

Queering SF Comics

Queering SF Comics:
Readings

by
Ritch Calvin



Seattle, WA

Aqueduct Press
PO Box 95787
Seattle, Washington 98145-2787
www.aqueductpress.com

Copyright © 2024 Ritch Calvin
All rights reserved

Library of Congress Control Number: 2024940176

ISBN: 978-1-61976-264-0
First Edition, First Printing, October 2024

Cover Illustration courtesy Arin Nurius

Book design by Kathryn Wilham

Printed in the USA by Bookmobile

Acknowledgments

Once again, I want to acknowledge my students. They inspire me to continue to learn and to teach. Although I have not yet taught this course, it's the one they want to take. I can't wait to teach it.

Once again, I would like to thank Timmi Duchamp and Kathryn Wilham at Aqueduct. Their input is always incredibly beneficial. All shortcomings remain my own.

My heartfelt gratitude to Arin Nurius for the wonderful cover art.

A huge thank you to my beta reader, Genevieve Ruzicka. Your care and insights were such a huge help.

To Agamemnon, Hobbes, Brutus, Fudge, Rubin, and Rowan

Contents

45 Shades of Queer SF Comics: An Introduction.....	1
Shade 1 — <i>A Quick and Easy Guide to They/Them Pronouns</i> (2018).....	9
Shade 2— <i>Gingerbread Girl</i> (2011).....	13
Shade 3— <i>Decrypting Rita</i> (2011-2015).....	18
Shade 4— <i>The Pride</i> (2014)	23
Shade 5— <i>Strong Female Protagonist</i> (2012).....	28
Shade 6— <i>Crossed Wires</i> (2014-2021)	33
Shade 7— <i>Galanthus</i> (A Space Fantasy Webcomic) (2015-2018)	39
Shade 8— <i>Always Human</i> (2015-2017)	44
Shade 9— <i>ODY-C: Off to Far Ithicaa</i> (2015).....	48
Shade 10— <i>Inhibit</i> (2015-2022).....	56
Shade 11— <i>Angela: Asgard's Assassin</i> (2015)	61
Shade 12— <i>The Infinite Loop</i> (2015)	66
Shade 13— <i>Kaptara</i> (2015)	72
Shade 14— <i>Paper Girls</i> (2015-2019)	76
Shade 15— <i>Joyride</i> (2016-2018).....	82
Shade 16— <i>Merry Men</i> (July 2018)	89
Shade 17— <i>Kim & Kim</i> (2016).....	94
Shade 18— <i>Love Circuits</i> (2017)	99
Shade 19— <i>Contact High</i> (2017)	105
Shade 20— <i>FTL, Y'All!: Tales from the Age of the</i> <i>\$200 Warp Drive</i> (2018)	109

Shade 21— <i>Moth and Whisper</i> (2018-2019)	114
Shade 22— <i>The Wilds</i> (2018).....	119
Shade 23— <i>Crowded</i> (2018).....	125
Shade 24— <i>Archival Quality</i> (2018)	130
Shade 25— <i>Open Earth</i> (2018).....	134
Shade 26— <i>SfSx</i> (2020).....	139
Shade 27— <i>Mooncakes</i> (2019)	144
Shade 28— <i>Alienated</i> (2020)	149
Shade 29— <i>Lost on Planet Earth</i> (2020).....	155
Shade 30— <i>Primer</i> (2020).....	159
Shade 31— <i>Crema</i> (2020)	163
Shade 32— <i>Don't Go without Me</i> (2020)	168
Shade 33— <i>Séance Tea Party</i> (2020)	172
Shade 34— <i>Apsara Engine</i> (2020)	177
Shade 35— <i>América Chávez: Made in the USA</i> (2021).....	183
Shade 36— <i>Cyclopedia Exotica</i> (2021)	189
Shade 37— <i>Barbalien: Red Planet</i> (2020)	195
Shade 38— <i>The Girl from the Sea</i> (2021).....	201
Shade 39— <i>I Am Not Starfire</i> (2021).....	206
Shade 40— <i>Killer Queens</i> (2022)	211
Shade 41— <i>Youth</i> (2021).....	218
Shade 42— <i>A Man's Skin</i> (2021)	224
Shade 43— <i>Rain</i> (2022).....	229
Shade 44— <i>Pixels of You</i> (2022).....	234
Shade 45— <i>Slice of Life</i> (2021-2022) 2 vols.....	240
Primary Works Cited	245
Secondary Works Cited.....	250

45 Shades of Queer SF Comics: An Introduction

WHERE TO BEGIN? Let's unpack the title first.

What are comics? Arguably, comics—if taken as sequential art and literature—could be one of our oldest modes of narrative. Were the cave paintings an early form of comics? Scott McCloud (he/him)* makes a case for Aztec/Nahuatl origins (10). Will Eisner (he/him), on the other hand, suggests that the first comics appeared “around 1934” (7). Daniel Stein (he/him) and Jan-Noël Thon (he/him), however, note that a schoolteacher from Switzerland, Rodolphe Töpffer (he/him), created the first stories that combined words and images *and* employed a panel border (5). He called these works “stories in etchings” (*histoires en ampes*) (5). Kai Linke (he/him) notes that comics in the United States first appeared in 1895 when Richard Fenton Outcault (he/him) published *The Yellow Kid* in *New York World*. That strip told the story of immigrants in the urban environment of an East Side tenement (22).

* A note on pronouns: I have tried to the best of my ability to locate the pronouns for people and characters discussed in the book. I have consulted home pages, references pages, publisher pages, and social media to determine what pronouns a person uses. However, I am aware that, sometimes, the internet does not get things correct. I am also aware that pronouns are not fixed and stable, that they change over time. The pronouns used in mid-2024 may be different in late-2024 or 2050. Nevertheless, I believe that it is important to use desired pronouns whenever possible: (a) it acknowledges the individuals themselves, and (b) it is consistent with the aim and message of the book.

And, wouldn't you know, comics were a huge hit! In the Golden Age of comics—generally taken to be 1938-1945—one out of every three periodicals sold in the US was a comic book. Linke writes that 90% of the nation read comics. Ninety percent! Just take a second and imagine the scope of that. Is any medium that popular these days? Does any form of entertainment capture that large of a market share? In this fractured market, not even close.

But that all changed, didn't it? You can probably guess why.

In 1954, one Fredric Wertham (he/him) single-handedly ended the Golden Age of comics. Every action has an equal and opposite reaction, no? In 1954, Wertham published *Seduction of the Innocent*, a screed against comics that linked the reading of comics to every social ill. To be fair, Wertham was concerned about a number of important social issues. He saw rampant authoritarianism in comics and saw it as a danger. Wertham also railed at the explicit and violent racism in comics. He saw both of these elements as detrimental to the developing mind.

Even so, it was Wertham's focus on sex and sexuality that drew the most attention. He pointed to the scantily clad women, to sexual activity, and to sexual "perversions." The consequence of Wertham's book was the creation of the Comics Magazine Association of America (CMAA), which then produced the Comics Code Authority (CCA). This organization and its code functioned very much like the Hayes Code did regarding film.

The CCA spelled out what could and could not be in a comic in order to get the seal of approval from the CMAA. Only comics that met the guidelines received the seal, and many distributors and retailers would only sell comics that had the seal. The seal was life or death for a comic. The CCA had a lasting impact on the representation of sexuality, in general, and of homosexuality, in particular, within comics (Linke 23).

Well, Sigmund Freud (he/him) has a lot to say about repression. The short version of Freud's take on repression is that one can try to repress something like sexuality or sexual desires, but those desires just return in other ways. That was no less true for the comics industry.

In the 1960s, underground comix began to appear in college towns. Technology had developed enough that college kids could self-produce comic books. These largely white, largely straight, and largely educated men were not beholden to the CCA, and they didn't give a fig about the seal. They also didn't care much about boundaries, except to push against them. All of those things banned by the CCA code returned: rampant racism, authoritarianism, misogyny, and violence. These underground comix flourished until 1973 when a Supreme Court ruling on *Miller v. California* ruled that local jurisdictions could determine obscenity standards for themselves (Linke 24). Now, suddenly, the small shop in the college town was nervous about selling a boundary-pushing comic.

So, queer folx found no representation in mainstream comics under the CCA. Queer folx saw no (positive) representation in underground comix. Well, the old adage goes: if you want something done, you do it yourself.... The time of Stonewall saw a wave of self-produced queer comics. After self-published underground queer comics became successful, a publisher wanted to get in on the act, namely Kitchen Sink Press in Wisconsin. Still, queer comics were largely relegated to indie comics.

However, queer folx did eventually make it into mainstream comics. As Linke points out, a change in the CCA allowed that shift to happen when it did. The CCA was revised in 1989, and in that revision, the clause about "sexual perversion" was dropped. It also stipulated that *some* adult human activities could be represented (32).

And so it was in 1992 that Northstar of the *Alpha Flight* series came out and said, “I am gay” (Linke 32). Nevertheless, it was not until 2010 that the comic *hints* at sexual activity off screen. And it is not until 2011 that Northstar kissed his boyfriend in the comic.

As I noted in my previous book, *Queering SF: Readings* (Aqueduct, 2022), 2010 seemed to be a watershed year for queer representation in SF. This current book will pick up the history there, with readings of queer SF comics published between 2011 and 2022.

The debates about what a comic is are complex and contentious. At their most fundamental, the definitions of a comic boil down to form versus function. Some histories of comics, such as Will Eisner’s *Comic and Sequential Art*, focus on the elements of a comic. That is, the things on the page (the panels, the images, the words, the order) are what define it as sequential art, or a comic. Other histories, such as Darriek Scott (he/him) and Ramzi Fawaz’s (he/him) introduction to *American Literature*, focus on what those things on the page *do*. They argue that comics formally and necessarily queer the reader’s perceptions of the world because they “direct[] readers toward deviant bodies that refuse to be fixed in one image or frame” (203).

Even so, we can employ a basic definition of what a comic is. A **comic** can consist of a single frame, a single panel that employs some combination of images (or icons) and words. That comic can also take the form of a **comic strip**, a short, often three- or four-panel strip, that runs in daily newspapers—or on web-based platforms, in which case it is a **webcomic**. A comic book is generally a short booklet with a series of strips. Comics run from 2-32 pages. An **omnibus**, as the name suggests, is a longer work that collects 3 to 6 comic books into a single volume—presumably for convenience, but also to sell additional copies. Finally, the most recent iteration of sequen-

tial art is the **graphic novel**, which is generally not conceptualized as a serial but rather as a whole and constructed as a single unit.

In this collection of readings, I will consider all these forms. In other words, the “comics” in the title is an umbrella term for all forms of sequential pictorial and narrative art. However, I will offer the caveat that I will not spend a lot of time on the formal elements of the comics, except where I think they queer the comic.[†]

To further unpack the title, let’s look at the term “science fiction.” Writer, editor, and critic Damon Knight (he/him) quite (in)famously said that “[Science fiction] is what we point to when we say it” (Clute and Nicholls *Encyclopedia*, 314). In other words, it’s whatever we say it is. Flippant though that definition may be, it is more or less the definition I have used in collecting these works. If an author calls their work science fiction, fantasy, or speculative fiction, I take them at their word. I have no interest in policing whether or not a particular piece is or is not SF.

However, I focus on SF comics for a reason. After all, the field of comics is *vast*, and I am only discussing those comics that are SF. Why? Well, first and foremost, I enjoy SF as a mode of narrative. If science fiction is a literature of ideas, then I’m there for it. Secondly, I think that SF is ineluctably connected to the queer. As I wrote in *Queering SF: Readings*, queer writing and SF writing tend to engage in a similar project—imagining and bringing a new reality into being, both science fiction and queer writing imagine societies in which social structures are differently constructed. Everything can be called into question and redefined: the family, government, relationships (personal, sexual, romantic, business), commerce,

† A note on spoilers: A number of my readings will contain spoilers. Reader beware.

the law, and so many other elements that have historically marginalized queer folk. Third, writers and artists are creating some magnificent SF comics right now. If 1938-1945 was the Golden Age of comics, then 2010-2022 just might be a Golden Age of queer SF comics.

Finally, let's unpack the final term from the title, "queer." Though historically deployed as an insult, *queer* has been recuperated to signify something positive and generative. In its positive senses, queer can signify an identity. Philosophically and ideologically, some who took up the term *queer* did *not* want it to be an identity, like woman or man, gay or lesbian. All of those terms of identity have fraught histories; all of those terms have limitations; all of those terms are part and parcel of the very heteronormative patriarchy they seek to dismantle (or at least live outside of). Nevertheless, intentions are things with wings, and no one can lock down the meanings and uses of any word. In 2022, when I was researching and writing these essays, many queer folk did, indeed, use queer as a category of identity. In this sense, queer can refer to sex, gender, or sexuality.

Queer can also refer to a state of being. Perhaps one does not identify as woman or man but identifies with some other term. In the past decade, the number of gender terms available and in circulation has increased rapidly. Some online social media sites offer as many as 100 gender options when setting up a profile. An individual can use fairly specific terms, such as agender, bigender, neutrois, pangender, or two-spirit, all of which reject the binary of woman and man. They can also use more amorphous categories such as genderqueer or, simply, queer. In this sense, queer signifies something outside the historically given norms.

Similarly, queer can also be taken to refer to sexuality or sexual practices. Historically given terms really define sexuality in terms of objects of desire (e.g., same-sex desire or opposite-sex

desire). Some terms, such as asexual or aromantic, suggest a complete rejection of that sexual paradigm. Some terms still rest upon objects of desire, but they add to the possibilities, such as bicurious, pansexual, or omnisexual. At the same time, some terms reject the object strategy altogether and use queer to signify a much more open and fluid “zone of possibilities” (Jagose 2).

Speaking of possibilities, throughout the book I will make a point of the importance of representation. For example, if a child has never seen, never heard of, or never read about a nurse, that child is unlikely to grow up and want to *be* a nurse, or to think that being a nurse is a possibility. Visibility matters! Even so, that comparison is limited. After all (not to degrade the nursing profession in any way), nursing is a profession, a trade, a job. It is not the core of that person’s being (again, I am quite certain that some in the nursing profession see nursing as the core of their being). Even so, that person *can* walk away from being a nurse. Queer folx cannot walk away from being queer. And so, seeing queer folx in comics is crucial. Seeing a range of kinds of queer folx is crucial, both for someone struggling with their own identity, and for those who are already quite confident in their queer identity.

Furthermore, the range of representation is important. What makes a comic queer? What are the criteria? Again, I tend to take the artist’s word. If they call it queer, I accept that. You will see a wide range of *kinds* of queer texts. Some comics here are marginally queer. Perhaps the comic features a single queer character. Other comics will be more fully queer, featuring multiple queer characters. Others are not limited to queer characters but will also represent sex, sexuality, and relationships. And finally, some comics here are radically queer, by which I mean that they fundamentally challenge and reimagine the comic form. I believe that it is important to include all of these variations of queer. Too often, marginalized narratives

are reduced to a single type. What I hope to show is that queer SF comics cannot be reduced to a single type. I hope to show a wide and dynamic range of kinds of queer comics.

Even so, I do not use “queer” in the title but “queering.” This specific use of the term is connected to the fourth definition of queer. Queer can also be used as an analytical or critical approach. To queer something, in this sense, is to make it strange or different, to look at it from a novel perspective, to use something in a nonconventional manner. As I argued in *Queering SF*, both queer and SF seek to make the familiar strange and to make the strange familiar. Both of these strategies play with and challenge our expectations. Both of them seek to bring about newly imagined futures. Scott and Fawaz argue that comics are queer by their very nature. They suggest that “comics do not need to be queered, comics themselves ‘queer’ the archive of US culture” (199). Even so, I am suggesting that artists can queer the content of SF comics and the form of SF comics (all the while being cognizant of the notion that those two are *not* separable).

In this sense, queering SF comics means challenging the very form of comics: what they represent, what they take as subject matter, how they represent it, what they aim to achieve. Queering SF comics means making them new. Queering comics means reimagining what they can do. Queering comics means imagining a new reality.

Let’s begin.

Shade 1 — *A Quick and Easy Guide to They/Them Pronouns* (2018)

Welcome to the Future

“We are living in a science fiction world.”
(George Takei [he/him] in Topel, 2013)

EVEN THOUGH THIS particular comic does not really fit the criteria of the book, I nevertheless begin here for a set of reasons.

For one, *A Quick and Easy Guide* is written in the form of a comic. Archie Bongiovanni (they/them) has been writing and drawing comics for a long time, including for *Autostraddle*, *The Nib*, and *Everyday Feminism*. Co-author Tristan Jimerson (he/him) has worked on various zines, for *The Moth*, and for NPR.

For another, *A Quick and Easy Guide* addresses queer issues and concerns.

Finally, as Lt. Sulu (actually, George Takei) noted, we are all living in a science fiction world right now. Many of the devices, gadgets, and technologies that once appeared only in SF stories and shows are now realities. When Dick Tracy (he/him) wore his amazing watch in the 1940s that sent and received video calls, many thought that that idea was preposterous. Now, we have the iWatch (and other smart watches). When Arthur C. Clarke (he/him) wrote about geosynchronous satellites for communications in 1945, it was the stuff of magic. Now, we all rely on those same satellites for our cars, GPS systems, weather forecasts, TV and cable broadcasts, smart phones, and smart watches.

So, as Bongiovanni and Jimerson write: “It’s the future, we don’t have time for that nonsense” (6).

This *Quick and Easy Guide* is set up in a first-person address. Long-time friends Bongiovanni and Jimerson tell the reader what they hope the book will accomplish. Bongiovanni is nonbinary, and Jimerson is cisgender and straight. They hope that two people from two different backgrounds with two different sets of experiences can demonstrate the need for and relevance of using non-gendered pronouns.

What does it matter that this book is presented in the form of a comic? For one, the publisher, Limerance Press, is an imprint of Oni Press. Oni is a significant publisher of comics and graphic novels, including *Rick and Morty*, *Black Metal*, *Helheim*, *Letter 44*, *Merry Men*, and *Kim Reaper*. I suspect they hope to tap into their usual reading audience.

For another, I suspect they see the social need. Social mores and practices change *fast*. A lot of people have had no exposure to they/them and gender-neutral pronouns. They simply do not know what to do, even if they are well intentioned. Additionally, Archie makes the point that many individuals who are nonbinary also may not be sure what the appropriate convention or practice might be. Everyone, they argue, can use a guide.

What Bongiovanni and Jimerson offer might seem basic for someone who reads a lot of queer and nonbinary literature. It might seem a tad introductory for someone who *is* queer or nonbinary. However, as they note, the book has a range of intended readers. One, they write for someone who is working through their own identity and pronouns. Two, they write for someone who actively wants to be an ally and engage in best practices. And three, they write for someone who may not know a whole lot about non-gendered pronouns and is open to learning. Four, they also suggest that you can throw the

book at the head of someone who stubbornly resists changing and persists in misgendering people. I'm pretty sure that was said in jest. No book throwing!

Instead, buy extra copies. Give them to friends, family, and colleagues. Buy copies and leave them on coffee tables worldwide. Buy copies and bring them to work so that HR and your bosses can begin to institute changes in their policies and practices.

The *Guide* correctly notes that all languages change over time. Sometimes slowly. Sometimes quickly. Right now, we are in a moment of rapid change, leaving many people uncertain of how to address family members, friends, and co-workers. The *Guide* also argues that no one owes anyone else an explanation as to why they would want to be addressed with they/them pronouns. If they share that explanation, fine. If they do not, also fine. The bottom line assumption here is that every person deserves to be recognized, acknowledged, and addressed as they please. It is basic human decency to do so.

The *Guide* also offers a “Practical Guide” to they/them pronouns. It reminds us not to make assumptions based on appearances—despite the fact that we were long taught that that was exactly what we should do. Things change. It reminds us not to ask about “preferences”—another recent change in practice. For a while we were always encouraged to ask about “preferred pronouns” at the beginning of a class or meeting. However, “preference” suggests everyone has a choice about identity and pronouns and that someone is just choosing the pronoun for, perhaps, frivolous reasons. The *Guide* then provides some scripts for how to introduce pronouns into the conversation and how to respond when meeting an individual.

The “Professional Guide” section recommends talking about nonbinary identities and practices early and often. It's important to do so whether or not nonbinary folx work in the office (or whatever the work space is). Making changes in

language, terminology, forms, titles, and paperwork, can make the work space more comfortable for enby (nonbinary) and queer folx who work there. Nevertheless, even if no enby and queer folx work there, those conversations still need to happen. For one, those conversations make everyone a more receptive and empathetic human being. For another, those conversations make the workspace more desirable for anyone who might even think of working there. And, finally, those conversations make working with clients and customers better. Win, win, win.

So, pick up a copy of the guide and join us in George Takei's science fiction future.

Plus, it'll come in handy for the rest of this book....

Shade 2 — *Gingerbread Girl* (2011)

You Can't Catch Me, I'm the Genderbread Person

IN LATE MARCH 2022, Florida governor and then presidential hopeful Ron DeSantis (he/him) held a press conference to announce the “Don’t Say Gay Bill” (he has a different, euphemistic name for it). In order to illustrate his point for the need for a “Don’t Say Gay Bill,” he displayed his printed out version of “The Genderbread Man.” He suggests that the Genderbread Man is being used to indoctrinate children into changing their gender identity. What is he talking about?

Well, The Genderbread *Person* does exist (just not gendered in the way deSantis talks about it). Sam Killermann (he/him) created a simple gingerbread figure in 2011 in order to break down and discuss the elements of gender/sexual identity. Since that time, the edugraphic has been revised and is now in its fourth iteration and available for free on the web. According to the drawing, identity resides in the brain; gender expression resides in the body; biological sex resides in the genitals; and attraction lives in the heart. The first iteration relied fairly heavily on continua—that is, every aspect of identity could be found along a continuum between two binary opposites. The continua have now been replaced, though the edugraphic does still rest upon a number of binary choices.

By chance (or not), also in 2011 Paul Tobin (he/him) and Colleen Coover (she/her) published the graphic novel, *Gingerbread Girl*. Tobin has worked for Marvel Comics, and Coover writes lesbian-themed erotic comics. Between the two of them, they have been nominated for seven Eisner Awards

(the top awards given annually in the field of comics), with three wins. *Gingerbread Girl* was written by Tobin and illustrated by Coover.

The graphic novel centers around Annahnette “Annah” Billips (she/her), a young woman who may or may not suffer from a neurological disease, or who may or may not have had her Penfield Homunculus removed by her father. (The cortical homunculus is a real thing, first mapped out by Dr. Wilder Penfield [he/him] and his team.) Annah believes (or so she would have *us* believe) that she has been split into two. She calls this extracted double the Gingerbread Girl because young Annah liked to eat gingerbread men cookies, make them play-fight, and sometimes make them have sex (19). She, Annah, is devoid of feeling, and her double, the Gingerbread Girl, feels all the feels. For example, Annah tells us that she has had sex while the Gingerbread Girl hid in the closet. Only the Gingerbread Girl felt anything in the experience.

The razor’s edge that Tobin and Coover walk is the epistemological verification of what has happened to Annah. Did her father experiment on her? Has she been divided into two beings? Or is the Gingerbread Girl a psychological cushion used to handle her parents’ divorce? That divorce happened when Annah was nine, right before the Gingerbread Girl appeared. In any event, Annah can be a bit cruel, and she seems to not fully understand—or not to play by—social norms.

The novel uses several techniques to dump information on the reader. *Gingerbread Girl* begins with pages from Annah’s yearbook. Annah often breaks the fourth wall and addresses the reader. For example, she faces the reader and says, “My name is Annah Billips, and as you can see, I’m currently in my panties. This is because I’m a *tease*” (9). Other characters do the same. When Annah’s date arrives, she, too, directly addresses the reader. Chili Brandals (she/her) lets us know that they work together, that she is smitten with Annah, and that Annah

is confused about her sexuality. They have been on eight dates and slept together twice (97). Chili is also the one who informs the reader of the *Gingerbread Girl*. In other words, we get the information at third-hand.

Gingerbread Girl employs a Virginia Woolf-like (she/her) style of connecting narratives. Take *Mrs. Dalloway*, for example. Woolf shifts the narrative perspective from Clarissa Dalloway (she/her) as she looks up and sees an airplane passing overhead to Septimus Smith as he sees the same plane overhead. I would suggest that this connection is more than passing. Woolf's own sexuality is up for debate, though many have suggested that she was bisexual. Clarissa Dalloway may, at first, seem to be the quintessential upper-middle class heterosexual woman, but she tells us about that time with Sally (32). Further, Septimus Smith is a young man back from the Great War, suffering from PTSD. He tells us, however, about that time on the rug with his sergeant (86). And, keep in mind that Dante damns homosexuals to the seventh (septima) circle of hell for a "sin against God" (homosexuality).

In *Gingerbread Girl*, Tobin and Coover use a number of similar techniques to shift the narrative voice. From the pages of yearbooks, to Annah's direct addresses, to Chili's voice, to the pigeon outside the apartment window, to some random dude walking past Annah and Chili, to Dr. Spectra who has insights into Annah's motivations, and many others. Some of these pieces of information could have come from Annah herself. Some of them could have been thought bubbles or flashbacks. Some of them could have been conversations with other characters. In this case, however, Tobin has other people besides Annah provide Annah's thoughts, her past, and her motivations. An interesting choice for a character who already believes that a portion of her self is separate from her body.

In some ways, however, the graphic novel is fairly conventional. The black and white drawings are precise and provide

enough detail to locate the reader in the action. The characters are cartoons, with most detail stripped away, yet Coover provides facial and expression detail to convey mood and thought. The panels on each page follow standard conventions. However, a number of things in the content challenge the conventions of a graphic novel.

For one, a bisexual woman as the protagonist is fairly rare (even if Chili tells us that Annah is confused about that). We will find far more lesbians and gay men in these comics than bisexuals. Second, the narrative is putatively about The Gingerbread Girl/Annah, and yet a great deal of that tale is in the voices of others. Toni Morrison (she/her) employs this technique of decentering the protagonist in her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*. In this case, Tobin decenters the narrator so that the reader cannot be certain of Annah's "real" (whatever that might mean) condition. Finally, the novel offers no resolution. We are no closer to understanding whether the Gingerbread Girl is a psychological construct or a physical manifestation. We have no idea whether Annah *really* believes in the Gingerbread Girl or if the Gingerbread Girl construct is an excuse for her lack of feeling—and occasional cruelty. We have no idea if Chili and Annah will remain together (Chili thinks not), or if she'll end up with Jerry (which also seems unlikely). In these three ways, then, Tobin and Coover queer the graphic novel narrative. They do not provide any certainty or resolution. They do not resolve Annah into a coherent unified subject. In fact, the last 14 pages of the comic are merely a summation, a list of things that Chili knows about Annah, things she likes and things she dislikes. And, yes, they are frequently inconsistent or contradictory. That's us. We are not consistent beings. Science does not provide an answer here. Psychology does not provide an answer here. The closest we come to any answer is the subjective data provided by Chili. "That's all I really know about Annah" (104).

Well, what does any of this have to do with Ron DeSantis and Sam Killermann? Killermann's Genderbread Person suggests that "Identity \neq Expression \neq Sex" and that "Gender \neq Sexual Orientation" (Killermann). In other words, one's identity is separate from one's body. The self is located in the mind, but that mental map, that self is not bound to the body one is born with. Furthermore, one can express that identity in different ways at different times in different contexts. Ron DeSantis's Gingerbread Man, or what he envisions instead of Killermann's model, is quite static. One is born with a (binary) sexed body, and that body will necessarily express the corresponding masculine or feminine identity.

Tobin and Coover's *Gingerbread Girl* is much closer to Killermann's model, and the underlying philosophy is the same. We are not unified and consistent people; gender and sexual identity are something outside the sexed body.

Maybe if Ron DeSantis runs, runs, runs, he can catch up with the times....