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Sound Memes on BookTok

Understanding Affect in the Platformised Reviewing of Young Adult Books on TikTok

Abstract: This article addresses the changing landscape of book reviewing within the field of young adult (YA) literature, particularly in the context of emerging and increasingly ubiquitous digital platforms and platformisation. Starting from the recognition that BookTok – the popular book-related subculture of the even more popular digital video-sharing platform TikTok – is becoming one of the most significant forces within the realm of YA literature at the levels of marketing, sale, and readership, we argue that there is a need to investigate how the affordances of TikTok as a platform are transforming YA literature reviews, particularly given the emerging popularity of YA literature reviews by young people and for young people on TikTok. We argue that hitherto unrecognised and seemingly unimportant modes of meaning-making have become central to the reviewing of YA literature on BookTok, focusing specifically on the way sound is used on and afforded by the platform. Building on the evolving literature on internet memes and specifically sound memes, as well as on Swedish-Finnish scholar Maarit Jaakkola’s work exploring how digital platforms are challenging monopolies which have traditionally characterised literary criticism, this article undertakes an analysis of three BookTok videos and the sounds they employ. The aim in this is to establish how the mimetic and affective properties of sound allows young users to express highly nuanced feelings relating to the books they review, ultimately pushing at the boundaries of what constitute valid and valuable practices for reviewing YA literature.

Keywords: reviewtainment, platforms, affordances, aural turn, children’s and YA literature, children’s literature reviews

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In the fall of 2023, our colleagues from Aarhus University invited us to do an online guest lecture based on our ongoing research on BookTok – the book-related subculture on the hyper popular digital platform TikTok. Despite years of experience of studying and working in hybrid environments, we had a technical glitch on Zoom: the sound on our example BookTok videos did not work. This made our chosen videos much less impactful and engaging, significantly limiting our ability to demonstrate why BookTok has been so instrumental in the marketing, sale, and readership of young adult (hereinafter YA) literature and young people’s reading practices in general. Even though we resolved our technical problem fairly quickly, as if by design this technical glitch only further concretized our overarching argument: sound was clearly critical to these videos. This is an example of how, in the age of platformisation, platform affordances – that is, the specific features of a platform such as the “Like” button on Facebook – significantly shape user practices and experiences (Bucher and Helmond).

Here, we understand platformisation as a process that “leads to the (re-)organisation of cultural practices around platforms, while these practices simultaneously shape a platform’s institutional dimension” (Poell et al. 6). This intricate relationship between evolving practices and platforms is acutely visible in the domain of youth literature and reading. TikTok, for instance, instituted the TikTok Book Awards in 2023 in UK and Ireland in which YA authors like Alice Oseman and Holly Jackson were popular winners. In this case, the cultural practice of consecrating the literary through awarding was mediated via a platform, creating not only a new strata of judges and critics but also completely novel award categories such as “BookTok Creator Of The Year” holding up a mirror to the growing importance of content creators in the life cycles of books. In addition to this annual event, the TikTok platform hosts an ever-evolving quotidian practice that seldom has been studied within the contours of BookTok: reviewing. The present article addresses this lacuna to examine how the reviewing of youth literature is evolving in the age of platformisation. More specifically, we analyse how platform-specific affordances shape new forms of reviewing by zooming in on TikTok’s affordance of sound and its crucial role in emergent reviewing practices on BookTok.

This position comes in response to Swedish-Finnish scholar Maarit Jaakkola’s *Reviewing Culture Online: Post-Institutional Cultural Critique across Platforms* (2022) that also lays the groundwork for this research. In this monograph, Jaakkola examines online reviewing of

goods and services as platform-specific and post-institutional practices where the “monopoly of traditional institutional criticism has been challenged” across different platforms (3). BookTok epitomises this as young people’s critical practices continue to have a measurable impact on young adult books (see Kulkarni and Owens) and the overall discourse surrounding them. Given that the image of the “competent child” – emboldened by not only the right but also the ability to partake in cultural conversations – has historically been “a fundamental part of the modernity project in most Nordic countries” (Johansson 7), the discussion around young readers as active online reviewers of their books is especially pertinent within the context of this journal. The platform-specific nature of these practices makes it essential to supplement the current theoretical apparatus used to understand reviewing practices with further insights from media studies. To this end, we first contextualise BookTok practices as forms of reviewing before moving towards a close analysis of sound on BookTok by drawing on the growing scholarship on audio memes. Through this article, we hope to show how hitherto unrecognised and seemingly unimportant modes of meaning-making have become central to the reviewing of YA literature on BookTok.

BookTok and/as Online Reviewing

The practice of reviewing books online has a close historical link to platforms. Platform, as understood in this article, emerged as a concept to understand changes in internet culture with the advent of Web 2.0 that focused on a rich and compelling user experience, inviting users to take on the role of participants and collaborators. When Amazon first started as an online book-selling platform, it cleverly pioneered user-generated book reviews to fill empty spaces on its nascent website (Murray 112). Amazon has since bought Goodreads – a bookish platform designed for finding books through your social network and cataloguing and tracking your reading – exercising control over a sizeable portion of user-generated book reviews online while also influencing similar practices on other bookish platforms such as Bookstagram and BookTube (Jaakkola 75). Even though online book reviewing practices exist in an ecosystem and along a continuum, the unique nature of each platform’s set of affordances creates a constellation of emergent practices that push the boundaries of how reviewing is understood and practised. As Jaakkola summarises:

in contrast to the pre-platformization era when a review was always linear, argumentation-based, typically even monological text, reviews on the platformized social web can take on a diversity of forms using different media and user interaction, which is something profoundly new within the tradition of reviewing and criticism. (Jaakkola 75)

At the time of writing, this is most prominently visible on BookTok, a TikTok subculture that aggregates book-related content ranging from conventional recommendation videos to more embodied and performative forms of reviewing. While all kinds of genres find a receptive audience on BookTok, some are exponentially more popular than others. YA books, for instance, enjoy a palpable appetite among BookTok users where authors like Sarah J. Maas and Adam Silvera have profited greatly from BookTok. This is unsurprising since TikTok is particularly popular with young adults.

BookTok has therefore caught the attention of researchers of young people's reading, propelling valuable contributions through several interconnected disciplinary lenses such as literacy and education (e.g. Dera et al.; Martens et al.; Boffone and Jerasa) and information and library sciences (Merga; Mashiyane). Building on these studies, we have previously urged for due consideration of young people's emergent practices on BookTok as a hitherto unrecognised form of literary criticism that hinges on a deeply personal and affective engagement with books (Kulkarni and Owens). Drawing on the framework of onto-epistemic injustice (Haynes and Murriss 299), we attempt to demonstrate how the rise in affective engagement with books propels an expansion of what it means to *know about* books offering young readers a wider toolkit for engaging in discussions about the books they read.

As such, these practices also align with Jaakkola's conceptualisation of post-institutional amateur reviewing as "performative and affective lifestyle work" (217) and "reviewtainment" (193) that navigate and challenge the line between reviewing as serious or recreational, critical or affective, authority-oriented or lifestyle-oriented. Unlike platforms like Goodreads whose architecture is specifically geared towards user-generated reviews of books, BookTok grew organically beyond the constraints of institutional reviewing structures and adopted the overall logics and grammars of its parent platform TikTok. Most notably, TikTok's push for "authentic" and "relatable" content has percolated into BookTok that is replete with ordinary readers' everyday interactions with books (Reddan). For

reviewing practices, this has meant a sharp departure from previous norms established even on genealogically related predecessors like Bookstagram. Common forms of young readers' reviewing practices on BookTok such as filming visceral reactions to books respond to TikTok's drive for virality, merging aspects of literary criticism and entertainment to neatly exemplify the concept of "reviewtainment" and establish affect as the driving force of online reviewing on BookTok.

Affective practices in reviewing and criticism are not entirely created by digital media but have always existed as "a long-standing 'underground' form of demotic literary criticism now massively amplified through its archiving and discoverability on the Internet" (Murray 125). However, in addition to archiving and making affective content more findable, the Internet and platforms thereon actively mobilise their affordances to create particularly fertile terrain for entertaining affective content due to its ability to grab and sustain user attention (Jenkins and Huzinec 403). On TikTok, sound is one such affordance that plays a crucial and ever-evolving role in mediating affective practices. As a video-driven platform, sound is an inevitable modality on TikTok. However, as briefly discussed above, what sets the platform apart is its innovative architecture: notably for this article, the app affords intuitive generation and integration of sounds in uploaded content. In fact, TikTok content is grouped together and often discovered by means of the background sound used, making sound prime currency on TikTok where it acts as a central pathway for all kinds of communicative practices on the platform (Radovanović 69). Since BookTok reviewing is embedded in the larger sociotechnical landscape of TikTok, sound thus becomes an important pillar in emerging reviewing practices and therefore merits closer examination. We argue that studying BookTok reviewing through the lens of the affordance that sets it apart the most allows us to study online reviewing of YA literature in its most radical form, not only furthering the discussion on reviewing cultures in general but also generating useful insights for literary scholars and practitioners in allied fields. To operationalise the affordance of sound in our analysis, we begin by offering a brief discussion on sound memes.

Sound Memes

Memes have been central to the study of internet media for some time – Alice Marwick has referred to memes as "the closest thing to

a native culture form the Internet has" (13), and the term has come to name "the common language that Internet users employ to communicate on all possible topics" (Denisova 2). Originally introduced by Richard Dawkins as a way to describe units of cultural transmission, the concept has lent itself with increasing elegance to the study of internet and digital platforms as an emergent and (perhaps omni) potent communication technology of the twenty-first century.

Very recently, however, there has been a shift in attention from internet memes as visual units of culture – characterised by combinations of images and texts in key recognisable formats – to internet memes as *auditory* units of culture, in academia as well as in the public consciousness. In a 2022 article for *The New York Times*, author Charlotte Shane suggests that TikTok functions so well as a digital media thanks in large part to the way it affords the use and re-use of sound clips. Similarly, in an article published in the *Critical Meme Reader*, Crystal Abidin and D. Bondy Valdovinos Kaye suggest that audio memes indicate a broader "aural turn" brought about by TikTok, as the app is characterised by the type of use and re-use of audio described by Shane. Abidin and Kaye term this "templatability," and note that it is conducive to the movement of earworms – sounds which get stuck in your head – across the app:

In the spectacular space of TikTok, memes have taken an "aural turn." For one, memes are primarily sorted and organized into "repositories" of audio clips available in the "use this sound" feature, which enables TikTokers to reuse the template clip with a new visual performance, or "embellish" their creative remix of the template. (Abidin and Kaye 76)

Others have noted how TikTok audio memes create meaning and affect users: Noah Roderick has stated that "the most ubiquitous form of imitative performance is the audio meme, in which creators overlay their own visual content with audio from existing content" (76). He highlights the power of sound as a tool of rhetoric to suggest that the repetitive aural function of the audio meme serves to create an *emotional* template, immediately informing how the viewer feels about a video, even before they have watched it.

A particularly in-depth exploration of audio memes on TikTok comes from the work of Lucia Bainotti and colleagues. Tracing two audio memes over 15,000 videos, they establish three categories of TikTok sounds: *integrated TikTok sounds*, which are songs or audio clips from other sources which are integrated into the app's

mimetic cycles; *semi-native TikTok sounds*, which are audios originally recorded as TikTok videos which have been modified or remixed with external clips; and *native TikTok sounds*, which are audio clips which originated on TikTok and have not been modified or remixed (Bainotti et al.). As we will demonstrate in our analysis, this typology offers a useful framework to examine how different sounds contribute to reviewing practices.

Although audio meme research is still in its infancy, all of these early findings indicate that sound on TikTok has particular *affective* power for meaning-making. Audio memes on TikTok clearly offer a novel tool for mediating feeling (Pilipets 125). We thus draw on these ideas to suggest that sound be understood not only as a critical feature of the affective “knowing” exemplified by reviewers on BookTok as they engage with YA literature, but also – more importantly for this argument – that sound represents a key mode for understanding YA reviewing practices in the broader context of platformisation. We illustrate this argument by analysing sounds used in three BookTok reviews featuring YA literature.

The (Im)Possibility of Studying BookTok Videos

The method for selecting TikTok videos as case studies for this analysis was necessarily developed in direct relation to the significant challenges presented by the structure of TikTok as a platform, as well as its much-cited and entirely automated recommendation algorithm, which Meng Liang has argued (using Douyin, the variant of TikTok available to Chinese users) fundamentally alters how attention is distributed on the platform. The TikTok algorithm is structured in such a way as to ensure that user experience is hyper-tailored to a hyper-specific data model. We suggest that such a model unavoidably skews any proposed research method for engaging with TikTok content in an unbiased manner (see Owens; Kulkarni and Owens).

Many studies have attempted to work around this unavoidable bias, most of which focus on taking large samples (broadly between 100 and 10,000) of videos based on certain key hashtags or user account characteristics (see, among others, Zeng and Yan; Vizcaíno-Verdú and Abidin; Mendelson; Harriger et al.). Fewer methods have been suggested for selecting individual videos for close analysis (see, for example, Darwin; Boffone; Owens; Kulkarni and Owens), and among these there is no consensus as to which is best. We therefore opted for a straightforward approach designed to acknowledge the algorithm: in June 2024 Sonali Kulkarni searched the terms

“BookTok Review” on TikTok, and Emilie Owens selected two suitable videos from the top twenty results presented by the app at that time. Suitability was determined by three criteria: 1) brevity; 2) use of audio meme; 3) YA- or otherwise youth-centric. These two videos were used as a point of departure. We then followed the sound meme used in one of the two videos to search for a third one to demonstrate how sound memes get reproduced to become parts of larger trends.

The three videos selected can be viewed on TikTok via QR codes (see images 1, 2, and 3), along with detailed publication information.¹ Since TikTok videos do not have titles, we refer in this article to the videos by their key audio feature, discussed in more detail below: the first is titled *Classic 1*, and the second is titled *Betrayal*. The third video chosen via *Classic 1* is titled *Classic 2*.



Image 1 – Classic 1. Image 2 – Betrayal. Image 3 – Classic 2.

Title	Length	Creator User-name	Date	Sound	Sound Type (Bainotti et al.)
<i>Classic 1</i>	00:26	bacchanalbaby	18-07-23	Slayed atasteof-mamas - Shar	<i>Native TikTok sound</i>
<i>Classic 2</i>	00:12	thecalvinbooks	28-09-21	Slayed atasteof-mamas - Shar	<i>Native TikTok sound</i>
<i>Betrayal</i>	00:15	lilylikes-reading	31-05-23	оригинальный звук - madqueen	<i>Integrated TikTok sound</i>

Reviewing Practices on BookTok

The analysis brings together key insights such as the concept of “reviewtainment” from Jaakkola’s seminal work and the growing body of research on sound memes on Tiktok discussed above to establish the nuanced ways in which *sound* in particular contributes to the evolution of YA literature reviews in the age of platformisation. Beginning by articulating a brief overview of the sounds used in

these videos – building on the categories of audio memes outlined by Bainotti and colleagues – we will first contextualise and then conceptualise the sound from each video, exploring the meanings implied by its aural features and how they contribute to the overall affect of the review. Then, examining this affectual character in detail, we will attempt to show how sound works as a tool for presenting these book reviews, which seem to express fairly complex judgements of literary works for young people.

Classic

In Classic 2, we see user thecalvinbooks address the camera directly with a copy of *Six Of Crows* (2015) by Leigh Bardugo in their hands. The words “Six of crows” are superimposed on this image. In the next ten seconds of the video, we see thecalvinbooks successively showing six other YA books with their titles superimposed on the images: *A Little Life* (2015) by Hanya Yanagihara, *Red Queen* (2015) by Victoria Aveyard, *A Court of Thorns and Roses* (2015) by Sarah J. Maas, *Shadow and Bone* (2012) by Leigh Bardugo, *Blame It on the Mistletoe* (2020) by Beth Garrod, and *They Both Die at the End* (2017) by Adam Silvera. The audio track that accompanies these images is a series of comments made by a male American voice. These comments are: “slayed; literally traumatising; slayed; no comment; partially slayed; merry christmas; I don’t know how to feel.” The contents of the video are timed such that each of the books above lines up with one piece of commentary – *Six Of Crows* appears onscreen to the commentary of “slayed,” then *A Little Life* appears to the commentary of “literally traumatising,” and so on. Thecalvinbooks amplifies these judgments via humorous facial expressions corresponding to the judgement expressed in the commentary.

The caption to this video reads “Rating popular BookTok Books.” Understanding the instrument used for this rating, however, requires existing knowledge of the sound as a TikTok audio meme: thecalvinbooks uses the first 12 seconds of a TikTok audio created by user shrwhatever on 14-09-2021. At the time of writing, shrwhatever’s audio has been used 24,300 times on TikTok, but it is not the original version of the sound. The original was created by a user named atasteofmamas on 13-09-2021 in a review of the outfits worn to the MTV Video Music Awards (VMAs) in 2021 – evidently shrwhatever saw this review on her FYP the day after it was posted and decided to use its audio for her own means, a common occurrence in the audio meme ecosystem of TikTok. The original version of the sound by atasteofmamas has been used 17,100 times, and almost all

of these videos are in the review genre: many are of outfits, following atasteofmamas' original (as well as its copy by shrwhatever), but it has also been used to review films and TV shows, fictional characters, brand logos, food recipes, professional athletes, royal weddings, astrological signs, and more. The sound meme has therefore evolved into a *trend*.

Classic 1 neatly exemplifies this trend. In this twenty-six-second video, user bacchanalbaby uses the full version of the sound meme. This video begins with an image of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) standing on a bookshelf in front of the spines of many other book titles. This image has text superimposed across it which reads "using this audio to rate classics." Thereafter, the text disappears and a series of images of various classic books are displayed in the same manner. In addition to the comments in Classic 2, Classic 1 includes the full version of the audio: "slayed; literally traumatising; slayed; no comment; partially slayed; merry christmas; I don't know how to feel; slayed the house boots down houston I'm deceased; slayed; yas slayed; a minute slay; like one third slay; slayed if the VMAs were a funeral."

It is clear that the text shown at the start of the video – "using this audio to rate classics" – is integral to its success as a review; thanks to this inclusion by the creator we know that the audio in this video is the standard to which the books shown onscreen will be rated. But to a regular TikTok user, the inclusion of the sound meme is enough to indicate that this video is a review owing to the replication of the sound meme across thousands of review videos.

Following Bainotti and colleagues, we can thus understand this as a *native TikTok sound*; although different versions of the sound exist across the app (the one used by bacchanalbaby being one example of many), they are *unmodified* copies of the original recording by atasteofmamas. Its meaning is therefore derived from and contained in the mimetic iteration of the sound on TikTok, where repeated use has compounded what Roderick refers to as its "earwork" in establishing a rhetorical logic of meaning and feeling (86). In this instance, that rhetorical logic is one of the review: atasteofmamas originally recorded the sound while reviewing outfits worn to the VMAs by celebrities in 2021 using an existing vernacular language of drag performance. *Slayed*, *yas*, *slayed the house boots down houston I'm deceased*, and so on, are distinct terms used within the drag community and which have been widely adopted by youth culture in the United States and beyond (Theil). These terms, spoken by atasteofmamas and adopted in use across an immense range of genres through

TikTok's affordance of the audio meme, thus come to connote highly specific meanings and feelings as standards for judging the quality of texts.

Here, we can return to Jaakkola's concept of reviewtainment to understand how the meanings behind these specific audio comments, cultivated first in drag culture and then across tens of thousands of iterations of TikTok review videos in every genre, are being applied by the creators to effectively perform a review. The reviews provide informed thoughts and feelings about the books in question while maintaining the engagement and entertainment expected on TikTok. Interestingly, Classic 1 demonstrates how these youth-centric practices spill over into classics such as *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879) by Fyodor Dostoevsky that – for a YA audience – are associated with school syllabi as opposed to the conventionally YA texts found in Classic 2 read for entertainment. Indeed, it could even be argued that by using a “classic” audio (for in the ecosystem of TikTok, atasteofmamas' five-year-old “slay” audio can be considered a classic) for their video, bacchanalbaby is establishing a genre for their review: classic audio for classic literature.

Betrayal

The Betrayal video, created by user lilylikesreading, uses sound in a completely different manner from the Classic videos, but with an equally powerful function in terms of reviewing. It is fifteen seconds long, opens with the text “books that feel like this song,” and continues to show a video of a hand removing books which have been stacked on a duvet, one after the other, so that the viewer can see their titles one at a time: included are a selection of popular YA texts such as *Red Queen* by Victoria Aveyard (which is also featured in the Classic 2 video) and *We Were Liars* (2014) by E. Lockhart. So, although the Betrayal video also begins with text indicating how sound will be used in the review of the books, in this case it indicates a very different relationship between the sound and the books, and one that is considerably more affectively driven than the previous example. In other words, these books are being reviewed according to their ability to emotionally evoke a similar state as the sound. As discussed above, this practice of demonstrating literary knowledge through an emotional relationship to the text is one which is particular to TikTok, and which pushes at the boundaries of existing reviewing practices in new and significant ways (Kulkarni and Owens).

Starting again with the audio meme framework laid out by Bainotti and colleagues, the sound for this video is not a *native TikTok sound* but rather an *integrated TikTok sound*. That is, although the audio used by lilylikesreading was originally uploaded by a TikTok user, it was not *created on TikTok* as in the case of the Classic audio by atasteofmamas. Rather, it is a brief section of the pop song “No Time To Die” (2020) by Billie Eilish recorded by another TikTok creator (username: **madqueen**²) with the title “оригинальный звук.” This title is Russian for “original sound,” which in this context is misleading; although the audio is original in the sense that it was created via TikTok by **madqueen** in April of 2023, it has not been *modified* by the creator in any significant way. It is simply a section of Eilish’s song “No Time To Die” as one would hear it on the radio or a streaming service. Or, in this case, in the James Bond film of the same name, since this particular song was released as a “Bond song” (Daub and Kronengold 28). To call it an *integrated TikTok sound* is thus to refer to the fact that it has been brought *onto* TikTok from elsewhere.

As an integrated sound, its meaning therefore comes in some part from its life outside TikTok as a stand-alone pop song: both music and lyrics can be understood to signify something about the books being reviewed in this video. Starting with the lyrics, the relevant words from this particular audio meme are as follows:

Another lesson yet to learn
That I’d fallen for a lie
You were never on my side
(Eilish)

The speaker or subject of the song is therefore expressing the realization of a lie and betrayal at the hands of another person; a person she now knows was never on her side. Moving to the musicality of the song, the minor chord progressions in “No Time To Die” connote conflict, sadness, and regret; a 2020 Pitchfork review of the song describes how the minor piano and rich orchestration, combined with Eilish’s voice, connote dour, sombre themes of dread and betrayal (Pearce). When lilylikesreading introduces her review of books by writing onscreen “books that feel like this song,” she is thus invoking a highly specific meaning at two semiotic levels: first, at the representational level by invoking the lyrics which *tell* a story of betrayal; second, at the symbolic level by invoking the music which connotes betrayal through *feeling*. The use of the audio in this video thus communicates to the viewer, without saying so implicitly, that these are successful examples of books which feature *betrayal*.

We argue that by introducing new digital modes into the traditional structure of the review, BookTok reviews further Jaakkola's theorisation of online reviews as performative acts of platformised entertainment; here lilylikesreading uses a highly specific piece of music, linked with a specific film, in order to establish a highly specific literary genre (namely, betrayal) and then identify particularly successful YA novels within that genre.

Discussion and Conclusion

It is not our intention to suggest that the audio from these videos is the *only* thing which makes them meaningful as reviews. There are many other affordances of TikTok which lend themselves to communicating information about YA literature for BookTok reviewers: in all three videos, for example, the practice of filming the covers of the relevant books is integral to the success of the review. Indeed, the aesthetic of the book – whether presented in the form of individual book covers and book spines, or as collections of books on shelves or in stores – is perhaps *the* salient feature of BookTok as a TikTok subculture, and therefore cannot be ignored. In the examples above, the use of the book as a visual object is integral to the meaning but also to the *fundamental comprehensibility* of the videos as book reviews.

Additionally, paratextual information for the video – its caption, hashtags, and comments section – also provides relevant information for creators to communicate about books, particularly when reviewing them. For example, in the Betrayal video the caption explicitly links the contents of the video to the “betrayal trope” and its hashtags make specific reference to YA and fantasy: “the betrayal trope is heartbreaking 😭 #booktok #books #bookworm #reading #bookrecommendations #bookrecs #betrayaltrope #bookplottwist #yafantasy #fyp.” Similarly, the caption for the Classic 1 video offers a series of relevant and informative hashtags: “#booktok #classic-literature #classicnovels #classics #bookratings #bookrecommendations #bookrecs #classiclit #readinglist.”

Information from the respective profiles of these three creators also helps provide key context and meaning to the individual reviews cited herein, and particularly in relation to an understanding of this phenomenon as related to *YA literature*. For example, thecalvinbooks' profile demonstrates that they are a YA and fantasy literature enthusiast, as well as an author of YA fantasy literature themselves: they almost always appear in the videos, and the paratextual information available on their profile points to a

professional presence in the broader literary sphere. Their profile therefore positions them as something of an expert YA reviewer in the space of BookTok. Bacchanalbaby's broader TikTok profile as a creator indicates that she is a young woman and college student who simply enjoys reviewing classic books for her similarly young audience; she also appears often in her videos, but makes no claims to broader literary expertise. Rather, her videos frequently use popular audio memes to demonstrate specialist knowledge of these classic texts and further assert their continued relevance within the context of youth reading culture more broadly. By contrast, the profile of lilylikesreading contains numerous examples of what might be considered a more "aesthetic" approach to BookTok than the videos created by either thecalvinbooks or bacchanalbaby: she rarely if ever appears in the videos herself. Rather, stacks of YA books appear in soft daylight on a rumpled duvet to the tune of emotional pop songs with female vocals.

Combining all of this information, and particularly drawing from the broader profiles of these creators, we can suggest two distinct modes by which the affordance of sound on TikTok comes to shape the reviewing practices of young BookTokers: *performative* and *affective*. Bacchanalbaby and thecalvinbooks operationalise their knowledge of a native TikTok sound to draw on existing meaning structures of the app and thus perform a nuanced and informative review of YA and classic literature for a young audience. By contrast lilylikesreading operationalises her affective understanding of an integrated TikTok sound to invoke a set of specific feelings which characterise the experience of reading specific YA books. In both cases, sound becomes a key affordance by which literary expertise is exemplified as part of broader reviewing practices on BookTok.

Furthermore, all three of these cases illustrate the concept of reviewtainment and show how BookTok reviewing is performative and affective to varying degrees. We deem these findings important to the field of children's and young adult literature at large as they clearly demonstrate how young readers' choices and habits are deeply intertwined with other cultural media such as music, opening exciting potentialities for literacy education and out-of-school volitional reading.

However, the availability of sounds is volatile within TikTok's infrastructure. In the beginning of 2024, a legal dispute between TikTok and Universal Music Group (home to megastars like Taylor Swift and Harry Styles) resulted in all of UMG's music being removed from the app overnight leaving millions of TikTok

videos without a soundtrack and therefore – as we learned from experience while teaching online – entirely ineffective. While a lot of this music has since been reintroduced to the platform, it can be argued that even though no overt institutional control is exerted on BookTok reviewing, the practice is subject to a new set of corporate constraints, opening up critical discussions on the (im)possibility of democratic literary discussions in the age of platforms.

Biographical information: Emilie Owens is a Doctoral Research Fellow at the University of Oslo, Norway, studying media and communications, and particularly the relationships of digital media technologies to the lived experiences of children and teenagers. Her PhD project, which will be completed in 2025, examines how TikTok shapes the identities and social worlds of sixteen-year-olds in Norway. She and Kulkarni have worked together researching BookTok since they were both scholarship recipients in the first cohort of the Erasmus Mundus International Masters of the Arts programme in Children's Literature, Media and Culture between 2019 and 2021. Together they have published a chapter in Giuliana Fenech's forthcoming anthology Child as Citizen: Agency and Activism in Children's Literature and Culture and are currently collaborating on a monograph to be published by Cambridge University Press, both on the subject of BookTok.

Sonali Kulkarni is a PhD Researcher at Tilburg University in the Netherlands. She studies developments in reading and book cultures in the postdigital age. In her doctoral work, she examines the digital and material afterlives of texts to understand emergent practices through which readers return to books they have previously read. BookTok is therefore a recurring case study in her work. She takes an interdisciplinary approach in her research and draws on children's literature studies, book history, and media studies. Kulkarni is an Erasmus Mundus scholar and graduated from the International Masters in Children's Literature, Media and Culture in 2021. Since then, she has been a lecturer in the same programme and teaches courses related to translation studies and life writing studies. Alongside her shared BookTok research with Owens, Kulkarni has authored an article on BookTok for the Dutch Reading Foundation and is currently co-authoring a chapter on transformative rereading practices on BookTok.

Notes

1 The QR codes provide links to viewing the videos directly on TikTok. As such, the creators have full control and may alter their content, usernames, and/or accounts in the future. We acknowledge that this ephemerality is an inevitable part of researching digital culture.

2 Usernames in this article have been presented as they are on TikTok – as such, this username is presented in a specific font and with bold formatting.

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