

Research on Diversity in Youth Literature

Volume 2 | Issue 1

Article 7

June 2019

Thomas, Ebony Elizabeth. *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games*. NYU Press, 2019. 240 pages.
ISBN: 9781479800650

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Recommended Citation

Toliver, S. R. (2019) "Thomas, Ebony Elizabeth. *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games*. NYU Press, 2019. 240 pages. ISBN: 9781479800650," *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 1 , Article 7.
Available at: <http://sophia.stkate.edu/rdyl/vol2/iss1/7>

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bell hooks contends that “to be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body” (xvii). She uses this commentary to address the fact that Black people were often allowed to enter various spaces as long as we remained on the perimeter. We were permitted to enter the heart of society, but we could not stay there. Once our service was complete, we were forced to return to the periphery. In fact, “there were laws to ensure our return. To not return was to risk being punished” (xvii). Thus, Black folks were and are consistently stuck in a cycle, one in which society conditionally welcomes us only if the purpose is to further a dominant societal narrative. However, due to this positioning, Black people “focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin. We understood both” (xvii). We saw that the whole of the universe included everyone, those who are centralized and those who are marginalized. As hooks argues, “our survival depended on an ongoing public awareness of the separation between margin and center and an ongoing private acknowledgment that we were a necessary, vital part of that whole” (xvii). In other words, the systematic reification of binaries between minoritized and dominant populations outwardly sustained oppression while Black folks privately dismantled those notions through the acknowledgement that without us, the whole crumbles.

However, what if the private conversations shifted to public awareness? What if endarkened people were focalized, rather than cast to the edges of a narrative? These are the questions that Ebony Elizabeth Thomas addresses in her book, *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games*. Similar to hooks’ discussion of feminism and its need to move Black women from margin to center, Thomas centralizes Black female secondary characters in speculative fiction texts featuring White protagonists. She analyzes the cycle, coined as the Dark Fantastic, that traps Black girls in a narrative that conditionally accepts their presence as long as their existence furthers the plot of the story. She investigates the laws prescribed by mainstream publishers, authors, and audiences that attempt to push Black girls back to the sidelines once they have fulfilled their tasks, and she examines the psychological, emotional, and physical punishments that occur when they continue to take up narrative space. Moreover, she challenges the ongoing public relegation of Black girls to the borders of speculative fiction and makes public their critical place as part of the whole speculative community. By researching the ways that “the fantastic shapes the collective consciousness

toward perceptions of difference” (19), Thomas acknowledges that even though some readers choose to ignore Black girls, “*the Dark Other is always already there*” (23), a vital part of the speculative whole.

The book opens with a personal anecdote in which Thomas recalls her speculative fiction reading history. She acknowledges the importance of magic in her young life, as it was essential in bringing catharsis, hope, and safety. However, she also notes that her preferences were often questioned because speculative genres have historically been positioned as spaces for White reader and writers. Her placement as a Black girl on the margins of imagination and fandom caused her to question the cartographies of dreams in American society. Using her childhood experiences as a reader, writer, and fan to ground her study, she presents the need for critical race storytelling, a way of restorying narrative traditions by uplifting voices of color, decentralizing hegemony, revealing often disregarded points of view, and unsettling liberal ideologies. She further states that critical race storytelling is essential in combating the imagination gap, the failure of adults to challenge traditional publishing that confines people of color to the edges of the imagination.

To elaborate on how people of color are often simultaneously present and absent in speculative works, Thomas engages with research that highlights how authors of the fantastic allegorically examine difference through monstrous surrogates – vampires, werewolves, witches, wizards, ghosts, and aliens. These allegorical stand-ins often represent the Dark Other, the obstacle to be challenged, overcome, and often vanquished. She argues, however, that endarkened readers who have been Othered in dominant society are provided an implicit message when all the heroes are White and all the Others are menacing and inhuman –

“We are the horde. We are the enemies.

We are the monsters.” (23)

That is, even in a story filled with White characters, people of color are still metaphorically present. We are always there, watching the townspeople chase us down the street, listening to the blood curdling screams of innocent White residents, viewing our deaths as the hero/ine receives a medal for our murder, and observing our caricatures symbolically placed in the speculative

stocks for all to see. Thus, to engage in critical race storytelling in fantastic fiction is to center the monster and examine the cycle that traps the Dark Other in the margins.

Thomas's Dark Fantastic Cycle has five components: spectacle, hesitation, violence, haunting, and emancipation. Spectacle is the aspect of visual difference that centers the Dark Other as abnormal within a fantastic universe; it is the disruption of the imaginary world. Once the "waking dream of the fantastic" (26) is interrupted, the audience hesitates as they figure out what to do with this unsettling presence. In order to resolve the conflict of the Dark Other's presence, the monster must be met with textual violence, often resulting in the death of the character. However, this death cannot be permanent, for "*Darkness is the source that powers the fantastic*" (29). Instead of complete death, then, the monster haunts the narrative, repositioning itself as a spectacle that will once again elicit hesitation and violence. The Dark Other is stuck in this cycle until they are emancipated through narratives that subvert their traditional positioning. Yet, in a genre whose soul hinges on the souls of dark folks, emancipation is not an easy feat.

To show the cycle and the imagination gap, Thomas presents analyses of three Black female characters in Anglo-American fantastic stories: Rue from Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*; Gwen from BBC's *Merlin*; and Bonnie Bennett from Alloy Inc. and the CW's *The Vampire Diaries*. In chapter two Thomas focalizes Rue, examining the unspoken racial undertones of the novel's setting while also highlighting Rue's presence as racial Other in comparison to the White protagonist, Katniss Everdeen. Collins' text situates Rue as brown-skinned, but because her race is underplayed in the text, many readers overlooked her racial identity. However, as a character represented on the big screen, Rue became a spectacle, interrupting the imagined world of the film because Rue's endarkened body was visually different from the image of White innocence that many people perceived. Upon viewing the spectacle, hesitation occurs as Rue and Katniss' friendship grows and as Rue is set up to become the human sacrifice. Of course, the violence enacted against Rue's body is unimportant, for "Katniss's pain at having failed to protect Rue becomes the emotional centerpiece" (53). Thus, even after Rue physically dies, she haunts the text as emotional fodder for Katniss to continue her journey. Through Rue's cycle, Thomas shows the problem with innocence in the Dark

Fantastic, noting that goodness, innocence, childhood, and frailty are characteristics not ascribed to Dark Others in the fantastic or in the imaginations of some speculative readers.

Chapter three outlines Gwen's Dark Fantastic Cycle, emphasizing the fact that not only does innocence elude Dark Others but so does beauty and any history that does not begin with enslavement. *Merlin* opens with a statement about its magical plot and mythical setting; still, the use of characters like King Arthur and Merlin caused many viewers to situate the show in the medieval period. Thus, when Gwen, a Black woman who is initially presented as a servant girl, is positioned as the future love interest for the king and therefore future queen of the realm, a spectacle is created. Once the spectacle is brought forth, the audience and narrative hesitate, watching the growing relationship between Arthur and Gwen and awaiting the inevitable wedding between the two characters. However, their happiness must be short lived, for the Dark Other does not warrant prolonged joy. Instead, Gwen is captured and tortured by a witch, and this torment alters her psyche and causes her to betray those she loves. When the spell is finally broken, Gwen does not experience a physical death, as Rue does, but a social death. For the rest of the series' run, Gwen's lines are reduced, her loving personality is changed, and she lives on as a ghost of her former self. Through Gwen's cycle, Thomas shows that in the mainstream imagination, the Dark Other is incommensurate with happiness and history beyond enslavement. Even though Gwen seems to break the cycle because she is alive at the end of the show, she is only a shell of her former self, suggesting that the Dark Fantastic Cycle lives on.

The focal character of chapter four, Bonnie Bennett, initially appears to contradict the pattern of the Dark Fantastic. Thomas categorizes Bonnie as a spectacle in the narrative because although she is a powerful character within the story, she is still sidelined and only focalized when she is in service of the White main characters. The narrative hesitates as the story toys with Bonnie's ability to be desired by various White men in a universe where sexual interactions occur consistently for the White leads. The hesitation ends, however, when Bonnie risks her life to resurrect her disloyal boyfriend. In a show that centralizes the undead, "Bonnie is the first major character who has an official funeral" (124). Even after her physical death, she haunts the narrative by possessing her friends and then being positioned as a medium between the real world and the spiritual realm. Thomas reasons that Bonnie could have been emancipated had the

writers chosen to create a more well-planned story ending. Instead, after she saves everyone yet again, Bonnie decides to go to Africa, a place she never mentioned visiting, a continent with no specific destination. Thus, through Bonnie's cycle, Thomas illuminates the various ways that emancipatory potential can be subverted through a writer's imagination gap.

Thomas does not end her analysis on a despairing point, for she highlights the emancipatory work of diverse fandom and numerous authors of color. At the end of chapter four, she explains the responses to Bonnie's character by various viewers as they wrote opinion editorials, Tumblr posts, and Twitter threads concerning the network's ill treatment of Bonnie. Thus, even if Bonnie was not emancipated through the show, the digital activism of various fans suggests that there are those who are working to break this cycle. Chapter five also centralizes the digital activism of fans through a discussion on restorying speculative works. In this chapter, Thomas considers how some fans are moving toward emancipation by altering stories through time, identity, place, mode, perspective, and meta-narrative. For example, many fanfiction and fanart producers depicted Hermione Granger as Black even though she was played by a White actress in the films. They refused the cycle of the Dark Fantastic and generated emancipatory stories and visuals using their own imaginations. By presenting the various ways that fans are already working toward emancipated Dark Others in fantastic fiction, Thomas suggests that unfettering the Dark Other from the cycle of the Dark Fantastic requires us to fill in the imagination gap, create new paradigms, and decolonize the imagination (Elliott).

Thomas challenges readers to consider the role that race plays within the imagination. She challenges us to emancipate our dreams and dismantle the system that forces Black girls into positions of Dark Other and into the Dark Fantastic Cycle. Not only does she challenge readers and fans, however, she also challenges researchers who do this work. hooks notes that "we can find common languages to spread the word" (xv), and she supports her belief by combining story, theory, public discourse, and academic research into her text. Similarly, Thomas combines literature, education, and popular culture research with blogs, social media posts, television shows, and personal anecdotes to convey her work. She foregoes the laborious writing style used by many scholars and embraces a style that presents valuable information and relieves the reader of the mental martyrdom that often accompanies academic works.

Therefore, in multiple ways, Thomas takes the private conversations of diverse fandom, in which fans of color have historically envisioned, reimagined, and created emancipated Dark Others, and she brings these discussions into the public sphere. She focalizes endarkened people, rather than relegating them to the sidelines of the narrative. More importantly, she asks us to liberate magic and our imaginations from the clutches of a hegemonic cycle. The systematic reification of binaries between Dark Others and dominant populations is sustained through the apartheid of children's literature (Myers), but Thomas shows us that "resolving the crisis of race in our storied imagination has the potential to make our world anew" (169). The whole of the imagination includes everyone. Without it, the whole crumbles.

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