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Hello, everyone. You are in querying the problem, destabilizing normative tropes.

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In Jonathan Stroud's Lockwood and Company. I'm Philip Fitzsimmons, the session moderator and a couple of things I need to say.

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Before we get started I will put the a link to the guidelines behavior guidelines in the chat box in a minute remember you can use the chat box to ask questions And the other thing to remind you all.

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Is that by participating in the Q&A and discussion that you are consenting to be recorded and those recordings will go on the.

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Sock digital repository. So as far as introducing our speaker. William Thompson is an associate professor at Mc.

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University in Edmonton, Canada, where he teaches a range of courses in Edmonton, Canada, where he teaches a range of courses in children's and young adult literature.

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And science fiction. Sorry about mangling your university name. What is it?

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Okay, thank you. Please start.

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Yeah, okay, No problem, Alright, so just gonna share my screen. I did have a PowerPoint.

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Okay, I think that should be it.

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There, now I'm seeing it.

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Alright, excellent.

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Okay.

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Alright, well thank you for coming everyone and thank you to Philip for moderating and thank you to the Mythopaic Society for hosting these these amazing online events and I'm just very happy to be and pleased to be a part of it.

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So today I want to talk about Lockwood and Company, which is a young adults series by Jonathan Stroud.

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And if you don't know the series, there are 5 books in the series, the screaming staircase.

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What's the order of the streaming staircase? The whispering skull, the hollow boy.

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The creeping shadow and the empty graves. So I'm going to be talking about my presentation is going to be kind of roaming over the whole series.

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It was a little difficult to try and focus everything on one book, but so I'm gonna be a bit all over the place.

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So if you haven't read this series. Hopefully I won't spoil it for you, but you may have some people may have seen the Netflix.

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Adaptation that came out in 2023 which I was very surprised when it came out because I hadn't really been paying attention to what was up and coming on Netflix and Netflix and I was very impressed by the job they did and unfortunately it was cancelled after one season, which is really too bad.

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So, so what I want to talk about is I'm going to apply a queer reading to the series.

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And while the while the series itself doesn't really support a, you know, very gendered and specific reading of the of the series I've really I think that looking at the series in the way.

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The ghost problem kind of destabilizes everything I think is a very helpful reading so So in the empty grave, which is the last book in the series, Hollim and Row and Lucy Carlyle, who is the narrator, of the 5 books are trapped in the kitchen at 24 Portland Road which is the home of Lockwood and Company.

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We have escaped the meeting. Is it over?

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There's a group of thugs who are, about to break into the, into the house.

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And they're very nervously exchanging confidences and Holly Monroe. And Lucy who haven't who've had their difficulties getting along over the over the series since Holly joined the company in book 3.

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Holly makes a comment that Lockwood isn't really her type. And she kind of gives Lucy a sidelong glance and says you must realize that other possible there are other possibilities.

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And so it's really this. You know, it's a hint. At a, at a, at a gay relationship within the, within the text, but they don't ever really follow up on it.

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And it's not really enough to form the basis. Of a gender and general identification reading of the of the whole series, but I think examining the the series in terms of a queer reading helps to really show the the way in which the ghost problem destabilizes everything within this world that Jonathan Stroud has created.

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Yeah, so the series essentially gets cleared by its destabilization. Abnormative societal, familial, institutional, and other governmental controls.

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So I'm just going to change a slide. I had to, I had to actually write in change slide in my notes so I remember to do this.

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So this should be the slide if you can read that for us, follow up.

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Yes, disrupting normativity. Calling Palmer, querying contemporary Gothic narrative, 1972.

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1,012. According to Palmer, spectral we

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Serves multiple functions in literature, especially important queer gothic, are the invisibility of lesbian and male gay sexualities in hetero normative.

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Give society and the haunting of the present by the repressed and fresh. Desires of queer people who lived in earlier periods.

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The Gothic in children's literature, *Haunting the Borders*, edited by Anna Jackson, Karen Coates, and Roderick McGillis.

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It is a genre, the Gothic. That presents us with. Structural consistencies that accommodate historical change.

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Innovations and appropriations that suit it to to new anxieties and an ethics that boldly challenges our cherished beliefs about childhood.

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Great, thank you. I appreciate that. So they, so taking a, using a career reading of a text is, it's not something that's really in my field, not something I've done before.

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I was very glad to see that the that the conference had this theme and it was so it was certainly a challenge for me to approach a text in this way.

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And, One of the things that I have done in the past is certainly looked at a lot of young adults.

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And children's literature in relation to the Gothic. So when I was trying to figure out how to actually approach the books.

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Part of the problem is that there just isn't really anything in terms of scholarship on the text.

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So I was looking to find the something that was dealing with spectrality. In the way Palmer's book does and tying that to the children's literature in the Gothic.

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Okay, so here's destabilizing the social the governmental and the institutional.

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So the problem, according to the, according to the series, is an epidemic of ghosts that has haunted Britain for 50 years.

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Lucy early on in the first book explains that the problem began 50 years ago and it was up to 2 young researchers Tom Rottweil and Melissa Fitz who very inventively figure out how to contain sources or in other words the the relics left behind by human remains which they would then contain and and and subsequently contain and control the ghosts.

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And so this very quickly, even though, Marissa fits and Tom wrote well, you know, found a way to try and contain ghosts the epidemic spreads very quickly.

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She says an atmosphere of panic. Developed there were riots and demonstrations.

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And Fitz and Rod, well. Launched psychic agencies to cope with the demand. So these psychic agencies Fitz in Rockwell, they're sort of the main ones in London.

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But psychic agencies, there aren't, probably a couple of other dozen. Psychic agencies in London doing a thriving business and there are psychic agencies all over the country as well.

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Dealing with specters wherever they appear. And the Department of Psychic Research and Control is an arm of Scotland Yard and it's headed by Inspector Montague.

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And it's headed by Inspector Montague Barnes and he's headed by Inspector Montague Barnes and he's a character who actually appears.

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Pretty often throughout the books. It usually appears at points of crisis or points when he's trying to warn Lockwood and Co off.

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One of the things That's unique to Lockwood and Co is that they don't have any adult supervisors.

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In this world, it's only children who can actually see the ghosts. And so children are the ones who are hired as agents and as nightwatch kids to perform all kinds of duties like just keeping watch and keeping guard at night while the agents are actually set out to control the ghosts.

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So the agencies employ adults as supervisors who were in charge of the teams of agents who go around hunting ghosts but Lockwood and Co.

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Do not have any adult supervisors. The head of Lockwood and company is Antony Lockwood who is a little older than Lucy at the beginning of the series.

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Lucy's I think about 15 Lockwood is maybe 16 or 17 and the other person who is part of the company is George Cubbins, he's the researcher.

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And Holly Monroe is the assistant who joins the company in book 3.

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So the secondary world of the of the books is, is interesting in a lot of ways. It's, you know, it's a secondary world, certainly, you know, maybe not quite in the way that's token and vision secondary worlds, but I still refer to it as a secondary world, primarily a Gothic world, full of haunting specters.

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Dangerous places forbidden rooms and all and and and into these dangers the the children are sent.

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So early in, early in the series in the screaming staircase, I believe, it's, it's Lucy and Lockwood who are actually going to a case and they're on a bus later on the end they actually take nightcs.

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But earlier on early on they're on a bus and I mean it's you know it says something about the fact that these children have to get around and of course they can't drive so they're having to take the bus.

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So we sat on the eastbound box that evening, she says. It was the final route on that service that evening before curfew.

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The seats were empty of adults but crowded with children. Some were still half asleep, some stared dully.

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Through the windows their watch sticks 6 feet long and tipped with iron rattled. In the racks at the front of beside the door.

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So the, so the watch kids are the ones who carry these long sticks tipped with iron because iron, pours and silver are one of the things that repel ghosts.

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And the all of the agents they carry rapiers and that's sort of the sign of an agent is the rapier.

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Lucy says most kids with strong psychic abilities become agents, but if you're not good enough for that.

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You swallow your pride. And join the Night Watch. Those kids are talented enough. And we never underestimate them.

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Some of the adults do treat them badly, but you know, agents like Lucy don't ever underestimate these kids.

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There's the way in which these kids are sent off to work that they're, you know, the way in which they're sort of pressed.

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Into service into the various agencies. It's very blakin's very nineteenth century.

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One of the comments that Lucy makes in the third book just regarding the position that agents have within this society.

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Agents in some ways they're the ones who help to make things as normal as they can be but they're also the ones who transgress.

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They're the ones who cross boundaries. Lucy says you were as an agent, you were loathed and admired in equal measure.

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After dark you represented all good things. They like to see you then.

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Sorry. And daylight you were an unwelcome intrusion. Into everyday life, a symbol.

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Of the very chaos you kept at bay.

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Okay.

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Should be the one who talks to ghost our next slide

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So the one who talks to Ghost is Lucy Carlyle. Again, the narrator of the 5 books.

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Haunted places and spaces abound throughout the series. One of the major, usually and usually in the in the books there's a major haunting that.

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Comes near the end of the book and at the end of the streaming, screaming staircase, it's Coon Carey Hall.

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And, you know, it's one of these major major hauntings. It's a ghost cluster and the children are sent there.

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Because they have some information that's going to put in jeopardy one of the major industrialists in the country.

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And so he's actually trying to entrop them. But but there and this constitutes kind of the end of the long plot in book one.

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And what's interesting about, Lu, Lucy's entrance into Koom Kerry Hall is she actually hesitates on the doorstep and this she says she tells us is something that agents should never do should never hesitate on a doorstep.

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And it sort of feeds into all these other motifs and metaphors around thresholds and boundaries and all throughout all throughout the series.

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Lucy, Carlyle, the area of the series, lives her life in the limited space.

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Between life and death. She is an operative, an agent, a ghost hunter. Most of all a listener she is only one of 2 people in the history of the problem to be ever to be able to talk.

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To spirits. Spirits are divided into Oh, Lord, now I'm forgetting the title class one class 2 class 3.

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Anyway, the, the. Type one ghost that's what it is type one ghosts are inoffensive spirits that don't really do very much.

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Type 2 ghosts are much more aggressive kinds of spirits who very often will injure or kill people and type 3 ghosts which are very rare are the ones that can actually talk to people on the other side.

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As a team girl as a team protagonist Lucy under cats many of the conventions of femininity and of many of the team romances that are narrated by by girls.

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She also undermines conventional ways of dealings with ghosts because one of Lucy's talents is talking to spirits and of course she always thinks about opening herself up to talk to spirits as another way of dealing with them.

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The talking skull that appears in all of the books actually appears right at the beginning of, the first book and but doesn't actually talk to Lucy until the end of the first book.

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And this talking skull becomes Lucy's almost like a familiar to Lucy. She actually Carries them around to a lot of her jobs eventually in her rucksack.

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First time the skull talks to her

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He describes the fluid nature of the boundary between life and death. Deaths coming to you all.

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Why? Because everything is upside down. Life's in death and deaths in life. And it doesn't matter what you try to do, Lucy, you'll never be able to stem the tide.

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So it's very potential, portentous at the at the beginning.

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Portentous sorry That's, that's sort of our first interaction with the skull. Not all like that.

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Eventually he just becomes This very irritating presence in her life and he's often criticizing her commenting on what she's wearing.

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Commenting on the behaviour of Lockwood and George and other people that they encounter.

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At 1 point when Lucy is going out with the lock with 2 a case, the skull looks at her.

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And says to her that what she's wearing looks like a cross between a, a demented sailor and a bag lady who's gonna think you're pretty?

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Who's going to notice you if you look like that?

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And Lucy, of course, he's always, he's always able to push her buttons and she sort of replies.

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Who says I want to look pretty for for anyone? And this is, you know, it's a simple little exchange, but it really does help to characterize Lucy as a character.

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She tries not to be concerned with her look. She thinks of herself as an agent first. More than anything else.

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And she identifies herself as a girl on a couple of occasions, but really she sees yourself as an agent doing dangerous work.

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There's an interesting I was working on this article the other week. It's actually an article by Sarah Kay Day and she talks about the sexual awakening for young girls in dystopian fiction, which I think kind of applies to Lucy in some ways.

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She does sort of feel threatened by Holly's femininity when Holly shows up. Later in the series and it does cause her to sort of question her own position within the company.

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What's, what, Day says. That adolescent women have often found themselves particularly vulnerable to cultural claims.

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And expectations around their bodies. To front and degrees, external efforts of control. Have resulted in young women experiencing a disconnect between their own bodies.

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And the expectations projected onto them. Lucy does experience this a little, but not to the degree that a lot of other characters in teen fiction do.

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Okay.

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So this is Lucy's contact and emotional connection. And this is really about Lucy and Ghosts and how she how she really firmly believes that finding a connection with spirits is going to allow her a different way of dealing with them.

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She thinks that these spirits come back or return to the world because they're tormented, they're angry, and if she can find out what it is they're trying to tell her that she feels like she can solve the problem more easily than just simply containing the the the source of the spirit.

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One of the things that and I'm just this is kind of an extension of. Sarah Day's comment and it comes from Katherine our broad in her discussion of the Hunger Games and she talks about the the way in which Catness kind of serves as a model.

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A model heroin for young girls.

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But she also suggests that Cadus's character Also in parts a very different message. The importance of growing up to find satisfaction in heterosexual love.

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And family and and heterosexual love in the nuclear nuclear family and again this is not really Lucy's interest it doesn't seem to be her interest at any point during the series at all.

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And so this is at least in, you know, an important way in which Lucy helps to undercut the kind of conventions that you can find in all kinds of teen fiction and particularly dystopian fiction because so much of it is actually told from the first person of these teenage girl characters.

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Just skipping ahead here.

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Yes, okay, so Lucy wants to find contact with go she believes that her ability to communicate with Ghost is going to give her a different kind of edge and an ability to deal with ghosts in a different way.



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Dealing with the ghost of an old man and an apartment of a family Lou Lucy very deliberately doesn't set up any protections.

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So that, there's a much more clear connection between her and the ghost of the old man.

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That's still living in the apartment.

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She talks about the family being close by and in theory she was endangering them. Deeptract roles especially for bid.

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Contact without adequate protection. According to them, I was committing a crime. So, so in this way, lose, Lucy herself is kind of a deviant even when it comes to agents because she's trying to deal with them in a way that no one else does.

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The third book in the Hall of Boy when the agency is dealing with a spirit in the winter garden home.

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Lucy again tries to do the same thing. She tries to make contact with the ghost. And she, you know, she has her ideas about what it means to contact ghosts.

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She says, my theory was right. You could make contact. If only you were prepared. To open yourself up.

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And then in response to Lockwood's insistent that she not talk to spirits, Lucy, you know, complains this is Lockwood.

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This is always his approach to dealing with ghosts. Eradicate the ghost. Don't engage with them.

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Destroy it and Lucy in the winter garden home. Chooses to try and engage with the ghost of Robert Cook.

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She actually makes a mistake. And thinking that, the ghost of Robert Cook is actually a benign spirit.

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But turns out this spirit wants to kill her and she just barely escapes with her life and she's actually rescued by Holly.

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The new assistant for Lockwood and Co. So another way in which Lucy's desire for contact manifests in the book is her desire for emotional contact or connection with Lockwood.

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And again, they, you know, her interest in Lockwood is never romantic. It's always about being partners in in in the agency it's always about working together working in the field working in tandem with one another.

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But none of us, there's a very interesting scene. Again, in the same book in the Hall of Boy, when The 3 of them are sitting in the parlor and Lucy is watching Lockwood through half opened eyes.

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I looked at his long legs. Loosely crossed over the side of the chair his bare feet The slim contours of his body.

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His face was mostly hidden. You could see the line of his jaw, his expressive lips.

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Relaxed and slightly parted and his hair fell over his Yeah, still softly over the white sleeve.

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And it's an interesting description because I mean here's Lucy you know sort of assuming the position of the gazer.

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And her description though is in some way that the kind of detail that you offers here about Lockwood, you know, you would think it would you think she was describing a girl rather than a young man just in terms of the details that she chooses to focus on.

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So it's an interesting characteristic of Lucy's that she doesn't seem to privilege the feminine but neither.

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Does she necessarily privilege the masculine? Lucy is frustrated, however, in her efforts to make a permanent long-lasting connection with Lockwood, partly because of her disastrous attempt to connect with the ghost at at the Winter Garden home.

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Now I said that this whole world in the, of Lockwood and Coates full of all kinds of forbidden Spaces and places including the institute that the that the agency encounters in book 4 places like the Black Library and Fitz House, which is the other major agency in London, but also right in side Portland row.

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There's a room which is a forbidden room. And, Lucy. Knows at this point by the third book.

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That it's actually the room of Lockwood's elder sister Jessica who was actually killed in the room by a ghost and it all sort of forms part of the the secret pass that Lockwood tries to keep from everyone.

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And so Lucy decides that she's going to enter the room with without any permission.

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And she's, she's thinking to herself, she's kind of justifying.

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You know, making this particular transgression right in the home.

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Sorry, I lost my place here. Yeah, what I, what I did down is Lockwood's ability to maintain a connection.

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In any meaningful way. When the excitement was over, he just snapped back into his cool remove.

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Keeping me at a distance. What did I deserve? Information at the very least. And if he wouldn't share it with me, I was going to take it for myself.

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So she enters the room. And in you know while she's in there Lockwood and George actually come up the stairs and she has to just to basically stay still and She falls over, grabbing onto the bed post and.

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Because of her ability to connect with the past and these kinds of traumatic events. She's looped psychically into the past and she gets a replay of Lockwood coming into the room and finding his sister dead.

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And then look what as a child destroying the ghost.

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So the interesting thing about Lucy entering this room is that entering the room is an act of penetration.

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And yet, you know, contrast with the way in which Lucy talks about dealing with ghosts, which is this she talks about in terms of opening herself up to to the ghost in order to speak to them.

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Alright, I've got another comment here from Palmer just in terms of secrecy. And.

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Yep, sorry.

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And just with reference to the closet of lot closeted lives lesbian and gay. People often feel forced to lead and she and so I thought it was an interesting reference to secrets because Lockwood is so full of secrets and he just really never wants to open up.

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He finally does in the series, but it takes him quite a long time. Alright.

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Okay, I'm gonna try and speed. I'm gonna skip a bit and speed ahead.

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So Lucy, femininity and power. So this is it's very interesting when Lucy encounters Holly in book 3.

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She's threatened by Holly's femininity and the 2 of them have a have a blazing round at the end of book 3 in the 8 meers brothers department store where they're actually investigating a haunting.

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And because of the because of the intention nature of their argument they actually raise a poltergeist. And the poltergeist, of course, tries to kill them and nearly and destroys the department store and nearly kills all of the all of the company who were searching through at the department store for the the source of the haunting.

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Later on, Lucy feels terribly remorseful.

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Oh, there we go. Lucy says I was the focus. So she feels like she was the focus of the poltergeist's attention and she's the reason why the thing gains so much power.

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When we were upstairs, I, with Holly. We stirred the poltergeist up.

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I'm really sorry Locke when it's all my fault. I couldn't control myself.

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I'm a liability. I could have killed us all. So Lucy thinks of herself as a liability and it's this lack of emotional control and lack of control over her own talent that actually makes her leave.

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Lockwood and Company at the end of book 3. So she's on her own for most of book 4 but eventually does rejoin the company at the end of that book.

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So one of the things in in the in the book is that we've got these these 2 major ghost agencies that are responsible for looking after the problem in London and elsewhere.

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And Steve Rockwell is the hypermask analyzed. Director and owner of Rockwell's and Marissa, sorry, Penelope fits is the highly feminized director of the FITZ agency and at the end of the fourth book the Lockwood and Co end up going to the Rockwell Institute and quelling Rottwell's attempt to build a spirit gate so that they

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can cross over from the world of the world of living into the world of the dead. And conduct experiments.

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And so Lucy and Lockwood and George and Holly all bring this to an end and in the process Steve Rotwell is killed and Penelope fits takes over.

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Control of all of the of both Rockwell's and her own agency and then subsequently tires to take over a lot of the smaller agencies in London.

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And so Marissa slash Penelope Fifth becomes the focus for control over both the agencies and over Penelope's own desire to control the crossing.

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Between life and death.

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Just skipping ahead here.

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So the the interesting thing with Marissa slash Penelope is that she and Lucy share some very share share similarities in that they're both they both have the ability to talk to go and they each have their own accompanying spirit.

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Penelope has her Ezekiel that has been with her for all of her life and Lucy has the skull.

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But for Penelope, what she's done is she's managed to by using the spirit gate that she's built in the basement of its house to cross into onto the other side and there she she and some others actually work to investigate ghosts on the other side and collect goes plasm.

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And she actually brings this plasm, which is. What the ghosts are essentially made of when they when they manifest in the.

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In the secondary world and Lucy's in the living world. And she actually brings this stuff back over to over to Fitz house and the idea is if she imbibes it it actually extends her mortality.

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So this is what Lucy and the others actually believe that Penelope is doing and one of the ways in which she's working to kind of violate this boundary between life and death.

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So in the final book there's confrontation between Lucy and Marissa slash Penelope and I say Marissa slash Penelope because what Lucy discovers in the final confrontation in her apartments in Melissa slash



Penelope's apartments is that Marissa who was the original, the original Marissa who learned how to control spirits actually on her deathbed managed

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to her spirit managed to cross over into another body, which is given her this ability, you know, to essentially become a mortal.

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But she's also she also has the ability with the plasm to keep the body she's in young and beautiful of course.

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My spirit. Oh, sorry. My spirit raged for life. So she's talking about her.

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She's talking about being on her deathbed and she said my spirit raged for life. Instead of dying.

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Jumped across to a living vessel my dear granddaughter. Penelope who was still a girl.

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I had to wait for a few years till the body grew and in that time I was forced to let my own daughter Margaret run my company, but now Penelope is in full control or Marissa is in full control.

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And she actually invites Lucy to join her. And and become essentially a mortar, immortal like yourself.

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But of course Lucy is decides that she's going to challenge her and in the final scene blockwood of course shows up and Lcy still has the skull with her.

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And in an act that's kind of compensates for or suggests the You know, the way in which he's learned to trust over the last couple of books.

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She breaks the she breaks the jar in which the skull is housed and it's the skull Manifesting is a spirit, the spirit of a young man who actually saves.

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Lockwood and Lucy and destroys Marissa Penelope at the very end. So at the at the end, you know, there's kind of a rebalancing of the masculine and the feminine.

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Inspector Barnes who's essentially become less and less effectual as the series has gone on retakes control now that the the leaders of these 2 major companies are dead.

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And things kind of return to a much more. more of a normative state. The problem still seems to exist, but Lucy in her efforts to challenge Penelope and what she's doing in London has managed to redress some of the, you know, some of these major transgressions that these people are committing.

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And even in Portland row, the company together. Take apart Jessica's room. Repaper the walls, do some painting.

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And try to turn the room into a guest bedroom so it can actually be part of the house. So the end of the series kind of has an ambiguous sort of ending.

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I mean, it's not clear that The problem is necessarily over. So the problem still seems to be affecting life in Britain the agents are still active but there's a much more equitable kind of understanding between barns.

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And especially Lockwood and Company by the end of the series. And it's also left pretty ambiguous.

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It's what is actually going to occur between Lockwood and Lucy by the end of the series as well.

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So, but nonetheless, I think taking a queer reading of the series as a whole just kind of allows, you know, certainly allow me to see the, you know, the kinds of transgressions that transgressive nature of the problem and how it turns everything upside down and how characters like Lucy and the others you know try and Try and deal with.

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You know, the results of the problem. So thank you.

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And thank you. So.

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Sorry I was rushing a bit at the end.

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Does anyone have any questions they would like to ask? Or make to make comments.

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So, I guess my question would be, and I think you might have been. Who was the scholar originally?

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Really?

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Oh, you know, that's a good question. You never actually find out. Mean at 1 point she yeah you never do I mean he seems to be in book 2 of the series one of the ghosts that they're dealing with is a ghost named Bicker staff and He's really the first one who invents something that allows people to see across to the other side.

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He's a, what is he, a surgeon and a bit of a madman in the late eighteenth century.

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And he's got this, he's got this servant and The skull apparently is his servant.

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You never find out his name. There's a reference to him. In in a couple of the documents that George finds.

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But yeah, he never tells Lucy his name. And I mean, you know, 1 point she actually asks him.

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And he said, you know, doesn't matter anymore. Yeah. Yeah, so.

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Doesn't matter anymore. Okay. Would you say that the skull functions similarly to the skull in the Dresden files.

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Oh, you know, I don't know the dress and files. I, so I can't, I'm sorry, I can't answer that question.

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What's the, what's the function of that's call? Can you tell me?

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Finish. Oh yeah.

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Oh, the, that's called knows a lot of magic. And so Dresden relies on it for research.

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Oh really? Okay. Yeah, yeah. Well, kind of.

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Yeah, yeah.

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I mean, this skull, as I said, Lucy hails them around in a rucksack and she takes him to various cases.

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She'll you know she will ask him she will ask him you know what do you sense what do you think is going on So she asked him for advice all the time, but of course he's this skill is trapped inside the silver jar.

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Can't escape and he. He's badgering Lucy, you know, various times.

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Over the course of the series to let him out and she finally does at the very end. And he's, and the skull is actually surprised that she does.

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She actually gives him his freedom. And, you know, suddenly he has the ability to act on his own and then he chooses to.

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You know be your friend and help her out. Yeah.

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Oh boy. Okay, Jonathan has a question.

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Oh yes.

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I'm seeing a lot of comments in the chat about dates when different series were published. And the Lockwood books are a relatively recent series.

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That's right.

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Yeah.

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The first one was published, I guess, 11 years now. How do you think the portrayal specifically in regards to Female protagonists.

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In children's fantasy. How do you think the portrayal of femininity versus masculinity has changed.

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Well, you know, if you read the books of, what's, what's, what is her name?

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Is it Susan Moss? You wouldn't think they've changed at all. I think what Jonathan Stroud does is he, trying to do something different with the character of Lucy.

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But Jonathan Stroud has particular kinds of representations of women and girls in his books. There are very often.

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Very accomplished female villains in his books. And there are very often strong female characters in his books and his latest series, Scarlett and Brown.

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The main character is an outlaw and a gunslinger. In sort of a sort of a very strange dystopian future in Britain.

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And the main villain who is a I think she's a doctor. She's a I think she's a medical doctor and a psychiatrist and she's the main villain of the of the series.

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So I think Jonathan Stroud definitely tries to change up the way in which he's representing. Girl characters and girl heroes, but I think The if we go back to.

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If we go back to, Twilight, I remember being at a children's literature conference and I didn't know anything about Twilight at the time and they had a couple of panels on Twilight and I thought I'm just gonna go to this panel on Twilight and see what the fuss is about.

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And the room was packed. Hey, there must have been 60 people in this classroom. And, and I think, and I'm pretty sure it was mostly women and, They were all very keen to talk about the ways in which female, female protagonist and female sexuality are represented in these books.

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And, you know, with Twilight, I mean, people talked about, you know, the, the character of Bella as a kind of Mary Sue.

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And, you know, she didn't really have much agency of her own and there was always a, you know, a romantic triangle of some kind.

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And that's that's essentially what Katherine Broad talks about. She talks about the the centrality of the courtship narrative you know as being so central to even books like the Hunger Games in which you know we're supposed to have this badass female hero protagonist who's you know, who's kind of leading the series, which, I never, I never agreed.

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I never agreed with that about countless anyway. She's just kind of a mess. Through most of the series.

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But still, the courtship narrative is still a, you know, very much at the heart of that series.

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And certainly here it's not. So. I'm not sure if that really answers your question.



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I mean, I, like I said, I think it change it has changed to some degree. I wish I had other examples, but I mean the the way in which the way in which a lot of children and young adult fiction represents female characters, especially in young at all, you know, the, you know, this love triangle between usually the main female protagonist and 2 other boys.

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I mean that's that's still pretty standard I think. I think it still happens.

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Yeah, it's a good question.

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I was wondering that myself as to how long that change, how far back it goes.

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Yeah, I mean, I'm sure it goes back prior to Twilight, but I think when You know, when Twilight was published, that triangle, I read a bunch of dystopian texts around that time.

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It was so persistent. I was shocked. No, and if it's not, if it's not exactly that triangle, it's, it was usually some kind of variation on that triangle.

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So, you know, in some ways, you know the female hero and the sort of agency and independence of the female hero but at the same time it it clearly takes, speaks to teens reading the books.

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There's no doubt about that.

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Right, right.

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I remember at the time when Twilight was popular there were some of the older YA novels that were getting new editions published and started being marketed as about love triangles even when the triangle were a small portion of the book.

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Hmm. Yeah, yeah. And I mean, even, and even in something like Harry Potter, I mean, we do have a triangle, right?

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It's not a love triangle, but it's still a triangle. And that persists for several books before there's really any kind of romantic.

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Involvement or attachments of any of those 3 main characters.

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So as far as books that have been. Published lately. Do you have anything to say about?

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David R. Slayton's. Adam binder series or his latest epic book dark dark moon shallow sea

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Okay.

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I'm afraid I can. I'm sorry. I have not read those. Do you, are you seeing, are you seeing, you know, something, something similar happening or something different?

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What was, what was his name?

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What would interest me? David R. Slayton, SLAY TON, David R.

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Okay, well definitely check them out.

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Slaton. He is actually in Oakland, in Oklahoma. And his first 3 books are the Animinder series are, urban fantasy.

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Okay, yeah. Nice.

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About, you know, a, it's white trash warlock. Trailer heart trickster and deadbeat druid.

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Okay.

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Yeah.

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And, he is gay as well as the author. And you do have a love triangle with a police officer in there.

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Oh, interesting.

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And I was wondering if you thought his books were more adult. Or young adult because I think he sees himself as adult.

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But, I, his works kind of read to me like.

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Right, yes, yes, and you know, I've encountered a number of different series like that that sort of across that line between Young adult and adults.

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I mean, there is a category called new adult. Which, you know, sort of makes room for you know for text that are dealing with you know really you know young adults that are still you know there's still facing certain challenges in terms of understanding their own their own place in the world, their own sexuality.

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But they're, you know, they're probably too much to be, you know, put on the young adult shelf.

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Grossman's, Love Grossman series, the Magicians is a bit like that.

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And the main character. Jeez, it's been a while since I've read Coulter.

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Somebody must know his last name. I think by the third book he's 30 years old.

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So he starts off when he's 18. So arguably, arguably, you know, it's young adult or new adult, but He's much older by the end of that series.

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And I'm thinking of other texts, you know, that, you know, where they, the main focus of the main protagonist is maybe young adult.

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But then the, you know, the, subject matter sort of. Places it by publishers and in you know in in say the adult category rather than the young adult so but there are a lot of books that that sit on the line so

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And they're, you know, it's an interesting conversation to have for sure.

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And then the, the last. The last book, Dark Moon Shallow C is, an epic thing and you do actually have a triangle there.

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Okay, yeah.

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Yeah, yeah. In fact, I recommend them all, but, I'm really fond of the latest, the epic would.

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Yeah.

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Nice, nice.

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Anybody else have any? We've got about 3 min. Anybody else have anything to say or any questions?

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I don't want to be a hog.

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How many people have actually read this? Oh, sorry. Go ahead.

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Oh yes, oh,

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I. I was gonna say IDs, I, I've had the Barton Mays trilogy on my TVR for ages and so I I'm just kind of like I just need to get my get my get my button gear and start reading some more of these because yeah this sounds like a sounds like a great time.

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Yes, it is. And if you're a Bartamans fan, then, you know, think of the, think of the skull in relation to You know, think of.

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Lucy in some way, she's like Kitty Jones. You know, she's, she's not quite a Kitty Jones character.

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She's Lucy is you know ostensibly much more secure and sort of who she is.

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And what she does. But, but yeah, yeah. Those are fabulous books. My daughter in loves those books too.

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We talk about them. Lots and lots. Yeah.

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Hmm, yeah.

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We got our son, the Bartle Mayus, books when they first came out to try and encourage him to read and the the scene that you're talking about in the Lockwood book where they have the the fight in the store reminds me a lot of a similar scene in the Bartle.

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Yeah, yeah, and he does some interesting things some similar things in the Bartamas books. I mean, there's this whole question of boundaries.

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And and what magicians have to do in order to secure Demons? Or spirits as they bring them into this world.

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And of course it's Kitty Jones who makes the journey across. Across the major boundary between the worlds, you know, to the, to the other place.

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So he's doing some similar things in that book as well, although in in Bartimaeus, I mean there are oh you know there's a whole discussion there about colonization and empire and and oppression and it gets very political by the end of that series.

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That's something that Lockwood and Co is not. It's not, it's not political in the same way as part of Mays, that's for sure.

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Do you recommend one series over the other?

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Very cute.

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No, I think everybody should read them. Including Scarlett and Brown. I think we're 2 books in.

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Okay.

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I Jonathan Stroud is a great, he's a, he's a fabulous writer.

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I think he, you know, he doesn't seem to have garnered the kind of popularity that a lot of other young adult authors have.

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But he really is a fine writer and in spite of some of the oddness of his portrayals of his characters, particularly as girl characters, you know, these are great reads and they're very finely written, so highly recommended.

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All right, we're at 2 50, so I'm sorry to say that we do need to stop in order to give a few minutes for the next session.



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So thank you, William. It was wonderful paper. So thank you very much.

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Thank you and thank you everybody for listening. As I sped up more and more.

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And by the way, you had 19 people and we're all clapping.

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Oh, excellent. Thank you very much. Yeah, thank you. Yeah.

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Yeah, thank you so much. Thank you so much for a great paper.

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Oh, well, you guys are great audience. There's absolutely no doubt about that. Thank you for listening.

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Oh, thanks.