

Introduction: Unwriting & Queering

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This anthology of twenty-seven undergraduate essays is the product of three sections of a senior-level English literature seminar course in gender and sexuality called “Beyond the Tragic Trope: Queer YA Romance” (Engl 417 at Simon Fraser University in Fall 2023, Summer 2024, and Fall 2024). Each student in the course developed their own research project, which had the option but not the requirement to be focused on one of the texts we studied in class. Each student had the option but not the requirement to publish the results of their work, with support from Simon Fraser University’s Public Knowledge Project and Digital Publishing: special thanks go to Ioana Liuta and Jen Zirkee, who gave us information and advice, and Tony Lu, who worked on the cover design. We spent a significant amount of class time on peer reviews and peer editing, from a proposal to an annotated bibliography, to a pecha kucha presentation of research results, to drafts and revisions of the paper. And we are proud of the results!

The literary texts on which class discussions focused changed slightly over the three offerings of the course, but altogether they included Anna-Marie McLemore’s *When the Moon Was Ours* (2016), C.B Lee’s *Not Your Sidekick* (2016), Claire Kann’s *Let’s Talk about Love* (2018), Abdi Nazemian’s *Like a Love Story* (2019), Malinda Lo’s *Last Night at the Telegraph Club* (2021), Adiba Jaigirdar’s *Hani and Ishu’s Guide to Fake Dating* (2021), and Jen Ferguson’s *The Summer of Bitter and Sweet* (2022). We explored what recent adult authors writing in English for teen readers are doing with love stories in which the protagonists exist beyond and challenge the binaries of male-female cis-het relationships. We looked at ways in which these texts both reproduce and challenge the conventions of YA (Young Adult) romance novels; we discussed ways culture can intersect with gender and sexuality; and we thought about how setting Queer romance in the future, the present, or the past has an impact on how readers may see themselves represented and/or gain insight into others’ ways of being in the world. As the designer of the course, I wanted us to focus on positive and award-winning recent works, so different from the “problem novels” of past decades—here, thanks go to Rob Bittner for a guest talk on the background/history of Queer YA and insight into how books receive awards. I deliberately chose texts in which Queerness is not solely/primarily a source of shame and is not solely/primarily a source of social

challenge, texts which add the richness of cultural diversity, texts which leave their characters in good places. We want to celebrate growth in the production of such texts and the ways critics and readers recognize them as valuable.

The student authors in this anthology have wide-ranging interests and thoughtful responses to their chosen texts. In many cases, the literary texts they analyse are by Queer authors and have Queer characters. In some cases, the student authors' approach has been to do a Queer reading of YA texts by authors who do not so identify, but whose texts accommodate such a reading.

We acknowledge our own positionality as students and instructor at a Canadian settler university located on the sacred, traditional, and unceded lands of several Coast Salish Peoples, including the Səḥilwətaʔɬ (Tseil-Waututh), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) Nations. We have tried to be respectful of and willing to listen to those authors and characters who are different from us and similar to us in complicated ways.

The student papers are divided into sections by the term in which the course took place, and within each section are organized in alphabetical order by the student's family name. An extra thank-you goes to Zandria Sarrazin, for assistance with proofreading the Fall 2023 group of papers. And, as the editor of the anthology, I encouraged students to capitalize "Queer" as a proud claim of identity for a diverse group of people. We hope that you will enjoy reading these papers, and we encourage you to read (or listen to) any of the literary works they focus on that may be currently unfamiliar to you!



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