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### TURMOIL AND UNREST IN SOUTH AFRICAN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

This article investigates the ways in which the student protests and unrest during the Soweto Uprising of June 1976 and its aftermath was mediated and presented to young adult readers in literature written from 1979 to 2009. The focus is on how events are remembered and constructed through narrative and characterisation. During the early part of this period English-language writers represented opposition to the status quo and were generally strongly opposed to the system of apartheid. Writers performed a role as activists, constantly pushing their young readers to resist authority and the prevailing ideology. This gave rise to a number of works which sought to draw the attention of young white readers to the catastrophic, and often absurd, effects of the apartheid system. Four of these novels are examined in relation to the depiction of student unrest and the power relations existing between black and white characters. The works demonstrate that white characters in these novels were largely removed from, and oblivious to, the everyday realities of their black counterparts. After the first democratic elections in 1994 writers continued to remember and interpret the past through texts dealing with the same events and the continuing unrest in the 1980s. Two later novels by black writers are examined with the purpose of contrasting and comparing narrative techniques, focalisation, characterisation and attitudes. As writers continue to interpret and mediate the events affecting young people during the struggle new memories and new interpretations are still being created. The earlier novels were all written before the first democratic elections and end of apartheid when the future of the country remained in the balance. The later novels are written from hindsight — the protests had proved successful, apartheid had been dismantled, and the role of the youth vindicated and partially iconized. The most important factors are the relationship between the authors and their characters, and between the authors and their own memory of events and the significance ascribed to them.

**Keywords:** Apartheid, political unrest, post-apartheid literature, racism, social memory, South African young adult literature, Soweto Uprising.

Turmoil and unrest, characteristic of the lives of many young South Africans growing up prior to the 1990s, has often featured in writing for young adults, particularly in relation to student and anti-apartheid protests. Before 1994 such works frequently served to disrupt the status quo and expose the many injustices of the apartheid system, while later works sought to explore the complex issues of memory and the legacy of the involvement of young people in the struggle. This article investigates

... The main character in the novel is a young girl, ... (The text continues with a detailed analysis of the novel's themes, including the role of the protagonist, the setting, and the author's perspective on the events of the apartheid era.) ...





