

JOHN CONSTANTINE AND THE HOMOAFECTIVE QUESTION: AN ANALYSIS OF LGBTI+ REPRESENTATIONS IN SUPERHERO COMICS AND ANIMATIONS

JOHN CONSTANTINE E A QUESTÃO HOMOAFETIVA: UMA ANÁLISE SOBRE REPRESENTAÇÕES LGBTI+ EM QUADRINHOS DE SUPER-HERÓIS E ANIMAÇÕES

JOHN CONSTANTINE Y LA PREGUNTA HOMOAFECTIVE: UN ANÁLISIS DE LAS REPRESENTACIONES LGBTI+ EN CÓMICS DE SUPERHÉROES Y ANIMACIONES

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ABSTRACT: This article is an analysis of LGBTI + representations in comic books, superheroes, and children's animations. In particular, we will approach the character of DC Comics John Constantine, bisexual, because he is a hero of a major publisher, appearing alongside Batman, Superman etc. Our methodology is qualitative, based on a broad contribution containing: Michel Foucault, Sarane Alexandrian, James Green, João Trevisan, Dandara Cruz among others. Our conclusions involve seeing how there has really been a profound change over time. If before this type of question could not be addressed as much, or could not be addressed explicitly, today there is a greater opening for representations of LGBTI + characters.

KEYWORDS: LGBTI+. Comics. Animations. John Constantine. Hellblazer.

RESUMO: O presente artigo é uma análise das representações LGBTI+ em revistas de super-heróis e animações. Abordaremos mais a personagem da DC Comics John Constantine, bissexual, por ele ser um herói de uma grande editora, aparecendo junto ao Batman, Superman etc. Nossa metodologia é qualitativa, se pautando em uma análise inicial do campo de estudos e na sequência em uma análise mais aprofundada da própria personagem Constantine. Possuímos um aporte teórico que envolve, entre outros autores: Michel Foucault, Sarane Alexandrian e Dandara Cruz. Nossas conclusões envolvem ver como realmente houve uma mudança profunda ao longo do tempo, do fim do século XX ao começo do século XXI. Se antes esse tipo de questão não podia ser tão abordada, ou não podia ser abordada explicitamente, hoje há uma abertura maior para representações de personagens LGBTI+.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: LGBTI+. Quadrinhos. Animações. John Constantine. Hellblazer.

RESUMEN: Este artículo es un análisis de representaciones LGBTI + en cómics, superhéroes y animaciones infantiles. Especialmente, nos acercaremos al personaje de DC Comics John Constantine, bisexual, porque es un héroe de una editorial importante, que aparece junto a Batman, Superman, etc. Nuestra metodología es cualitativa, basada en una

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amplia contribución que contiene: Michel Foucault, Sarane Alexandrian, James Green, João Trevisan, Dandara Cruz entre otros. Nuestras conclusiones implican ver cómo realmente ha habido un cambio profundo a lo largo del tiempo, desde finales del siglo XX hasta principios del siglo XXI. Si antes este tipo de pregunta no se podía abordar tanto, o no se podía abordar explícitamente, hoy hay una mayor apertura para las representaciones de caracteres LGBTI+.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *LGBTI+. Historietas. Animaciones. John Constantine. Hellblazer.*

Introduction

As it is known, there are representations of the non-heterosexual love universe since classical times. If we use Sarane Alexandrian (1993), we can see how among the ancient Greeks and Romans there were expressions of their sexualities since Autokylos (ALEXANDRIAN, 1993, p. 13), passing through the poetess Sappho of the island of Lesbos (ALEXANDRIAN, 1993, p. 279), until we get to the Satyricon (ALEXANDRIAN, 1993, p. 23; PETRONIAN, 1981), the Satires of Juvenaletc (ALEXANDRIAN, 1993, p. 28).

As cultural elements, the ways of representing love relationships were not totally free, being correlated to the elements of society/culture, involving disputes, historical issues and rules. Something that Alexandrian himself (1993, p. 19) deals with, when addressing the codes of conduct and honor in the relations between erastes and eromenos². And as if this code was not followed, there were mockery with offensive terms, vide cinedes or katapygones, terms that would be correlated to what is used today when someone is called a fag, queer etc³.

On this basis, that our cultural representations are not neutral and are linked to sociological and historical elements, this paper will analyze current pop culture. And we refer to the LGBTI+ representations existing in comics and animations, our key character will be John Constantine from DC Comics.

The present article is divided into five parts. It started with the present Introduction. It then moves on to a second follow-up, called LGBTI+ Representations and the issue of comics, in which we address how there are historical persecutions against the LGBTI+ community, with the 20th century being a time of profound changes. The third follow-up, John Constantine and bisexuality, further presents who such a character is and how his

² The first term, *erastes*, refers to an adult man who is in a relationship with an adolescent, in this case *eromenos*.

³ A question that Michel Foucault (20102010, p. 245), in turn, further elaborated on. Even if he also deals with the mockery that existed about the relationships between two made men.

bisexuality has been explored in comics. The fourth part, LGBTI+ Representation in Animations, specifies a bit of how John's representation was in Justice league dark and deals with the ways LGBTI+ issues⁴ are being addressed in animations. The article closes with the Conclusion.

Why deal with comics, animation, pop culture? Because as Slavoj Žižek (2017; 2018) shows, for example: there are forms of symbolic, ideological legitimation, ranging from the movies we watch to the music we listen to.

Cartoons, comics, etc. are part of culture. And that is what this article is about: to see if we can, through certain examples, understand the changes in how the issues of the LGBTI+ community are viewed. Has there been a change, for example, from the 1980s until now?

Our analysis is qualitative, there is at first a more general approach to the issue and we focus mainly on Dandara Cruz. Then we will analyze another academic contribution, which focused more on the character Constantine.

To understand Constantine, we also read some stories of the character, and watched the animated feature Justice League Dark and its movie, Constantine from 2005. The movie will not be discussed, since it tells us little about the sexuality of the character, being an inaccurate representation. It is also worth mentioning how the content of the article, in more than one moment, will be more descriptive and this occurs because this text has an introductory intent to the theme. Since this type of discussion about comics has not yet been very appropriate by the Brazilian academia, apparently.

Why do we rely more on the character John Constantine? Because besides being an existing product in several media, having been presented in comics, movies, TV and animation, demonstrating its relevance to consumers, a scene in the animated feature Justice League Dark: Apokolips war⁵ recently caught the public's attention. Demonstrating how the sexuality of the characters is something that still generates: curiosities, news in certain portals on the internet etc.

We refer to a scene, in an underground fight club, in which there is a dialogue between the character Raven⁶ and Constantine. All very brief. Constantine, surprised, says something

⁴ We know that there is a debate about the use of such acronyms and there is no final consensus. So we prefer LGBTI+, which refers to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transvestite, Transsexual, Transgender, and Intersex. There being the + that makes room for the addition of other minorities.

⁵ Feature released in 2020 on digital platforms and on 4K, *Blu-ray* and *DVD*.

⁶ A witch who is a member of the Teen Titans.

like: it's my ex. ⁷Then Raven, looking in the direction John is observing, thinks he is referring to Harlequin⁸. But, in fact, Constantine is talking about the character on the villain's side, King Shark⁹, who smiles and gives her a wink. Constantine then puts his hand on his neck, embarrassed, and looks away. Also being interesting as he is a good guy who has dated a villain.

LGBTI+ representations and the comics

Following James Green (2019), James Green and Renan Quinalha (2018), João Trevisan (2018), Adriana Nunan (2003), Bruno Bimbi (2017), Murilo Mota (2019) etc., we know how there was a long period of persecution against sexual minorities and to this day problems, several, endure¹⁰.

Until the 18th century, homosexuals could be described as sodomites, in a very broad category that included sexual contacts between men, men and animals, or men and women in ways that defied reproduction (NUNAN, 2003, p. 33). However even after religious ideas no longer showed themselves as the main filter, for analyzing reality, this did not mean simple acceptance of such groups. Adriana Nunan (2003, p. 30-31), following the Foucauldian current, treats how the homosexual then began to be the subject of studies, along with, for example, hysterical women.

In a framework of advances and setbacks, for if the bourgeois hygienic standard collaborated to the extinction of punishments, for example, in the colonial period in Brazil. This has taken its toll, in the creation of a subject more closely watched by the therapeutic control, which placed its references as scientific standards. The role of the psychiatrist as also that of an enhancer of control over people with sexual practices considered deviant (TREVISAN, 2018, p. 171).

⁷ We put it in English, because in Portuguese the gender designation would already indicate that he was referring to a man. After all, translated, it would look something like: *he is my ex-boyfriend*.

⁸ Batman villain created in the 1990s and originally introduced as a girlfriend of the villainous Joker.

⁹ A villain created in the 1990s that is roughly an antagonist of the superhero Aquaman. Such a villain is a mixture of shark and human, being a hybrid form.

¹⁰ In Brazil, for example, the Christians were shocked by the nefarious sin, because they faced sodomy as one of the four clamantia peccata of medieval theology. Being that such practices had already been noticed even in 1549 with Father Manoel da Nóbrega or in 1587 by Gabriel Soares de Souza (TREVISAN, 2018, p. 63).

Nunan (2003, p. 32) deals with how psychiatry progressively defined the personality of the homosexual¹¹ as a special pathological personality. And if some authors favorable to the free expression of such minorities appeared, presenting certain positive claims in the eyes of the time, the speeches were mostly loaded with prejudice (NUNAN, 2003, p. 34)¹².

The 20th century, and the beginning of the 21st century, is still a time of prejudice against these groups, but there have been certain cut-off points and advances in sexual freedom.

To demonstrate how representations of homosexuals have been changing, we believe that literature can help us. If we take **O bom crioulo** (CAMINHA, 2015) from the end of the 19th century, and works like **Córidon** by André Gide (GIDE, 1985) or **O beijo no asfalto** by Nelson Rodrigues (RODRIGUES, 2012), both from the 20th century, we see that the homosexual issue is still dramatic¹³.

From the 20th and 21st century, however, we also have books like *Call Me by Your Name*, *The Third Pillow*, *One Man Guy*, David Levithan's pop hits etc., that show changes. Even if author J.K. Rowling revealed that one of the most popular wizards in her franchise, Harry Potter, was gay, and had a good acceptance from the public, this is not irrelevant (NUMAN, 2003). We refer here to *Target Dumbledore* (GI, 2007).

Considering then that in the 20th and 21st centuries LGBTI+ sexual ways were no longer considered diseases etc., and brands started to target, more openly, the LGBTI+ public (NUMAN, 2003). Now let's look at the issue of the American superhero comics market. We explain this geographic issue because we know, for example, that in Japan there are different events happening, such as a strong manga market¹⁴ focused on the representations of homosexual love. But this will not be dealt with in this article.

If we follow the analysis of Dandara Cruz (2017), we will observe how superhero comics are related to a more masculine audience and thus represent fantasies imbued with characteristics of the heteronormativity standard. But in the last four decades, from the end of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century, the LGBTI+ universe started to occupy

¹¹ The word homosexuality itself was possibly only created in 1869 by the Hungarian journalist and lawyer Karol Maria Kertbeny (NUNAN, 2003, p. 34).

¹² "The hunt for homosexuals involved the police, judges, and medicine, which believed it could detect the homosexual by physical and moral characteristics, and attempts to cure homosexuals emerged, going through practices such as: forced abstinence, hypnosis, and, in the 20th century, hormone and surgical treatments" (NUNAN, 2003, p. 35, our translation).

¹³ It is worth remembering the very case of the author Marquis de Sade, who spent a large part of his life in prison.

¹⁴ Roughly speaking, these are Japanese comics.

more space in the public agenda, so they started to point to some discussions about inclusion and representativity. In superhero comics there started to be more visibility of such groups, something that ends up creating clashes between more conservative (PAIVA, 2019) or progressive readers.

The author deals with the importance of representation for minority groups (CRUZ, 2017, p. 16). And points to the heroes as semi-divine beings, who have become entrenched in our imagination, with elements of exaggerated masculinity and female objectification (CRUZ, 2017, p. 18). But thanks to certain changes, characters have come to counter such an image.

The author points out the imagery issue and how to reaffirm masculinity, certain classical artists worked a lot with muscular men, something related even to the body of Greco-Roman sculptures. It is, for example, the case of Tarzan's features drawn by Hal Foster, The Spirit¹⁵ or Alex Raymond's Flash Gordon (CRUZ, 2017, p. 43-44). And there is a devaluation of possible conduct, in these heroes, of what could be seen as feminine (CRUZ, 2017, p. 43).

Some characters from the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, of the 20th century, are considered as allusions to homosexuality, but the issues are ambiguous (CRUZ, 2017, p. 48). And of great relevance was the 1954 book *Seduction of the Innocents*. The author, Friderick Wertham, believed that comics could lead young people not only to delinquency, but also to sexual disorders, talking about the desire for the women in the stories and the risk of homosexuality (CRUZ, 2017, p. 56).

There was a period of anti-comics hysteria in 1954, after all parents and government were worried (CRUZ, 2017, p. 61). Faced with the threat of state control, publishers created their own means of self-regulation, the Comics Code Authority, CCA. And obedience to the code guaranteed a stamp on the cover that reassured those responsible for young people (CRUZ, 2017, p. 61). One of the rules involved the prohibition of depictions of sexual perversions and spoke of no depiction of sexual abnormalities (CRUZ, 2017, p. 62).

Even with the CCA in place, more characters with evidence of abnormal desires began to emerge, in the terms of these readings. In any case, it was still discreet and involved minor characters in the plots (CRUZ, 2017, p. 63).

With the sexual freedom that flourished in the 60s and 70s, we saw changes. Comix made sex open in the face of this conservative mold, but even though famous names like

¹⁵ Character created by Will Eisner, in 1940.

Robert Crumb addressed fetishes and orgies, homosexuality still seemed to be in the closet (CRUZ, 2017, p. 64).

With the 1980s, there was still a certain smokescreen and the character of the wizard Extraño, from DC Comics, seen as implicitly gay at the time, stands out. However his stereotypes were ill-received, both by more traditional wings and by members of the gay community themselves (CRUZ, 2017, p. 66).

As we know, "extraño" can be translated in English as "queer" and he was flamboyant, even by superhero standards. Affeminate, obsessed with his own hair, and who made references to himself as an aunt. Still, with CCA, he never came out (CRUZ, 2017, p. 67). Also causing controversy was his death from HIV, thanks to a scratch from an enemy (CRUZ, 2017).

Marvel through the characters Mystique and Sina, villains of the X-Men, also worked with implicit relationships, the two were adoptive mothers of another superheroine, Vampira (CRUZ, 2017, p. 68).

The author would also have to deal with Watchmen, seen as a point outside the curve of the 1980s, for its different tone (CRUZ, 2017, p. 87)¹⁶. Making this story part of the British Invasion, when British authors, disillusioned with the Thatcher government, brought their pessimistic views to American comics (CRUZ, 2017, p. 87)¹⁷.

In Watchmen it is made explicit that the secondary character Silhouette was a lesbian, having a tragic end. For she was killed along with her partner (CRUZ, 2017, p. 88)¹⁸.

We cannot forget how Neil Gaiman, with Sandman's **A game of you** arc (GAIMAN, 2019), and other productions by Alan Moore, vide **V for Revenge** (MOORE, 2005) would also come to further address the issue of the existence of LGBTI+ characters. However such representations were adult stamps and from less central lines of comics.

It is worth mentioning how the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, GLAAD¹⁹, gave its first award in 1992 to a comic book, issue #53 of the publication *The Flash*. In it the former villain Pied Piper²⁰ reveals himself as gay to Flash (CRUZ, 2017, p.

¹⁶ It was published in 1986.

¹⁷ Such a point is also addressed by Carlos Assis (2016).

¹⁸ "There were also, in the plot, suspicions and insinuations about the first vigilante of such a universe, the secondary character Hooded Punisher" (CRUZ, 2017, p. 88).

¹⁹ The *Gay and Lesbian Alliance against defamation* is an NGO, established in 1985.

²⁰ "Possessed powers of superhearing and who ended up developing a kind of sound hypnosis technology" (CRUZ, 2017, p. 71).

71)²¹. It is a quick moment, lasting only a few pages, and unrelated to the rest of the plot, yet it has importance in addressing Flash's apparent initial discomfort, who ultimately seems to have overcome the problem (CRUZ, 2017, p. 74).

We believe that the 1989 Arkham Asylum comic book is also worth mentioning, because we witnessed a Joker that presents elements that could indicate homosexuality or bisexuality.

In Batman's first encounter with the villain, he calls the hero sweetie and chuchuzinho, also asking if he is not tasty enough to be eaten by the hero. He then proceeds to put his hand on his rival's ass, telling him to relax. The character also mentions Robin, asking him if he shaves, hinting that Batman and Robin could be a couple. The representation of the Joker, in such a story, involves high heels and long green painted nails.

There have been changes to the original story line to tone down the villain. In the original version, in the Joker's first appearance, he would be striking a seductive pose, like a calendar model. He would be dressed in a black tights, high boots, and fake eyeliner/eyelashes. It was a Madonna inspired look, with the Open your heart music video (MORRISON, 2012) being cited in the script.

As the CCA restrictions ended, there was a new generation of artists in the 1990s, vide Todd McFarlane²² and Rob Liefeld, to address sexual issues, even if in an appealing way (CRUZ, 2017, p. 83).

In Gen 13, one of the 1995 products of the publisher Image, the character Sarah Granizo was openly bisexual (CRUZ, 2017, p. 84). But Cruz (2017, p. 85) analyzes such a character as a fetish for female bisexuality, in the sense that Granizo was almost exhibitionist and adept at nudism. And these female representations constantly boasted the position known as brokeback, which seeks, in aesthetic terms, to highlight the buttocks and breasts of the characters.

From the 2000s on, the author points to a more positive representation. Dialoguing with the existing conflicts and making chorus to the issue of tolerance (CRUZ, 2017, p. 92). In the New Avengers, for example, the couple Hulkling and Wicanno, who debuted together in 2005, gained prominence (CRUZ, 2017, p. 93). And that, little by little, were being presented as a couple to the public.

²¹ Famous *DC* hero with super-speed.

²² Creator of the character Spawn.

The first such kiss would only come to be published in 2010 (CRUZ, 2017, p. 97). It is worth recalling how such story, when published in Brazil, caused controversy with the mayor Marcelo Crivella (MACHADO; FRANCO, 2019). It is also worth recalling the famous gay kiss between two alternative versions of the characters Wolverine²³ and Hercules²⁴, in the tenth issue of X-Treme X-Men (CRUZ, 2017, p. 102).

DC, for its part, in the reformulation of its magazines, known as New 52, presented a homosexual Green Lantern²⁵. This in 2012 appeared kissing his boyfriend, in the second issue of Earth 2. And the scriptwriter of such story reported, also, how many of the negative reactions, via internet, came from Brazilian readers (CRUZ, 2017, p. 99-100).

What seems to bother most, a certain portion of readers, are the male homosexual relationships, as Cruz (2017) addresses. After all, there is a whole appeal in two very sexualized women kissing.

It is not our place to genealogize all the representations of such minorities in comics, but we see how there has been an expansion and changes in the forms of representation.

Bisexual or lesbian characters were increasing in number: Harlequina (CRUZ, 2017, p. 105), Catwoman (CRUZ, 2017, p. 108), Wonder Woman etc. (CRUZ, 2017, p. 110). Just as other male characters have been coming out of the closet, see a new version of Ice Man (CRUZ, 2017, p. 113). There was the marriage of a transgender character in the Batgirl publication (CRUZ, 2017, p. 121-122). Finally, from the silence and discrete representations, we reach the moment when such issues can be addressed quite clearly and with a depth that goes beyond the humorous or the tragic.

John Constantine and bisexuality

Constantine first appeared as a sidekick in Swamp Monster stories, back when it was written by Alan Moore (ASSIS, 2016, p. 36). But he ended up getting a solo title. And Hellblazer turned out to be an iconic publication from DC Comics' Vertigo line²⁶.

Hellblazer was a title released in 1988 and was the longest-running publication of the seal. Even after its closure, the main character, John Constantine, went on to integrate other

²³ One of *Marvel's* most famous characters.

²⁴ *Marvel's* secondary character.

²⁵ Other heroes of great importance within *DC*.

²⁶ A label geared toward more adult publications within such a publishing house.

stories of such editorial universe, appeared in adventures of Batman, Superman, Flash and so on (ASSIS, 2016, p. 27).

Constantine breaks with the stereotype of the cape magician, wealthy and/or possessing a prominent position within society. He is a working-class magician (ASSIS, 2016). Evidencing in his stories social, political, and economic problems. In issues related to the lack of freedom of expression of sexual minorities, for example (ASSIS, 2016, p. 31). The terror and horror come from a mixture of fear of the political/social conjuncture added to the supernatural elements (ASSIS, 2016, p. 37).

Constantine's idea is to be a wizard of the streets, connoisseur of the urban underworld (ASSIS, 2016, p. 40). John is presented as the lead singer and founder of a punk band. His friends/acquaintances are Ray Monde, an HIV-positive homosexual murdered by a group of Christians; Ali, a Pakistani businessman harassed by neo-Nazis; Chas, a taxi driver; Marj and Eddy, participants of a hippie movement, etc. Considering that such stories were written during Margaret Thatcher's second re-election, many of the measures of Thatcherism were already in place and speaks the author of Clause 28, which prohibited the intentional promotion of homosexuality (ASSIS, 2016, p. 41-2)²⁷.

It is remarkable how writer Jamie Delano is inspired, for example, by William Burroughs to write Constantine, so we see how important the marginal element is in such a construction (ASSIS, 2016). He is an outcast from bourgeois society and its values (ASSIS, 2016, p. 98). There was also influence of the writer Jack Kerouac (ASSIS, 2016, p. 99)²⁸.

Constantine's wanderings through the city are a portrait of abandonment. Garbage on the ground, even abandoned people, faced with the issue of begging etc. (ASSIS, 2016, p. 128). In another moment, while the narration of the magazine talks about there being more than one way that leads to hell, Thatcher's victory is announced on television, which the character is watching (ASSIS, 2016, p. 142-143). And there are similarities between the British case and the United States, under the Reagan government.

Constantine emerged and remained for a long time a disruptive, marginal character. Starting to appear in stories of bigger heroes, such as Batman and Superman, changes were to be expected. Even if in some stories, such as Batman: Curse, also from a label aimed at a more adult audience, we still see Constantine immersed in a dirty and decadent universe.

²⁷ Section 28 or Clause 28 refers to a measure in the *Local Government Act* 1988, which was not closed until June 21, 2000.

²⁸ To deal with Kerouac is to deal with the beat generation, thus Assis (2016, p. 101) associates them with the poorer classes and an aggressive aesthetic.

The character's bisexuality doesn't seem like something that was present from her origin. It is an element added with writer Brian Azzarello (SMEE, 2019). In other words, many years pass between the creation of the character and her declaration of bisexuality, as Hellblazer issue 164 came out in the year 2001.

It is in Hellblazer's Hell in Prison arc that we follow her bisexuality. We see one story, in which Constantine is imprisoned and becomes the wife of a stronger prisoner. So from an initial point, of severe sexual violence, this element ended up resurfacing in other stories. Like in Azzarello's final arc, Ashes and Dust in the City of Angels, in which Constantine seduces a wealthy sadomasochistic nightclub owner (SMEE, 2019). Or in the bound Ghosts of the Past, as we follow a scene, in which Constantine goes to a bar and upon meeting a man who attracted him, starts flirting with the stranger (ARAÚJO, 2018).

LGBTI+ representation in animations

How is Constantine represented in Justice League Dark: Apokolips War? For starters, it's worth understanding that recent DC Comics animated features are banking on more violent and adult stories. Thus came an animation of Alan Moore's classic Deadly Joke, in which a sex scene between Batman and Batgirl was even added. But also more violent and sexual animation like Assault on Arkhan. Compare these two animations with Batman: The Mask of the Phantom from the 1990s, and the difference will be clear²⁹.

In Justice League Dark Constantine becomes a member of the Justice League³⁰. He already starts the feature with a joke that he will not put on a superhero cape. But after a foiled battle against the villain Darkside³¹, the earth is conquered for two years by the alien invader.

In the images we see of such a confrontation, there is already an atmosphere of greater violence, as heroes appear torn to pieces and killed in such a confrontation. Stellar,³¹ for example, appears cut in half with guts, blood, and bones sticking out. And even in other scenes the violence continues: Raven, in turn, at a certain point of the plot was going to attempt suicide; Batgirl is devoured alive; they break Superboy's neck, killing him etc.

²⁹ Classic character, usually seen as a sidekick to Batman.

³⁰ Classic comic book superhero group, adding Superman, Batman etc.

³¹ Seen as one of DC's most powerful villains, having a level of strength comparable to Superman's. ³¹ Character member of the *Teen Titans*.

Constantine in the initial battle, in an unheroic manner, runs away from the fight, leaving the others to their fate. The first time we see Constantine again, after this defeat, he is drunk, bearded and staggering. In another moment he is smoking, something uncommon for today's heroes as well.

If heroes were once represented as demigods, heroes today can appear in less idealized representations. This is the very case of the movie *Batman v Superman* or the series *The boys*.

Upon receiving a visit from Superman and Raven, Constantine initially refuses the invitation to save the world, thinking the plan won't work. After he accepts to join the group, the scene between him and King Shark takes place. Like the revelation of the homosexuality of the former Pied Piper villain, it is not something that is directly involved with the plot of saving the world.

As in other cases, there is no scene that shows the deepest affection between these two beings. There is no kissing, hugging, or anything of the sort. So we see that even within a more adult standard, DC animations are still not investing in more explicit demonstrations of homo-affectivity.

Justice league dark is not an isolated case, there are more animations with characters from the LGBTI+ community as well. It is not our goal to make a list, in this article, of all these representations. But as in the case of comics, it is valid to make a cut between the animations with a more adult profile and those more aimed at a very young audience.

So animated series like *South Park*, already dealt with homosexual characters since its first season, with the character Big Gay Al, for example. *The Simpsons* also had a character, Waylon Smithers, who everyone already suspected of his homosexuality, but he stayed in the closet for many years, until he revealed himself after twenty-seven seasons of the cartoon. Similarly, *Family Guy* has a character, cousin of the talking dog Brian, who is openly gay (UOL, 2017).

BoJack Horseman worked with the plot of a gay character, Herb Kazzaz, who, when he is revealed to the general public, loses his job, at a major TV station, and even thinks about suicide. The show also has an asexual character, Todd, one of *BoJack's* best friends.

In the 2000s we can detect certain children's cartoon characters that presented traits that could identify them as sexual minorities, but, like the character Extraño, are not assumed. For example, the villain Ele from the cartoon *Girls Super Powerful*, because such an entity has feminine elements, such as his thin voice and clothing. Another more specific example: in an episode of the Cartoon Network cartoon *Dexter's Laboratory*, we see a parody of the Silver

Surfer³². The character is called the Silver Spoon and caused controversy for being a stereotypical gay man (UOL, 2017).

The recent news then seems to be LGBTI+ representations in animations aimed more at children and teenagers in an open way.

In *The Loud House* one of the main character's best friends has two parents (SEE, 2016). In *Avatar: The Legend of Korra*, the main character presents herself, in the last episode, as bisexual, by holding hands with another female character, Asami. The writers of the series came to confirm that this was a love relationship (UOL, 2017). For the creators of the series to have to come to confirm such involvement, already makes it explicit to us that it was something discrete and dubious. Something similar to the representation of homosexuality of Target Dumbledore in the movie *Fantastic Beasts 2*.

In the *Steven Universe* cartoon two female characters, Ruby and Sapphire, have a relationship (UOL, 2017). In which it is worth mentioning two cases that dealt with this more clearly: *The hour of adventure* and *Star vs the forces of evil*.

Disney's *Star vs the Forces of Evil* was designed, in a pioneering way, to feature gay kisses between characters (G1, 2017). In a scene that shows some couples kissing, there is clearly a couple of two men. In the previous moment, less centrally in the image, there was also a couple of two women³³.

A similar thing happens at the end of *Time for Adventure*. The characters Marceline and Princess Jujube kiss, after overcoming a threat together. There is a difference: in *The Adventure Hour* they are a very important couple within the plot, both beloved by the audience.

Final considerations

This article was about LGBTI+ representations in cartoons and comics, with the main focus on the character John Constantine, who recently drew some public and media attention by revealing an ex-boyfriend in an animation called *Justice league dark: Apokolips war*.

As we saw in the 80's, in the 20th century, there were already certain discussions about the sexuality of the character Extraño and the villain Mystique, from the *X-Men*, but the

³² Classic *Marvel* villain, usually appearing in the *Fantastic Four* stories.

³³ And at the end of the series one of the main characters in the animation, Jackie, showed up with a possible girlfriend.

representation was still veiled. Apart from more adult comics, such as Watchmen, Sandman, V for Revenge etc. It was in the 90s that more freedom emerged in comics.

From the 2000s on, representation has increased. Here you can think of a number of cases: a gay couple in New Avengers, an Ice Man who came out of the closet, a gay kiss from Wolverine etc. As far as Constantine is concerned, his presentation as bisexual also occurred in the early 2000s.

About his sexuality presented in the animation Justice League Dark: Apokolips war, as we have seen, is something quick and discreet. There are no scenes of great affection between the character Constantine and King Shark.

Regarding animations, they seem, in the American case, to have taken longer to assimilate the issue of LGBTI+ representation. Even so, there have been gay characters in adult animations, such as South Park or Family Guy.

In the 10's, of the 21st century, there are open representations then in the drawings. Examples are: The Loud House, Avatar, The Adventure Hour, Star vs the Forces of Evil etc. And this last example featured a controversial gay kiss in one of its episodes. Also, if The Adventure Hour left to reveal at the end of the series the lesbian relationship of its characters, this may involve the fact that if there was some attempt to boycott the show or controversy, the series would have already ended, so it would not threaten its audience so much, for example.

The representation of the LGBTI+ community is variable over time, it involves, among other things, how open or not society is to sexual minorities.

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