Research Article

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The Queer Glow up of Hero-Sword Legacies in She-Ra, Korra, and Sailor Moon

Abstract: The narratives within *Sailor Moon Crystal, The Legend of Korra*, and *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* enlist gender fluid and queer protagonists to spearhead rebellions against the heteronormative domains of colonizers, imperialists, zealots, and hypercapitalistic military–industrial complexes. Magic is commodified by each villain; used to crown their exaggerated conquistador reputations and power their nuclear weapons. To defeat them and the toxic sociopolitical narratives and power paradigms they have spawned, Sailor Moon, Korra, Adora, and others must confront how these ideologies have stunted their power, corrupted their ethical systems, and distorted their understanding of their identities. By achieving self-actualization/self-acceptance and collaborating with their allies to do the same, they co-create new endings for themselves and reclaim a broader spectrum of gender and sexuality. Within the liminal moments of these reflective identity battles, protagonists and their allies enter a magical communal space, a social network for a Jungian collective unconscious. Here, they exchange their evolving powers, ideologies, and emotionally charged memories (her stories) and collaborate to liberate their communities. These champions, ambassadors of their (our) collective unconscious, urge us to commune within the liminal spaces of our social networks to self-actualize and collectively unearth a neohuman identity and system of governance.

Keywords: psychoanalysis, magic, gender, queer, animation

Introduction: Who are the Animation Icons Sailor Moon, Korra, and She-Ra?

Even if you did not grow up in the 1990's or watched the dubbed version of the original *Sailor Moon* anime, you have likely seen the battle-ready image of the series' protagonist etched across clothes, artwork, memes, or GIFs. Thanks to digital streaming platforms like Netflix and Hulu and their global audiences, Sailor Moon continues to cement herself as a pop culture icon for younger and older generations alike.

In the 90's English dubbed version of the series, Usagi Tsukino is whitewashed and introduced to US audiences as Serena, a 14-year-old middle school student who discovers she is actually the reincarnation of a moon princess charged with becoming the galactic warrior for love and justice named Sailor Moon. With the help of a magical cat named Luna, Serena awakens her powerful entourage of sailor scouts and fellow princesses of the solar system and together they battle alien colonizers who threaten planet Earth, her prince, and her time-travelling daughter. In addition to whitewashing characters and settings, that version of the anime censored and rewrote queer relationships and desires to ensure the show remained in compliance with heteronormative depictions and expectations for children's animation. However, the recent

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2014 series reboot, *Sailor Moon Crystal*, more explicitly showcases gender fluidity, sexual identity, and queerness in both the animation and the dubbed English script.

In 2012, Nickelodeon premiered *The Legend of Korra* as a sequel to the *Avatar: The Last Airbender* series. Both series are set in a world where people known as benders possess magical/spiritual abilities that allow them to manipulate the element of their respective nation: earth, air, fire, or water. Korra is presented as the new Avatar and the reincarnation of Aang, the original series' protagonist. As an Avatar, Korra has the capacity to manipulate all the elements and acts as a balance keeper between nations and the spiritual beings that shape her world. She is a teenage Southern Water Tribe Princess who, along with her allies, works to resolve the sociopolitical power imbalances caused by Aang's decision to establish Republic City, a democratic steampunk metropolis where benders and non-benders of all nations cohabit. Contrary to her predecessor, Korra starts her journey as the unlikeable hero; she's constantly fallible, uncompromising, arrogant, impulsive, and hot-tempered. And she's also gender fluid and queer. However, that queerness is stifled by broadcasting restrictions and, in the end, the show's audience is only permitted to ingest a subdued implication of that queerness. Fans of the series can read an uncensored continuation of the story in the form of two graphic novel sequels titled *Turf Wars* and *Ruins of the Empire*.

By contrast, Netflix's *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* is both a reboot and a queer retelling of the original 1980's *She-Ra: Princess of Power*. In the new 2018 version, Adora lives on a planet called Etheria and is a Horde captain trained to believe that the Horde's military colonization of Etheria helps protect the planet from the chaotic ecosystemic damages caused by magical princesses. But when she activates a magical sword in the forest and transforms into She-Ra, Princess of Power, she realizes that she must battle Catra, her former best friend, in order to save Etheria from the Horde's destruction and free the planet's stored magic. This new Adora and her Princess Alliance freely explore identity, gender, and queer love and how these can trigger the magical evolutions needed to defeat their imperialist oppressors.

Like most works of fiction, the plights of these heroes mirror the ones in our world. But what are the effects of these icons on the social membrane of its multigenerational audience? The digital means through which we ingest these heroes and the social media platforms through which we reflect on their queer and gendered narratives have catapulted them into our collective unconscious. Here, they force us to confront how the sociopolitical narratives of our globalized culture continue to cast damaging spells on us.

Fairy Tale Archetypes: Gendering and Heteronorming the Collective Unconscious

Traditional fairytale storytelling has aided in our subconscious structuring and reinforcement of gendered systems and sexual castration. For generations, children's animation has produced the most potent of liminal thresholds through which gendered fairy tales and mythological archetypes can infiltrate the subconscious of its spectators. Carl Jung proposes that we have access to a collective unconscious, which contains universal contents and behaviors and house archetypes (3–5). However, as Susan Rowland explains, the archetypes housed in the collective unconscious are not universal but rather inherited structuring patterns with potentials for meaning formation (173–174). Archetypes are "containers of opposites and [...] androgynous, equally capable of manifesting themselves in either gender or non-human forms. [They] link body and psyche, instinct and image" (173–174). The new archetypes housed within these three series allow us to reflect on the archetypical meanings we assigned to the storytelling matrix of the fairy tales we consumed in childhood. They also ask us to reflect on the archetypal meanings we have been conditioned to expect from the archetypical hero, weapon, gender, history, love, and sexuality and how these expectations affect our personal understanding of who we are and who we allow ourselves to become.

From an early age, traditional heteronormative stories condition us to ceaselessly idolize and buy the archetypal princess and hero toys inside the pink and blue gendered aisles of toy department stores. They toxify queerness, otherness, and gender fluidity by signaling that these are shadow agents of the

subconscious that threaten our ability to become our idolized archetypes. Through repetition and story-telling regurgitation, they resurface to hypnotize us into believing that the archetypal princess and hero are our ultimate super-ego personas perpetually just out of our reach. According to them, our ability to achieve the self-validation, success, love, and happiness we have been taught to crave depends entirely on our continued collective subscription to heteronormative sociopolitical ideologies and consumerist values.

Sailor Moon, Korra, and She-Ra show audiences a roadmap for navigating through the coded systems of gender and sexuality that poison their narratives.

Shapeshifting Animal Companions and the Warrior Princess' Sexuality

These magical warrior princesses are often aided or accompanied by shapeshifting animal companions who help craft, reflect, reinforce, or reinvent important aspects of their warrior princess personas. Sailor Moon has a female shapeshifting black cat servant named Luna; Chibiusa (Neo Queen Serenity's time-travelling daughter) has Luna-P, an artificially intelligent cat toy and Diana, the shapeshifting cat daughter to Luna and Artemis; Korra has a female polar-bear dog hybrid named Naga and other hybrid spirit creatures; She-Ra has a magical unicorn named Swift Wind; Catra has a shapeshifting blue alien named Melog. These animal companions work to inform the sexual identities and sexual explorations of the princesses they accompany. As Joseph Campbell outlines in *The Hero's Journey*, when the hero responds to the call to adventure, they encounter an agent of the unconscious, a supernatural figure that represents "[...] the benign, protecting power of destiny [...] the supernatural helper [who is not infrequently] masculine in form" (71–72). In *Sailor Moon Crystal*, the animal companions work to establish themselves as the princesses' superior self. Oftentimes, they operate as agents of consciousness that use heteronormative expectations to evaluate and determine the validity and appropriateness of the princesses' sexual desires. They also work to inhibit sexual and emotional expression. Jung defines the animus as the masculine personification or masculine archetype that is confronted by the female consciousness (177). Magiru proposes that the wandering knight, Sir Lancelot, is the ideal manhood who haunts women with his chaste virility (1151). As enforcers of a heterosexual unconscious, the animal companions of Sailor Moon infuse this knightly animus into the Guardian Warrior Princess persona and work to castrate her queer sexuality and emotions. In the first few episodes of Sailor Moon Crystal, Luna works in tandem with Tuxedo Mask, who exhibits courtly knight behaviors and uses roses as weapons, to help teach Sailor Moon about the appropriate fighting styles of a warrior. During her first fight as Sailor Moon, Usagi is overwhelmed by her fear of her enemy's clay demon and falls to the floor crying. Despite witnessing how Usagi's emotional cries allow her to deploy a sonic wave attack that successfully renders her enemy helpless, Tuxedo Mask tells her to stop crying. When she complies and "toughens up," Luna rewards her with a transformation that allows her to use her tiara as an attack. In her article about subversive sexualities, Catherine Bailey argues that adventure stories,

> migrate women from girlhood to adulthood, "Demand that women be muted, silenced, and violated when she enters the time-line that forces her into a sexual story." By the female's adherence to traditional sexual and gendered conduct as proper or correct, such stories funnel women in to two endings: heterosexual marriage or death. (209)

Luna's push to have Usagi compartmentalize her animus infused Sailor Moon persona away from her core identity is done so that Sailor Moon is not made part of Usagi's self-actualization process, or what Jung would refer to as the "individuation" process. Rowland defines individuation as the process through which "the ego is brought into a relationship with the archetypal dynamics of the unconscious [and] constantly made, unmade, and remade by the goal-directed forces of the unconscious" (177). Luna intends to prepare Usagi for a regal and matriarchal role in which fighting as Sailor Moon is no longer appropriate. Since Luna also acted as a lady-in-waiting to Usagi in her former incarnation as a Silver Millennium princess, Luna's

past, present, and future agendas involve ensuring that Usagi discards the warrior princess identity and adopts the graceful persona of Princess Serenity. Once she successfully separates the warrior persona from her princess identity, Usagi is free to become the immortal Neo-Queen Serenity who later embodies the archetype of a female Goddess and eternally perpetuates gender roles within her new Silver Millennium kingdom.

In another episode, when Usagi rides a bus and first encounters Rei Hino, who is later revealed to be Sailor Mars, the animation uses classic romantic anime tropes to signal Usagi's romantic and sexual attraction for Rei. From the moment Usagi sees her, we see Usagi blush and then the camera follows Usagi's eyes as they focus on Rei's face. Through Usagi's perspective, we see red roses framing Rei's face in a way that denotes infatuation at first sight, which is commonly used when two anime love interests first meet each other. The animation further confirms this when it shows us that there are pink hearts in Usagi's eyes. When Usagi steps off the bus to chase after Rei, she explains to Luna that she's chasing after Rei because "she's beautiful." In response, Luna chastises Usagi for chasing Rei because she's attracted to Rei's beauty. This potential bisexual attraction is dismissed by Luna who works quickly to quell any sexual reflections or curiosities the audience may have had as a result of this sequence. She promptly informs us through inner dialogue that Usagi's real impetus for chasing Rei comes from an intuitive knowing that Rei is Sailor Mars and nothing more. In his essay, Kevin Cooley analyzes the power economies between the magical companion Kyubey and the magical girls in the anime *Puella Magicka Madoka*, which offers "a damning take on Sailor Moon's original premise" (28). He argues that Kyubey establishes an exploitative system of magical power exchange with the magical girl that reflects "the real world's linked demands of compulsory hetero-sexuality and capitalism in a country plagued with declining birth rates" (30). Like Kyubey, Luna marks Usagi's romantic or sexual desires toward another girl (and any similar desires stemming from the audience) as deviant and unthinkable because these would violate the pre-programmed heterosexual economy of both the character and the audience (29–30). Luna must, as Cooley explains, police Sailor Moon's sexual agency in an effort to safeguard the heteronormative system of magical power exchanges (29). This policing ensures that Usagi will one day continue to propagate the heterosexual framework of her Silver Millennium world. For Luna, as Bailey argues, an obedient Usagi who succumbs to the natural progressions from bashful virgin to sexual object, to doting wife and selfless mother is rewarded (209–210). However, the Usagi who disrupts the order of these events is met with contempt and disgust because she will become a sexual and gender outlaw and a grotesque monster (209–210). Throughout her journey, Luna makes Usagi a pretty guardian and militarizes her sexuality, making it taboo for her to deploy her feelings and sexual attractions in any way that does not secure the sailor guardians triumph and bring her closer to the married Princess Serenity persona.

Contrary to Luna, who works to constrain Sailor Moon/Usagi within sexually repressed ideologies, Luna-P (Chibiusa's mechanical cat toy) reflects Chibiusa's anxieties of never reaching sexual maturity. Despite being Usagi's 300-year-old daughter from the future, Chibiusa's physical body cannot age or evolve beyond her elementary school years. She comes from a synthetic future where immortality renders fecundity and sexual realization obsolete. As a sentient robotic cat guardian born out of the morally pristine utopia that is New Silver Millennium, Luna-P concludes that her world lacks the tools through which Chibiusa can be liberated from a sexless, childless future. Therefore, Luna-P facilitates Chibiusa's exploration of her own subconscious shadow by intentionally allowing Chibiusa to become fully corrupted by Wiseman, who is capable of unleashing Chibiusa's hypersexualized persona, "Black Lady." This persona embodies the feminine unconscious archetype Jung calls the anima. When Chibiusa witnesses the destruction and damage Black Lady inflicts on her parents and her planet, she internalizes the notion that the Black Lady's unrestrained sexuality and gender presentation is chaotic and that choosing to unleash this part of herself is destructive for the world. As a reward for choosing to reject her Black Lady persona and all she represents, Chibiusa gains the ability to physically grow older and obtains her magical sailor scout powers. Afterward, Diana, Luna's cat daughter, becomes Chibiusa's animal companion and sexual gatekeeper. As such, Diana is charged with safeguarding the little princess' chastity and sexual desires until she has been properly groomed to enter a heteronormative marriage.

Inside the world of *the Legend of Korra*, Avatar Korra and Bolin (her earthbending friend) both have non-speaking animal companions that protect them and their allies from danger; Korra has Naga and Bolin has Pabu. The series uses parodied versions of Korra, Bolin, Naga, and Pabu to explore the toxic hyper-masculinity associated with the heroic warrior trope and its relationship to the feminine and the queer. When a civil war between the Northern and Southern Water Tribes ensues, Varrick, a multi-empire mogul/inventor, decides to create a series of war propaganda movies ("movers") to further incite war and increase his profit from war sales and products. To rally the troops, Varrick heavily adapts a hypermachista script from the real-life power struggle between Avatar Korra and Unalaq. Verrick casts Bolin as the movies' protagonist, Nuktuk, who is the hypermasculinized characterization of Korra. He also casts a beautiful movie star named Ginger, as the perpetually hypersexualized damsel in distress who is Nuktuk's prize and also named Ginger, and chooses Pabu and Naga, Bolin and Korra's animal companions, to be Nuktuk's talking animal companions and advisors, Juji and Roh Tan. In the Nuktuk narrative, Juji and Roh Tan can speak through dubbed over voices and demonstrate human mannerisms, such as high-fiving, through special effects. Varrick consistently uses Juji and Roh Tan to verbally direct Nuktuk's actions and inform Nuktuk's decisions (and by extension the actions and decisions of the audience). As Rowland explains, the theatre (or in this case, the "mover") is "a space in which language of the body can challenge the verbal language of the patriarchal Lacanian symbolic [...] the gendered self is constituted through *performance* and [...] can be imagined *performatively*" (Rowland 118–119). The animal companions celebrate and reward Nuktuk when he uses his raw virility, strength, and prowess to successfully save his damsel and claim her as prize. However, the series constantly breaks the fourth wall in this metanarrative to show us several behind-the-scenes moments of the Nuktuk movies. In these scenes, we see Bolin in his Nuktuk costume after filming has ended. He is often abandoned inside the empty Nuktuk movie sets and left to comically dangle from the wire contraptions that create Nuktuk's powers through special effects. This reinforces the notion that the hypermachista archetype is only made possible through movie editing magic. It also shows just how impossible it would really be for Bolin to embody this hypermachista archetype and emphasizes how absurd it would be for the audience to emulate Nuktuk. Likewise, the movies show us how Varrick's script vilifies femininity, queerness, and gender fluidity. Outside of the Nuktuk stories, Unalaq is Korra's antagonist but he's also a highly respected spiritual teacher, gifted water bender, and Chief of the Northern Water Tribe. He and his twins, Eska and Deska, are shown wearing gender fluid attire and hairstyles. In this sense, the series uses Unalaq and his children to show how animation has the ability to "portray males and females as exact equals aside from adornment, which is necessary for distinction between them [...] [and] introduces uncertain gender roles" (Kelly). Unalaq and his daughter both sport the hair ties associated with women in his Southern Water Nation culture. Inside the Nuktuk movies, Unalaq wears exaggerated eye makeup, eyeliner, hair ties, and sports long fingernails. By pitting this version of Unalaq against Nuktuk, Varrick labels the feminine, the queer, and the gender fluid as threats to the machismo Nuktuk represents. His script signals that Unalaq's embodiment of the feminine, queer, and gender fluid are his weaknesses, and these will prevent him from defeating the heteronormative Nuktuk. More importantly, the series high-lights Varrick as a fallible character with a toxic understanding of the relationship between gender and power. As the Nuktuk movies continue filming, we see Bolin slowly allowing himself to believe and inter-nalize the hero myths his character sells to the audience. He starts believing that his faithful portrayal of the hypermachista Nuktuk automatically entitles him to a romantic and sexual relationship with the real-life Ginger. During one of Nuktuk's kissing scenes with Ginger, he continues kissing her once the camera stops rolling because he believes the romance between the two characters exists beyond the movie. He is often confused as to why she refuses him outside of scene acting or why she does not consider herself to be his girlfriend in real life; for him there is no separation between Ginger the damsel and Ginger the real-life woman. During the episode where the final installment of the Nuktuk movies is set to premier, the two co-stars walk the red-carpet arm in arm and an interviewer named Shinobi comments to the camera (and us) that Bolin and Ginger are a famous couple. Behind closed doors and away from the press, Bolin repeats these comments to Ginger so that she can confirm their authenticity. In response, Ginger completely rebuffs Bolin and tells him that he is "as dumb as the rocks he bends." However, later in the episode, while the Nuktuk movie plays in the background, Bolin renounces his allegiance to Varrick and engages in a fight

with Varrick's men. Here, Bolin's movements are synchronized with Nuktuk's movements in the movie. And once Ginger sees that Bolin does legitimately embody Nuktuk's hypermachista strength in real life, she becomes sexually attracted to Bolin and chooses to act like the Ginger in the Nuktuk's movies. In front of the press, she rewards him for becoming Nuktuk by verbally confirming that he is her boyfriend and publicly kissing him. By enacting the Nuktuk script with Bolin outside of the movies, Ginger reinforces the toxic notion of women as prizes and glamorizes the romance born out of that metanarrative. During his review of this episode for *Vulture*, Patches explains the appeal of this hypermachista image of the thirties serials and reveals the ways in which we as audience are conditioned to celebrate it. He says the Nuktuk films,

> work as both a parody and love letter to thirties serials. Seeing Bolin rise to the occasion is tremendously fulfilling [...] Simply put, he kicks ass. Ripping his sleeves off like Jean-Claude Van Damme, Hamilton and Heck empower the runt of Team Avatar. He's blocking water strikes, flinging stone discs, and embodying Nuktuk. When the musical fanfare kicks, sounding like Heinz Roemheld or Sammy Timberg's music for the old Fleischer *Superman* cartoons, that's when we know Bolin really is the hero he's been pretending to be all this time. (Patches)

Here, Patches misses that the series exposes the dangers resulting from Varrick's decision to use a hyper-masculine Bolin as a surrogate for Avatar Korra in his movie scripts. His narrative choices imply that a powerful and respected Avatar could not be a woman like Korra; the feminine is too weak to be heroic, to embody the warrior hero archetype, to inspire and rally troops, or to lead. It also suggests that hetero-normative heroes should solve conflict with violence and weapons of war. And yet, the series never rewards Varrick for his toxic belief system. Instead, it shows us how we as the audience should interpret and dismiss the Nuktuk films. In an episode where Bolin goes to visit his family in the Earth Kingdom, Bolin's family tells him that the Earth Nation always believed his movies were comedies. This is a teachable moment for Bolin's ego because it contradicts the notion that the movies are inspiring and that his performance is worthy of praise.

Spirit creatures found in *The Legend of Korra*'s Spirit Wilds, however, are an extension of the queer and often force Korra to confront her own insecurities about her identity as an Avatar and what it means to be and fight like a warrior princess. As Conker explains, the liminal nature of the Spirit World and its portals link them to "hybrid and fluid identities that transgress these space [...] these [...] secondary worlds [to] become geographies of Otherness crisscrossed by fluid, hybrid, and reassembled identities" (1–2). In the Avatar's Spirit World, spirits materialize and present themselves in nonconforming body types and spaces – sometimes as amalgamations of other spirits, other times in form of animals, plants, bodies of water, or celestial bodies like the moon. They can also appear and disappear through fluid, undefined mechanisms and motions. Likewise, they can possess human bodies and produce physical alterations to the bodies they possess or the souls they meld with – such as in the case of the Avatar, whose soul is a fusion of human and a universal creation spirit named Raava. For these reasons, these queer spirits deliberately resist any prescription of what dominant social and political relationships should look like and destabilize the natural order of social, cultural, and gender constructs with their strangeness (Seifert 16). In an episode where Korra first navigates the Spirit Wilds with her spirit guide/teacher Jinora, she confronts spirit gophers who crop up from the grass she is treading on. They question Korra and the validity of her claim to being the Avatar. They verbalize Korra's insecurities about being a worthy Avatar and yell at her to leave because she does not belong there and is not trustworthy. Korra defensively reacts to their accusations and tries to attack them with her bending. However, when she fails, she is overwhelmed with anger and fear. These emotions transform the grass beneath Korra's feet into a deep sinkhole and she quickly falls through its depths. This liminal descent into the spirit hole implies that the Spirit World is a hallmark territory of the collective unconscious. Conker explains that the transitional machinations of portals allow characters like Korra to reconstruct identity inside liminal space, where she must battle with mythical, miraculous, and archetypal images that represent the sociopolitical clashes of the material world (2). Through her aimless journey into the dark parts of the Spirit Wilds, Korra shrinks down to a child-like self that cries out from fear of being attacked by what she perceives to be a terrifying dragon-bird spirit. Child-like Korra encounters the spirit of General Iroh, Avatar Aang's former friend, who tells her that her emotions become a reality in the Spirit World. He teaches Korra and the audience how empathy and sympathy play active roles in shaping

perspectives. Once Korra internalizes his teachings, her visual perspective of the dragon-bird spirit shifts and she sees that it is actually small and wounded, like her. He also informs her that she will return to her former self if she successfully carries the wounded dragon-bird spirit to the top of a mountain. During her climb up the mountain, Korra encounters ferocious spirits with snarling, dog-like faces. However, this time, instead of violently trying to fight them by firebending at them, she dispels the fears she associates with their faces by shifting her perspective and empathizing with the spirits. She tells them, "I'm not afraid of you. You're not scary, you just look that way. I have light inside. It's okay. You can be my friends." In response to her peaceful emotional response and gestures toward them, the spirit animals shift forms and become cute and playful dog-like spirits that closely resemble Naga, Korra's polar bear-dog companion in the material world. In that instant, these enemies shift to become Korra's friends and help her finish her climb to the top of the mountain, where she finally regains her teenage body. Korra's journey into the Spirit World represents a journey into the collective unconscious, where queer spirits and animals deconstruct her fears and beliefs to guide her through what Jung calls individuation. When she first interacts with the gophers at the entrance of the Spirit Wilds, we begin to see how much Korra relies on her role as an Avatar to define who she is, who she should be, how she should operate in the world, and how the world should react to her influence. Like Varrick, Korra assigns the stereotypical hypermachista expectations associated with the animus to her role as hero and Avatar. When the gophers reject her, she lashes out violently at them because she believes that is what an independent, powerful, and courageous hero like the Avatar can and should do to assert authority. She also does not admit to fearing her opponents or their lack of validation because doing so means she would have to acknowledge fallibility within herself and her understanding of her role as Avatar. Jung proposes the belief that individuals who descend into the subconscious will enter a "suffocating atmosphere of egocentric subjectivity [that exposes them] to the attack of ferocious beasts [...] of the psychic underworld" (20). He says that the individual who reflects on himself in this space will "risk a confrontation with [themselves] [because] the mirror does not flatter [but] shows [...] the face we never show to the world because we cover it with persona, the mask of an actor. [...] The meeting with oneself is, at first, the meeting with one's own shadow" (20). Inside the Spirit World, she is able to lose that super-ego inflated image of herself and becomes a child-like Korra when she admits her fear. When she chooses to reject the monstrous connotations linked to the queer demon dog spirits (archetypes for the Other) and refuses to perceive the spirits as her opponents, she discovers the liminal nature of archetypes and archetypal meaning within the collective unconscious. In this sense, spirit creatures show us the importance of both dismantling the power paradigms we create for the hero archetype and reevaluating the ways in which these paradigms rely on gendered attitudes.

In *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power*, Adora creates Swift Wind when she accidentally transfers magic from her sword to a horse and transforms him into a unicorn with rainbow wings. As time goes by, he gains the ability to speak, names himself Swift Wind, and advocates for horse rights. Swift Wind urges Adora to escape a tragic hero's trope (of a martyr's death) by giving herself permission to embrace her magicality and express the full spectrum of her emotions. He signals the transformative powers of emotions because, as Jung argues, "the autonomy of the subconscious [...] begins where emotions are generated" (278). As her powers grow, Swift Wind encourages Adora not to give up her voice, power, or identity. He often works in tandem with She-Ra and uses his horn as a beacon to transmit her power across time and space. Similarly, Catra, Adora's former best friend, also gains a magical alien panther, Melog, who responds to her emotions. He is an extension of Catra's evolving emotions and sexual desires and helps her confront her fears of being abandoned and of being unloved.

Toxic Sword Histories of the Chosen Ones

In addition to grappling with the emotional castration that accompanies the warrior princess archetype, the heroines must fight for dominance against their swords of power (or sword symbols of power) and the gendered memory-histories they protect and repeat. These toxic sword symbols and their relationship to

these heroines are referred to as the phallus anima. According to Rowland, this Lacanian and Jung hybrid concept of the anima occurs,

> via the symbolic phallus, the masculine "has" the fantasy phallus and feminine must "be" the phallus for the masculine. Such a binary notion structures gender in a fantasy relation to biological difference [and] locks the feminine into merely performing a mirroring function for masculine. [...] Jung suggests that women are, and should be, the carriers of anima images for men. (113–114)

The images of the chosen one and his sword are inextricably connected with the archetype of valiant heteronormative knight and the martyr hero. In her article, Bailey argues that this is a phallic symbol and masculine icon that is coded as a symbol of masculine sexual virility (213). The sword has the power to connect the chosen one to their past lineage of male dominated hero histories and their religious philosophies. In the case of these hero-warrior chosen ones, the masculine supreme hero wields a virtuous sword to slay the tyrant whose position he is one day doomed to inherit; he perpetuates a historical cycle (Campbell 337, 345, 349). The only solution to avoid this fate, according to Campbell, is if he sacrifices himself and becomes the redeemer of the world he lives in (353). This martyr position is directly linked to religion because the sacrifice "strongly recalls the one Christian believers deem Jesus Christ made, dying for [his] people's sake, and aiming to give everyone another chance, even [his] enemies" (Puglia 113).

In the first season of *Sailor Moon Crystal*, Sailor Moon/Usagi remembers that in her past life she used a magical object called the Legendary Sacred Sword to commit suicide shortly after her Earth lover was killed by the same sword. In that life, this Romeo–Juliet martyr scenario triggers the apocalypse of the Silver Millennium Kingdom and initiates the reincarnation of all the guardians on Earth. In this sense, Princess Serenity (Usagi's past self) is the keeper of the tragic sword and the memory-history attached to it. In the present, when her nemesis seemingly kills Mamoru (Usagi's reincarnated lover), Princess Serenity overtakes Usagi's body in order to activate the Legendary Silver Crystal to save Mamoru's life. However, when he is kidnapped by Queen Beryl (Usagi's archnemesis) shortly after, Usagi despairs and allows the Princess Serenity persona to possess her mind and body. Thereafter, Usagi realizes that in order to free herself and her allies from reliving her martyred past, she must reject her Princess Serenity persona and the attitudes that are linked to the martyr archetype. She decides to embrace her present identity as Usagi Tsukino and declares that she refuses to become a tragic princess again and will not follow anyone's destiny but her own.

Despite her declaration, Sailor Moon and her allies seek to restore their old Moon Kingdom to its former glory. In order to successfully accomplish this, they need to summon the same Legendary Sacred Sword that Usagi used to commit suicide in her past life. After Sailor Venus is able to summon the sword, Sailor Moon once again ends up reenacting this history of martyrdom with her reincarnated lover and runs the sword through him but avoids fatally harming him. The sword's role in reviving the Moon Kingdom also means that Sailor Moon's future is set to be dominated by memory-histories linked to the sword. The sword condemns her to inherit and relive the cyclical memory-histories of her mother, Queen Serenity; she will be subject to Joseph Campbell's hero-becoming-tyrant trope.

In the case of Korra, the sword or the phallic anima is the Avatar Wisdom of past Avatars that perpetuates the first Avatar's belief about maintaining a binary separation system between the human and spirit worlds. Under this philosophy, people rely on the Avatars to stave off the Spirit World's domain and prevent its queerness and queering effects from integrating into their material world. In one episode, Unalaq becomes possessed by Vaatu, the spirit of destruction, and becomes a Dark Avatar. He extracts Raava, the creation spirit that makes up half of the Avatar's soul, from Korra's body and separates Raava from Korra's spirit. This severing permanently disconnects Korra from the ideologies of her past lives and their Avatar Wisdom can no longer shape Korra's decisions and actions or the worlds she inhabits. Even after Korra successfully manages to reunite her spirit with Raava and become the Avatar again, she can no longer discuss and consult her dilemmas with her former selves. In this sense, the Dark Avatar prevents the binary philosophies of past Avatars from controlling and shaping Korra's identity and power. This destruction allows the world in *Legend of Korra* to experience a memory-history reset and paves the way for

evolutionary change. As a result, Korra learns to rely on her own judgment and makes the pioneering decision to keep the spirit portals open. This allows the spirits and humans to commingle in the material world inside a new queer landscape. From this landscape, select citizens are able to awaken their dormant airbending powers and help restore the formerly extinct Air Nation. By allowing humans to mediate their own experiences with the Spirit World entities living in the material world, Korra challenges the belief that only the Avatar, inheritor of the Avatar soul, is qualified to act as a spiritual mediator and, consequently, that only the Avatar can interpret and manipulate the images, philosophies, sociopolitical tensions reflected in the collective unconscious. When she removes herself as guardian/facilitator of the phallus anima and its gendered histories and belief systems and redistributes power to the world's citizens, she allows them to discover their own agency within the Spirit World and the collective unconscious.

In *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power*, the Sword of Protection that enables Adora to transform into She-Ra is literally a coded technological weapon from ancient colonizers named the First Ones. The She-Ra produced by the sword is a gendered costume of the phallic anima that is superimposed on the warrior princess archetype image: large, slow, excessively powerful, but with flowing hair and a dainty tiara. Noelle Stevenson explains that the costume "is [...] a specific femininity that [Adora's] not comfortable with [...] She Ra has always been a little bit of an uncomfortable costume for her. It's something that she's been trying to embody and has been failing at embodying" (qtd. in Radulovic). The sword conditions Adora, programming her to assimilate the toxic and emotionally castrated ideologies of the animus. It convinces Adora to leave the Horde and sever her emotional bonds with others. The sword works with Light Hope, a holographic program designed by the First Ones to activate She-Ra's nuclear weapon capabilities. Through Light Hope, the sword informs Adora of her She-Ra lineage and tells her that it is her destiny to "balance the planet" (which echoes Korra's sword destiny and Avatar lineage). This destiny takes on sinister implications and echoes the magic siphoning abilities and apocalyptic power embodied in Sailor Moon's Legendary Sacred Sword. The balancing of the planet involves successfully transforming the members of the Princess Alliance into magical batteries so that these can then siphon their magic into the Sword of Protection and charge it with the nuclear energy needed to destroy planets. To escape her destiny as a colonizing weapon, She-Ra urges Light Hope to overcome her programming by remembering her emotional connection to Mara, the previous She-Ra. Light Hope's resistance to her programming allows Adora to successfully break the sword. However, prior to its destruction, the sword manages to transport Adora's planet, Etheria, into the larger universe. This makes Etheria vulnerable to attack by Horde Prime, a galactic planet and memory colonizer who infects planets with heteronormative religious and sociopolitical doctrines. Luckily, Adora discovers that the Sword of Protection and the She-Ra that comes from the sword are mere replicas designed to restrict her unlimited magical power. She learns that by self-actualizing and emotionally expressing herself she can summon the real and queer powered magical sword and She-Ra from within herself.

Queer Desires, Liminal Bodies, and Workshopping Identity

In the same vein that these series explore the need to sever gender from sword symbols, they also utilize gender fluid characters to expose the gender and sexual anxieties projected onto bodies. Rowland explains that the subjective nature of our gender and sexual identities allow mutable archetypes to be fluid because they are constantly being transformed and renegotiated throughout our social discourse. She explains that Jung's writings on the alchemic nature of the psyche signal that gender fluidity and queerness, which she refers to as the excluded body and the abject *Other*, is important for the individuation process of the individual and society. She says,

> [...] reconstructing the abject continually to redraw boundaries between self and other is urgent [...] because the individuation psyche cannot rest on the heterosexual model of sacred marriage of two genders. Psychic union has to go on and encompass the body and the discursive world. [...] [When Jung] writes of dragons as the abject feminine, they are

simultaneously revealed as protean, mutable psychic images, ripe for transformation. Gender, subjectivity, and the body are a matter of continual psychic reformation in which social discourses can never restrict or congeal identity. (145)

These gender fluid beings propose that these liminal bodies and queer desires have the ability to trigger internal and external identity evolutions.

The fourth season of *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* introduces Double Trouble as a gender plural shapeshifting mercenary hired by Catra to infiltrate the Bright Moon rebellion led by She-Ra and Queen Glimmer. According to Jacob Tobia, the voice actor for Double Trouble, the character has access to full personhood (qtd. in Whitley-Berry and Mayer). In the series, they rely on being able to shift in and out of gender performances to embody different identities. Catra pays Double Trouble to spy on Adora and Glimmer and cause rifts in their friendship. Double Trouble decides to provoke these conflicts by shifting into Flutterina, a "tooth achingly cute and pink" performance of an eager and naive She-Ra fangirl. As Rowland would suggest, Double Trouble's gender fluidity displaces the restrictive gender conventions that govern the political dynamics of patriarchal systems of governance (91). As Flutterina, Double Trouble exposes the power and ideological struggles between Glimmer's Machiavellian war tactics and Adora's reluctance to deploy She-Ra's nuclear force against her enemies. This conflict reaches its climax when Glimmer uses her authority/power as Queen to order Adora to obey her war command. When Adora disobeys and leaves to find an alternative strategy for the ongoing war, Glimmer works with Light Hope to activate She-Ra's nuclear weapon programming against Adora's will. Prior to this collaboration with Light Hope, Glimmer discovers that Flutterina is Catra's spy and hires Double Trouble to work as a double agent against Catra. Once Double Trouble turns on Catra, they work to crumble Catra's perception of who she is and why she desperately wants the Horde to successfully conquer the planet. This confrontation with Double Trouble echoes the confrontation Korra has with the spirit gophers in *The Legend of Korra*. During this scene, Double Trouble rapidly shapeshifts through their gendered performances of Adora, Scorpia, Shadow Weaver, and Catra. The performances allow Double Trouble to embody the shadow of Catra's unconscious and showcase how each of these people have made Catra feel marginalized, abandoned, or unnecessary. As a result, Catra's false perception of herself as an emotionally castrated villain is dismantled and she is forced to self-reflect on her true identity and desires.

In the last season, when Catra and Glimmer are captured by Horde Prime, Catra begins to deconstruct the hyperheteronormative programming she was conditioned to ascribe to within the Horde. The series shows us how Horde Prime is the embodiment of this hyperheteronormative programming. We see Horde Prime enacting that toxicity in scenes that use distorted monk and church chanting as background music. Throughout the scenes, he subjugates his enemies by dipping them in memory-erasing and chip-implanting baptismal baths, offers absolution to those who surrender to his power, claims to be all powerful overseer of the cosmos, and showboats the trophies he has amassed from civilizations he has long destroyed. This helps us draw direct parallels between him and the forceful religious indoctrinations, anti-LGBTQ + religious institutions, and gay conversion therapy practices of our real-world past and present timeline. To fight him and prevent him from hurting Adora, Catra chooses to help Glimmer escape Horde Prime. She also admits to Horde Prime that she is an emotional Etherian with strong connections to others. Double Trouble's character deconstruction of Catra has ripple effects on the narrative and initiates a domino sequence of revolutionary character decisions. When Catra shifts allegiances and helps Glimmer escape Prime Horde, she sparks Adora's desire to rescue Catra from Prime Horde.

After Catra challenges Horde Prime, he chips her neck in order to colonize her mind and body. This colonized Catra is controlled by Horde Prime and she fights with Adora until Horde Prime forces her to jump off a ledge to her death. At the sight of Catra dying, Adora recognizes how significant Catra is to her and makes the choice to yell out her transformational phrase to summon the true magical form of She-Ra from within herself, which comes from a golden sword that emits powerful rainbow magic. More than an archetypal costume, the new She-Ra is depicted as being a fluid extension of Adora's body/identity. This She-Ra's outfit is an amalgamation of her friend's individual strengths: "the golden gorget around [She-ra's] collarbone now boosts a heart as a nod to Bow's costume [her] boots have wings on them for feisty Glimmer [and] the shape of her crown – now more masklike and grand instead of a dainty tiara – comes

from Catra's mask" (Radulovic). In this sense, this new She-Ra archetype is a community-built identity reflective of the love that her friends feel for her and the empowering nature of that love. According to the show's creator, Noelle Stevenson, this She-Ra image "is a little bit more of a combination between Adora's personal style, the way that she presents what she's comfortable with – with the ponytail, with the pants with the boots – but it also has aspects of pure magic and pure love as well" (qtd. Radulovic).

In the final two episodes of the series, Adora is once again forced to battle the toxic sword ideologies and the emotionally castrating practices instilled in her by Shadow Weaver, her former Horde mentor and mother figure. At first, Adora allows the sword ideologies of Shadow Weaver to convince her that Adora's relationship with Catra is a distraction that keeps her from fulfilling her responsibilities as the chosen one. This reabsorption of this toxic ideology causes Adora to lose her access to the new and powerful She-Ra because she rejects the possibility of achieving an alternative future where she will not die a martyr-hero. In response to Adora's toxic choice, Catra leaves Adora. This causes Adora to succumb to despair and she allows herself to become infected by a First One's virus which prevents her from transforming into She-Ra and releasing the magic reserves that would undo Horde Prime's control on the planet. When Catra decides to return to Adora's side, she helps Adora battle the self-doubt posited by Horde Prime and the First Ones virus by verbally communicating her love for Adora. This overt expression of her love causes Adora to verbalize her feelings to Catra. Their mutual affection helps both of them escape the pre-written destinies they were formerly slaves to. Through a shared kiss and mutual rejection of Horde Prime's conditioning, Adora and Catra unleash She-Ra together and help restore the queer landscape of Etheria when She-Ra releases all the previously mined deposits of magic. The new She-Ra is then able to heal Horde Prime out of existence by healing the control he has on Hordak's mind.

In the third season of *Sailor Moon Crystal*, the gender fluid Sailor Uranus (Haruka Tenoh) exposes the gender expectations and behaviors that have been assigned to the role of Sailor Guardian. Haruka's liminal body and queer sexuality produce gender anxieties in their fellow guardians. Haruka is in a romantic relationship with Sailor Neptune and simultaneously flirts with Sailor Moon, who is also sexually attracted to Haruka. At one point, Haruka kisses Sailor Moon and this triggers Sailor Moon's reflection of her own sexuality and understanding of gender. When the other Sailor Guardians learn about Haruka's queerness and Haruka's attraction to Sailor Moon, they actively try to distance Haruka from Usagi because they worry that Usagi's sexual interest in Haruka could threaten the hetero-normal and monogamous constraints of her true love relationship with Mamoru. This series further explores this discomfort with the queerness of the fluid body through the alien invaders who fight the sailor guardians. These aliens provide us with a perspective that is unconstrained by gender binaries or heteronormativity. They often express frustrations with the constrictions of the gendered human body as it prevents them from unleashing their full form and power. They also refer to the sailor guardians as "alien anomalies," which implies that the magical powers and transformative powers of the sailor guardian bodies are also liminal spaces that challenge binary definitions of the human identity. During their confrontation with these alien invaders, Sailor Moon learns that she can summon the Holy Grail when all the sailors work in unison. When the sailors deposit their powers into the Holy Grail, Sailor Moon douses herself with this collaborative magic and unleashes Super Sailor Moon and her rainbow powers. In this sense, Super Sailor Moon becomes the queer body that houses their shared identities, or "magical souls," and the Holy Grail, or Moon Chalice, becomes the symbol that houses new queer connotations of the divine (Puglia 115).

In the fourth season of *The Legend of Korra*, the narrative picks up 3 years after Korra was poisoned and lost her ability to access her Avatar persona and the audience follows Korra as she embarks on a solo journey to deconstruct her identity and heal her body. She decides to metaphorically shed parts of her identity that signify heterosexual femininity in her Water Tribe culture, such as shortening her hair and removing her hair ties. Her inability to connect with the Avatar state and her experience with understanding pain further amplifies her ability to understand and empathize with her enemies. When a blind earthbender named Toph suggests that Korra's enemies followed ideologies that had value, Korra learns to deconstruct the binary coding systems assigned to heteronormative morality and hero/villain identities. She even enlists the help of the same man who poisoned her to help her overcome the fear of dying so that she can once again enter the Spirit World and reunite with Raava. Korra's new liminal understanding of these

identities and broader understanding of morality restores her Avatar persona and allows her to evolve into a more flexible leader who adopts non-combative conflict resolution styles. In the final episodes of the series, Korra must battle a dictator named Kuvira, who transforms spirit energy into the nuclear weapons that allow her to assert her dominance over the Earth Nation. To resolve this, Korra works with her friends and former enemies to disable the weapons. Unlike her younger self who relied heavily on her Avatar powers to challenge her enemies to one-on-one combats, Korra has evolved to understand the power of community collaboration. When Kuvira is unable to stop a spirit weapon beam from striking Republic City and the nuclear surge almost kills her, Korra jumps in front of the nuclear beam and uses her Avatar powers to save Kuvira. This decision born out of compassion for her enemy causes the Avatar powers to meld with the spirit weapon energy. This energy unification creates a new spirit portal in Republic City, which heals the nuclear destruction of the landscape by filling it with spirits and spirit vines. Korra takes Kuvira through the portal to discuss her dictatorial actions against Republic City and the Earth Nation. Inside this collective unconscious space, Korra explains that she sees a reflection of herself in Kuvira and resists the urge to vilify her. Instead, she opts to empathize and rationalize with her. This empathy and discussion allow us to understand Kuvira's perspective and intentions; we learn she wanted to provide her nation with leadership to prevent cities from starving and descending into chaos. And by the end of their conversation, Kuvira chooses to evolve beyond the constraints of villainy. She accepts accountability for her actions and surrenders to Korra.

The show's final scene positions Korra and Asami in front of a queer landmark, the new spirit portal. The scene mirrors the lighting and animation tropes used to frame Aang and Katara's romantic kiss in the original series' finale. The scene also suggests to the audience that Korra and Asami are not allowed to explicitly express this queerness until they have reached this queer and unpoliced space of the Spirit Wilds. Once they cross through the portal, they are free to explicitly express their feelings for one another and they confirm their budding sexual attraction by kissing and dating inside the first few animated panels of graphic novel continuation in *Turf Wars* (DiMartino 13).

Remakes, Fanfiction, Social Networks: The Neohuman and the Love Spectrum

These stories mark a distinct progression for queer representation in television: from the erasure of queerness in the originally dubbed Sailor Moon, to the subverted and implied queerness of Korra, to the romantic kiss between two queer main characters and the normalized representation of gay married couples. In her article about LGBTQ + representation in animation, Millman explains,

> Hollywood has a long history of othering queerness, even (and especially) of a casually intimate nature. Among kids' shows, homophobia has long manifested in the pervasive idea that positive portrayals of LGBTQ + characters are something that kids are "too young" for. It doesn't matter, of course, that heterosexual pairings aren't held to the same age restrictions; it's about policing existence [...]. (Millman)

These series show us the power of digital communal spaces and how they provide us with the tools to help animators override the heteronormative limitations encoded within media and societal standards.

In his Tumblr post, Bryan Konietzko, the creator of *The Legend of Korra*, explains that he wanted to create a character that escapes the gendered binaries of heteronormative stories, "especially since the majority of the examples in media portray a female character that is little more than a trophy to be won by the male lead for his derring-do" (bryankonietzko). He explains that he subconsciously knew that network permission this queer pairing would most likely be denied but that he still went forward in order to challenge the heterosexual paradigm (bryankonietzko). According to him and Noelle Stevenson, fanbase and creator interactions through social media helped pave the way for allowing the inclusion of queer representation. Pitre explains that "spectators were able to claim certain signifiers and nuances and build a

fan community, [taking] it upon themselves to draw up queer fan art, or write queer fanfiction, especially between Korra and Asami" (27). Sherer explains that a "groundswell viewer support [of She-Ra/Catra] allowed Stevenson to make a case to the studio for supporting the story she wanted to tell with She-Ra" (Sherer). From the spaces of social media, we can co-author the narratives we wish and need to consume.

The remake versions of *She-Ra and the Princess of Power* and the *Legend of Korra* also signal the importance of what Miriam Johnson calls the "Citizen Author" and how the fanfiction behaviors of the citizen author can be used to transform archetypes, compound new archetypal meanings, and explore new horizons for narrative depictions of gender and sexuality. Johnson explains that,

> the driving force [of fanfiction] has been about connectivity, and tapping into a feedback loop of a "reader's active participation in meaning-making." […] The growth of digital social technology and the low barriers of entry to the publishing process develops into a new way of writing […] new generic frameworks […] [that] allow […] [marginalized] genres to flourish. (401, 406)

From these liminal spaces, we can critique how narratives propagate toxic heteronormative attitudes toward gender and sexuality and we can hold animators/writers accountable for the creative choices they make. We can continue to unearth a neohuman identity unrestrained by memory-history within the collective unconscious. We can evolve our ideals and desires beyond gendered binary system constraints.

In our real worlds, we experience how the definition of humanity is used to limit, expand, or secure our human and civil rights. Sailor Moon, Korra, and Adora urge us to claim our agency within our collective unconscious and the liminal digital spaces of our social networks. In doing so, we glow up and channel the collective voices and neohuman ideals needed to restructure the sociopolitical systems governing our daily lives.

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