

Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary “Romantasy” Literature

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Abstract

In recent years, fantasy romance, often termed “romantasy,” has become one of the most successful genres within the contemporary literary landscape. Thanks to flourishing reading communities on social media, like BookTok and Bookstagram, which offer new ways of engagement with books as well as their readers and writers, the “romantasy hype” has come to influence the publishing industry at large (Balling & Martens 2-3). Despite its popularity and scope, the genre has of yet not garnered much academic attention; however, its blend of romance and fantasy elements offers many opportunities for scholarly discussion. The inclusion of the romance narrative, in particular, draws attention to ideas of gender and sexuality, which continue to be the source of much contention in contemporary culture.

Even though the two genres have their distinct forms and conventions, what they have in common is their subversive potential. Both fantasy and romance may challenge established political and social structures, and the ideals on which they are built, by offering alternative perspectives and systems (Sangster 66; Roach 383). In regard to gender and sexuality, romantasy narratives thus have the potential to deconstruct patriarchal and heteronormative structures, and instead present societies and relationships based on equality and freedom.

Relying on Judith Butler’s concept of gender performativity as well as sociological approaches to gender, this thesis seeks to build a conceptual framework within which selected texts of both heterosexual and queer romantasy will be examined in regard to ideas of gender, femininity, masculinity, and heteronormativity, keeping in mind the history and conventions of fantasy and the romance novel to explore to what extent these texts realize their subversive potential.

Works Cited

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