

Book review:

An analysis of Margaret D. Stetz's 'Fabricating Girls – Clothes and Coming of Age Fiction
by Women of Colour'

Lauren Wakefield
N0791518@my.ntu.ac.uk

Word Count: 524

Key Words: Identity, heritage, culture, ageing

Clothing is an essential part of most people's lives. It is the subject of many articles, magazines and blogs, and plays a significant role in showing the world what you want to express. Clothing expresses the individuality of the characters authors write into life in novels such as *The Private Joys of Nnenna Maloney*¹ and others. The essay I am examining reflects on how authors use of clothes to reveal individuality in Coming of Age novels, and Stetz specifically discusses the way clothes can be used to allow women of colour to connect with their heritage as they grow and learn more about what connects them to their family's past. She stresses that up until now "the focus has been exclusively on white women authors and on their white female fictional characters"² while the experiences of young women of colour have been neglected, and uses her article as a way of investigating a different side of identity in literature.

Her article is useful to that effect; 'Fabricating Girls' critically analyses how authors write clothing into a story to aid women of colour in exploring their heritage, which helps them to define what they believe. Stetz discusses many cultures and how they relate to clothes in her essay, such as how headscarves are an essential part of religious expression for Turkish women.³ Her standpoint on the issue of cultural representation and her subsequent discussion of such issues in her essay is significant as it allows us to use her work as a basis for many points of analysis in a lot of different texts, such as the *New York Times* bestseller *The Twelve Tribes of Hattie* by Ayana Mathis,⁴ the story of a young girl escaping Jim Crow laws in Georgia after seeing her father killed. 'Fabricating Girls' takes a minute detail often overlooked by readers and allows them to expand upon it, to look deeper and understand that even the smallest details can be affected as the character grows and their personality changes. To that effect, Stetz's article is a very informative and useful resource in analysing identity representation in novels. It can be used by many as a starting point for their own analysis of coming of age novels, and how the way represents identity changes, the author writes these characters into being.

¹ Okechukwu Nzelu, *The Private Joys of Nnenna Maloney* (London; Dialogue Books, 2019).

² Margaret D. Stetz, 'Fabricating Girls – Clothes and Coming of Age Fiction by Women of Colour' in *Humanities Bulletin* vol. 2 no, 1 (London; London Academic Publishing, 2019) p. 124.

³ Margaret D. Stetz, 'Fabricating Girls – Clothes and Coming of Age Fiction by Women of Colour' in *Humanities Bulletin* vol. 2 no, 1 (London; London Academic Publishing, 2019) pp. 126-7.

⁴ Ayana Mathis, *The Twelve Tribes of Hattie* (London; Windmill Books, 2013).

Bibliography

Mathis, Ayana. *The Twelve Tribes of Hattie* (London; Windmill Books, 2013)

Nzelu, Okechukwu. *The Private Joys of Nnenna Maloney* (London; Dialogue Books, 2019)

Stetz, Margaret D. 'Fabricating Girls – Clothes and Coming of Age Fiction by Women of Colour' in *Humanities Bulletin* vol. 2 no, 1 (London; London Academic Publishing, 2019) pp. 122-134