

Are you there, reader? It's me, Margaret: A reconsideration of Judy Blume's prose as sororal dialogism.

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Abstract

Judy Blume's 1970 problem novel *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* explores the dynamism found not just within the sociocultural shift in the plot of young female protagonist but also a shift between authored subject and reader. This article re-examines Blume as a writer not simply working within the staid boundaries of the problem novel but as an author testing the boundaries of narrative space and time to construct a "sororal dialogism" between reader and narrative protagonist. Blume genders the text by creating a conversation of an empathic nature, constructing bonds between girls on subject matter once considered taboo.

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That's another thing. My mother's always talking about when I'm a teenager. Stand up straight, Margaret! Good posture now makes for a good figure later. Wash your face with soap, Margaret! Then you won't get pimples when you're a teenager. If you ask me, being a teenager is pretty rotten—between pimples and worrying about how you smell.

—Margaret Simon, *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* (25)

I am only somewhat joking when I attribute the above lines to Margaret Simon rather than to Judy Blume, a author of the 1970 problem novel *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*. The passage immediately rejoins a comment by Margaret's mother that playfully chides Margaret for not only not acting her age but presupposes that Margaret's attitude will only worsen as she ages: "Margaret! I don't know what I'm going to do with you when you're a teenager if you're acting like this now" (25). For the record, Margaret is eleven. As the epigraph indicates, Margaret is painfully aware of her impending post-pubesence and all the demands that adolescence holds for her (a need for better posture, cleaner complexion, and, possibly, deodorant [1]). Adolescence, though, does not make these expectations upon her; rather, her mother does and, to Margaret, that is intolerable—so intolerable, in fact, that Margaret breaks the fourth wall of Blume's text and seeks out someone, anyone, to vent her frustrations. The anyone in question here, I would argue, is the reader herself—someone who, presumably by the function of the problem novel, seeks out textual Margaret in order to safely confront and comprehend a personal difficulty outside of the text. Margaret could have this conversation with her mother. She could,

Joseph Michael Sommers is an assistant professor of English at the University of Central Arkansas, where he teaches children's and young adult literature as well as courses in modern and contemporary literature and critical theory. He has published essays on figures such as Gary Paulsen, Hunter Thompson, Denise Levertov, and Judy Blume. His current projects include a book-length work investigating post-World Wars chronotopes in Anglophone children's and young adult literature as well as a study of the sentimental bonds created through lady's magazines during the pre-Civil War period in America.



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