

Book Reviews

Arnaudo, Marco. *The Tabletop Revolution: Gaming Reimagined in the 21st Century*. McFarland, 2024.

For anybody who has been paying attention, tabletop gaming – from board games to card games to cooperative games to story-driven games and more – is substantially different today compared to years past. In *The Tabletop Revolution*, Marco Arnaudo persuasively argues that tabletop gaming in the late 20th Century to early 21st Century has undergone substantial transformation to become a hobby enjoyed by more people, in more ways, in more places. With near-encyclopedic knowledge of tabletop games, and references to dozens upon dozens of games throughout the book going back hundreds of years, Arnaudo captures the contours and dimensions of the hobby gaming culture. He also showcases the multifaceted ways that tabletop gaming expanded into new themes, mechanics, and playstyles, all while changing the culture of gaming worldwide.

As a gaming nerd myself, I have witnessed the expansion of gaming culture in my lifetime, though Arnaudo’s experience with gaming far surpasses my own. My observations of the evolution of this culture would be simple gestures compared to Arnaudo’s deft and altogether thorough exploration of tabletop gaming’s depths. As a kid who grew up playing the Nintendo Entertainment System and *Dungeons & Dragons*, my interest in board games stalled in my middle school years after playing *Monopoly* and *Risk* to excess. In my college years, I was introduced to the *Settlers of Catan* (now simply *Catan*), a game that, when released, Arnaudo says “brought early eurogaming trends into focus, and single-handedly launched the current revolution in the hobby” (144). From *Catan*, my friends and I jumped to other games, like *Pandemic*, *Ticket to Ride*, *Carcassonne*, *Dominion*, and more. While a familiarity with modern tabletop gaming certainly helps the reader understand Arnaudo’s arguments (especially if readers have played any of the games mentioned), those who have not kept up with tabletop gaming will quickly find themselves introduced to many, many more possible games to play.

In the book’s first three chapters, Arnaudo describes how today’s tabletop gaming has evolved. Chapter 1 captures some of the modern “fixes” to classic tabletop gaming problems such as player elimination, downtime, and runaway

leaders, comparing today's games to beloved (or infamous) classics like *Monopoly*. Chapter 2 explores how modern gaming keeps players engaged in the games by offering more interesting choices to players, limiting randomness, and depicting themes far more varied and nuanced than the wargames of old. Chapter 3 is a celebration of the physical production values of games, including beautifully printed games, gorgeous box art, and high-quality wooden tokens. These games, while aesthetically pleasing to look at and hold, keep players engaged by more fully immersing them in the theme or setting of the game. However, these components also allow for more variety of play, as seen in games that allow for variably set-up play areas, such as boards that are different from play to play. Chapter 4 offers two case studies of modern games, showcasing how two classic games (*Taboo*, 1989, and *Fireball Island*, 1986) have been updated and made more enjoyable with modern gaming conventions (respectively, *Trapwords*, 2018, and *Fireball Island: The Curse of Vul-Kar*, 2018).

These first four chapters are an excellent primer on the modern state of tabletop gaming. For readers who are still beginners to tabletop gaming, these opening chapters offer a relaxed and informative introduction to the evolution of gaming in recent decades. For anybody who has been immersed in this culture, such as myself, many of the observations will not be new (though again, because of Arnaudo's vast experience with gaming, I still learned of new examples and games from these chapters).

The book gets far more interesting in Chapter 5, as Arnaudo discusses how modern gaming "breaks the rules" of classic gaming, making explicit "the constructed nature of gaming conventions" (62). This chapter examines gaming conventions that, until recently, had seldom been questioned. These conventions are: rules are fixed and unchanging; cheating is not allowed; gameplay should be symmetrical; the composition of competing teams is established at the beginning of the game; and so forth. This chapter showcases how numerous modern games break one or more of these conventions to provide more interesting gameplay opportunities. This leads to an even more interesting discussion of game mechanics in Chapter 6. This chapter discusses popular gaming mechanics (a mechanic being a method of interacting with the game by the player), and how modern games have taken existing gaming mechanics and "reinvented" them "to include more complexity, variety, strategy, and engagement" (82). Nine mechanics are discussed in this chapter, and in some cases, Arnaudo shows how something that used to be a game in and of itself. For example, Rock Paper Scissors or Mancala, can be turned

into a mechanic for a modern game, offering additional layers of interaction for the player.

Chapter 7 moves beyond reinventions of existing gaming conventions or mechanics by addressing truly revolutionary ideas that have changed the face of modern hobby gaming. These mechanics include action points, worker placement, the rondel (a wheel showcasing different actions a player can take on their turn), deck building, card drafting, and targeted clues. These newer mechanics have been so well received that they often inspire a range of imitators that further expand and refine the mechanic. These six mechanics were invented in the late 1990s and 2000s, which Arnaudo labels the “Golden Age of gaming invention” (113). He argues that the 2010s and early 2020s, then, are the age of “refinement and recombination” (113). No revolutionary new mechanic has entered the gaming scene (yet); rather, designers continue to push the boundaries of previous reinventions. At this point in the book, I started to wonder, “where does tabletop gaming go from here?” If thousands upon thousands of tabletop games currently exist, covering nearly every theme imaginable, and if every mechanic or convention has been reinvented, and if nothing truly revolutionary has hit the scene in 15+ years, then has the hobby reached its peak? Arnaudo only briefly addresses that thought at the end of this chapter, and then once again in the book’s epilogue.

The remaining chapters are targeted, expanded explorations of ideas only briefly discussed earlier in the book. Chapter 8 investigates whether the playing of hobby games, or the games themselves (through their physical components, box or card artwork, or even the setup of the game) can be considered art. These ideas build naturally upon the observations of Chapter 3, which was concerned with how gaming components have been reimaged in the modern age.

Chapter 9 reviews the history of eurogaming, starting with the gaming culture of Germany. Many of the revolutionary games discussed earlier in the book came from Europe, so the deeper dive into the history of eurogaming is appreciated. The chapter takes a critical turn midway through when Arnaudo discusses how many popular eurogames have recently been critiqued for the ways games sometimes “implicitly or explicitly” support “racism, imperialism, and economic exploitation” (151-52). Such games include *Puerto Rico*, highly regarded for its innovative gameplay, which casts players in the role of plantation owners using slaves (called “colonists” in the game) to work their fields. The chapter ends with examples of games and publishers working to design more inclusive games to address these criticisms.

Chapter 10 showcases the numerous cooperative games that have arisen, games in which players no longer compete against each other, but rather work together to achieve common objectives. Finally, Chapter 11 describes another style of game where storytelling is the centerpiece, such as games that use a guidebook with short text snippets that are read as the game progresses, or the invention of legacy-style games (first introduced by *Risk Legacy* in 2011), in which the game itself changes with each successive play (rules are added or expanded, components change or are altered, and so forth). These two chapters show that there truly is a game for every type of player, and that the diversity of today's offerings is a big reason why this hobby has exploded in recent decades.

The Tabletop Revolution is a comprehensive look at the current state of hobby gaming, an analysis of how modern games evolved and expanded upon ideas of earlier games, and a celebration of the richness of the games on display. While much more could be said about hobby games, such as examining the player culture that surrounds such games, or the social interactions present when games are played, this book is a great starting point for anybody interested in a scholarly exploration of tabletop gaming. The thought that stuck with me the most as I finished the book was: there are a lot more games that I should be playing!

Dennis Owen Frohlich
Commonwealth University of Pennsylvania

Brown, Shaun C., and Amanda MacInnis Hackney (Eds.) *Theology and Star Trek*. Lexington, 2024.

J. J. Abrams movies aside, *Star Trek* is in part defined by its progressive ideals and willingness to criticize contemporary society, especially Western civilization in the 20th century. For many viewers, the scientific rationalism at the heart of Gene Roddenberry's vision, exemplified by Spock in the original series, is presented as an antidote to the tribalism, superstitions, and violence that has punctuated the course of human history. Instead, the show offers a utopian vision of the future based on the premise that humans can overcome their biases with the humble reframing of their place in the universe. Indeed, this last piece is, in the *Trek* narrative, essential, as it is not until humans create their first warp drive and meet the Vulcans that they begin to work toward their future utopia in which traditional

divisions are overcome. In other words, it is not until humans see themselves as part of a larger network of sentient beings in the universe, rather than the center of it, that they are able to progress.

This all would appear to place the worldview of the *Star Trek* universe at odds with a religious viewpoint. Religion is often directly criticized in the original series, such as in “Return of the Archons” (season 1, episode 21), and *The Next Generation*, such as in “Who Watches the Watchers” (episode 4, season 3). Yet, as the editors of *Theology and Star Trek* point out in their introduction, the development of the franchise through its various iterations tracks neatly onto the philosophical transitions at work from modernity to postmodernity. This notion lands *Star Trek* firmly in the discussion, perhaps inaugurated by the Enlightenment, about which ideas best lead to human flourishing. By placing the franchise into this conversation and into this chronology, a strong case is made that while *Star Trek* may not always directly address religion, it exists within a framing that critiques and seeks to understand religious world views. This volume interprets *Star Trek* as reflecting the shifting ideas, from the Enlightenment to the postmodern, that have influenced the contemporary world, including how those shifts intersect with theological traditions.

With this framing in mind, the anthology breaks its contents into four parts. The first is titled “These are the Voyages” and “explore[s] the overarching themes of *Star Trek* and its creator, Gene Roddenberry” (xvii), as they relate to the treatment of religion in the franchise. While the explicit rejection of religion by Roddenberry is acknowledged, the chapters in this section articulate how theological study can be used to better understand the epistemological stance of the franchise. Part 2 is titled “Strange New Worlds” and focuses on politics and technology. This includes chapters that tie the Borg to transhumanism and the Christian doctrine of the resurrected body and that discuss the ethics of advanced technology, such as gene editing, as they play out in the various series. They also consider articulations of personhood and humanity, as seen through the character Data, and religious language that makes its way into the series. The third part, called “To Explore and to Seek,” considers how the franchise’s progressive values work in tandem with its treatment of the religious. This often results in complicating Roddenberry’s Enlightenment-style values by considering edge-cases, such as the Delta Quadrant or Data, that push the characters to reevaluate how they make moral judgements. This part also includes examinations on work and leisure in the world of *Trek* and

how the franchise's view of personal growth and progress can be compared to Hebrew eschatology.

Several chapters stand out as especially interesting to those interested in a more scholarly view of *Star Trek*. In "The Future of Humanity: Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and *Star Trek*," Joshua Canzona compares the futurist optimism of Teilhard's work to the utopian vision in *Trek*. The overlap hinges on a shared "unflagging optimism concerning the future of humanity" that is underlined by a belief in the "potential for human evolutionary development" (52). As this optimism is often one of the primary attractions for fans of the television series, historicizing *Trek's* utopian vision through the context of the French Jesuit priest and scientist's own thought validates that utopianism by putting it into conversation with an alternate view of possibility in the formation of modernity. Teilhard served in World War I as a stretcher-bearer and therefore was no stranger to the violence of which humans are capable. Canzona points out that Roddenberry served as a pilot in World War II (54). While utopianism is often derided as naive, it should give critics some pause to consider that some of our most credible optimistic futurisms have come from individuals who have faced perhaps the worst humanity has to offer. Importantly, in both *Trek* and de Chardin's work, utopian possibility is "a natural progression" that is made possible through "a species-wide transcendence brought on by the drive for greater progress and deepening union" (61). This unfettered optimism, however, does not evince an unwillingness for *Trek* to consider the difficult nuances of human relations.

Meanwhile, in "Fundamentalism and Openness in *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*," Timothy Harvie and Michael R. MacLeod analyze the more overt inclusion of religion in series, arguing that *Deep Space Nine* "shows the reality of religious belief and the mystery of spiritual experience as a complex phenomenon in human (and nonhuman) experience" (218). The authors here focus on fundamentalism and openness, a dichotomy that has powerful resonances to the political and social problems of the 21st century. The authors consider this dynamic through the work of Deitrich Bonhoeffer, a Christian martyr who stood against the Nazis and argued for a more flexible and practical sense of faith (218). The authors emphasize the ways in which the character arcs in *Deep Space Nine*, especially that of Captain Sisko, reflect Bonhoeffer's own assertion that fundamentalist approaches to religion and faith risk becoming "compromised by personal and political ambition" and away from an "authentic faith that produces a healthy adherence and

acceptance” (226). For the authors, this shows the breadth of *Trek’s* creative engagement with the personal and political ramifications of religion.

Finally, the collection’s last part, “To Boldy Go,” discusses the future of the franchise through some of its newer installments, such as *Picard*. Here, Harvie argues that despite Roddenberry’s long shadow in the continued production of *Star Trek*, its “vision is still under construction” (287). Harvie reads, in *Picard* as well as in *Discovery*, a “turn towards affect” in which the franchise begins to tackle “issues of embodiment, emotion, grief, loss, and what these might mean for human structures, power, and growth” (290). We see once again the value of interpreting the franchise’s development in terms of the progression of ideas and ideals from the Enlightenment on to the contemporary era. These newer installments of *Trek* are intimately concerned with the problem of identity, specifically how identities are constructed and reflected in the political and social systems that people create. If earlier iterations of *Star Trek* offered a genuine utopian vision, one of the few serious-minded attempts at narrative utopianism (though, that is not to say they are without humor!), the recent resurgence in *Trek* series and narratives appears to be concerned with what it means to a human in that kind of vision and how human emotion, physicality, and trauma manifest even when our more basic needs are met.

Carlos Tkacz
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Earle, Harriet E.H. *Aren’t You BoJack Horseman? Critical Essays on the Netflix Series*. McFarland, 2024.

As funny as it is depressing and sad, the Netflix original series *BoJack Horseman* made a lasting impact on popular culture. Spanning six seasons from 2014-2020, the show explores the life of “Hollywood” star BoJack Horseman, who resides in an alternative Hollywood populated by humans and anthropomorphic animals. Once a major sitcom star, BoJack has now faded into obscurity but tries to make a public come-back with an autobiography.

Aren’t You BoJack Horseman? is an edited collection that offers close readings of the show’s major themes. By blending the comedic and the traumatic, *BoJack Horseman* is a primary example of a streaming series that draws from familiar

tropes, but also rises above them to create social and cultural commentary. The series builds on sitcom, adult animation, and self-referential storytelling to comment on masculinity, Hollywood, and more.

BoJack Horseman is representative of today's popular culture, which Earle argues acts as a "barometer of social and cultural feeling" (4). The series' major themes, such as trauma and masculinity, show that animation can tell big stories, even if the medium is still often associated with low art and children's entertainment. As Earle writes in the introduction to this volume: "Whatever genre we place it in, what *BoJack Horseman* 'does' for animation is to create a space for dialogue around mental health, celebrity culture, addiction, sex, and myriad other issues that would generally not be touched by this particular form" (4).

The collection consists of fourteen chapters, divided over three major themes that discuss the show's treatment of masculinity, mental health, and celebrity. The first section "'That's too much, man': Masculinities and Identity" contains four essays that discuss *BoJack* as a man but also as an animal. John Alberti explores the show's representation of *BoJack*'s "horsiness" and how that relates to his identity as a white middle-aged character. He reveals how the series fits into a tradition of "radical potential in anthropomorphized animation to repress, recode, and reveal these constructions of race, gender, and sexuality" (15). Ole Christoffer Haga also interrogates the show's anthropomorphism and reveals a tension between the characters' animalistic and human features. He argues that this tension provides an "honest representation that discloses the unlimited configurations of animated expression. But even more important, it gives the audience an awareness of their own human behavior" (61). Jacqueline Ristola, meanwhile, focuses on the show's female characters and how they are aesthetically presented and animated. Finally, Juliana Varela's essay uses the category "zany" to unpack how the series treats masculinity in relation to absurdism, toxic masculinity, and trauma.

BoJack Horseman also stands out in its representation of the effects of intergenerational trauma on individuals. The second section "'Silence drowns the sound': Mental Health and Trauma One" includes essays that discuss the psychology of the characters. Laura Mulcahy, for instance, discusses the impact that *BoJack*'s mother Beatrice had on him, but also how this connects to his own "daughters," Sarah Lynn and Hollyhock. Sam Chesters discusses this form of trauma in relation to Beatrice's dementia and eventual death, meaning that *BoJack* can never come to terms with how his family damaged him. "*BoJack* exemplifies the way trauma can persist, even after the traumatizing behavior ceases, with

BoJack's memory of his mother operating as a permanent tethering to his haunted past" (102). The third chapter by Lucy Rivers explores how this "metamodern sitcom" depicts mental health and Otherness through its anthropomorphic characters, arguing that "Animation serves to create distance while the anthropomorphization of animals provides an easy way for viewers to map the highlighted issues and constraints within society onto the real world" (131). The section's final essay by Mike Clarke and Aanchal Vij deepens these themes in the close reading of one iconic episode, "The Old Sugarman Place."

Finally, the themes of celebrity and art are central in the section "Everyone loves you, but no one likes you": Celebrity, Fame, and Entitlement." The first essay by Lawrence Alexander explores the prominent role of BoJack's house as a home, but also as a site of entitlement and privilege. Arya Rani examines how Hollywood stars are constructed in the show as an exploration of cult celebrities. Through its focus on mental health, *BoJack Horseman* powerfully represents the "vulnerabilities of stardom" (183). The third chapter in this section by Dikshya Karki explores Todd's Avant Garde rock opera *Utopia Rising* as a reflection on artworks. The author argues that "Todd's storyline in *BoJack Horseman* illustrates current and historical debates surrounding the value and meaning of art, artworks, artists, and the art world" (194). Sarah Wagstaffe combines major themes in this essay collection by discussing the problematic behavior of male celebrity stars specifically in the show. While in real life, men may not always be held accountable for such behavior, Bojack is given no free pass. While audiences may expect his redemption, they never receive it. Wagstaffe emphasizes: "Just as BoJack does not get a free pass to indulge in tawdry displays of atonement, neither do his viewers" (212).

By closely reading major themes of *BoJack Horseman*, such as trauma, masculinity, and celebrity culture, this collection provides criticism and depth to the series. The different authors contextualize the show as an artifact of popular culture. The collection primarily focuses on *BoJack Horseman* as a text. Yet, while the anthology offers solid interpretations of the show, it does not often explore the series' production and reception. Certain questions that I had when opening the volume are largely left unanswered, such as: How does this Netflix title relate to the overall business strategies of the platform, and its unique context in our culture? How does *BoJack Horseman* compare to related products, such as the cancelled *Tuca & Bertie*? How do fans embrace specific characters from the show and explore them further in their own works, such as the asexual Todd? While these aspects are

not covered in the collection, readers will find many detailed insights on the groundbreaking representations within the show.

What this volume provides, then, is a rich interpretation of *BoJack Horseman* through different viewpoints. The authors bridge insights from animation studies, gender studies and celebrity studies, among others, demonstrating a solid, interdisciplinary approach to this case. I highly recommend this work to readers who have a passion for the show, or for animation and celebrity culture overall.

Nicolle Lamerichs
HU University of Applied Sciences

Foy, Matt, and Christopher J. Olson. *Mystery Science Theater 3000: A Cultural History*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2024.

“*What do you think, sirs?*” – Joel Robinson (Joel Hodgson), multiple episodes.

As I sit here, writing this book review, a YouTube livestream reminds me that this week commemorates the 95th birthday of B-movie producer Sandy Frank. His films, mostly English dubs of Japanese-produced originals, featured prominently in the early seasons of *Mystery Science Theater 3000* (hereafter MST3K). It is a series which I began watching during its years on the then-Sci-Fi Channel (now Syfy) and revisit regularly to this day. To fully investigate the series, which spanned thirteen seasons, two networks, two streaming services and multiple spinoffs, would be as impossible to do in a single book as watching poorly made films without riffing them would be. As such, Matt Foy and Christopher J. Olson choose the show’s cultural history as a framework for their book, with each chapter covering a defined production era (its runs on KTMA, Comedy Central, Sci-Fi Channel, spinoffs and streaming) rather than the differentiation based upon the lead character/actor (Joel, Mike Nelson, Jonah Ray, and then a mix). This allows the authors to engage with different types of analyses in each chapter as they arose in episodes of the series, creating a strong foundation for future researchers as well as an accessible introduction for undergraduate students or interested lay readers.

The book covers a wide range of theory, covering (inter)textual, industrial, and audience-based theory, making it a good choice as a textbook for courses covering

American cultural and/or media history as it illustrates how a single series can be analyzed in multiple ways. While the entire book is compelling, of particular interest to me is the section on intertextual references as communication, as well as the running thread of participatory culture. While MST3K is hardly the first to use popular culture references to communicate with its audience, it does, as the authors note, do so very commonly and across intertexts from multiple levels of cultural capital. This idea plays into MST3K and its omnipresent focus on participatory culture as the intertexts create in-jokes that can be used for identifying other MSTies as well as cementing the rapport between the audience and production team through that shared lexicon. The multiplicity of intertextual layers, plus routine callbacks, create a sense of shared fan identity.

I might have liked to have seen a bit more engagement with work on cult audiences and how they are both similar to and different from audiences of “quality” and mainstream media, but that would have overloaded the historical aspect of the text, not to mention the Eegah-sized task of trying to write comprehensively on any series of MST3K’s depth, breadth, and timespan (especially while watching out for snakes). I feel much the same about the absence of direct audience research, though it is understandable that a cultural history and a single book cannot cover everything. The connections the authors make between the use of participatory culture from the series’ inception through to its Kickstarter campaigns are well done and critically important to understanding the series’ success. While the book lacks discussion of how spin-off project RiffTrax does much the same for its live shows (not unlike another spin-off project Cinematic Titanic’s live shows), I also recognize that doing so could have diverted the focus from MST3K itself and might be better suited to future work focusing on the riffing industry.

Though written by fans of the series, the authors do not allow their cultural history to slip into hagiography. Rather, they acknowledge some of the more problematic riffs, particularly regarding race, ethnicity, and transphobia, without excusing them. The authors also take care to note both producer Jim Mallon and producer/creator/host Hodgson’s statements about Hodgson’s choice to leave the series in season five without passing judgment on veracity or lack thereof, something critically important in a history. These are, for me (and for my former academic life as an archaeologist and historian), key points in the book. The authors’ clear affection for the series does not cause them to erase or elide any of the more potentially negative aspects and they remain nonjudgmental regarding the

series' controversies, including analyzing the most recent one which may have led to the season fourteen Kickstarter failing. While it is thematic and not chronological in structure, as a book explicitly stated to be a cultural history the authors' choice allows for wider media history to infuse the series' own wide timespan. That, like the other critiques listed above, is a very minor complaint, and does not take away from the authors' skill at explaining why such a long-term series has become so culturally omnipresent in an understandable, accessible text.

This book makes a valuable contribution to academic literature by standing as the foundation for future study of MST3K as well as an authoritative account of its place in cultural history regardless of what the future might hold for MST3K. Now, if you would all excuse me, I am off to listen to "California Lady" (by The Band That Played "California Lady") as soon as I finish looking through this crate of Hamdingers. Meanwhile, keep circulating the tapes!

Melissa Beattie
Al Akhawayn University

Levy, Yael. *Chick TV: Antiheroines & Time Unbound*. Syracuse UP, 2022.

The book *Chick TV: Antiheroines & Time Unbound* focuses on an area of study that has traditionally not received much scholarly attention – "chick TV," or programs that celebrate femininity. Specifically, the book shines a light on television content regarding femininity that was produced between 2000 and 2010, and, as this is in our recent past, this period is especially lacking in analysis. Thus, the work done in *Chick TV* was already set to offer a unique contribution to the field of feminist popular culture studies. Author Yael Levy expands upon this area further, complicating it by focusing on two more concepts that are somewhat unique on their own, and when combined make for a very novel study. Levy focuses her examination of "chick TV" from this era on depictions of characters she classifies as antiheroines. Levy claims that "though both antiheroism and antiheroism challenge the social order, antiheroism ultimately maintains it, whereas antiheroism resists it, deviates from it, and envisions an alternative order" (11). Levy maintains that television shows in the early 2000s furthered this narrative by using complex temporality in storytelling and a resistance to chrononormativity. In

the end, all these elements together combine to form the potential for chick TV to be radically feminist and to challenge patriarchal order in unexpected ways.

The basic arguments of the book are laid out in the Introduction before the reader is given the first glimpse of the analysis that will follow in “Chapter 1: Resistance.” This chapter focuses on the series *Girls*, *Nurse Jackie*, and *Being Mary Jane*, while also discussing reality “soaps.” Literary devices that play with time, such as the story-within-a story device, are highlighted within the chapter and it is argued that these devices drive women characters to resist social order. For example, with *Girls*, the show which leads off the chapter, Levy discusses a story that the main character, Hannah (the character is a writer), writes – producing a story within the larger story of the show itself.

“Chapter 2: Deviation” moves the reader’s attention to the still-running program *Grey’s Anatomy* and explains the ideas of flashforwards, flashbacks, and flash-sideways. These techniques help in defining the antiheroines who are resisting normative life choices regarding family, sex, career aspirations, etc. Much like the characters, these temporal storytelling techniques, which are often employed to great effect in the series, swerve dramatically from a typical storyline. Levy makes the argument that these storytelling techniques pause the narrative progress, causing a deviation from the norm, which by default sets up the female characters as antiheroines, outside the standard path followed by most individuals, and in resistance to normative choices.

The focus shifts in “Chapter 3: Serialization” as Levy describes the soap reality series *The Real Housewives* and its many iterations (*Real Housewives of Orange County*, *Real Housewives of New Jersey*, *Real Housewives of Miami*, etc.). Here, Levy analyzes the use of plot and the stories from different iterations of the show and how they lead into one another and thus exist and overlap together in time. Levy argues that by having multiple texts that continue the overall story of the “real housewives,” narrative closure is avoided. Once again, there is a disruption of storytelling norms in this formula that challenges societal norms through its unique approach. A narrative arc that might classically end with a “happily ever after ending” for a series is stripped of its meaning because it is immediately replaced by a new beginning when another series in the franchise starts its season soon after the ending has aired.

The penultimate chapter, “Chapter 4: Rewriting,” has at its center the show *Desperate Housewives*. Levy uses the show as a backdrop, especially the character of Bree Van De Kamp (played by actress Marcia Cross), while referencing many

other shows and characters to explore the antiheroine “who overdoes feminine performance.” Those who overdo femininity, like those who reject overtly feminine displays as women, are also seen as “not quite right” and, thus, these characters have the power of resistance as well. Here, Levy highlights temporality and how it is found throughout the series, tying these feminine characters together in time and place in their resistance.

Levy states in her Conclusion that, “this book insists on reclaiming chick for TV, insisting that ‘girly,’ ‘soapy,’ ‘trash,’ ‘chick’ TV, often dismissed as inferior, in fact possesses textual, narrative, temporal, and characterizational complexities, and when read closely in search of its complexities, is, contrary to common criticism, political, resistant, and radical” (148). This argument is well made overall through detailed examples and supporting evidence throughout the book. It is worth noting that Chapter 1 is the shortest of the chapters, and, not coincidentally, it contains the least-developed of the arguments made. However, the chapter focusing on *Grey’s Anatomy* shines as an example of a particularly detailed analysis that is easy to read. Yet the book’s content is at times hard to read. There are large sections that would benefit from further explanation of terminology and more details on the examples being studied, rather than there simply being quotes from other sources. Due to this last part, I would not recommend this book be used for undergraduate students. The complex vocabulary without much explanation leaves the work better suited to graduate students or those with extensive background in related areas of study. I would also personally like to see a bit more explanation on the reasoning for the texts chosen for analysis. There is some explanation, but more time spent on defining this selection would be beneficial to the reader. Despite these critiques, *Chick TV* is a valuable contribution to the field of feminist popular culture studies that is well researched and novel in its approach. It is a welcome addition to the study of television.

Nichole Bogarosh
Whitworth University

Lotz, Amanda D., and Ramon Lobato. *Streaming Video: Storytelling Across Borders*. New York UP, 2023.

As the subtitle *Storytelling Across Borders* suggests, Amanda Lotz and Ramon Lobato present in their monograph *Streaming Video* a cosmopolitan array of critical insights within and across national television histories, production aims, and audience interests. Each chapter covers national streaming video on demand (SVOD) development and illuminates the expansive complexities at work in different national television histories, while at the same time teases out intersections of television production strategies and audience appeal.

With SVOD services overshadowing traditional broadcast television audiences worldwide, Lotz and Lobato prompt necessary attention to their diverse range of stories and the strategies that underlie their production. The explicit aim of the work is “to investigate the stories that SVODs are commissioning around the world,” with a focus on the first decade of global streaming through 2022 (Lotz and Lobato 2). Because SVODs and the global media industry have changed and continue to shift their operative strategies, the collected essays draw attention to the industry’s dynamism while acknowledging its relevance before the addition of advertising in major global SVODs.

To foreground the diverse collection of SVOD scholarship, the editors take time to unpack the notion of SVOD, beginning with Lotz examining the complex intersection between the industrial distinctions of SVOD commissions and its imagined audiences for which SVOD stories are produced in Chapter 1. Lotz warns against linear and restrictive theorizing of SVODs in a diverse and complex media studies terrain (Lotz 18-36). In the subsequent chapter, Lobato, Scarlata, and Cunningham articulate the different subcategories of SVODs as national or global, drawing the distinction between a national SVOD (or localist, focused on local language(s), audiences, self-representation, and local productions) and a global SVOD with multiple markets, cosmopolitan diversity in representation and audience, and a correspondingly immense catalog scale (41).

The theme of cosmopolitan diversity posited by Lobato, Scarlata, and Cunningham recurs in several chapters when referencing Netflix’s aim to produce stories that simultaneously capture local familiarity while being accessible to nonlocal viewers (Wayne 55). Such cosmopolitan strategy also appears in the writing process, where Netflix provided its Indian market with writing workshops led by *Narcos* creator Chris Daccato to share storytelling approaches proven successful in another market (Tiwary 75). In this instance, Tiwary highlights the impact of global SVODs on local markets not only for its consuming audiences, but also, on its production workforce and the infrastructure in which they operate.

In addition to the cosmopolitan strategies mobilized by SVODs, the position of SVODs outside the parameters of national broadcast television provide room for challenging national taboos and negotiating state agenda for nation-building internally with social values and outwardly with chosen representations of self-image. An internal example is Ildir's analysis of local Turkish SVOD BluTV's original comedies that criticize conservative religious values while normalizing sexuality (103). An outward example of Mexican indigenismo is offered by Llamas-Rodríguez, whereby Mexico's indigenous history is celebrated through stereotypical and reductive portrayals on popular television while excluding indigenous peoples from the body politic – an ideological function of its nation-building agenda to self-present as modern (225).

The use of television by the state is similarly traced in Kang's chapter on Netflix original Korean drama (or K-Drama), where the nationally defined genre restricted to depicting a sanitized and glamorous Korean society now finds freedom in global SVOD commissioning toward realism and creative extensions of the genre, such as crime, sci-fi, etc. Netflix original K-Drama thus provides opportunities for Korean storytelling outside the confines of government regulation and predefined formulas of self-presentation (176-78).

Though global SVODs such as Netflix, Disney+, and Amazon Prime occupy much of U.S. mainstream television viewing culture, the landscape changes brought about by streaming to television viewing and production logics in national contexts outside of the U.S. seem often unconsidered by U.S. viewing audiences and overlooked by its academics. The contributors of *Streaming Video* represent institutions and nations almost all not within the U.S., broadening critical perspectives for media and communications study tending to focus on the U.S. alone.

Streaming Video offers a rich collection as a contemporary television studies or global media course textbook, and the complexities presented therein could challenge a higher-level major course student. Because of their very precise national examinations of stories as they pertain to specific genres and audiences, chapters like Kang's on Korean drama or Scarlata's on the romantic comedy genre and its situationality for Netflix's success offer texts that are approachable and informative for use in a national television or new media survey course.

Due to the necessity of providing sociohistorical context within the confines of an edited collection, each chapter offers a succinct slice of a larger complex realm, which might include the entanglement of a nation's television history, its socially

valorized genres, and the aims of a state through media use and regulation. *Streaming Video* highlights such convergences of power in the SVOD ecosystem to equip and expand critical new media study.

Hannah Lee Otto
Illinois Institute of Technology

Masters, Patrick. *The Knights Templar in Popular Culture: Films, Video Games and Fan Tourism*. McFarland, 2022.

It is hard to deny that the Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon, popularly known as the Templars, have been a popular topic for more than three decades as they have been integrated into several fictional texts and the focus of scholarly inquiry. Patrick Masters's book *The Knights Templar in Popular Culture: Films, Video Games and Fan Tourism*, which is based on his 2021 PhD dissertation of a similar title, broadly explores Templar representations across various media as he seeks to unravel "how the [Templar] myth has influenced popular culture texts" (35). Although Masters recognizes that Michael Haag and Sharan Newman devoted some attention to Templar representations in popular culture in their respective books, he recognizes that this is an understudied field of academic study. In some respects, *The Knights Templar in Popular Culture* conducts a greater analysis of this field than its predecessors, particularly regarding video games as Haag's treatment of them in his text *The Templars: History & Myth* is starkly different. The scope of Masters's four-chapter examination extends beyond Templar representations in novels and on screens (film, television, video games) as it includes fan tourism. One word that frequently appears in this text is malleability, as Masters cites the malleable nature of the Templar image to account for the diverse and sometimes conflicting ways they have been portrayed in popular culture.

The book's preface introduces the "defining thematic aspects" that Masters identified through his survey of the Templars in popular culture, which considers the natures of the Templar and the quest (10). Masters further elaborates on these aspects in his introduction as he categorizes them into the "warrior monk" and "grail guardian" archetypes (20). The introduction also provides a brief survey of Templar history, an examination of academic literature in the field and its

limitations, and a brief discussion of the methodology Masters used for his study. Here Masters attributes the existence of diverse Templar narratives to a “vacuum” that formed following the “seemingly unexplained sudden fall” of the Templars, which he contends “meant that there remained no authority or safeguarding over the Templars’ legacy” (17).

In Chapter 1, Masters applies a series of paradigms to four films that revolve around the nature of violence, religion, and attitudes toward outsiders to differentiate between what he categorizes as the “good Templar” and “bad Templar.” Of the three paradigms listed above, Masters identifies the one on violence as being “one of the critical distinguishers between the good knight and the bad knight” (94) because it can be a means “to depict the morality of the character” (50). Masters describes the “good Templar” as one who engages in violence that is perceived as “justified” or “protective,” exhibits a mindset of “inclusivity,” and/or is “pious,” which are traits Masters associates with Templar representations in *Ironclad* (2011) and *Arn: The Knight Templar* (2007). Conversely, Masters notes the “bad Templar” uses “oppressive” or “unjustified” violence, exhibits “prejudiced extremist” views, and/or is contemptuous towards Christianity. Masters states at least some if not all these characteristics are found in Templar representations in *Ivanhoe* (1952) and *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005). One commonality Masters identifies between *Kingdom of Heaven*, *Arn: The Knight Templar*, and *Ironclad* is that they each “portray the Catholic Church in a negative light” (57). Furthermore, this chapter uncovers the political and social dynamics that can affect the nature of Templar representations as Masters sees them as a potential “stand-in for the ugly side of history in current times” in his discussion of *Ivanhoe* and *Kingdom of Heaven* (95).

Chapter 2 explores how video games, with a focus on *Assassin’s Creed* (2007) and *The First Templar* (2011), “[adapt] and further [cement] the Templar archetypal roles within the aspects of the bad Templar and the good Templar” (108). Masters returns to the violence and religion paradigms to differentiate between the “good Templar,” as demonstrated in *The First Templar*, and the “bad Templar,” as represented in *Assassin’s Creed*. His discussion of digital participation includes digital cosplay by exploring *The First Templar* and *The Secret World* (2012). Despite the range of character customization and actions a video game may potentially offer to the player, there is still a restrictive element to the gameplay that continues to “lock the role of the Templar into the archetypal character aspects” (128), as he previously discussed. Masters identifies how use of certain symbols,

specifically “the red cross upon his white mantle” presents “ubiquitous imagery [that] identifies the Templar across all media formats” (129). He also explores James Bushe’s low budget independently produced fan film *Predator: Dark Ages* (2015) to demonstrate that people interested in the Middle Ages can express that fandom by producing a short film “that further evolves the Templar narrative by repurposing Templar archetypes for a science fiction horror setting” (149). Although Masters accuses Bushe of having “lifted” material from *Ironclad* (153), he contends that Bushe’s film is “further adding to the Templar narrative by merging” elements of the “good” and “bad” Templar “to create his own version of the Templar hero knight” (155).

Chapter 3 explores the “grail guardian archetype” and its evolution by focusing on the quest narrative categories identified in the introduction: “the quest of the knight,” which is examined through *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975) and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989), and “the quest to follow in the Templars’ footsteps,” which focuses its analysis on *National Treasure* (2004) and *The Da Vinci Code* (2006) (161). Both *National Treasure* and *The Da Vinci Code* provide excellent examples to dissect how the “Templars’ footsteps” quest narrative revolves around the search for a “lost secret” connected to the Templars (164). The conspiratorial elements embedded within the “Templars’ footsteps” narrative have made this type of quest narrative appealing since conspiracy theories have resonated with a large segment of Americans. Masters notes the presence of Templars in *Parzival*, a poem dating to circa 1220, to discuss an early example of the Templars in a quest narrative and to demonstrate that the Order was connected to grail narratives prior to its mass arrest in France in 1307. Although Masters uses *Indiana Jones* and *Monty Python* to elucidate on the themes embedded in “the quest of the knight” narrative, he recognizes that they do not explicitly refer to their characters as Templars. Nevertheless, Masters contends the two films demonstrate “the influence of the Templar quest narrative on the iconography and themes of the story” (162). He also dissects the nature of the grail in these quest narratives as it can either be a physical object with “supernatural powers” or as something “symbolic” that manifests itself in “the form of [a] beneficial revelation” that a modern-day protagonist searches out (163). Masters recognizes the “healing powers” associated with the grail in *Indiana Jones* is “symbolic of healing the relationship between Indy and his father” (180) but could perhaps direct more attention to the father-son reconciliation in *National Treasure* and articulate in

nuanced ways how the quest to find the treasure brings Benjamin Gates closer to his father, Patrick.

Chapter 4 examines tourist sites, particularly those shown in films associated with the “Templars’ footsteps” narrative, *National Treasure* and *The Da Vinci Code*, as Masters seeks to show how active fan/tourist interaction with these sites can not only heighten the individual experience, but “expands and evolves the Templar narrative in popular culture and further impacts the Templar urtext” (225). Masters opted to revolve his discussion of *National Treasure* around the cemetery of Old Pine Street Church and Independence Hall while Rosslyn Chapel is primarily used to elucidate his points on *The Da Vinci Code*. Masters articulates how active engagement with these spaces allows for “immersion” with both the historical site and the narrative of the book or film (230). He also notes the applicability of heterotopia to the three sites listed above and applies “inbetweenness” to fan engagements with Independence Hall and Rosslyn Chapel. In addition, Masters recognizes the “tensions” that can arise when a site fails to conform to the ways it has been framed within a text as evidenced by his analysis of tourists’ comments about Rosslyn Chapel.

Masters demonstrates his wealth of knowledge through the academic frameworks and concepts that he employs throughout his book. Furthermore, he uses great sources ranging from interviews to script drafts in his quest to uncover the motivation behind inserting the Templars into these texts and the (potential) factors that shaped the nature of these representations, including how Ridley Scott viewed the crusaders for *Kingdom of Heaven*. Furthermore, Masters adds to Haag’s discussion of *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* by outlining Steven Spielberg’s motivation for creating what Masters describes as the “Templar-esque” Brotherhood of the Cruciform Sword as a stand-in for the Templars (183). Here, he cites an *Entertainment Weekly* interview to show that George Lucas was aware of the theory that the Holy Grail was in the possession of Templars at one point in the Order’s existence. It would have been beneficial to use more sources to uncover the creators’ intentions behind the knightly representations in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* to better ascertain whether the film is “a parody of the Templars’ notoriety as chaste monks” (220) or a parody of Galahad’s purity.

The conclusion explores how the series *Knightfall* (2017-2019) fits into the frameworks and archetypes articulated in the book, and Masters provides an appendix that lists additional films, made-for-television productions, and video games that have integrated the Templars in their plotlines. That said, the only video

game included in the appendix aside from *Assassin's Creed* and *The First Templar* is *The Cursed Crusade* (2011). There is no analysis of *Broken Sword: The Shadow of the Templars* (1996), which predates *Assassin's Creed*, and could have been discussed in the "Templars' footsteps" quest narrative section to add a video game component and analyze an additional example of how texts frame their quest narratives. Although Masters references the quasi-historical works *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* and *The Lost Treasure of the Knights Templar: Solving the Oak Island Mystery*, the examination of this genre goes largely unexplored in this book. Further research needs to explore how quasi-historical literature has further shaped Templar narratives and how they have been used in fiction. For example, an examination of the depth of quasi-historical literature would demonstrate in more nuanced ways the nature of Templar and grail connections to Rosslyn Chapel that predate *The Da Vinci Code*. Such a discussion would also provide better context on how Rosslyn has been inserted into these narratives for the reader. Masters recognizes further inquiry into this field will be required as Templar representations are crafted in the future, however, there is a wealth of texts that utilize Templar representations that still require further analysis.

Although literature was not the focus of Masters's study, there is a rich body of existent fictional literature on Templars ranging from some written by *New York Times* bestselling authors James Rollins and Sharon Kay Penman to lesser-known authors, including Michael Hillier. A discussion of a greater number of texts would reveal the depth of Templar connections to a wide variety of topics, including the Cathars. Despite these limitations and a bit of repetition, Masters's text makes a valuable contribution on the topic of Templar representations in popular culture and provides a great launching point for further academic studies on this topic.

Brian de Ruiter
Brock University

Toole, Anne (w), and Sonia Liao (a). *The Curie Society: Eris Eternal*. The MIT Press, Einhorn's Epic Productions, 2024.

"I am among those who think that science has great beauty." - Marie Curie

The Curie Society: Eris Eternal, a sequel and the second publication in *The Curie Society* graphic novel spy adventure series created by Heather Einhorn and Adam Staffaroni, is a confident work with gorgeous illustrations and characters that are as electric as the underlying plot. While the challenges posed by gender gap statistics are daunting, if any single work or series has the potential to positively impact the school-to-science pipeline and achieve significant equity and diversity gains in this context, it is *The Curie Society*.

A series of the ages and for all ages, as “everyone” reads graphic novels (SPSCC), *The Curie Society* is an ideal tool for any arsenal ready for battle against underrepresentation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Simone, Maya, and Taj – the brilliant science-loving, puzzle-solving, strong female protagonist detectives from *The Curie Society*’s first work – return for more gripping adventures and continue to serve as role models for navigating complex issues of ethics, power, and discovery. The comic’s dialogue and plot rely heavily on accurate depictions and descriptions of scientific concepts. The work takes the excitement of science out of traditional textbooks and into the relatable, impressionable, and memorable form of a graphic novel.

The importance of “meeting people where they are” (McNamara) and helping them see where they can go was never lost on the book’s creators. *The Curie Society: Eris Eternal* will meet, and likely exceed, the wants, needs, and interests (both known and yet to be discovered) of many readers. The characters have broad appeal serving as inspiration to reimagine how one might fit in the world of science and as role models for budding scientists of all ages. With a vibe of *Wonder Woman* combined with your favorite female *Marvel* character, the work hits a sweet spot at the intersection of action-packed superhero and super cool science teacher all while making a case for females in STEM.

Eris Eternal’s opening setting of Paris is fitting. After her incredible performance at the 2024 Olympics, Simone Biles spoke of the power of an image. During a medal ceremony, she and teammate Jordyn Chiles bowed to fellow artistic gymnast and 2024 gold medal winner on the floor, Rebecca Andrade (Greze and Wire). The photo became instantly iconic. When asked about it, Biles said it is important for girls to “Stand in your power” (Greze and Wire). The power of an image coupled with a strong narrative is, indeed, a force to be reckoned with and *The Curie Society* is a perfect illustration of such power as well as a vivid example of the potential of and for females in STEM.

With origins that result in part from the “early” emergence of gender stereotypes of interest (Master et al.), girls remain disproportionately underrepresented across all levels of the STEM fields (Bahar et al.; Chan; Yalcinkaya). Allison Master et al. notes that “societal stereotypes depict girls as less interested than boys in computer science and engineering” (1), with STEM-related stereotypes observable across STEM topics among youth from first to 12th grade.

Innovative programming and STEM-focused initiatives have been designed to help mitigate and address this persistent challenge. Specifically, the question of interest in STEM and how societal stereotypes depict girls as such has spurred novel initiatives and educational tools designed to promote change. Graphic novels have emerged as a tool that can positively impact mindsets, perceptions of self, and educational experiences across disciplines, including for teens and other groups (Kulinski). Graphic novels also have the potential to make STEM more accessible to diverse audiences (McNamara) and broaden perceptions of females and female protagonists as capable and well-aligned change agents and makers in STEM. Graphic novels can shift mindsets, engage at the narrative level, and introduce substantive scientific concepts, hopefully with positive long-term implications across benchmarks indicative of STEM-related interest, engagement, and identities. Examples include nursing (Williams), medicine (Consorti), pharmacy education (Hoffman), and physical education (Wickens and Parker) among other applications.

Graphic novels are an ideal venue where imagery and storytelling converge to create a sum stronger than its parts. Regarding gender gaps and disparities, there will always be more work to do. *The Curie Society* is a powerful tool in the literary arsenal as women around the globe test, experiment, discover, and ultimately lead their way to a more just tomorrow. Readers see strength and brilliance embodied in *The Curie Society*’s strong and confident female protagonists. Just as important, readers may also see themselves in similar roles. The work demonstrates a place for girls in STEM and shows them thriving in such spaces. The work, too, reflects the tremendous beauty Curie saw in science and women’s potential. Rich in narrative and literary, artistic, and scientific achievements, the work embodies Curie’s beautiful curiosity and adventurous spirit.

With the book’s engaging forward-moving plot, dialogue, and characterization, coupled with compelling and vivid artwork, it is a delight to accompany the female protagonists on their adventures and to explore, learn, and discover the allure of science alongside them. Grounded in the curiosity and relentless spirit of Marie Curie, the book’s characters, plot, and language are as spirited as its inspiration.

The energy is palpable and capable of a chemical reaction that is both transferable and replicable among readers.

The book is dedicated to the next generation of women in science, and it does more than its part in inspiring that same generation. Indeed, it is everything a graphic novel should be – unforgettable with three-dimensional characters whose actions, conflicts, and arcs transcend the words and art on the page. In the characters’ journeys, readers travel far beyond the secret Curie Society into an increasingly visible future of science that not only includes them but needs, welcomes, and embraces them.

Equal parts inspiring and informative, this series sequel does not disappoint. Rather, it continues a tradition of high-energy action, constant conflict, and page-turning suspense. For a fun, high-energy graphic novel, *The Curie Society* is a STEM-excellent choice and a must-have addition to any library, classroom, or bookshelf in spaces where girls gather.

Jennifer Schneider
Southern New Hampshire University

Works Cited

- Bahar, A. Kadir, et al. “Gender Disparities in AP Computer Science Exams: Analysis of Trends in Participation and Top Achievement.” *Journal of Advanced Academics*, vol. 33, no. 4, 2022, pp. 574-603.
- Chan, Randolph C. H. “A Social Cognitive Perspective on Gender Disparities in Self-Efficacy, Interest, and Aspirations in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM): The Influence of Cultural and Gender Norms.” *International Journal of STEM Education*, vol. 9, 2022, <https://stemeducationjournal.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s40594-022-00352-0>.
- Consorti, Fabrizio, et al. “Graphic Novels and Comics in Undergraduate and Graduate Medical Students Education: A Scoping Review.” *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education (EJIHPE)*, vol. 13, no. 10, 2023, pp. 2262-75.
- English language arts - William Boerman-Cornell, and Jung Kim. *Using Graphic Novels in the English Language Arts Classroom*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2020.
- Grez, Mattias and Coy Wire. “Simone Biles tells CNN competing in Paris ‘meant the world’ after struggles in Tokyo.” *CNN*, 6 Aug. 2024,

- <https://www.cnn.com/2024/08/06/sport/simone-biles-cnn-olympics-spt/index.html>.
- Hoffman, Alexander. "Using Graphic Narratives in Pharmacy Education." *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, vol. 87, no. 4, 2023, p. 496.
- Kulinski, Alexa R. "Stories We Live By: Exploring Graphic Novels with High Schoolers." *Art Education*, vol. 76, no. 6, 2023, pp. 24-31.
- Master, Allison, et al. "Gender Stereotypes about Interests Start Early and Cause Gender Disparities in Computer Science and Engineering." *Grantee Submission*, vol. 118, no. 48, 2021, p. P.
- McNamara, Alexander. "'We're meeting people where they are.': Graphic novels can help boost diversity in STEM, says MIT's Ritu Raman." *Live Science*, 5 May 2024, <https://www.livescience.com/human-behavior/arts-entertainment/were-meeting-people-where-they-are-why-mits-ritu-raman-thinks-graphic-novels-can-help-boost-diversity-in-stem>.
- SPSCC (2023). Guide to Graphic Novels. *South Puget Sound Community College*, 19 Sept. 2023, <https://library.spscc.edu/c.php?g=1335767>.
- Wickens, Corrine, and Jenny Parker. "Integrating Literature in Physical Education: Read-Alouds, Young Adult Literature and Graphic Novels." *JOPERD: The Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, vol. 93, no. 6, 2022, pp. 35-41.
- We Are Tech Women. "Marie Curie: Inspiration Quotes." *WeAreTechWomen.com*, 2024, <https://wearetechwomen.com/inspirational-quotes-marie-curie-physicist-chemist-pioneer-in-the-study-of-radiation/>. Accessed 8 Aug. 2024.
- Williams, Lisa, et al. "Nursing Students' Reactions to a Graphic Novel: A Multi-National Descriptive Qualitative Study." *NURSE EDUCATION TODAY*, vol. 139, 2024, p. 106229.
- Yalcinkaya, Nur Soylu and Adams, Glenn. "Expressing the Self or Achieving Security through Academic Choices: Implications for Gender Gaps in STEM Pursuit." *Social Psychology of Education*, vol. 25, no. 6, 2022, pp. 1507-26

Wyatt, Justin. *Creating the Viewer: Market Research and the Evolving Media Ecosystem*. Texas UP, 2024.

Justin Wyatt's *Creating the Viewer: Market Research and the Evolving Media Ecosystem* draws on the author's considerable experience both as a scholar of media

studies and as a professional television market researcher. With the help of his background, Wyatt conducts a uniquely informed examination of how the television industry has traditionally constructed its audience, how recent changes in culture and technology challenge those traditional methods, and how the industry might effectively adapt to those changes. Along the way, the reader learns much about how the business of television works and how its insiders understand their relationships to the viewing public. The book is an important contribution to the study of today's popular culture, valuable especially for its up-to-date exploration of a rapidly changing media landscape.

Creating the Viewer consists of three parts: the first called "Introduction," the second "The Battery of Media Market Research Studies," and the third "Rethinking the Viewer." In Part 1, Wyatt distinguishes between "the viewer" as constructed through television market research and the actual people who watch television. He explains that "these studies do not present the actual viewer but rather the industry's conception of the viewer as constructed through the very specific lens of media market research. This construction skews heavily toward definitions of the viewer that dovetail with advertising categories. These studies therefore most often present the viewer as the person to be sold to rather than a nuanced, complex picture of viewers and their lived experience" (15). As becomes clear throughout the remainder of the book, Wyatt seeks to help close the gap between these two figures by introducing greater nuance into the methods of media market research. To that end, this introductory part also situates the practice of media market research as currently conducted within the television industry, emphasizing that the various networks and executives utilize such research in different ways and lend it different amounts of credence. Market research, in other words, represents only one of several inputs into the television industry's construction of its audience.

Part 2, "The Battery of Media Market Research Studies," takes up most of the book's length. Throughout the four chapters of this central part, Wyatt walks the reader through the various functions of media market research, including "Pilot Testing and Series Maintenance" (Chapter 3), "Brand Alignment and Derailment" (Chapter 4), "Talent Testing and Media Research" (Chapter 5), and "Ideation and Content Co-Creation" (Chapter 6). Each of these explanations of industry praxis follows the pattern of first describing traditional techniques, including some discussion of those techniques' histories and of the innovators who contributed to their standardization, then considering how the effectiveness of those techniques is impacted by recent trends such as the proliferation of subscription-based streaming

services, the emergence of other entertainment options (especially social media and gaming), and the increased cultural expectation of diverse representation. Each of these four chapters conclude with an Appendix that gives readers a more concrete grasp of what Wyatt has been describing by showing them relevant sample documents, such as a market research survey presented to potential viewers of a certain television show (included in the Appendix to Chapter 3).

The final part of the book moves from the mainly informative concerns of Part 2 to more theoretical matters. Chapter 7, “The (Manipulated) Performance of Market Research” applies the observer effect to the relationship between market researchers and their objects of study: the real people whom their procedures alchemize into “the viewer.” Wyatt argues that while moderators of focus groups might aim to present themselves neutrally, “as a blank slate” (199), their behavior inevitably influences the experiences and responses of the group members. Chapter 7 closes by considering another way in which the procedures of market research can influence the reliability of its results: the reliance on classification into groups based on race, gender, class, age, etc. This focus introduces into Wyatt's discussion a concern for social justice in cultural representation, which is aided by his engagement with social theorists including Kwame Anthony Appiah and Ruha Benjamin. He relies on the work of these two figures to illustrate the double-edged sword of identity representation: to follow him in quoting Appiah, “The modes of identity can all become forms of confinement, conceptual mistakes underwriting moral ones” (215).

The book's final and most theoretically rich chapter, “A Corrective for Media Market Research and You,” focuses on the novelties of the current relationship between media, society, and selfhood. It summarizes the recommendations that Wyatt has offered along the way for effectively conducting market research today. Wyatt proposes a multifaceted ethnographic approach as opposed to an overreliance on data and algorithmic modeling. He explains that “Data and algorithms cannot explain human motivations and the complexity of factors yielding even a single data point such as time spent watching Netflix during an evening. The ethnography responds to the holes and omissions within data technologies by focusing directly on the individual subject. The ethnography shifts attention to the person and the processes they follow in engaging with media as part of their daily lives” (242). The book concludes with a sudden shift of perspective, from addressing media scholars and industry professionals to addressing the reader as a television consumer. Wyatt advises greater “media mindfulness” (249), which he suggests is

important for overall well-being in today's intensely media-saturated society. Characteristically, he provides an Appendix that includes a practical guide to fostering such mindfulness.

What many will see as a major strength of *Creating the Viewer* – its relevance both for scholars and for industry professionals, which mirrors Wyatt's own dual experience – also exposes it to both stylistic and substantive criticism. It alternates awkwardly in some instances between scholarly analysis and professional advice to market researchers. This ambivalence of intended audience reflects an unaddressed tension between these perspectives, which reflects a much broader tension pertaining not only to media studies but to every corner of academia: is the purpose of scholarship to serve the interests of industry, meaning ultimately to enhance its profitability, or those of society as a whole? The two orientations do not always conflict, but at times the social good requires interrogating and criticizing the practices of industry. While Wyatt's book includes a few gestures in that direction, such as its recommendations of how media market research can better promote inclusivity, they remain underdeveloped and tenuously integrated within the overall argument, for its more sincere vocation is to use the tools of scholarship to render market research a more potent aid to the profitability of media companies.

Daniel Cunningham
Miami University of Ohio

Film Review

Treasure. Dir. Julia von Heinz. Screenplay by Julia von Heinz and John Quester. Perf. Lena Dunham and Stephen Fry. Bleecker Street, 2024.

Based on the novel *Too Many Men* by Lily Brett, *Treasure* is about how reconnecting with family and with the past can be an unexpected treasure. Written and directed by Julia von Heinz, *Treasure* follows Holocaust survivor Edek (Stephen Fry) and his daughter Ruth (Lena Dunham) as they take a trip to Poland and Auschwitz. Set in 1991 after the fall of the Iron Curtain, *Treasure* follows Ruth as she and many other Jews from all over the world travel to their ancestral homes to understand their family legacies (Brett; von Heinz). Ruth wants to learn more

about their family and make sense of the past while Edek wants to leave it behind (von Heinz). Edek and Ruth do not have a close relationship at the start of the film, but this trip gets them to talk to each other about their lives and feelings. By exploring their family's past, this trip brings Edek and Ruth closer together.

According to Haim Dasberg, "The Holocaust touched all of us, we are all survivors and children of survivors, but the children of those who were there have an intimate knowledge of the meaning of being a victim and victor at the same time," (as cited in Berant). Trauma can be passed down from one generation to another (Frankish and Bradbury) and each generation copes with the trauma in different ways (Berant). According to von Heinz, the generation who survived the Holocaust did not want to talk about it even though their children did (Bleecker Street). Ruth feels a strong connection to her Jewish heritage and wants to put the pieces of her family back together to understand the impact the Holocaust had on her father. Edek, on the other hand, is conflicted by the paradox of wanting to forget his trauma even as he wants to recall it (Berant). On the surface, it seems like Edek wants nothing to do with recalling his trauma, rejecting his Jewish roots and sabotaging Ruth's trip every chance he gets, most notably by avoiding the train and refusing to go inside his childhood home. However, the fact that he goes on this journey with Ruth at all tells us that he genuinely wants to make sense of his trauma.

By returning to Auschwitz, Edek comes face-to-face with the Holocaust and slowly starts to open up to Ruth. Edek's acknowledgement helps Ruth understand why her father avoided the subject for so long. "Of course, Edek thinks his past is horrible and something he would only want to protect his daughter from, but in a transgenerational trauma constellation, it *is* essential to talk about it, to dig it out and to uncover it," said von Heinz (Bleecker Street, emphasis in original). Even though Ruth was never held at Auschwitz, they share that history and that trauma and together they realize that they cannot overcome the transgenerational trauma alone.

While the film only touches on transgenerational trauma and neglects to dive deeply into its effects and how each generation can help each other cope, it does open a conversation that by confronting the past and arguing that generations can heal. Ruth's actress, Lena Dunham, acknowledges the universality of transgenerational trauma, adding:

When pain and abuse befalls [*sic*] a generation (whether in a mass tragedy or within nuclear families), the results ripple and ricochet in ways more powerful than we could ever understand... This film is about the many ways

Ruth is still trapped in the pain that her father can never release. For us to live in a world that we would want to leave to our grandchildren, our actions – today – matter. By looking back at our pasts to understand the evils of history, we can avoid repeating them ad infinitum, while also healing each other. (Mantilla)

Even though reconnecting to the past can be painful, as Edek and Ruth illustrate, the past can also be healing. By seeing a father and daughter deepen their relationship and navigate these difficult memories together, other families can potentially do the same.

Elizabeth Shiller
Georgia Southwestern State University

Works Cited

- Berant, Ety. "Transgenerational Transmission of Trauma in Children of Holocaust Survivors: A Case Study." *Rorschachiana*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2002, pp. 28-57.
- Brett, Lily. *Too Many Men: A Novel*. William Morrow, 2001.
- Frankish, Tarryn, and Jill Bradbury. "Telling stories for the next generation: Trauma and nostalgia." *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2012, pp. 294-306.
- Mantilla, Ryan Louis. "Treasure trailer previews road trip dramedy starring Lena Dunham." *Y! Entertainment*, 7 May 2024, <https://www.yahoo.com/entertainment/treasure-trailer-previews-road-trip-152900555.html>