

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

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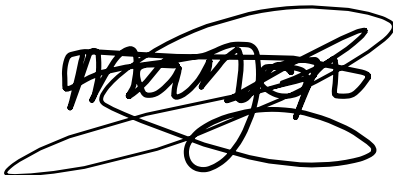
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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Manon Janssen', with a large, sweeping flourish underneath.

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Abstract

This thesis explores themes of female objectification in combination with posthumanism and storytelling mediums in the *Starstruck* works of Elaine Lee, focusing specifically on the play *Starstruck* (2013) and the graphic novel *Starstruck* (2012). Through conducting a close reading of both texts, this thesis examines the author's treatment of key themes, such as the objectification of female characters, and how the characters can achieve empowerment by embracing the fact that their bodies are unfixed. Additionally, the thesis investigates how the storytelling medium, in both the play and the graphic novel, is used to convey feminist and posthuman themes. The thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the relevant key theories in the field of posthumanism and science fiction graphic novels. The second chapter delves into how these themes are explored in Lee's first *Starstruck* work – the play – while the third, and final, chapter delves into how these themes are explored in the graphic novel. Through close examination of the source texts, this thesis aims to argue that in Elaine Lee's play *Starstruck* and the graphic novel *Starstruck*, by embracing the idea that their bodies and identities are unfixed and capable of transformation, the female characters are able to carve their own path towards physical autonomy.

Keywords: posthumanism, feminism, Elaine Lee, *Starstruck*, graphic novel

Table of Contents

List of Illustrations	4
Introduction.....	5
Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework.....	9
1.1. Posthumanism and Feminism: Intersections	9
1.2. The Posthuman in Science Fiction Comic Books	12
Chapter 2 – <i>It’s a tough galaxy, but somebody’s gotta live in it, and it might as well be you.</i> .	14
2.1 Finding Power in the Female Body	14
2.2 The Posthuman Objectification.....	18
Chapter 3 - <i>I’d Rather Have A Paper Doll To Call My Own Than a Fickle-Minded Real Live Girl</i>	22
3.1 <i>Starstruck</i> and the Graphic Novel	22
3.2 Feminism and Posthumanism in the Graphic Novel <i>Starstruck</i>	25
Conclusion.....	31

List of Illustrations

Figure 1. Elaine Lee in her Galatia 9 costume. 16

Figure 2. A quote from William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* at the start of the issue
“Mirage à Trois.”..... 23

Figure 3. A quote from Bronwyn at the start of the issue “I Ate A Whole Funnel Cake...”
..... 23

Figure 4. A series of panels from the issue “The Right Bait.”..... 27

Figure 5. A page with panels from the issue “Pretty Maids All in a Row,” interwoven
with lyrics from Johnny S. Black’s *Paper Doll*..... 29

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Introduction

Despite Mary Shelley often being credited with creating the science fiction genre through her novel *Frankenstein*, science fiction is still frequently perceived as a genre dominated by men.¹ In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when female writers were starting their careers in writing and sought to publish their science fiction stories, they were told to use pseudonyms, as editors believed that readers would only be interested in these sorts of novels if men penned them.² This led to many women being overlooked in the history of science fiction. Even in today's society, science fiction is still often viewed as a genre tailored to men and centred around male protagonists. Nevertheless, within this male-dominated genre, the contribution of female creators is exceedingly valuable and worth acknowledging.

As defined in the *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, science fiction is “a popular modern branch of prose fiction that explores the probable consequences of some improbable or impossible transformation of the basic conditions of human (or intelligent non-human) existence.”³ It is, first and foremost, a genre concerned with all of the possibilities of the future. Science fiction (SF) seeks to find an understanding of the unknown and wants to know what the consequences of current actions could be in the future. Brooks Landon attempts to give meaning to the definition of science fiction, as he reevaluates various definitions that

¹ Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 1992).

² Jane Donawerth, “Teaching Science Fiction by Women,” *The English Journal* 79, no. 3 (1990): 40.

³ Chris Baldick, *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford Literary Press, 2015), 324.

have explained the genre over the years. He says that “plausibility in SF nods toward the real and the known, while the “sense of wonder” frequently invoked to explain the affective appeal of SF nods toward the fabulous, if not the fantastic; extrapolation and speculation are the imaginative processes that negotiate the difference between those two ends.”⁴ Science Fiction is not merely the assumption of what the future will hold, but also holds a sense of wonder to what the “science” in science fiction will bring humanity.⁵ It allows the imagination to roam freely, contemplating the countless possibilities that the future holds with new and exciting scientific discoveries.

During the popularity of science fiction in the seventies and eighties, with series such as *Star Trek* and the *Star Wars* movies, an entirely different movement was happening in New York. According to Tym Stevens, the so-called ‘Do-It-Yourself’ spirit had ignited the Punk genre, as well as many other independent and hybrid genres, such as the No Wave and Indie Film.⁶ During this time, *Starstruck* (2013), the play, was being written.⁷ This play would later spin off into various projects, of which the play and the graphic novel – *Starstruck* (2012) – combining the earlier comic books will be the focus of this thesis.⁸ *Starstruck* (2013) finds itself at the heart of these various creative movements of the seventies and eighties. It combines the DIY spirit with an attempt to capture the essence of an episode of *Star Trek*, featuring heroes and villains facing off on a spaceship. The play was created by Elaine Lee, her sister Susan Norfleet, and Dale Place. Later, Elaine also connected with Michael Wm Kaluta, a comic artist who would go on to illustrate the comic books.⁹ Kaluta would help them in the play with the design of the set pieces and the outfits. Many of these props and costumes were fashioned out of things found on the street, a true ‘DIY’ endeavour. After the success of the play and the meeting of Lee and Kaluta, they decided to create more adventures within the world of *Starstruck*, and began writing and drawing comic books. These comic book issues were written under various labels, as well as over many years. In 2012, previously

⁴ Brooks Landon, “Extrapolation and Speculation,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Science Fiction*, ed. Rob Latham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014): 29.

⁵ Landon, 29.

⁶ Tym Stevens, “A History of Starstruck” *Starstruck Comics*, accessed May 31, 2024, <https://starstruckcomics.com/a-history-of-starstruck/>.

⁷ Tym Stevens, “A History of Starstruck” *Starstruck Comics*, accessed May 31, 2024, <https://starstruckcomics.com/a-history-of-starstruck/>.

⁸ Tym Stevens, “A History of Starstruck” *Starstruck Comics*, accessed May 31, 2024, <https://starstruckcomics.com/a-history-of-starstruck/>.

⁹ Tym Stevens, “A History of Starstruck” *Starstruck Comics*, accessed May 31, 2024, <https://starstruckcomics.com/a-history-of-starstruck/>.

written issues were republished with expanded art, transitioning from square to rectangular forms.¹⁰ The republished version of the comic book consists of an anthology of stories following the same characters, rather than a continuous narrative, and is the source that this thesis will use for its argumentation.¹¹

Both the play and the comic books follow the same characters, albeit in different stories and at different times. A brief description of the characters will now follow as they will be frequently referred to in the chapters about the main texts. The character of Galatia 9, as played by Elaine Lee herself in the play, is the captain of the spaceship. She was punished and banished from her home for writing feminist nursing rhymes, after which she was left severely bodily disfigured.¹² Furthermore, the character of Brucilla is perhaps the most down-to-earth, as she originates from the fictional planet of Amercadia, a blatant parody of the United States.¹³ She was once a Girl Scout, after which she enrolled in the army, but was later dishonourably discharged. Most of the time, she is seen cracking a joke or acting in an irrational, but humorous manner.¹⁴ Moreover, the character of Bronwyn acts as a bridge between the natural and the supernatural, as when she was a young girl she came into contact with some superpowered aliens, who granted her the power of telepathy.¹⁵ Lastly, the character of Erotica Ann has landed us fully into the world of the posthuman. Described as a combination of robotic and girl-ish, this robot is the first of her kind to have achieved sentience, and in the play, the audience can see her grappling with human behaviour and her traumatic past.¹⁶

Due to its strange cast of characters, and its fascination with science fiction, the works of Elaine Lee provide the reader with a lot of insightful information into what the world might look like for a woman in such a strange imagination of a fantastical universe. That is why this thesis will ask the question “How is the female body represented in Elaine Lee’s play *Starstruck* and the graphic novel *Starstruck* and how does this relate to issues of autonomy, robots, and sex?” This thesis argues that in Elaine Lee’s play *Starstruck* and the graphic novel

¹⁰ Tym Stevens, “A History of Starstruck” *Starstruck Comics*, accessed May 31, 2024, <https://starstruckcomics.com/a-history-of-starstruck/>.

¹¹ Elaine Lee, Michael William Kaluta, and Lee Moyer, *Starstruck*. (San Diego: IDW Publishing, 2012.)

¹² Elaine Lee, Susan Norfleet Lee, and Dale Place, *Starstruck*. (New York: Broadway Play Publishing Inc, 2013), 1.1, 8. (Henceforth referred to as: Author, Title, Act, Page Number)

¹³ Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 1.1, 5.

¹⁴ Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 1.1, 5.

¹⁵ Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 1.1, 7.

¹⁶ Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 1.1, 6.

Starstruck, by embracing the idea that their bodies and identities are unfixed and capable of transformation, the female characters are able to carve their own path towards physical autonomy. This argument will be demonstrated with the help of three chapters. The first chapter will build a theoretical framework that will provide the background information necessary to fully delve into the feminist and posthuman themes of the series. The second chapter will explore posthuman and feminist themes as presented in a play, while the third chapter will examine how these themes are portrayed in a comic book medium.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

To gain a better grasp of the theoretical foundation of this argument, it is crucial to begin with the central theories in the field. Elaine Lee's *Starstruck* involves itself with many different subjects. It attempts to combine critical theory about post-humanism and feminism, all within a single franchise of different multimedia experiences. In *Starstruck*, Elaine Lee criticizes the objectification of women in a science fiction world, while also providing the reader with many powerful female main characters. The play and graphic novel can be linked to the key theories as presented by Hayles, Haraway, and Toffoletti and their take on posthumanism as it relates to feminism, while also being relevant to the central theories on how the medium of the graphic novel is used to portray posthumanism, as written by Miller and Varis.

1.1. Posthumanism and Feminism: Intersections

The argumentation will be engrained in the field of post-human critical theory, which is concerned with the overlap of the biological and the technological. This field is also concerned with the technological advancements of the world, and how binaries might evolve into fluidities instead. Two particularly important texts on the subject are from Katherine Hayles and Donna Haraway. Both texts have proved to be very influential and are seen as the groundwork on which many other texts are based.

First of all, Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" is a revolutionary essay that investigates how the ideas of technology, feminism, and of course, the post-human intersect with one another.¹⁷ According to Haraway, there have been several historical binaries and oppositions put in place, and these have become more transcendent over time. For instance, there is the separation of the animal and the human, the organism, and the machine, and the physical and the non-physical. The factors have, historically, had a firm line between them. But over time, this line has faded and the clear differences between the two have become more blurred. She writes:

Insofar as we know ourselves in both formal discourse (e.g., biology) and in daily practice (e.g., the homework economy in the integrated circuit), we find ourselves to be cyborgs, hybrids, mosaics, chimaeras. [...] There is no fundamental, ontological

¹⁷ Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s," in *The Haraway Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004): 7-46.

separation in our formal knowledge of machine and organism, of technical and organic.¹⁸

The cyborg, in this case, embodies hybridity, as it is a metaphor for the blurring lines between all these oppositions. Thus, the posthuman invites us to think beyond fixed categories. Since the experience of being human is moving beyond the organic, beyond purely that of nature, so should one embrace new perspectives and think beyond these fixed categories. This pertains greatly to the themes of the *Starstruck* saga and its emphasis on transcending the human body. Rather than clinging to the static, one should concentrate on the dynamic.

Secondly, the other most influential text written on the posthuman condition is Katherine Hayles' *How We Became Posthuman*.¹⁹ This book asks questions about the posthuman, feminism, and agency. According to Hayles, the posthuman can be defined as the state beyond the human condition, and the influences technology can have on the human body, as in the current age, information has lost its body because we have discarded embodiment.²⁰ However, she proposes a different approach to the embodiment of the posthuman in an age of information.²¹ She notes:

If my nightmare is a culture inhabited by posthumans who regard their bodies as fashion accessories rather than the ground of being, my dream is a version of the posthuman that embraces the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality, that recognizes and celebrates finitude as a condition of human being, and that understands human life is embedded in a material world of great complexity, one on which we depend for our continued survival.²²

This dream version of her posthuman world is one in which all the possibilities of the posthuman condition are neatly woven into all the complexities of the world, but does not take away from it. Furthermore, she examines the role of agency in a rapidly advancing world, and how power dynamics shift in such an environment.²³ Apart from having to

¹⁸ Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," 35.

¹⁹ Katherine N. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999).

²⁰ Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 28.

²¹ Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 5.

²² Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 5.

²³ Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 19.

understand these power dynamics in a world without powerful technology, now we must shift our understanding to include technological power in this as well.²⁴

Both sources are not only very insightful to the case of the posthuman condition but, due to their interest in the human body in a rapidly advancing world on a technological level, they are very interesting for the topic of feminism as well. What would these advancements entail for the female experience, exactly? Haraway's argumentation for thinking beyond binaries also applies to the topic of feminism. She employs this example of the cyborg to argue for a different form of feminism, one that is not rooted firmly in single categories but instead embraces the multiplicities of womanhood. By accepting different forms of feminism, and not the singular experience, one can rise above the patriarchal system on which our society is built.²⁵ In a similar vein, Hayles argues that traditional gender roles and patriarchal structures have shaped how technology and its embodiment are perceived. She also argues that technology has been historically gendered and that this impacts the concepts of identity and agency in the posthuman era.²⁶

The works of Hayles and Haraway are positively combined in the works of Kim Toffoletti. She takes both texts by Haraway and Hayles into careful consideration but proposes a different method of approaching the relation between the feminine and technology. She goes beyond the interpretation of the cyborg as a figure through which women can gain a better understanding of themselves. She argues that, in a posthuman landscape, "technology is neither friend nor foe, but emerges as a possibility or potentiality to refigure bodies and identities outside of self/Other relations."²⁷ In her book *Cyborgs and Barbie Dolls*, Toffoletti employs a critical reading of feminist posthuman texts and explores the many ways the relationship between technology and women is described as either good or bad.²⁸ However, she proposes that the relationship is neither good nor bad.²⁹ By taking the Barbie doll as a precursor for the posthuman body, she argues that its fixed plastic body and the perceived epitome of femininity allow for freedom and for the identity to be "mutable and unfixed."³⁰ Toffoletti explores the debate between feminist critics, who either relate the plasticity of the

²⁴ Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 20.

²⁵ Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," 37-39.

²⁶ Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 161.

²⁷ Kim Toffoletti, *Cyborgs and Barbie Dolls: Feminism, Popular Culture and the Posthuman Body* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), 21.

²⁸ Toffoletti, *Cyborgs and Barbie Dolls*, 26.

²⁹ Toffoletti, *Cyborgs and Barbie Dolls*, 26.

³⁰ Toffoletti, *Cyborgs and Barbie Dolls*, 163.

plastic and posthuman body to the victimhood of women or pose women as agents for the same reasons. However, she suggests that thinking in these boxes is limiting, and argues that “positioning women as ‘victims’ or ‘agents’ limits the ways that subjectivities can be envisioned through a range of possible modalities of the body.”³¹

1.2. The Posthuman in Science Fiction Comic Books

Elaine Lee’s *Starstruck* is a piece of science fiction media, created in the format of a play and a comic book. Understanding its medium and the genre will be of extreme importance to understanding the further analysis of the texts. Both of the primary texts utilise their respective genres in very intriguing ways. They push the boundaries of what is achievable in the medium to add more depth to their storytelling and emphasise their themes.

Science fiction, as a genre, is extremely interested in testing the limits of what is human, and when it traverses over into the non-human. According to Gerald Alva Miller “both critical theory and science fiction harbour the same implicit desire: to conceptualise and understand the human and/or to determine ways of advancing, perfecting, or even transcending the current human form and the structures or variables that define and control identity.”³² But while critical theory is adamant about the utopian hope for the post-human, science fiction allows the consumer to weigh the positives and negatives of a post-human world. With a close reading of *2001 Space Odyssey* Miller argues that, while works of science fiction attempt to imagine alternative forms of existence, they more directly comment on our present systems of thought.³³ These texts allow the consumer to make first contact with the unknown and allow them to question their most basic concepts of the self and reality. Science fiction texts allow us to make first contact with a potential future that has moved beyond humanity and let us grapple with the implications and our own sense of self. This is also very apparent in the works of Lee, as they present multiple characters who are very close to the ordinary human experience, while others range far beyond that, allowing the reader to come into contact with the unknown. As Miller further argues “whereas the traditional fictional narrative might expose us to the beautiful, to the orderliness and structure of the utopian, science fiction brings us into contact with the heterotopian, a sublime space that shreds our

³¹ Toffoletti, *Cyborgs and Barbie Dolls*, 164.

³² Gerald Alva Miller Jr., “Conclusion: Beyond the Human: Ontogenesis, Technology, and the Posthuman in Kubrick and Clarke’s *2001*,” in *Exploring the Limits of the Human through Science Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan New York, 2012), 164.

³³ Miller Jr., “Conclusion: Beyond the Human,” 190.

concepts and decimates our attempts to impose structure and coherence.”³⁴ Thus, science fiction as a genre allows for a different approach to the imagined future of the post-human. It provides a different method, in which, it can take a proactive approach to imagining ways humanity has to grapple with the impending dawn of the post-human, instead of the reactionary approach taken by many critical theorists.³⁵

While Miller primarily analyses the post-human in the script itself, Essi Varris takes a different approach and seeks to understand how artists present the post-human in comic books. Because comic books add another dimension to the method of storytelling, they also provide another way in which one can analyse the representation of the post-human, and how the audience interacts with such a different form of representation.³⁶ Not only is the graphic novel a blend of different art styles and contrasting colours, but by employing a close reading of Neil Gaiman’s *Sandman*, Varris concludes several methods in which the post-human is made in comic books.³⁷ He examines how the posthuman plays into the suspension of disbelief – or, the emittance of critical thinking to allow oneself to believe in the impossible – of the readers.³⁸ For one, Gaiman presents the audience with an array of characters that tease the reader with little counterintuitive assumptions, as they are not strictly human or non-human, but rather characters that blend the conventional and alien. Rather than taking a leap and confusing the reader, they are instead intrigued by strange inhuman inaccuracies that urge the reader to assume the nonhuman.³⁹ The *Starstruck* graphic novel is also filled with a diverse range of characters that blur the line between alien and human, creating an intriguing predicament that prompts readers to question their own assumptions. Another method is the continual holding up of a mirror to the audience. This mirror implies that the reader is only learning what their psyche is currently ready to learn as if implying that if they were to dig deeper, an even more incomprehensible world would be presented to them.⁴⁰ This is how Gaiman imposes a disconnect between the human and the non-human, a disconnect that will also be prevalent in the comic books by Elaine Lee.

³⁴ Miller Jr., “Conclusion: Beyond the Human,” 190.

³⁵ Miller Jr., “Conclusion: Beyond the Human,” 190.

³⁶ Essi Varris, “Alien Overtures: Speculating about Nonhuman Experiences with Comic Book Characters,” in *Reconfiguring Human, Nonhuman and Posthuman in Literature and Culture*, ed. Sanna Karkulehto, Aino-Kaisa Koistinen, and Essi Varris (New York: Routledge, 2019), 79-107.

³⁷ Varris, “Alien Overtures,” 79.

³⁸ Varris, “Alien Overtures,” 79.

³⁹ Varris, “Alien Overtures,” 84.

⁴⁰ Varris, “Alien Overtures,” 95.

Chapter 2 – *It's a tough galaxy, but somebody's gotta live in it, and it might as well be you.*

Or, how is the posthuman female body represented in *Starstruck* the play?

This chapter delves into Elaine Lee's first endeavour in the *Starstruck* series, the play *Starstruck*.⁴¹ The production follows a motley crew of female space adventurers as they are confronted by a villainous spacecraft. Through various schemes and clever thinking, the crew of the Harpy – consisting of Galatia 9, Brucilla, Bronwyn and Erotica Ann – manage to overpower the gang of villains led by Verloona.⁴² The play explores feminist themes, such as the objectification of women and feminism in a posthuman world.⁴³ In two acts, the play depicts a brutal picture of the hardships women face in this science fiction world. This crew of misfits have to work through various hardships, such as facing past enemies and crushes, and the horrifying abomination that is a spaceship made out of the bodies of hundreds of little girls. Luckily, the play takes a positive turn as the crew manages to overcome these setbacks and defeat the villains, and they come out stronger than they were before. That is why this chapter argues that in Elaine Lee's *Starstruck*, the female characters achieve empowerment through their bodies. The first part of the chapter evaluates the general portrayal of women in the play and their various ways of overcoming hardships. The second part dives deeper into the character of Erotica Ann.

2.1 Finding Power in the Female Body

First of all, through embodying their changed bodies once again, characters are able to overcome the hardships they have had to face and escape the binary of a fixed female experience. The play features a character who, at one point, has been literally disembodied, but she later manages to overcome this when she feels comfort in her body once again. One of the main characters in the play is Captain Galatia 9, who, when introduced, is revealed to have been a feminist writer on her home planet, but was punished and henceforth enslaved because of this.⁴⁴ During her enslavement she was bodily disfigured, as one of her more feminine-

⁴¹ Elaine Lee, Susan Norfleet Lee, and Dale Place, *Starstruck*. (New York: Broadway Play Publishing Inc, 2013).

⁴² Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 2.10, 106.

⁴³ Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 1.1, 6.

⁴⁴ Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 1.1, 8.

presenting traits was removed – one of her breasts.⁴⁵ This is both mentioned in the script, but can also be seen in photographs taken of the play. The actress - Elaine Lee - wears a top that has been constructed to highlight the missing breast, as a big star has been sewn over this spot, which can be seen in Figure 1.⁴⁶ By hurting her in such a manner, she was literally disembodied from her female figure and made to look and feel like the other, as is now the case both in the *Starstruck* universe, but also outside of it, as the audience can now also see that something sets her apart from the rest. As Erotica Ann mentions in the play, when they are planning on infiltrating the enemies' forces, Galatia 9 is easily recognisable in her new form, and would therefore be unfit for this mission.⁴⁷ She has been othered to such an extent, that she is instantly recognisable. As has been mentioned in the theoretical framework, the critical theory of Toffoletti and the posthuman condition position the female form as one that is neither a victim nor an agent.⁴⁸ The form can be both at once. For instance, at the beginning of the play, and the events that transpired before that, Galatia 9 might have been perceived as a victim of the situation but near the end, she is very much presented as an agent when she has successfully led her crew to victory. She is both victim and agent, and both female and not.⁴⁹ She can traverse the boundaries and find her identity in the blurring lines. By finding strength in her new physical form, she can build an identity outside of her feminine – more traditionally human – form. For the audience, as well, the costume would have changed to a symbol of power, as she wears the star symbol with pride on her chest. Showing off what makes her both the Self and the Other, as she has changed to fit the costume. Galatia 9 can exist inside her body, outside of Self-Other-relations, such as Toffoletti suggests.⁵⁰ As in the example of the Barbie doll, in which the feminine figure is free to change and grow over time.⁵¹ While still representing as a female form, the character of Galatia 9 is also able to embody her new – still female – form, and thus, allow her female identity to be unfixed.

⁴⁵ Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 1.1, 9.

⁴⁶ Lee, Kaluta, and Moyer, *Starstruck*, 321.

⁴⁷ Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 1.3, 31.

⁴⁸ Toffoletti, *Cyborgs and Barbie Dolls*, 164.

⁴⁹ Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 2.10, 106.

⁵⁰ Toffoletti, *Cyborgs and Barbie Dolls*, 21.

⁵¹ Toffoletti, *Cyborgs and Barbie Dolls*, 163.

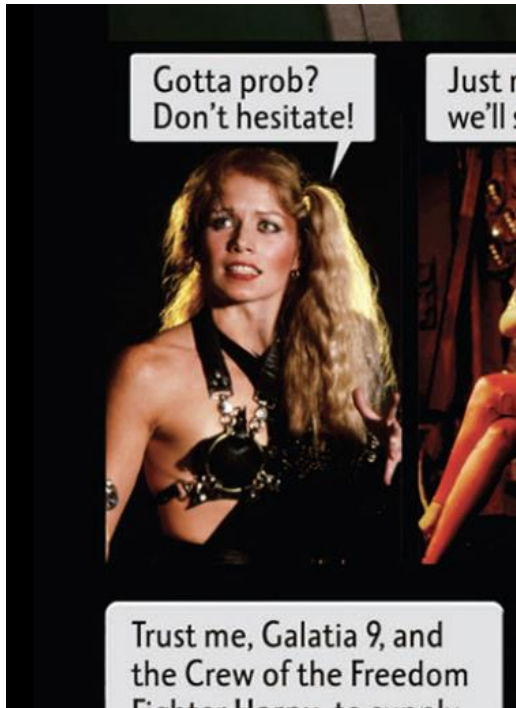


Figure 1: Elaine Lee in her Galatia 9 costume. From “Starstruck ...a History from Tym Stevens’ blog *RockSex*” in *Starstruck* (San Diego: IDW Publishing, 2012): 321.

Second of all, the maturity levels between male and female characters are highly contrasted in the play, but the female characters are able to use their maturity to overcome their disembodiment. In the first act, it is revealed that the spaceship Verloona’s crew pilots is built out of the bodies of hundreds, if not thousands, of Galactic Girl Guides – the girl scouts of this universe, they are, however, able to overcome this disembodiment.⁵² A key theory in feminist studies is the idea that girls take on more of the household work than boys, and are therefore expected to grow up faster.⁵³ A study carried out by Gager et al. reveals that throughout most of their childhood, as opposed to boys, girls do more household tasks, do more repetitive work, and spend more time in employment, while boys spend more time in their preferred extracurriculars.⁵⁴ This discrepancy is reflected in the story of the Galactic Girl Guides. These young girls were still in the developmental stage of their childhood when they were captured and had their bodies used as a literal spaceship. Verloona is using their

⁵² Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 1.1, 12.

⁵³ Constance T. Gager, Teresa M. Cooney, and Kathleen Thiede Call, “The Effects of Family Characteristics and Time Use on Teenagers’ Household Labor,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 61, no. 4 (1999): 991-992.

⁵⁴ Gager, Cooney, Thiede Call, “Effects of Family Characteristics,” 991-992.

childhood to maintain her youth and appearance.⁵⁵ When compared to certain male characters in the play, it becomes clear that the girls were forced to mature faster than their male counterparts. For instance, the character of Kalif is revealed to have been a very privileged young man who had been pampered throughout his entire life.⁵⁶ When he was given an entire line of robots, because he had fallen in love with his father's copy, he threw a temper tantrum when he found out they would never be able to love him back, or experience pleasure during their sexual escapades.⁵⁷ He ordered the robots to destroy themselves in a fit of rage.⁵⁸ This immaturity starkly contrasts with the emotional maturity of the young girls. At the end of the play, the Galactic Girl Guides prove their emotional maturity by destroying the ship that has kept them captive and protecting another character, Bronwyn, who was once one of them.⁵⁹ By freeing themselves from their cage, they regain their power and demonstrate that they can overcome oppressive systems.

Thirdly, the patriarchal system, as depicted in the play, not only hurts its women, but also characters of different species. Through the character of Eeeeeeeeluh, the audience can see how this female-presenting alien has to manage both transgressions based on her species and her gender. However, by accepting and utilizing her intersectional and dual body, she manages to overcome this. In the play, the audience is introduced to a fictional race of fish-like people, called Aguatunesians, and although there are no remaining pictures or descriptions of these aliens from the play, later instalments in the franchise depict them as a female-presenting gender non-conforming species, who are shown to have a female-looking body, but with fish-like scales and fins.⁶⁰ Although they appear female, they look very different from humans, have empathic powers, and need water to breathe, they overall seem to communicate and operate on a human level.⁶¹ Intersectionality, as explained by Patricia Hill Collins, means the combination of different forms of oppressions.⁶² A woman of colour will never just experience sexism, but will also be marginalized within the group of women, as

⁵⁵ Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 2.3, 71.

⁵⁶ Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 1.5, 44.

⁵⁷ Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 1.5, 45.

⁵⁸ Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 1.5, 45.

⁵⁹ Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 2.6, 87.

⁶⁰ "Ordering Anarchera, or "The Multiverse According to Me" by Lady Scooter Jean. Maiden Priestess of Phoebus." *Starstruck Comics*, accessed May 31, 2024, <https://starstruckcomics.com/glossary/a/>.

⁶¹ Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 1.2, 17.

⁶² Patricia Hill Collins, "Intersectionality as Critical Inquiry," in *Intersectionality As Critical Social Theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 30.

being ‘other.’⁶³ For this reason, Collins argues that “using intersectionality as a metaphor breaks down mono-categorical analyses to focus on the conceptual correspondences or relationships among racism and sexism.”⁶⁴ Verloona’s people find her an easy target and make transgressions towards her, ranging from calling her names, such as ‘libidinous lizard’ or ‘Scales-for-Skin,’⁶⁵ and capturing and torturing her.⁶⁶ Because she is both a woman and alien to them, they feel that they are in their right to objectify her and use what makes her different to them, namely her being an empath, and make her their alarm system. However, she manages to escape the ship, by protecting the Galactic Girl Guides and guiding the Harpy’s crew to her.⁶⁷ By embracing both her alien and human sides and traversing the boundaries of her identity, she breaks free from fixed definitions and accesses the power of both aspects of her being – the female and the alien. With this newfound strength, she is able to overcome the oppressive patriarchy of the people who have kept her prisoner. By embracing her unique experience of femininity, both as experiencing ‘othering’ as a female and as an alien, she harnesses her power for good and works towards overthrowing the system that has kept her imprisoned.

2.2 The Posthuman Objectification

Foremost, the character of Erotica Ann is perhaps the most notable instance of the posthuman in this universe, and she is able to use this hybridity between the organic and the bionic in her favour when she is exacting revenge on her oppressor. Erotica Ann originated as a robot, entirely on one side of the posthuman juxtaposition, made by a factory specialised in creating dolls and robots specifically to be used for sexual pleasure, “Living Doll Cybernetics.”⁶⁸ Upon her introduction, she is described as having a body created for sexual pleasure, while also speaking in a voice that is simultaneously robotic and ‘girl-ish.’⁶⁹ This juxtaposition is immediately made apparent to the audience, who have to grapple with this uncomfortable combination of the organic and the robotic. After her creation, the entire Erotica Ann line was bought by Kalif’s father, intended to serve as a present to him, as he had

⁶³ Collins, “Intersectionality as Critical Inquiry,” 30.

⁶⁴ Collins, “Intersectionality as Critical Inquiry,” 30.

⁶⁵ Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 1.2, 18.

⁶⁶ Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 1.2, 17.

⁶⁷ Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 2.6, 83-87.

⁶⁸ Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 1.1, 6.

⁶⁹ Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 1.1, 3.

gained an interest in his own specimen.⁷⁰ However, when Kalif found out that the robots would never be able to love him back or experience any form of sexual pleasure from him due to a manufacturing mistake, he ordered the robots to walk to their demise.⁷¹ It was in that moment that Ann, the only one in the line, suddenly gained a hint of sentience, her first independent thought, as she knew that she did not want to die.⁷² In that moment, she moved from being solely on one side of the binary of the organic and the robotic to a fluid hybrid middle line between human and robot – she became a cyborg. Because she suddenly gained some sort of sentience, she was able to escape her doom and flee to safety.⁷³ When discussing the cyborg, Haraway notes that “The cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, post-modern collective and personal self.”⁷⁴ This definition of the cyborg fits Erotica Ann seamlessly at this moment. She is running away from who she used to be, and for the first time in her life, she has to figure out who she is or wants to be as a person. She has to grapple with suddenly gaining human-like sentience, while still inhabiting a robotic body. Being a hybrid form of a person, a combination of the organic and the robotic, leads her to be able to overcome her oppressor. When she encounters Kalif again, she is able to use this fluid, but singular, feminine form, to take her revenge on him, by suffocating him with a non-human amount of strength.⁷⁵

Furthermore, at the beginning of the play, Erotica Ann behaves in a robotic manner and is punished for this, but later she embraces this aspect of her cybernetic body and uses it to take revenge on her oppressor.⁷⁶ One can often see the miscommunication between her and another member of the Harpy, or her making inappropriate comments.⁷⁷ But, as opposed to how Kalif treated her, the crew of the Harpy actually accepts her like this, even though there is often some form of miscommunication. She is presented as a selfless member of the crew, on whom the rest can rely. She is Hayles’ ideal interpretation of the cyborg that was mentioned in the first chapter. If the world ever were to be inhabited strictly by posthumans, she hopes that the posthumans embrace the infinite possibilities of unlimited knowledge

⁷⁰ Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 1.5, 44-45.

⁷¹ Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 1.5, 44-45.

⁷² Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 1.5, 44-45.

⁷³ Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 1.5, 45.

⁷⁴ Haraway, “A Manifesto for Cyborgs,” 23.

⁷⁵ Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 2.8, 94-95.

⁷⁶ Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 2.8, 94-95.

⁷⁷ Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 1.1, 4.

technologies, without being seduced by the images of grandeur and immortality.⁷⁸ Erotica Ann, in this case, represents a stable presence of nearly unlimited knowledge possibilities for the crew, while also finding herself to be on equal footing with them. As she embarks on a journey of self-discovery and delves deeper into the complexities of human-robot relationships, she gradually gains a better understanding of her own emotions. This newfound comfort in her understanding of her own emotions allows her to lure Kalif and ensnare him in her robotic embrace, turning the previously established power dynamic on its head, when she uses her posthuman strength as a means of exacting revenge and suffocating him.⁷⁹

Lastly, through the character of Erotica Ann, the female characters are able to find solidarity in one another. Because she is a robot and therefore was specifically designed and programmed to fulfil certain functions and follow orders, Ann was unused to being her own person and making her own decisions before meeting the rest of the Harpy.⁸⁰ One can observe instances of this uncertainty in her own personhood in her interactions with her teammates, such as misunderstanding jokes and struggling to communicate with others.⁸¹ Sometimes she also asks permission to say something in the conversation, such as asking Galatia 9 if she may relay a piece of information.⁸² These interactions all culminate in the feeling that she is always on the outside looking in, wanting to participate in their human conversations, but not knowing how to do so. Nevertheless, with the help and guidance of her crewmates, Ann gradually gains more autonomy and grows as a character. As Stevenson argues, “Cyborg identity cannot simply be about escape or ‘bodiless exaltation’; it must also be concerned with the bonds that tie individuals to one another and the necessary connections that define aligned networks and communities. Autonomy for the cyborg is both impossible and insufficient.”⁸³ The way in which Ann grows in her own autonomy is with the help of the others. Such as at the end of the play, where they keep her from doing something she might regret,⁸⁴ help her through her grief and dealing with human emotion for the first time, and help her out in

⁷⁸ Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 5.

⁷⁹ Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 2.8, 94-95.

⁸⁰ Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 1.5, 44-45.

⁸¹ Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 1.1, 6.

⁸² Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 1.5, 44.

⁸³ Melissa Colleen Stevenson, “Trying to Plug In: Posthuman Cyborgs and the Search for Connection,” *Science Fiction Studies* 34, no. 1 (2007): 101.

⁸⁴ Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 2.10, 101.

traversing the new human abilities she receives.⁸⁵ Through helping Ann find out who she is as a person, the rest find solidarity in their existence as a group.

All in all, the play *Starstruck* paints a gruelling picture of the hardships women have to endure in this science fiction world, but also gives a hopeful outlook by having its female characters bond together in solidarity, find power in their bodies and use this to overcome these sexist mechanisms set in place in the world. This is done by having a character who was physically disembodied, Galatia 9, use her new posthuman and unfixed form to overcome her oppressor. And by having the young Galactic Girl Guides come together in solidarity to regain power over oppressive systems. Moreover, some characters face intersectional transgressions based on race and gender, such as Eeeeeeeeluh, but she finds power in her body and uses it for good. Furthermore, the character of Erotica Ann is a great example of how the posthuman body is used to get one's power back after having that power taken away from them. For instance, by using her emotions to get back at the man who enslaved her, using her body's power to physically enact revenge on him, or how the rest of the women bond together to help her experience the world in a more human manner.

⁸⁵ Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Place, *Starstruck*, 2.10, 102.

Chapter 3 - *I'd Rather Have A Paper Doll To Call My Own Than a Fickle-Minded
Real Live Girl*

Or, a Closer Look at the *Starstruck* Graphic Novel

The *Starstruck* graphic novel is a collection of several issues of the *Starstruck* comic book series. The comics take place in the same science fiction universe and include most of the familiar faces the reader might have seen before in the play. Several backstories are explored in individual issues, while other issues illustrate different adventures or heists that take place sometime after the events of the play, therefore the graphic novel acts more as an anthology series with reoccurring characters. The graphic novel deals with similar themes as the play, while also utilizing its media in creative ways such as starting every issue with a different quote from classic literature or ignoring comic book customs for effect. That is why this chapter argues that in the graphic novel created by Elaine Lee, M. W. Kaluta, and Lee Moyer, *Starstruck*, the female characters, like in the play, achieve empowerment through their bodies, but also through testing the limits of the science fiction comic book medium.

3.1 *Starstruck* and the Graphic Novel

First of all, the othering that characters must confront at various levels in the graphic novel leads to the empowerment of the female characters. The intertextual quotes, which can be referred to as quotes used to “designate the various relationships that a given text may have with other texts,” that start the issues change from influential non-fictional writers into fictional characters from the science fiction universe itself, which means that they are transforming into metafictional characters themselves.⁸⁶ In the graphic novel, every issue is accompanied by a quote from an influential writer or a definition in the top right corner. For instance, some issues start with a quote from one of William Shakespeare’s plays, as can be seen in Figure 2,⁸⁷ or another one starts with a quote from Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*.⁸⁸ The intertext in this graphic novel is used to allude to the different relations the graphic novel has to other texts or is used to foreshadow what is about to happen in the issue the reader is about to read. However, at the start of some issues, such as “I Ate A Whole Funnel Cake...,” the rectangle that is usually reserved for allusions to other literature, is taken up by a quote

⁸⁶ Chris Baldick, *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 184.

⁸⁷ Lee, Kaluta, and Moyer, *Starstruck*, 39.

⁸⁸ Lee, Kaluta, and Moyer, *Starstruck*, 33.

from a different – mainly female – character in the graphic novel, which is Bronwyn in this case, as seen in Figure 3.⁸⁹ It reads: “What you do at gunpoint will depend on both your basic nature and the speed of the bullet. Where you land after the jump is ‘where you are.’ ‘Where you are’ is the only starting point you have for any act of free will. You can see the connection.”⁹⁰ This quote means that, in the intertext of the graphic novel, the characters of this science fiction universe have risen to a similar level as Shakespeare. They have transcended the comic panel and have come to an existence on the metatextual of the graphic novel. They are not just two-dimensional characters drawn on the page, they have now become characters who have transcended the boundaries of what was possible of characters in the story and have become a hybrid character who exists both in and outside of the story.

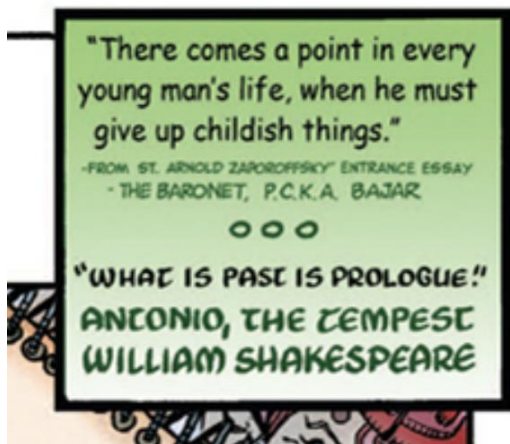


Figure 2: A quote from William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* at the start of the issue “Mirage à Trois.” Elaine Lee, Michael William Kaluta, and Lee Moyer, *Starstruck*. (San Diego: IDW Publishing, 2012): 39.



Figure 3: A quote from Bronwyn at the start of the issue “I Ate A Whole Funnel Cake...” Elaine Lee, Michael William Kaluta, and Lee Moyer, *Starstruck*. (San Diego: IDW Publishing, 2012): 151.

Second of all, the comic panels themselves lead to the empowerment of the female characters. In the graphic novel, there are various instances in which the boundaries of the

⁸⁹ Lee, Kaluta, and Moyer, *Starstruck*, 151.

⁹⁰ Lee, Kaluta, and Moyer, *Starstruck*, 151.

comic panel are crossed, which mostly happens to female characters. Ordinarily, the comic panel exists as a rectangle in which everything happens – the dialogue in speech bubbles, internal monologue, action, and the characters interacting. As Katherine Kelp-Stebbins writes, “Every comic is involved in the creation and articulation of regimes of the visible and the readable, the utterable and the invisible; such regimes necessarily frame a political sensibility and play a role in the formation of certain reading communities in space and time.”⁹¹ Every comic book page is completely thought out, and adheres to certain rules, as to make it clear and visible for the reader to know everything that is happening. However, there are rare instances in which it is necessary to change the layout of the page to make something clear. There are panels and pages in the graphic novel in which the drawings go over the lines of the rectangles and the characters or speech bubbles cross the lines of the panels.⁹² Whenever this happens in *Starstruck*, it primarily happens to the female characters. For instance, in “The Right Bait,” in which speech bubbles float over panels, and onomatopoeias, such as “SPLLOSH” and “MUNCH” describing the actions are written between the panels.⁹³ While the female characters might be discriminated against inside the lines of the story, they are powerful outside of it. They are not limited to the usual page layout, but instead are able to traverse the boundaries and exist outside of them. They are not victim to a static existence within the page but can live fluidly outside of it. Thus, by discarding the normativity of the usual page layout, the female characters in the graphic novel can find power outside of the story, and also in the comic book.

Lastly, the female characters in the graphic novel are able to reclaim their power by embodying their nudity. In the comic book, because it is a visual medium, the reader can see a clear discrepancy in the way in which male and female characters are drawn, as the female characters are more scantily clad than the male characters. However, they are able to claim their nudity as their own and be empowered by it. More often than not, when a character is drawn in the nude, or has barely any clothes on, it is a female character. The Erotica Ann robots, for instance, are present in the majority of the issues and are always dressed the same. In an outfit that barely covers the body, and highlights the feminine figure.⁹⁴ Or Brucilla, who

⁹¹ Katherine Kelp-Stebbins, “Reading Spaces: The Politics of Page Layout,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Comic Book Studies*, ed. Frederick Luis Aldama (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019): 76.

⁹² Lee, Kaluta, and Moyer, *Starstruck*, 155.

⁹³ Lee, Kaluta, and Moyer, *Starstruck*, 100-101.

⁹⁴ Lee, Kaluta, and Moyer, *Starstruck*, 27.

works as a space adventurer and faces a lot of danger a majority of the time, who is only dressed in a tiny skirt and small top.⁹⁵ When analysing superhero comic books, Anna F. Peppard notes that: “male superheroes are often positioned in the background admiring the female superheroes who are most often positioned in the foreground as the central subjects—or, more appropriately, the central objects—of the tableau.”⁹⁶ Similarly, to how the Erotica Ann robots, or the character of Galatia 9, were at one point objects to do with as the male characters please, they were also perceived as objects to look at. However, the characters can reclaim their bodies and become the subjects of the story. Both Brucilla and Galatia 9 are shown to have comfort in their bodies, despite their objectification as opposed to the male characters of the graphic novel. As shown in the epilogue panel, both of them can be seen topless, relaxed, chatting, and joking with each other.⁹⁷ Even though they are only seen as a tool in the stories of male characters, they can cross that boundary and embody their nudity and power. As for instance, in the epilogue, the characters are shown to have peace at last and are drawn topless on Brucilla’s home planet.⁹⁸

3.2 Feminism and Posthumanism in the Graphic Novel *Starstruck*

First of all, in the graphic novel, characters are able to utilize their grounded bodies to achieve empowerment. Lee and Kaluta present the reader with the character of Brucilla, who is both more grounded in the reality of this non-fictional world and who organically embodies her power. The character of Brucilla is the only main character in the comic book series, who, before becoming a space adventurer, hailed from Kansas, which is a place on the planet Amercadia.⁹⁹ Both of these places are a comedic parody of the United States, and they also emulate parts of North American culture, such as the Girl Scout parody of the Galactic Girl Guides.¹⁰⁰ In a comic book series that was mainly published in the United States of America, Brucilla is one of the characters readers might immediately grasp onto, as she provides a relatable – and more human – point of entry into the unknowable science fiction universe. Moreover, at first glance, she also seems to be one of the only characters who has not in some

⁹⁵ Lee, Kaluta, and Moyer, *Starstruck*, 187.

⁹⁶ Anna F. Peppard, “Is that a monster between your legs or are ya just happy to see me?” in *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Sexuality in Comic Book Studies*, ed. Frederick Luis Aldama (London: Routledge, 2020), 92.

⁹⁷ Lee, Kaluta, and Moyer, *Starstruck*, 207.

⁹⁸ Lee, Kaluta, and Moyer, *Starstruck*, 207.

⁹⁹ Lee, Kaluta, and Moyer, *Starstruck*, 215.

¹⁰⁰ Lee, Kaluta, and Moyer, *Starstruck*, 148.

way been altered by artificial means. In a universe full of cyborgs and robots, she is completely organic, in terms of the body. However, as Haraway argues, “Any objects or persons can be reasonably thought of in terms of disassembly and reassembly; no “natural” architectures constrain system design.”¹⁰¹ The cyborg and robotic figure are often opposed to what seems natural or organic, while actually not differentiating all that much. A person might believe they are completely different from the cyborg, but act and exist as a cyborg unknowingly. Similarly, while Brucilla looks and behaves human-like, she is a cyborg nonetheless, and she also provides the reader with a relatable character who gives insight into a supernatural world beyond belief. Thus, Brucilla, can be powerful in a more relatable and organic manner, while actually crossing the bridge to the robotic herself.

Second of all, through the usage of bodies and transcending bodily limitations, characters can escape the binary of human existence. In the comic book issue, “The Right Bait,” Bronwyn’s acquisition of her telepathic powers is depicted, as she falls into a fishtank, inhabited by the aforementioned Aguatunesian species, and connects with the aliens in there.¹⁰² Bronwyn is a character that is present in both the play and the comic book, and she is a woman with telepathic powers who is a part of a convent due to her powers. In this issue, she forms a connection with the Other – the ostracized and captive Aguatunesians – and by accepting them, becomes more than simply human. In this case, similarly to what Toffoletti argues about the Barbie doll, “In Barbie’s plastic body, transformation becomes a contamination of forms; a rejection of a stable female identity through the disruption of oppositions such as self and Other, subject and object.”¹⁰³ Bronwyn, by reaching out a hand to the Other, can reject the stable identity and instead transcends the limitations of the human body. She becomes a cyborg or hybrid of multiple species. Moreover, the medium of the comic book helps depict this meeting of the self and Other, as Bronwyn transcends the binaries of the single comic book panel and the singularity of the speech bubbles. The speech bubbles, while ordinarily belonging to a single character, are instead shared with each other, as can be seen in Figure 4.¹⁰⁴ She also can read the speech bubbles from other characters and interact with them, while the bubbles from the Aguatunesians transcend into her space in the panel.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, the relation between the self and Other in the story is not only present in

¹⁰¹ Haraway, “A Manifesto for Cyborgs,” 22.

¹⁰² Lee, Kaluta, and Moyer, *Starstruck*, 99-105.

¹⁰³ Toffoletti, *Cyborgs and Barbie Dolls*, 163-164.

¹⁰⁴ Lee, Kaluta, and Moyer, *Starstruck*, 105.

¹⁰⁵ Lee, Kaluta, and Moyer, *Starstruck*, 102.

the lines but also in the drawing and medium of the text. Showing once again the fluidity of the body and the cyborg in the story. By rejecting the stasis of human existence and reaching out towards the other, Bronwyn can embody a more powerful state of being in which she exists above the boundaries between the self and the Other, and can she escape the binary of human existence.

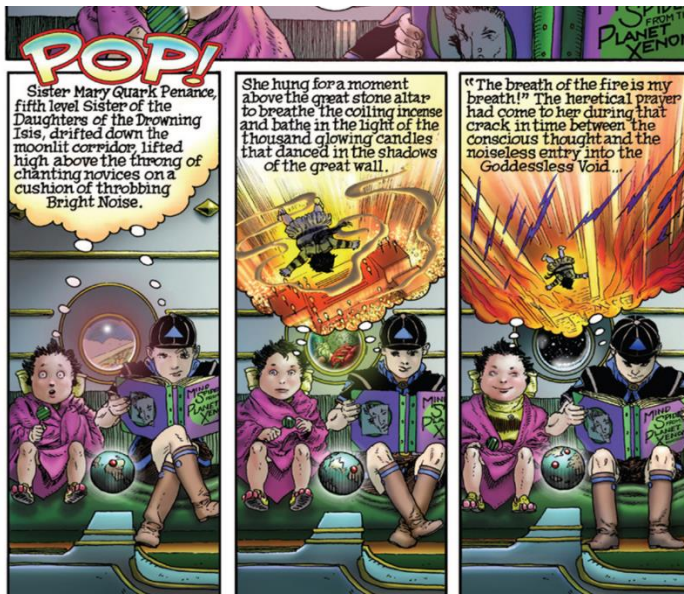


Figure 4: A series of panels from the issue “The Right Bait.” Elaine Lee, Michael William Kaluta, and Lee Moyer, *Starstruck*. (San Diego: IDW Publishing, 2012): 105.

Third of all, in the graphic novel there are various instances of women using their perceived inferior status to achieve empowerment in their bodies. In various issues, such as “Mother’s Little Helpers”¹⁰⁶ and “I Ate A Whole Funnel Cake...,”¹⁰⁷ the Galactic Girl Guides are seen disguised as little robots. As was discussed in the second chapter, robots and women are disadvantaged in the story, as they are perceived as “lesser than.” Therefore, a robot, who would identify as female, would experience discrimination based on their gender, but also on the fact that they are a robot or cyborg. It is a form of discrimination that exists above categories and is based on the single experience of the individual; it breaks down the singularity of the category and focuses on the relationships among different forms of

¹⁰⁶ Lee, Kaluta, and Moyer, *Starstruck*, 148-149.

¹⁰⁷ Lee, Kaluta, and Moyer, *Starstruck*, 151-169.

discrimination.¹⁰⁸ In the graphic novel, the Galactic Girl Guides use this to their advantage, as they dress up as robots to fade into the background of the story and achieve their goals there. Because they are perceived by the rest of the world as inferior, they can slip into the background with ease, and use this to their advantage when carrying out various schemes. As far as the medium goes, the reader might also overlook them, as in the aforementioned issue “I Ate A Whole Funnel Cake...,” a major part of the story plays out in the background of the panels.¹⁰⁹ Since Galatia 9 and Brucilla are the main characters of the issue, the drawings are mainly focused on them, which the Galactic Girl Guides are able to use to their advantage, as they slip into the background dressed up as robots.¹¹⁰ They can transform their body into something more fluid, which exists above the categories of organic and cybernetic, to reach their full potential.

Last of all, in the issue “Pretty Maids All in a Row,” intertextuality is utilized to show the duality of the powerlessness of the robotic female figures, but also their unrecognized power. In the issue, “Mirage À Trois,” the reader can see how the large army of subservient Erotica Ann robots is used to exact revenge on the behalf of Kalif.¹¹¹ They are not able to do anything of their own accord and do not seem to have any wants and needs. They are literally used as objects for Kalif to do with as he pleases. Moreover, Kalif walks around with a robot that has been decapitated, a cruel reminder of their fate if they misbehave. However, the issue after this, “Pretty Maids All in a Row,” depicts the event that was described in the play, as one of the Erotica Ann robots gains sentience and decides to take her fate into her own hands.¹¹² Every panel in this issue is accompanied by a song lyric from Johnny S. Black – lyrics that seem to go against what is happening in the panels.¹¹³ This causes a discrepancy between text and image, as can be seen in Figure 5, which ultimately comes together in the freedom of the character of Erotica Ann. She is able to go against the overpowering lyrics on the page, and is instead, against all the odds, able to gain sentience and freedom. Furthermore, the intertextuality of the issue indicates that Erotica Ann has not only transformed into a boundary-crossing being – the cyborg, but also that the medium has become a hybrid version of the story. The issue is not just limited to the comic book medium and what that entails. It

¹⁰⁸ Collins, “Intersectionality as Critical Inquiry,” 30.

¹⁰⁹ Lee, Kaluta, and Moyer, *Starstruck*, 151-159.

¹¹⁰ Lee, Kaluta, and Moyer, *Starstruck*, 151-159.

¹¹¹ Lee, Kaluta, and Moyer, *Starstruck*, 39-46.

¹¹² Lee, Kaluta, and Moyer, *Starstruck*, 47.

¹¹³ The Mills Brothers, vocalists, “Paper Doll,” by Johnny S. Black, recorded February 1942, B-side on *I’ll Be Around*, Decca 18318, single.

can go beyond the medium by using intertextuality to test the boundaries and explore the possibilities of this type of storytelling. Thus, in the issue, intertextuality is utilized to show the duality of the powerlessness of the robotic female figures, but also how they regain their power against all odds.

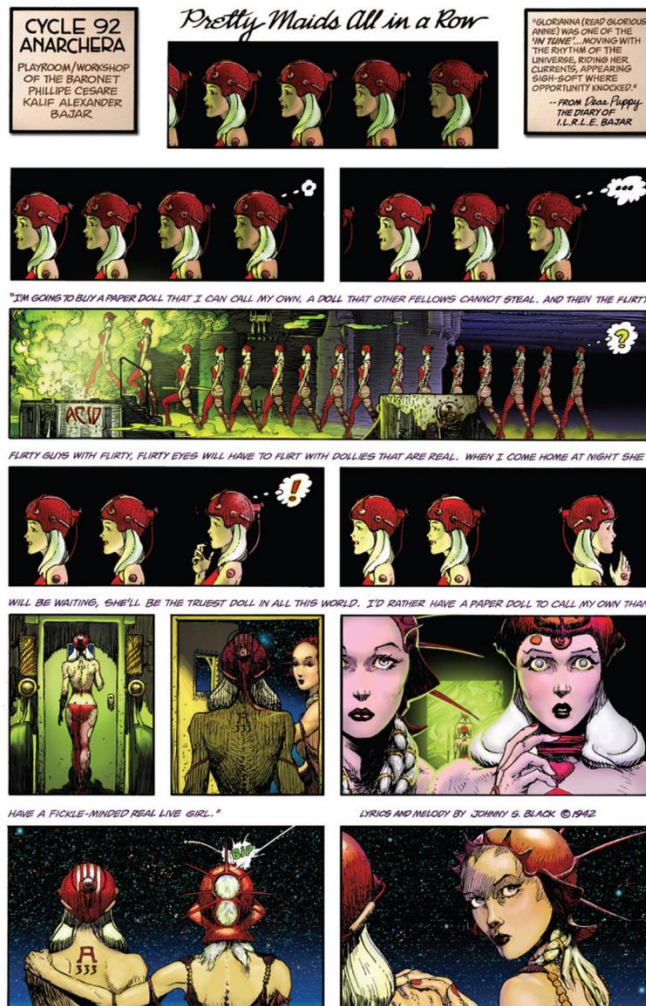


Figure 5: A page with panels from the issue “Pretty Maids All in a Row,” interwoven with lyrics from Johnny S. Black’s *Paper Doll*. Elaine Lee, Michael William Kaluta, and Lee Moyer, *Starstruck*. (San Diego: IDW Publishing, 2012): 47.

In summary, much like the play, the *Starstruck* graphic novel tells the stories of many different characters as they navigate the challenges of a daunting science fiction world, often using humour to cope. In the comics, the female characters find empowerment in their physical bodies, as well as in the comic book medium. This is done in various ways. For instance, female characters can use the comic book medium to gain power in their bodies. In

addition, intertextuality causes characters to transcend from the comic book pages to the metatextual, using the lay-out of the page to find power outside of the panels, or finding power in their nudity. Furthermore, there is a character who can be powerful in a more relatable and organic manner, while crossing the bridge to the robotic herself, or by having a different character become more powerful in her body by connecting to the Other. Moreover, some characters were able to transform their body into something more fluid, that exists above the categories of organic and cybernetic, while others used intertextuality to show how powerless cyborg female characters regained power against the odds.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored the way in which female characters embody or regain their power in Elaine Lee's *Starstruck* works. Through comprehensive analysis and investigation, several key findings have emerged. Firstly, in both the play and the graphic novel, the connection the characters have with the posthuman condition and how it influences their body are utilized to embody the power of the female characters. Additionally, the storytelling medium in both the play and the graphic novel is used to empower its female characters, allowing them to go beyond the boundaries of what is possible in the mediums. The discussion of the posthuman condition and the utilisation of the storytelling medium to empower female characters highlights the implications of this research within the field of science fiction literary studies.

In both the graphic novel and the play, the characters navigate the complexities of their ever-evolving identities as their bodies undergo a life-changing transition from organic to cybernetic. These profound changes have far-reaching implications, impacting every facet of their lives. Embracing the idea that their bodies and identities are fluid and capable of transformation over time, the characters are able to realise that the human body is not bound by the strict binaries of human life. There is no hard line between organic and cybernetic, and they have the capacity to toe the lines in between. By embracing these transformative experiences and carving their own path to physical autonomy, the characters not only embrace their femininity but also achieve a profound sense of empowerment.

The visual storytelling in the graphic novel is very effective in conveying the fluidity and transformation of identities. The artwork frequently breaks the usual comic book conventions, such as going over the lines of the panel, symbolising the characters' transcendence of fixed identities, as they have grown beyond the need for a singular identity. The visual fluidity mirrors the journey the characters are on towards self-actualization and empowerment. The characters' interactions with the medium and each other are depicted in ways that challenge traditional ideas of identity and autonomy. For example, there are occasions when, to illustrate the character's departure from the traditional human experience, their speech bubbles deviate from the typical behaviour seen in conventional comic books.

In a similar vein, the play employs a range of techniques to underscore the hybridity and fluidity of its characters. For instance, the costumes are designed to showcase the fluidity of the character's identity, as can be seen in the costume of Galatia 9, or vocal performances

are used to reflect the dual nature of a character. Erotica Ann's costume, overtly sexual yet coupled with a voice that is both robotic and girl-ish, exemplifies this dynamic. The interaction between the script and the performers in the play helps to shape the characters' complex identities.

In addition to gender and identity, *Starstruck* delves into the theme of posthumanism, questioning what it means to be human in a technologically advanced world. The characters' transitions from organic to cybernetic bodies raise questions about the nature of humanity and the boundaries between human and machine. The works suggest that femininity is not defined by a fixed set of characteristics but, like a Barbie doll, is instead a fluid and evolving concept. This perspective challenges readers and viewers to reconsider their assumptions about identity and humanity.

Due to its status as a 'cult classic,' *Starstruck* has not been extensively studied, though it offers rich material for academic exploration. This thesis has only scratched the surface of the potential analyses of these works. Future research could delve deeper into the series' social critiques, such as its commentary on capitalism, which would provide valuable insights. Additionally, because of the volume of work is quite distinct, it would lend itself fruitful for further comparison to other science fiction sagas. It would be insightful to see how its commentary on feminism and the posthuman condition holds up when compared to other science fiction sagas of the same age.

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