

Defying Patriarchal Expectations – 4:30pm-5:10pm GMT

Lesbians in Space with Swords: Sapphic Representation in Contemporary Graphic Narratives

Abstract: This paper will discuss the ways lesbians and queer/sapphic female characters are represented in three speculative works – two graphic novels, *Cosmoknights* by Hannah Templer and *On a Sunbeam* by Tillie Walden, and one animated series, the rebooted *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* – and how these modes of representation combine specific aesthetic and symbolic elements to produce certain political framings of lesbian and sapphic identities as emancipatory. The modes of representation are tied to the specific worldbuilding of the graphic narrative, and notably to the question of whether patriarchy and gendered oppression are structural elements or not: *Cosmoknights* depicts patriarchal feudalism in space, while *On a Sunbeam* portrays a world with seemingly only female and non-binary characters, and the world of *She-Ra*, while clearly contending with imperialism, does not seem to feature patriarchy as part of its hegemonic system. Depending on each narrative's political structures, lesbian relationships may be a form of dissidence or the norm, but in all cases, the sapphic main characters are always positioned as resisting hegemony and as subverting categories of gender and sexuality, and thus contributing to a more expansive vision of what womanhood or lesbianism entails. This is underscored by the visual representative choices of each graphic narrative, from the characters' gender presentation (physical appearance, clothes, etc.) to color palette and drawing style. I will thus argue that these three graphic narratives can provide us with multiple new ways of thinking the lesbian (/queer/sapphic) as a politically crucial figure of subversion and liberation.

Bio: Heloise Thomas (she/they) is getting ready to defend their PhD dissertation on history, futurity, and the apocalypse in contemporary North American literature. She has authored articles on the poetics and politics of memory, pandemic imaginaries, and lesbian representation, and currently teaches in the English department at Lyon 3 University.

But Where Do The Babies Come From?: A Look at Recent Retcons of DC's *Wonder Woman*

Abstract: What happens in a world where there are no men or patriarchs? How are relations formed? And where do the babies come from? These are some of the questions posed in the origin stories of DC's *Wonder Woman* (1941-). As a comic book series, one written and rewritten a number of times by a variety of authors, DC's *Wonder Woman* (1941-) has a long and complicated history. This paper will consider three later additions to the cycle, all written by male authors (that is, it will not include the latest instalment by G. Willow Wilson). While in the original *Wonder Woman* comics, Hippolyta creates her daughter Diana from clay Brian Azzarello's retcon (*The New 52*, 2011-2015) changes this parthenogenetic birth so that Diana is created from the union of Zeus and Hippolyta, reaffirming the role of heterosexual parentage. Although relatively recent, this version has quickly become canonical as the 2016 film adaptation focused on this relationship.

Azzarello's recon is also problematic because, although the original matriarchal Amazonian society is based on peace and serenity, *The New 52* presents Amazonians who are more aggressive, warrior-like, and ultimately, portray a 'man-hating' view of feminism. Greg Rucka's retcon (*Rebirth*, 2016-2017), while still presenting Amazonians as warrior women, undoes this misandrist interpretation of feminism. Alan Moore's *Wonder Woman: Earth One* (2016-2018) returns to misandrist nuances, but also considers a more sensitive depiction of lesbian relationships. While these texts are still fairly conservative (as they do not engage in sustained conversation about transsexuality, intersexuality, pansexuality, etcetera), each narrative still reveals fruitful insights into binary power structures, family dynamics, and female relationships. This paper will begin this dialogue as the first steps of a larger project examining power and gender roles in fantasy fiction.

Bio: Charul ("Chuckie") Palmer-Patel is founder of *Fantastika Journal*. Her first monograph, *The Shape of Fantasy* (2020) investigates the narrative structures of Epic Fantasy, incorporating ideas from science, philosophy, and literary theory. Her next research project, *Mothers, Maternities, and Matriarchs* examines systems of power and oppression in American Fantasy. You can find out more about Palmer-Patel at www.doc-fantasy.com.

"Mom, it's not you": *The Owl House*, validation seeking, and the queerly-othered mother figure in children's fantasy media

Abstract: This paper seeks to analyze and advocate for an often-overlooked form of queer representation in children's fantasy media: that of the queer, socially awkward, adult mentor/ mother figure. This paper's primary focus is Eda 'the Owl Lady' from Dana Terrace's ongoing animated Disney show, *The Owl House*, but it will situate her in comparison to her precedents, including Miss Honey from *Matilda*. By 'queer' this paper refers to both explicitly LGBTQIA+ adults, and those who embody more metaphorical forms of non-conformity, such as an inability to exist in their fantastic society in a 'normal' way, i.e., lacking magic. This paper also draws from M. Remi Yergeau's concept of "neuroqueerness."

While much has been made of *The Owl House*'s teenage LGBTQIA+ couple, Luz and Amity, and its inclusion of Raine Whispers, who uses they/them pronouns, this paper foregrounds the mentorship between Luz and Eda. Eda is canonically LGBTQIA+, and Terrace also addresses her loneliness, guardedness, and trauma through her owl curse, loss of magic, and hybrid harpy form. Eda represents – for both young queer viewers and chronically invalidated adult ones – an authentic, vulnerable, empowering queer adult who is capable of change and deserving of family.

But the particular power of social-misfit adults, like Eda, is that they are able to validate the child protagonist in a way their 'real' parents cannot, because of shared experiences of queer otherness and/or trauma. In many narratives, the queer/non-conforming child feels they must choose between their 'real' parent and their magical

'found' one. *The Owl House* is perhaps the first to engage directly with the pain of this perceived ultimatum, through Luz's human mother, Camila. *The Owl House* therefore provides crucial representation that could help normalize conversations about children who seek diverse mentors, and give those children the words to explain themselves to hurt parents.

Bio: Elizabeth Boothby (she/they) is a Master's student at Memorial University of Newfoundland. She did her undergraduate work at Queen's University and the University of Edinburgh. Her research explores queer and ecocritical SF/F, particularly narratives of apocalypse, magic, mutation, and monstrous children. She lives in St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada