

Interrogating Space and Place – 3:00pm-3:40pm GMT

“Are You Woman Enough to Survive?”: Transgender Segregation in *Bitch Planet*

Abstract: Kelly Sue DeConnick and Valentine De Landro’s American comic book series *Bitch Planet* (2014–2017) has been celebrated for its depiction of intersectionality, its subversion of the comic book form and even for its use of trigger warnings. The current state of the literature derived from this work has yet to address the portrayal of transgender characters in the comics. A satire of exploitation comics and films, *Bitch Planet* presents a dystopian future where women are exiled and imprisoned for being “non-compliant”, deemed as such by a patriarchal Protectorate that has taken over most of the world. Transgender women were introduced in Issue #8 and further developed in Issue #9, when the Auxiliary Compliance Outpost—the official name of the prison—is revealed to have more than one facility with different types of populations. This paper is set to address this literature gap in the assessment of *Bitch Planet*’s speculative fiction, relying on a sociolegal analysis that focuses on the prison industrial complex’s function as enforcer of a rigid sexual dichotomy. By integrating transgender prisoner perspectives with the legal bases for sexual segregation a fuller understanding of the comic’s choice to create a trans-only prison facility will be provided. This paper will argue that, within the context of the comic’s dystopia, segregation exacerbates the “otherness” of transgender women: their crime is “gender falsification” by presenting as female yet they are still deemed non-compliant, a female-only crime. This paradoxical scenario is solved in *Bitch Planet* with a secondary facility, which contrasts with the PIC’s struggle to accommodate trans prisoners. The result is an intersectional premise that challenges the normative conceptions of gender, sex, and incarceration that can be extrapolated to other aspects of human life.

Bio: Verónica Mondragón-Paredes is a senior studying International Relations (BA). She studied English at Yale University during the summer of 2019 under a Banco Santander grant and worked on young-adult literature as a MITACS Globalink Research Intern at the University of Alberta in the summer of 2021.

Ichthyology of the Closet

Abstract: From Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Little Mermaid” (and its inspirations such as Undine) to modern depictions including *The Shape of Water* (del Toro 2017), *Luca* (2021), and *The Girl by the Sea* (Ostertag 2021), merfolx have embodied a liminal and queer narrative space. Monstrous in their hybrid appearance and nature, the fish-people inhabiting this narrative tradition contend with notions of belonging/home, desire, and a binary divide of land and sea.

This paper, inspired by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's landmark study *Epistemology of the Closet*, examines graphic representations of merfolx in light of the critic's assertion that "categories presented in culture as symmetrical binary oppositions... actually subsist in a more unsettled and dynamic tacit relation" (9-10). The binary of heterosexual/homosexual that Sedgwick deconstructs stands in parallel to that of land/sea and man/animal in these stories as merfolx attend to their desires and transcend these boundaries.

Over time, this strand of queerness in literature and visual culture has been used to cope and illustrate various aspects of LGBTQ+ experiences. This presentation will offer a brief, reflective historiography of how these narratives illuminate queer subjectivity from Andersen's mermaid experiencing sensations of bleeding and burning on her enchanted legs as she walks on land in pursuit of the story's prince to the almost nonchalant "outing" of the protagonists of Luca as they collapse the boundaries between life above and under the sea.

Bio: Corey D Clawson (he/him/his) is a PhD student in American Studies at Rutgers University-Newark. His main research project, *Archivepelago.org*, maps queer artistic influences using digital humanities methods. The project parses archival finding aids for instances of LGBTQ+ writers corresponding with one another and translating one another's work.

Detoxifying Male Fantasy: Genre-Savviness and Desire in the Worldbuilding of *DIE*

Abstract: This paper will examine how the worldbuilding of *DIE* (2019-) by Kieron Gillen, Stephanie Hans, and Clayton Cowles attempts to detoxify fantasy: that is, how it challenges male-dominated fantasy canon and gatekept fantasy fandom.

Pitched as 'Goth Jumanji', *DIE's* premise – where teenagers disappear into their fantasy tabletop roleplaying game (TRPG), and are then forced as adults to return – allows for a self-conscious and self-reflexive approach to the tropes of gaming and fantasy.¹ By utilising TRPG fan culture as a framework, *DIE* is allowed to build genre-savviness into its worldbuilding. Ryan Vu argues that, by formalising genre convention into game systems, TRPGs provide players with 'an unprecedented set of tools for analysing their [own] genres'.² Gillen's description of *DIE* as an exploration of fantasy and gaming's history seemingly supports this reading: 'there's a lot of history, postmodernism and even nostalgia [...] but it's not a book which is interested in being comforting'.³

I wish to examine how successfully *DIE* utilises 'uncomfortable' reflexiveness to deconstruct the toxic, typically cis- and straight male image that fantasy fandom often projects. The focus

¹ 'Series: *DIE*', *Image Comics*, Para. 1, Retrieved from: <https://imagecomics.com/comics/series/die> [Accessed: 03-08-2021].

² Ryan Vu, 'Fantasy After Representation: D&D, Game of Thrones, and Postmodern World-Building', *Extrapolation*, 58 (2-3), pp.273–301, p.281.

³ Kieron Gillen, 'Into the Dungeon', 'Essays', *DIE Volume 1: Fantasy Heartbreaker*, (Portland: Image Comics, 2019).

of this will be the bisexual protagonist, Dominic Ash: an AMAB person who, when in the secondary world of *DIE*, inhabits a cis female body and conducts relationships with men, something they do not do in the 'real' world. Although the main character can also be read as trans, I will be focusing on their bisexuality. I will examine Ash's negotiation of their sexual orientation, and their relationship to *DIE*'s gamemaster, Sol, as a representation of fantasy and TRPG culture's changing relationship to toxic masculinity.

Bio: Emma French (she/her) is currently studying for a PhD in Fantasy Literature at the University of Glasgow. Her thesis examines how *Dungeons & Dragons* consolidates notions of fantasy, while also giving players agency to subvert genre convention. She is a member of the Glasgow International Fantasy Conversations committee, and an editor at *Mapping the Impossible: Journal for Fantasy Research*.