

Saturday, February 16, 2019

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FICTION

Young Adult

## The Homosexual Agenda Comes To YA

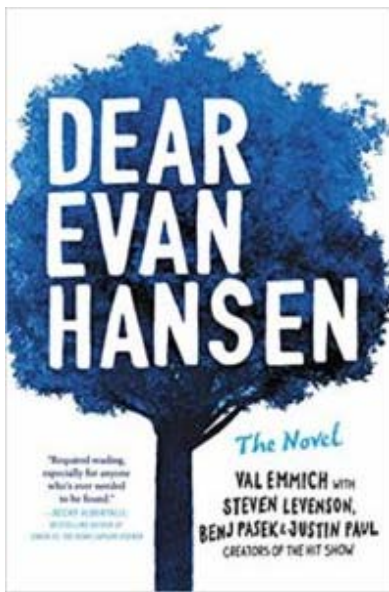
*Boys Meet Boys and Girls Meet Girls and No One Blinks*

October 10, 2018 Michael Giltz

The “gay boys in New York” young adult novel *What If It's Us* came out (joke!) on October 9<sup>th</sup>. That same day also saw the release of *Dear Evan Hansen*, a novelization of the Broadway show that retains the musical's modest gay-friendly jokes and adds in a gay subplot; *Odd One Out* by Nic Stone, which includes multiple teen people of color and multiple sexual orientations; and *Alan Cole Doesn't Dance* by Eric Bell, a middle grade novel about the further adventures of Alan, who chose to be openly gay one book earlier. And those are just the ones I know about!

The most notable fact about this crush of queer teen novels is how un-notable they are. It's not Gay Pride Month and having them all be released on the same day is pure happenstance, like when gay people meet at a non-gay event, such as when I'd bump into other queer folk in the bleachers at Yankee Stadium. Oh hey, you too? What's up?

Another common thread connecting these books is how grappling with sexual orientation is so not the point. Ever since S.E. Hinton championed



*Ho-hum, just another gay YA novelization of a Broadway play*

The *Outsiders* and Judy Blume tackled every social issue imaginable like a one-woman AfterSchool Special, young adult novels have proven admirably realistic. Apparently, being realistic now includes being blasé about queerness in all its varieties.

Few authors demonstrate that better than Becky Albertalli (*Simon Vs. The Homo Sapiens Agenda*) and Adam Silvera (*They Both Die At The End*) who have hit home runs commercially with gay teen novels (among others) and now team up to deliver a meet-cute romance between Arthur and Ben.

Arthur is from Georgia but visiting NYC for the summer with his lawyer mom. Ben is a proud Puerto Rican New Yorker and they bump into each other at the post office (ok, Arthur stalks him). They start chatting but a flash-mob wedding proposal separates them (*so* New York!) and they miss the chance to reconnect. But the universe demands they meet up again and so they do, followed by a first date and then a do-over first date and then a *third* do-over first date and it's all adorable and entertaining in a non-demanding way.

Both their parents and friends are beyond supportive and if it weren't for a jerk on the subway who can't handle them snuggling in front of his kid, you'd swear this wasn't set in the real world. The novel is pleasant enough and zips by and is thoroughly undistinguishable from a thousand other boy-meets-girl teen romances. And isn't that pretty awesome? Sure, it's been-there, done-that for adults who've read this stuff before. But for queer teens, it will probably be like that first kiss they'll never forget.

What If It's Us by Becky Albertalli & Adam Silvera

(October 9, 2018; HarperTeen)

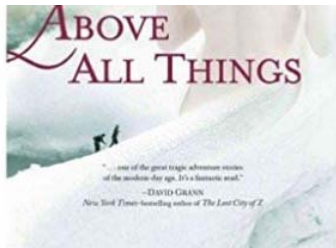
Tags: Adam Silvera, Becky Albertalli, Dear Evan Hansen, gay YA, Judy Blume



## Michael Giltz

Michael Giltz is a freelance writer based in New York City covering all areas of entertainment, politics, sports and more. He has written extensively for many outlets, such as New York Post, New York Daily News, New York Magazine, The Advocate, Out, Huffington Post, Premiere Magazine, Entertainment Weekly, BookFilter, USA Today and the Los Angeles Times. He's co-host of the long-running podcast Showbiz Sandbox.

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