

# Re-membering Practices with Fictional Characters

*A reflection on Landscapes of Possibility: An introduction to fantasy in 2SLGBTQIA+ and disabled therapeutic contexts (2022) by Emily Salja*

In my past paper, *Landscapes of Possibility: An introduction to fantasy in 2SLGBTQIA+ and disabled therapeutic contexts (2022)*, I talk about how fantasy worlds create a liminal space in which many marginalized people can locate and expand on Possibility, which may otherwise be inaccessible to them due to various systemic oppressions.

Two years after writing this paper (and one year after publishing), my practice remains firmly rooted in finding Possibility in unexpected places. Some things have changed, however. My politics are more heavily rooted in nuance and relationality; I no longer participate in online activist spaces, which allows me to step back from high-pressure binary morality and consider what might be possible if we fostered curiosity instead of being 'right'. This shift has made it more possible to engage with stories curiosity-first, instead of coming in with pre-existing ideas of how I 'should' feel about them.

This brings to mind a touchstone of the last half-year, *Nimona* (2023, at least in 'canada'): an animated film based on the comic of the same name written by trans artist ND Stevenson. The explicitly queer film was cancelled after being acquired by Disney and was only resurrected after being acquired by Netflix in 2022. Eight years after 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox first acquired the rights to an animated feature film adaptation, the film was finally released this past summer. This seems off-topic, but I mention this because the ramifications of the Hayes Code are still unfolding and affecting what makes it to our screens. Consider *The Owl House*, whose animators pulled off cramming two seasons worth of story into three long episodes under Disney's eagle eyes.

While I will not spoil anything for those who have yet to watch (or read) *Nimona*, I will say that this film (and the original comic, though the film feels like the same story but matured, like fine wine) challenges us all to consider and challenge what we expect to be 'right' and 'wrong'. My conversations these days, as I'm sure many of you can relate to, touch on the highly televised global upheaval that crosses borders upon borders. Stories of resistance, and the characters that plot ways of resisting, lend us much-needed hope.

I titled this session 'Re-membering with Fictional Characters' because we are all shaped by the stories that we are most familiar with, similar to how we are influenced by the people we are surrounded by. For many of us, the stories we grew up with offered lessons about how people relate to each other, navigate hardship, cultivate ethics and values, and act in ways that we would or would not want to emulate.

Michael White talks about re-membering practices with fictional characters briefly in *Maps of Narrative Practice*, reminding us that re-membering is a practice of 'purposive reengagement' (129). Fantasy characters can offer a relational space outside the bleakness of being 'othered', which is a rich space to explore in re-membering conversations with people who grew up neurodivergent, queer, trans, disabled, or as a person of colour in a colonized context.

I would be remiss here if I didn't mention that the history of fantasy and sci-fi, at least in 'north america', is overwhelmingly white due to racist practices within the publishing industry throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which of course complicates this. If you are curious about speculative fiction, Tiffany Sostar is a bastion of specific recommendations in this area (and this is just the tip of the iceberg: even a quick search on the Internet for 'speculative fiction by authors of colour' brings up 717 books on Goodreads, and that doesn't even touch graphic novels, webcomics, video games, zines, films, roleplaying games etc).

Prior to this Meet the Author, I would like to invite folks to consider what characters:

- You might like to be friends with;
- Were or are integral to developing your ethics and values;
- Shifted your ideas of what was possible;

- Invited ways of navigating situations that were formative (either in a “I never want to do that” way or a “I want to do that” way); or
- Broadened your understanding of self.

And following that, what might those characters be for the people you work alongside? What are some ways you could invite fictional characters into your conversations?

I look forward to our chat! Please find a few references below:

Librarian on whiteness in fantasy (with book recommendations!):

<https://www.yalsa.ala.org/thehub/2014/12/15/is-this-just-fantasy-its-a-white-white-world-and-thats-got-to-change/>

'Re-Membering Conversations' chapter from *Maps of Narrative Practice* by Michael White:

[https://dulwichcentre.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Re-membering\\_conversations\\_Michael\\_White.pdf](https://dulwichcentre.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Re-membering_conversations_Michael_White.pdf)

Wikipedia article on comic/film *Nimona* (see: film adaptation section for further references):

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nimona>

*Them* on *The Owl House* saga:

<https://www.them.us/story/the-owl-house-season-3-lgbtq-representation-disney>