



# The Age Between: Personal Reflections on Youth Fiction

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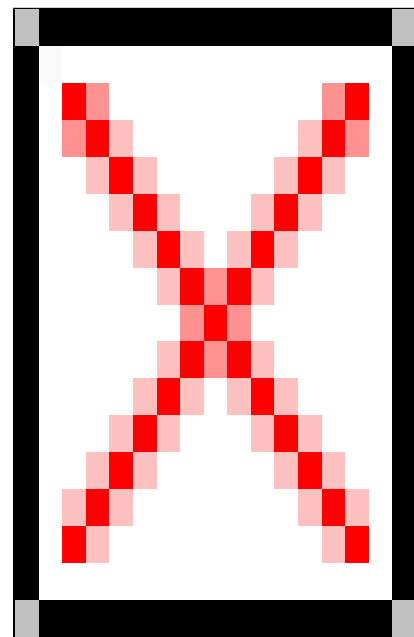
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4



Aidan Chambers is a distinguished and successful writer of Young Adult books. He is also a leading theorist on what goes on in the act of reading and the multifarious ways authors engage with their stories and how readers might respond. Now, aged 85, he has brought together his final thoughts on such matters into a slim volume packed with quotations ranging from Lewis Carroll to Tolstoy and Wittgenstein.

What follows is always admirably lucid, thankfully avoiding the high theorising and currently fashionable jargon increasingly creeping into modern academic discussion of children's literature. He often refers to his own novels, some of which are now out of print although often ground-breaking at the time. All youth writers face an uphill struggle trying to remain contemporary when actual events and practices on the ground are changing so fast. But when it comes to the eternal issues of adolescence and young adulthood, Chambers later novels still remain ever-accessible, with one of them, **Dance on My Grave**, recently filmed.

When discussing Mark Twain's **Huckleberry Finn**, Chambers makes no mention of the racist language Huck as a boy of his times often turns to. This in some quarters has now given this classic story a bad name, but it is good to be reminded that it is still a supremely wise as well as witty work which deserves to be defended, as Chambers does so well. He is less impressed by J.D. Salinger's **Catcher in the Rye**, seeing it as more a celebration of immaturity rather than as a serious comment upon it. But this is perhaps to under-rate the enduring appeal of Salinger's style of writing for young adult readers and the message this conveys in itself whatever else is in the text. There is a lot more to think about here and elsewhere in this admirable book which ends with a long and illuminating dialogue with Deborah Thacker, herself an expert in youth literature. Read on!

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