romance and domesticity:

[The book] presents glimpses of the Japanese occupation of China during the late 1930’s [sic], a regime so brutal that Mr. Terasaki, ashamed of his countrymen, asked to be

⁴⁸ Ibid., 164.

⁴⁹ Edwina Campbell, “Curl Up and Read,” *Seventeen*, Sept. 1967, 234.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 234.

transferred to another embassy. In addition to its historical significance, *Bridge to the Sun* is also the most beautiful love story I've ever read.⁵¹

Campbell highlighted the Terasakis' romance while also invoking a key girl-authored account of the era: "[Terasaki] never pictures herself as a martyr; rather, she treats her problems with as much understanding as Anne Frank dealt with hers, and this is the beauty of the book—despite all, Mrs. Terasaki was sincerely happy in her marriage." Campbell, knowing her audience, concluded with the assertion of Terasaki's "sincere" happiness in her marriage. In her column, however, Campbell also noted how the racial discrimination shown by the United States' willingness to intern second-generation Japanese Americans could be repeated in the case of a parallel "emergency." Balancing the weightiness of these books' topics with an emphasis on their readability, Campbell positioned herself as both a reader of historical tomes *and* an ordinary teenage girl susceptible to emotionally appealing stories.⁵²

Diana Deverell, age sixteen and from Burlington, North Carolina, opened her January 1965 column with a polite rejection of the passivity implied by the phrase "curl up and read": "With all due respect to the title of this column, *Anthem* by Ayn Rand [1938], is a book guaranteed to make you sit up and think." The four books Deverell chose allowed her to express concerns about conformity, herd mentality, and hubris. Describing the books in terms which implied her agreement with Rand's disgust with a communist "utopia", Deverell noted how "skillfully" Rand "describes the horror of the existence [the hero] rejects, and exposes the worship of the group as a monstrous thing which can lead to slavery," concluding, "Whether you disagree with her philosophy (and many people do) or feel that she is saying what you have always believed, Miss Rand has written a novel to uncurl even the most passive of readers." Deverell went on to review George Orwell's novel *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1956) perceiving a split between Orwell's apparent distaste for the "stodgy middle class" and the ending of the book: "Can he be saying that happiness lies in conformity? Or does he mean that no one in our society can escape from worshipping [sic] the money-god?"—an interesting question, following Deverell's charitable reading of an Ayn Rand novel.⁵³

⁵¹ Ibid., 234.

⁵² Ibid., 234. Campbell's sympathetic treatment of Hidenari Terasaki's resistance to the "brutal" Japanese regime echoes girls' organizations' postwar efforts to frame Japanese girls as potential friends. Jennifer Helgren, *American Girls and Global Responsibility: A New Relation to the World During the Early Cold War* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017), 82-94.

⁵³ Diana Deverell, "Curl Up and Read," *Seventeen*, Jan. 1965, 115.

Deverell described Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962) as being about "a group of cowed, docile patients [who] submit to the autocratic rule of Big Nurse as she works at remolding them into uncomplaining, frightened little men who can be returned to the outside world neatly labeled 'sane,'" until their lives are disrupted by McMurphy, "profane and loving life," who "teaches the other patients what it is to be a man." Finally, Deverell turned to William Golding's *The Spire* (1964), a fable about the dean of a cathedral who became obsessed with building a huge steeple that his cathedral was unable to support: the reader is led to ask, did the spire stand for "faith or for self-delusion"? Deverell wasn't telling: "The answers are in the book. Read it, think about it—I dare you to stay uncurled." Deverell's review turned not simply on difficult themes, but also on how wrestling with these themes could push the reader towards action. At the same time, her running verbal play on the column's title both underscored and subverted the idea that *Seventeen* readers were only inclined to passive "curled up" reading.⁵⁴

In an unusual variation of the column's format, eighteen-year-old Kathleen Callanan of Silver Springs, Maryland wrote her entire January 1968 column on William Styron's *Confessions of Nat Turner* (1967). Callanan praised Styron's attempt to express Turner's thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. Referring explicitly to the race riots of the summer of 1967, Callanan noted how many people had asked, "Why are they so impatient now that they've achieved so much?" She used her review of Styron's imagined reconstruction of the life of a "Negro slave" to discuss the novel in the context of understanding contemporaneous racial tensions. Praising Styron's attempt to experience Turner's thoughts, feelings, and perceptions, Callanan urged readers ("we") to turn the empathy suggested by Styron's characterization towards social and political awareness:

With Nat, we react in anger to the condescending little kindnesses, somehow worse than cruelty in their calm assumption of superiority. We share his urgency for a sign from God and the futility of his infatuation with the daughter of a slave-owner. We discover what it is to feign stupidity so as not to appear 'uppity,' to descend to new depths of self-abasement to obtain favors, to be placed on the selling block.... Reading *The Confessions of Nat Turner* won't change your world; only you can do that. But it will give you a startling new perspective on the events that are shaping your present and future.⁵⁵

Callanan interpreted the 1967 riots through a highly-charged African American historical figure in a novel written by a white man. Styron's interpretation of Nat Turner's experiences may have been

⁵⁴ Ibid., 115.

⁵⁵ Kathleen B. Callanan, "Curl Up and Read," *Seventeen*, Jan. 1968, 116.

seen as more accessible to the presumed white middle-class readers of *Seventeen*. Nevertheless, Callanan's emphasis on empathy and how a changed perspective can support individual change echoed the relational expressiveness encouraged by First and the relationally-based political awareness noted by Jennifer Helgren.⁵⁶

In her September 1966 column, nineteen-year-old Kristine Anderson offered a first-person short story playing on a standard "how do I get a cute boy to talk to me?" narrative. "What can you say to a boy who finds errors in his chem book for fun?" asks the heroine. When she fails to engage the boy in his areas of interest by tossing out scientific facts, the girl turns instead to pseudoscientific and supernatural texts (that is, the books reviewed) as conversation starters—angels, mermaids, murderous eleven-year-old girls, sacred mushrooms. But the boy can only splutter "What?" as she peppers him with questions: "Can the soul leave the body before death? Can a personality from 2700 B.C. speak through the body of a man living in 1964?" Those last questions constituted Anderson's review of Andrija Puharich's *The Sacred Mushroom: Key to the Door of Eternity* (1959), the last book incorporated into the story. At the end of the story, the girl invites the boy in for "a cup of hot mushrooms or something." But to no avail: the boy flees, leaving the girl to ask, innocently: "I wonder if he'll call again?"⁵⁷

Anderson described all these books in fanciful, whimsical terms, intended, it is implied, to challenge the boy's scientific-minded rationality. Unable to get the boy's attention by speaking to his areas of interest (the standard advice!), the girl resorts to more fantastical works hoping to shock him into conversation. She succeeds only at confusing and baffling him until he decamps altogether. But the story is ambivalent: does the girl actually like this boy? It was 1966, and Anderson's byline identified her as from College Station, Texas, which suggests that she may have been a student at Texas A&M University at the time. Was this review meant as a venture into countercultural thinking, in response or resistance to a "straight" culture focussed on rules, perfection (he enjoys finding errors in his chem book), and the hegemony of rationality? The books reviewed are referred to as sources for enlightened conversation, a gambit which fails with the science-minded boy, but which might introduce readers to new books, new ways of thinking, and new models of boy-girl relationships—relationships which might have included a shared cup of 'shrooms.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ibid., 116; First, "Write a Better Book Review;" 28; Helgren, *American Girls*.

⁵⁷ Kristine Anderson, "Curl Up and Read," *Seventeen*, Sept. 1966, 34.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 134.

Like Anderson, who wove her reviews into a short story, other reviewers also used their columns as opportunities for their own creatively inflected criticism. Seventeen-year-old Debora Greger, from Richland, Washington, wrote her May 1967 review as a series of very short stories, with the books reviewed circulating as tokens of affection and as instigators of relationship—simultaneously emotional and intellectual—between a boy and a girl: a boy gives a girl a book he hopes she'll read, the girl shares a book she loves with a boy. In two of the vignettes, the girl draws a boy's attention through the book she is reading: in the third "review," the girl Jamie drops her books and "the new boy in trig," helping her, notices that she is carrying Kingsley Amis' *Lucky Jim*; in another tiny story, Shelly sits on the library floor reading *The Annotated Alice* and is embarrassed to be discovered there by "Greg, the very smart boy who knew all the answers and read Ian Fleming behind his lit book in class," who is impressed by her blurting out her fascination with Carroll's neologisms and calls after her when she flees in humiliation. Greger concluded the review with "The moral of these stories? Books have a place in your life!" But in these tiny stories Greger portrayed what I have called elsewhere "intellectual desire," the desire both for intellectual activity and for relationships based in intellectual as well as emotional affinity. The books create and cement relationships (here, heterosocial/sexual relationships). These vignettes portrayed boy-girl couples bonding through shared affinity for a specific book, and the conversations Greger depicted in these stories, which constituted her reviews of these books, centered not simply on shared responses to the book, but to the sharing of ideas about the books. Greger went beyond showing simple agreement about the value of a given book to showing *discussions* about the books.⁵⁹

Fifteen-year-old Lloyd Rose, from Charlotte, North Carolina, focussed her May 1966 column exclusively on books by Truman Capote, including *In Cold Blood* (1965) and several earlier works. Addressing the social psychodramas of these texts, Rose also discussed the literary qualities of Capote's work, using the texts as opportunities to showcase her own writing. Rose praised in particular *Other Voices, Other Rooms* (1948) as "an unusual, beautiful novel, almost a poem in prose—full of a sense of the light and shadow of life, the elusiveness of reality." The story portrayed the innocence of the young male protagonist, one of Capote's "terrible children": as Rose described the story, it is "the battle between others for possession of [his innocence]." As the people he cared for abandon him, Rose noted that, "at the end, the boy is not so much lost to, but is reclaimed by, his

⁵⁹ Debora Greger, "Curl Up and Read," *Seventeen*, May 1967, 208. On intellectual desire, see Jill Anderson, "Dinny Gordon, Intellectual: Anne Emery's Postwar Junior Fiction and Girls' Intellectual Culture," *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* Volume 7, no. 2 (Spring 2014), 243–66.

homosexual uncle Randolph,” an ambiguous sentence which abruptly ended Rose’s treatment of this novel. Rose concluded by describing the “irresistible” eighteen-year-old Holly Golightly in *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* (1958), “romp[ing] through its pages with a one-eyed cat on her shoulder and dreams of diamonds in her head.... by turns brashly confident, awkward, and lost, Holly is a captivating heroine. ‘Fred’ falls in love with her, and so will you.”⁶⁰

Rose’s column singled out the young characters in Capote’s work, referring both explicitly and implicitly to her feelings for these characters. Her discussion of *In Cold Blood* concluded with a brief description of young Nancy Clutter as “what every mother wants her teenage daughter to be, but she is not a paper doll. I really liked her and was all the more appalled by her death because of that.” The reader was also encouraged to identify with Nancy Clutter, who Rose describes as both a real girl (“not a paper doll”) while also being a model girl and daughter—a balance *Seventeen* sought both to inculcate and celebrate. At the same time, Rose bluntly invokes a kind of relational reading: her genuine affection (“I really liked her”) for Nancy Clutter causes her to react even more strongly to Nancy’s death, an identification that Rose implies the reader will experience as well, just as the reader will also, as ‘Fred’ did, fall in love with Holly Golightly.⁶¹

In November 1964, eighteen-year-old Sandra Frisvold opened her column with a paean to the creative powers of the human heart: “Long ago a wise man said, ‘There is nothing new under the sun.’ True, the human heart is unchanging, but it is a never-boring subject, capable of wonder and wonderful things. Writers who show this best do so not by ‘inventing’ but by creating new and different combinations from timeless and familiar things.”⁶² Frisvold then introduced readers to her “favorite concoctionist,” E. E. Cummings, waxing poetic about his *Poems, 1923-1954*:

In [this book], the combinations are so original that some consider them far out. Actually, they reach far in—into your mind (if you are a scientist), into your heart (if you are a romantic). Like a great glass elevator they lift you up and give you a new and different view of the world around you. The words skip and fly and leap and stagger and march right into where you live, with lines like ‘snow is the white idea / on the mind of the earth’ and ‘I’d rather learn from one bird how to sing / than teach ten thousand stars how not to dance.’

⁶⁰ Lloyd Rose, “Curl Up and Read,” *Seventeen*, May 1966, 190; Margaret Shea had previously reviewed *In Cold Blood* in Feb. 1966. Margaret Shea, “Curl Up and Read,” *Seventeen*, Feb. 1966, 182. Despite the masculine name, Lloyd Rose was a girl; her Sept. 1965 “In My Opinion” column included a small photograph of her. Lloyd Rose, “In My Opinion,” *Seventeen*, Sept. 1965, 222.

⁶¹ Rose, “Curl Up and Read,” 190.

⁶² Sandra Frisvold, “Curl Up and Read,” *Seventeen*, Nov. 1964, 24.

Cummings believed in the miracle of individuality, and delighted in springtime, in flowers, in girls, in beauty. He wrote with simplicity. He wrote with depth. His words speak the language of youth.⁶³

Frisvold's review of Cummings' work—incorporating his poetry but also expanding beyond his words—allowed her to exercise her own writing skills, while also praising “the miracle of individuality”—a common theme in *Seventeen*, in spite of its behind-the-scenes promotion of “copycat” Teena as marketing persona. Seeking to draw others to Cummings' work, Frisvold used her own poetical rhetoric to encourage reading, while also identifying Cummings' language as “the language of youth,” inviting readers to participate in a shared language that includes Cummings' poetry.⁶⁴

Similarly, in the last “Curl Up and Read” column, published in May 1969, Carol Ferdinandsen, age seventeen, used her own poetical prose to bring readers and another poet, Leonard Cohen, in a shared community of youthful expression. Wrote Ferdinandsen, reviewing Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* (1966) and *Selected Poems, 1956-1968* (1968):

Cohen's theme seems to be that much of the evil which exists in people's hearts and minds stems from the need to purge ourselves. We are even ready to commit an ‘evil’ deed in order to wipe out evil. A paradox? Certainly. We—the young people—stand up for an impossible dream, even for a contradictory concept. Each of Cohen's poems voices at least one of the things you've been thinking lately: in his own words, he ‘touches your perfect body with his mind.’⁶⁵

Ferdinandsen's hymn to Leonard Cohen stood as the column's last statement: a call to identification with other young people, which was also a call for self-reflection. Ferdinandsen's review showed a kind of dreamy idealism with darker tones, but was not a clear call for action beyond the mention of commission of ‘evil’ deeds to destroy a greater evil— “a contradictory concept.” Ferdinand's conclusion is also a paraphrased quote from Cohen's poem “Suzanne Takes You Down,” about a beautiful and inscrutable young woman. In Ferdinandsen's paraphrase, Cohen's words touch both her mind and the reader's minds (“the things you've been thinking lately”), but the readers' bodies are also “touched” by Cohen's mind through his poetry.⁶⁶ With this review, “Curl Up and Read”

⁶³ Ibid., 24.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 24.

⁶⁵ Carol Ferdinandsen, “Curl Up and Read,” *Seventeen*, May 1969, 32

⁶⁶ Ibid., 32. Ferdinandsen quoted from the poem “Suzanne Takes You Down.” Cohen wrote this poem about Suzanne Verdal, a 17-year-old dancer Cohen met in Montreal in the early 1960s; Verdal, ten years younger than Cohen, was the

ended on a countercultural, pensive note, fervently dreaming of change but not offering strategies towards achieving it.

“Discussion, Anyone?”

As Carley Moore has noted, over the course of the 1960s into the 1970s, girls’ writing in *Seventeen* became more political and more “troubling,” offering challenging takes on sociopolitical issues, in particular feminism and race relations while also reflecting the magazine’s uneven balance of citizenship, consumption, and heteronormativity.⁶⁷ However, the “Curl Up and Read” columns’ emphasis on intellectual challenges, as well as the relational connections between readers and books and between reviewers and readers, echoed the tones of Helen G. First’s original columns. Indeed, the intellectual seriousness running through the “Curl Up and Read” columns harked all the way back to *Seventeen*’s earliest book review columns, which set world-political texts alongside junior novels. What differed was that, from August 1963 on, these intellectually and emotionally charged book reviews were written by girls (and a handful of boys) and addressed to their peers.

The differences in style from review to review suggested that the teen reviewers were able to structure their reviews according to their own interests, tastes, and their own desires to engage in literary-critical work. The reviewers sought to build relationships as they urged reading and resulting actions onto their peers: they lectured readers, explained to them, conversed with them, sought to mobilize them. If their tones and their approaches differed—Kinkead’s archness, Deverell’s almost hectoring instigation, Anderson’s anti-rational whimsy, Greger’s tiny short stories, Griswold’s and Ferdinandsen’s dreaminess—their goals were similar: they were writing about books they had found interesting, important, worth communicating about, worth recommending to other girls. *Seventeen*’s girl reviewers offered their fellow readers a kind of intellectual, if not always explicitly moral, self-improvement through serious, thoughtful reading.

In her 1964 “Curl Up and Read” column, we see Kosofsky flexing her early critical-writing muscles, reading, writing—but her desire to talk with others about literature and ideas is itself the

partner of a friend of Cohen’s. Leonard Cohen, “Suzanne Takes You Down,” in *Parasites of Heaven* (Toronto, ON: McClelland & Stewart, 1966), 70-1; the version in *Selected Poems* misprints the final line as “she’s touched her perfect body with her mind.” Leonard Cohen, “Suzanne Takes You Down,” in *Selected Poems, 1956-1968* (New York: Viking Press, 1968), 210. Sylvia Simmons, *I’m Your Man: The Life of Leonard Cohen* (New York, HarperCollins, 2012), 124-30.

⁶⁷ Carley Moore, “Writing Trouble: ‘Seventeen’ Magazine and the Girl Writer” (PhD diss., New York University, 2004).”

frame for her column. Her culture is structured around a call for discussion, with her discussion of each book framed as an inquiry directed toward her readers: is the literary argument obsolete? Is *Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* the British *Catcher in the Rye*? What *isn't* fun to argue about? “Discussion, anyone?”⁶⁸ Her column is premised on the idea that *Seventeen's* readers might be interested in talking about a play for a long time to come, or that they might enjoy arguing about dehumanizing urbanization or whether escapism was a valid response to pressures to conform. Kosofsky both called for and modeled intellectual engagement, presuming both discussion and community: a friend or friends whose nimble minds would match hers. Kosofsky's “Curl Up and Read” column might have been subtitled “And Then Call Me and We'll Talk.”⁶⁹

Originally encouraged by adult reviewers like Helen First, intellectual self-development became—potentially—a shared project, with teens writing recommendations and speaking directly to other teen readers. And yet *Seventeen* as a community for intellectually-minded girls contained limitations. Given the geographic range of the reviewers, we can guess that at least some actively responded to the calls for reviewers. With the girls' “Curl Up and Read” columns, *Seventeen* gestured towards the kind of “literary discussion” Kosofsky hoped for—a fact worth noting in itself—but, with the absence of printed responses to these reviews, *Seventeen* did not actively foster that discussion beyond the publication of the reviews themselves; these young reviewers' efforts to spur conversations were almost never reciprocated within the pages of *Seventeen*.

Responses, if received, would likely have appeared in the “Letters” column, and very few responses to the book review columns appeared there—notably, James Stone's outright rejection of *Catcher in the Rye* [1951] was the only column to receive any substantive response in the “Letters” column. I suspect that this absence underscores *Seventeen's* primary function as a normative text, one focussed more on dispensing recommendations than on fostering dialogue. The editorially mediated nature of the “Letters” columns also subtly suggested that dialogue in *Seventeen* as Thompson's “shared space” would take place between girls and editorial staff, rather than between girls. Within the pages of *Seventeen*, when Kosofsky concluded her review with “Discussion, anyone?” we do not get to see anyone taking her up on the offer—at least, not in 1964. This does

⁶⁸ Eve Kosofsky, “Curl Up and Read,” *Seventeen*, Jan. 1964, 18.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 18. This eagerness is particularly haunting given the adult Sedgwick's conversations with her therapist Shannon Van Wey, as published in her *Dialogue on Love*, about her deep depression at the age of 13—the age printed in her “Curl Up and Review” column byline. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Dialogue on Love* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), ff., especially 75-78.

not, of course, mean that the reviewers received no response whatsoever to their efforts, but does imply that conversations, if they took place, would have occurred beyond the pages of *Seventeen*.⁷⁰

Nevertheless, the presence of these book reviews, alongside other girl-authored texts, identifies *Seventeen* as a *site of evidence* for girls' intellectual agency in the immediate postwar decades. Certainly the "Curl Up and Read" texts, like girls' writing in *Seventeen* in general, can be read as juvenilia—Hal Sedgwick has indicated that "Curl Up and Read" may well be Kosofsky's first publication.⁷¹ But these book reviews should be read not simply as juvenilia foreshadowing adult work, but as texts authored by girls, sources for a history of girls' creative and intellectual activity.

We can hear the future Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's fondness for philosophizing and her delight in argument in thirteen-year-old Eve Kosofsky's review. The adult Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's oeuvre and influence shapes our response to discovering thirteen-year-old Eve's voice in *Seventeen* magazine. But in 1963, when she must have written her "Curl Up and Read" entry, Eve Kosofsky was a depressed young teenager struggling with junior high; as she would tell her therapist as an adult about her depression during those years:

[Junior high] seemed to offer so much wider a canvas for action, attention getting, achievement. Of course I couldn't not want it. But of course I couldn't get much of it, either—I wasn't pretty, or interpersonally skillful, or athletic or self-confident—and I think each time I tried and failed, I would batter myself for having been tempted off-center, for losing hold of my tenuous sense of myself.⁷²

⁷⁰ James Stone, "Curl Up and Read," June 1964, 30; "Letters," *Seventeen*, Aug. 1964, 4, 20. The only other "Curl Up and Read" column which received any attention in the Letters column was Madeline Tress' Jan. 1966 review of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, which readers criticized for a factual mistake. The editor noted Tress' apology. Madeline Tress, "Curl Up and Read," *Seventeen*, Jan. 1966, 31; "Letters," *Seventeen*, Mar. 1966, 14; Kosofsky, "Curl Up and Read."

Lana Lin has noted that Sedgwick's other experience with magazine writing—her advice column "Off My Chest," published in *MAMM* (a magazine for women with breast cancer) from Feb. 1998 through Jan. 2003—also did not receive responses. In a 2000 interview, Sedgwick stated, laughing: "Nominally it's an advice column, but I make up all the letters. I wish people would write and ask for my advice." Lana Lin, *Freud's Jaw and Other Lost Objects: Fractured Subjectivity in the Face of Cancer* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 83-94; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "This Piercing Bouquet: An Interview with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick," interview by Stephen M. Barber and David L. Clark, in *Regarding Sedgwick: Essays on Queer Culture and Critical Theory*, ed. Stephen M. Barber and David L. Clark (New York: Routledge, 2002), 255.

Sylvia Plath's four-year correspondence with Eddie Cohen, a 21-year-old English major who sent her a fan letter following the appearance of her story "And Summer Will Not Come Again" in *Seventeen* hints at the possibilities of intellectual companionship triggered by but not recorded in the magazine itself. Andrew Wilson, *Mad Girl's Love Song: Sylvia Plath and Life Before Ted* (New York: Scribner, 2013), 93-98

⁷¹ H. A. Sedgwick, "From H. A. Sedgwick," in *Reading Sedgwick*, ed. Lauren Berlant (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 36.

⁷² Sedgwick, *Dialogue on Love*, 75.

Kosofsky's choice to respond to a call for book reviewers in *Seventeen* could conceivably have encompassed both the desire to participate in that wider canvas—given the popularity of *Seventeen*—and a desire of her own to give voice to her intellectual interests and way of being.

Eve Kosofsky's presence in *Seventeen* may suggest that she read and was worked on by *Seventeen*'s highly normative oeuvre; but it also means that in 1963, Kosofsky, who by her own adult accounts was a young girl who longed to be acknowledged as an intellectual, recognized *Seventeen* as a venue where a girl could hold forth, even for a half-page column, about serious books. And in the 1960s, Kosofsky was one of fifty-five girls who published thoughtful, wide-ranging, carefully crafted book review columns in *Seventeen*. Her column—and the columns written by her teen-critic colleagues—stand as primary sources and points of entry for postwar girls' creative and intellectual history, as evidence of the presence of girls who wanted to engage in critical reading and writing and to share that work with others. To paraphrase the adult Sedgwick, this article amounts to “a claim for respectful attention to the intellectual and artistic [lives]” of the teenage girls who sought to represent themselves as literary critics in the pages of postwar *Seventeen*.⁷³

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⁷³ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “A Poem is Being Written,” in *Tendencies*, Series Q (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 177.

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