

**UNIVERSITY OF TARTU
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STUDIES**

**BUILDING FAMILIES BEYOND BOUNDARIES:
QUEER KINSHIP IN THE HOUSE IN THE
CERULEAN SEA AND YOUNG ADULT
LITERATURE**

BA thesis

**MIINA VALGMA
SUPERVISOR: Prof. RAILI MARLING, PhD**

**TARTU
2023**

ABSTRACT

Although visibility and acceptance of queer experiences have overall increased, there has also been an increase in discrimination in recent years. Given the significance of community for queer people, it becomes crucial to analyze and emphasize the concept of kinship, especially in light of the current state of affairs. TJ Klune's young adult (YA) novel *The House in the Cerulean Sea* published in 2020 is one of the more notable contemporary works in the genre that deals with queer kinship. This thesis aims to explore the various representations of this concept in the novel.

The thesis comprises an introduction, a literature review, an empirical analysis, and a conclusion. The introduction provides contextual information on queer visibility and acceptance, as well as on the novel and YA literature. The literature review consists of an overview on the discourse surrounding the term "queer", queer kinship, and the latter's presence in YA literature. The empirical part explores the portrayal of kinship in *The House in the Cerulean Sea*. It is divided into three subchapters that discuss the formation of queer kinship, its capacity to facilitate healing, and how it fits into the YA genre. The conclusion summarizes the main findings of the thesis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	2
INTRODUCTION	4
1. QUEER FOUND FAMILIES AND YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE: LITERATURE REVIEW	8
1.1. Defining “Queer”	8
1.2. Queer Found Family and Kinship	11
1.3. Kinship in Queer Young Adult Literature	14
2. QUEER KINSHIP IN THE HOUSE IN THE CERULEAN SEA	20
2.1. The Formation of a Non-Normative Family/Non-Normative Kinship	20
2.2. Queer Kinship as Healing	23
2.3. Queer Kinship within the Book in the Context of YA Literature	26
CONCLUSION	30
REFERENCES	33
RESÜMEE	36

INTRODUCTION

The topic of queer young adult literature has become increasingly relevant in the past decades, since acceptance of and tolerance toward LGBTQ+ people have overall increased systematically, legally, as well as among the general public. The increased visibility of the queer community in literature has also highlighted certain topics that, while not exclusive to queer people uniquely impact the community. One such topic is kinship. Despite increased visibility and normalization, many queer people still face struggles in their daily lives, including their family lives, because of their non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender identities.

Although the queer community and topics related to it have increased in visibility overall, in recent years there has been a new influx of anti-queer legislation in many countries. For instance, bills introduced in state houses in the US targeting the rights of transgender people (and very often, trans youth) have been increasing since 2020. 144 bills were introduced in 2021 (Trans Legislation Tracker 2023a), 174 bills in 2022 (Trans Legislation Tracker 2022), and as of March 2023, an unprecedented number of 492 anti-trans bills have been introduced (Trans Legislation Tracker 2023b). In addition to the curbing of rights on the legal level, the Council of Europe reports that vilification, physical violence, harassment, and scapegoating of queer people have also increased. Politicians, government leaders and representatives, and notable religious figures frequently openly and actively promote similar kinds of prejudice. (Parliamentary Assembly 2022) Such behavior also encourages others to express their bigotry out loud.

The increase in undisguised prejudice against queer people is one of the main reasons why the topic of community and the feeling of belonging is especially important to explore in the context of *young* queer people. Youth is the time of various different kinds of self-discovery and formation of identity. Queer youth have to contend with both the normal

awkwardness of this sensitive period as well as possibly being endangered or scrutinized due to their sexuality and/or gender. It is imperative to discuss representations of young people belonging to marginalized communities, as they “feature protagonists, voices, and issues too often rendered invisible by society” (Jenkins, Cart 2018: 3). As a result, this increases the importance of broadening the range of representation to give young people an opportunity to recognize their own experiences in media. Experiencing the sense of relief that comes from understanding that they are not alone and that there are others similar to them is an integral part of healthy development. Exploring uplifting stories about different kinds of chosen close relationships is thus important since the queer community often finds refuge in such relations.

One possible type of fiction where such representations can appear is young adult (YA) literature. Definitions of YA literature vary somewhat, mostly depending on who is considered to be part of the intended readership. Jenkins and Cart (2018: 3), for instance, define it as literature that is written for people from ages 12-18, is told from the viewpoint of a young adult, and covers stories about various topics that concern that readership, such as coming-of-age narratives. However, other definitions may include people from ages as early as 10 up until 25 (Cart 2008). The readership itself is even broader: a survey from 2012 conducted by *Publisher's Weekly* shows that as much as 55% of readers of YA literature are adults aged 18 or older, with people in their 30s and 40s forming a significant share. No more recent statistical data could be found, but the percentage might likely be even higher today. This means that the readership of this type of literature is rather broad. Although younger and older adults form a significant part of the genre's consumers, YA works are still first and foremost intended for adolescents and teenagers.

Although the novel being analyzed in this thesis is commonly classified as a YA novel and it does fit into that category in some respects, it defies certain other prevalent

characteristics associated with the genre. *The House in the Cerulean Sea*, a fantasy book published by TJ Klune in 2020, follows the main character Linus Baker throughout his journey of accepting his non-conformity and finding people to belong with. However, the story is told from the perspective of a 40-year-old man. Even though some coming-of-age elements and other concerns related to young adults are explored through a few of the younger side characters, their experiences are not portrayed from a young adult perspective. Moreover, only a few of the younger side characters in the book could even be considered young adults. Therefore, although the novel is still primarily written with younger readers in mind as its main audience, older readers can also find relatable elements within its narrative and characters.

At the start of the novel, Linus is living a dull life, doing little else except for his diligent, yet unrewarding government work as a caseworker for The Department in Charge of Magical Youth. His life changes when he is sent to inspect a particular orphanage. As he spends more time with the inhabitants of the place, however, he grows fond of them and slowly recognizes the unfair practices of his employers. The author of the book stated in an interview (Uphaus 2020) that this storyline was inspired by the Sixties Scoop. It was a period when the Canadian government took Indigenous children away from their families and relocated them to live with different white middle-class families. Klune saw the similarities between the Sixties Scoop and a more recent separation of migrant children from their families at the US-Mexico border between 2017 and 2018 as a result of Trump administration policies. He intended to write a story that celebrates children's differences and demonstrates the benefits of providing kids with a safe and accepting environment where they can be themselves. (Uphaus 2020)

Klune's book has received much acclaim and its reception has been very positive. For instance, in 2021 it received the Alex Award (American Library Association 2021) as

well as the Mythopoetic Fantasy Award (Mythopoeic Society 2021). It was also a *New York Times* best-seller (The New York Times 2021) and has a rating of 4.44 out of 5 on a popular social book cataloging website Goodreads, with about 59% of the approximate 445,000 ratings being 5 stars out of 5 (Goodreads). It is one of the more notable YA books from recent years that have specifically been advertised *for* containing the notion of “chosen family” (Fiorillo 2022; Nordling 2020). Since the novel was published rather recently, it has not yet been discussed in academia.

The purpose of this thesis is to see in what ways queer kinship is represented in YA literature, specifically in TJ Klune’s novel *The House in the Cerulean Sea*, through its use of imagery, word, and narrative choices. The first part of the thesis will focus on previous research on the term “queer”, the concept of queer kinship, and kinship in queer YA literature. The second part of the thesis will examine how kinship has been represented in TJ Klune's novel *The House in the Cerulean Sea*. The key findings of the research will be summarized in the conclusion.

1. QUEER FOUND FAMILIES AND YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is going to start with the definition and use of the term “queer”. The chapter will continue with the exploration of notions of kinship as regards to queer folk, the complex nature of “family” for queer people, and some of the pitfalls that discussions of these topics tend to fall into. The chapter will then finish by discussing queer YA literature, its potential to enact positive change, but also some of the criticism that it has received.

1.1. Defining “Queer”

The term “queer” is going to be used throughout this thesis when referring to non-straight and/or non-cisgender people. The use of that term, however, is quite contentious even today and thus I will first explore the origins of “queer” and how it is generally defined today. Subsequently, the discourse surrounding the term is going to be explored and then the reasons why “queer” is going to be used throughout the text are going to be explained.

According to Herbst (2001: 237), the origins of the term “queer” can be traced back to the 16th century. Although its roots are in the Scottish word “queyr”, Sayers (2010) explains that the term’s colloquial history is significantly more extensive. Originally it was used to denote something or someone “odd” and was thus also utilized to characterize and ostracize people who did not fit into the contemporary societally accepted binary understanding of gender and/or sexuality (Herbst 2001: 237). Nevertheless, the word was not *mainly* used in relation to sexual and/or gender deviance from “the norm”.

It was in the late 19th century that the word “queer” started to acquire its contemporary connotation. John Douglas, the 9th Marquess of Queensberry, allegedly provides us with the first recorded written example of queer as a slur in 1894. In a letter addressed to his son during the prosecution of Oscar Wilde, the Marquess used the phrase “Snob Queers”, establishing the term’s standing as a slur. (Foldy 1997: 22)

Such disparaging usage continues to be widespread today, but starting around the 1980s, some members of the LGBTQ community decided to reclaim the term as an act of defiance and celebration of their shared diversity (Herbst 2001: 237). As Peters (2005: 102) and Jagose (1996: 76) point out, the term, and hence also its reclamation, gained momentum in the 1990s when queer theory emerged as distinct from gay and lesbian studies. Queer theory was, defined by its defiance of binary heteronormativity, but also binary homosexuality. As Peters (2005: 102) states, “challenging heterosexuality with homosexuality, we are replacing one inadequate category with another similarly inadequate category”. Queer theory aims to explore and deconstruct the normalized binary notions of gender and sexuality, as it sees them both as fluid and ever-changing (Chandler, Munday 2011).

In the recent two decades, the term “queer” has seen an increase in popularity and today the identity is often seen as “empowering” (Worthen 2020). Although earlier it was used predominantly as a slur, Edmondson (2021: 193-221) demonstrates that today many consider “queer” as being the most familiar term as well as the one least likely to be perceived as insulting, taboo, or to incite negativity out of a selection of other words used for non-heterosexual and/or cis-gendered people. Nonetheless, many older people still perceive it as having a negative connotation and would prefer it if it were not used for the entire community (Brontsema 2004: 1-17).

When it comes to the actual definition of the word, even today there is not *really* one agreed-upon understanding. Even so, in most cases, as in Jagose’s (1996: 1) definition, “queer” is defined as an umbrella term that includes people of “culturally marginal sexual self-identifications”. Although she later goes on to talk about queer as also including various gender identities, in her initial definition they are not included. On the other hand, Linville, and Carlson (2015: VIII) specify that they are talking about “queer and gender-creative”

people, making it clear that they include not only sexuality identities but also gender nonconformity. Peters (2005: 102) argues that queer is a term that recognizes that identity is complex and that it can change and fluctuate throughout time, thus defying rigid boundaries.

Another definition that is somewhat similar but a bit more specific in its wording is the one that this text is going to follow the closest. Shaeleya D. Miller, Verta Taylor, and Leila J. Rupp define the word as follows:

“queer” as a term (1) refers to both an individual’s sexual identity and also functions as an umbrella term encompassing other individual identities such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or pansexual; (2) is a highly politicized identity linked to an activist commitment; and (3) signals a rejection of dominant gender and sexual binaries and includes the possibility of attraction to transgender and genderqueer people. (Miller et al 2016: 444)

Their definition, though rather lengthy, serves as a valuable framework for embracing a diverse array of sexual and gender identities within the term “queer”.

Another way that is often used to refer to this community is some variation of the acronym LGBT. Haggerty and McGarry (2015: 1-2) somewhat oppose the use of the simplest form of the acronym because nowadays it often comes across as exclusionary, insinuating that the letters only refer to a select few identities within the entire umbrella. This is also corroborated by Brontsema (2004: 1-17) and Butler (1993: 17-32) who say that the acronym fails at comprehensively describing the experiences of many people and that “queer” feels the most fitting for those whose identities seem to refuse to be clearly defined.

Even though some variations of the acronym, such as LGBT+, LGBTQ, or LGBTQIA+ can include more identities, at some point the acronyms tend to get convoluted. As an increasing number of various sexual and gender identities is openly expressed today, and even though the attempt to include as many of them as possible is commendable, one acronym is never going to be enough. This is also why “queer” is a lot more comfortable to use: it is simply shorter and more ambiguous, which also increases the possibility of it including the less visible sexual/gender identities. Jagose (1996: 1) supports this claim by commending the term for its “resistance to being defined” and argues that “its non-specificity

guarantees it against recent criticisms made of the exclusionist tendencies of ‘lesbian’ and ‘gay’ as identity categories” (Jagose 1996: 76).

All of this demonstrates that even though in recent decades “queer” has been received in an increasingly positive fashion by the general public, there is still lingering discontent due to its past and present meanings. Just as Jagose (1996: 1) claims, the term is in a sense, still in its developmental phase, having to contend with its more negative past and its increasingly more popular use for liberating purposes today. Hereafter, this thesis is going to use the term “queer” because of its inclusivity. The definition of “queer” by Miller, Taylor, and Rupp is going to be the one used throughout the remainder of this thesis.

1.2. Queer Found Family and Kinship

According to Uibo (2021: 41), anthropological research has historically demonstrated a predominant focus on examining close relationship bonds through a lens that upholds cis-heteronormative norms. This bias has prompted a growing number of anthropologists to broaden their investigative scope to encompass queer close relationships. Contemporary scholars, like Uibo (2021: 42), draw upon feminist and queer perspectives informed by critical analysis of oppressive systems, such as heteronormativity, to inform their conceptual frameworks and research inquiries. By expanding the parameters of their scholarly pursuits, these researchers aim to confront and surpass the constraints imposed by prevailing heteronormative paradigms within the realm of anthropology, thus advocating for a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of close relationships.

However, the term “family” in relation to queerness is also quite contentious. As Uibo (2021: 43) and Treuthart (1990-1992: 92) point out, even though the term itself can include a myriad of differing collections of close people, it still often retains a more binary undertone. The term “family” is often interpreted as first and foremost including parents, siblings, other relatives, or what is traditionally understood as a family of origin (Uibo 2021:

112). However, queer people often have fraught relationships with their families of origin. According to Pearson and Wilkinson's (2013) study on family relationships of queer youth, the latter often report feeling less close to their parents than their non-queer peers. Unfortunately, they are also more likely to experience parental abuse (Friedman et al 2011) and even homelessness (Waller, Sanchez 2011). According to Waller and Sanchez (2011), transgender youth, in particular, are more likely to suffer from child abuse than their cisgender peers. Complicated relationships between relatives can therefore cause queer folk quite a lot of confusion when describing their own families (Uibo 2021: 25-26).

Thus, the notion of family has been expanded by some scholars. For example, Truthart (1990-1991: 91-92) defines a family as a group of people who show its members love and support. Yet, queer people who have been hurt by their families of origin can have difficulties with calling a close group of people "their family". That is also one of the reasons why queer people often do not count people closest to them as "family". For one, the term carries a certain amount of weight and expectations (Uibo 2021: 25-26). Additionally, when it comes to such dynamics, it is not always possible to specifically define the relationships within such close relationship structures for "the boundaries between relationships increasingly blur" and "it is not always straightforward to delineate friendships from family or from other forms of intimate/close relations" (Uibo 2021: 45).

Then again, not all queer people reject the term "family", preferring its familiar nature and connotations of happiness (Nay 2015). According to Uibo (2021: 126-127) for some queer folk, referring to their chosen family as such can act almost as an equalizer, placing as much importance on queer close bonds and relationships as on non-queer ones. Although they do not live together, friends and other individuals who are not related by blood frequently form close relationships and depend on one another in the same manner as many families of origin would (Uibo 2021: 46).

Rodríguez (2013: 330) also seems to defend the concept of “family” in his article. He notes that even though various “heteropatriarchal value systems” (Rodríguez 2013: 330) should be assessed, the concept of family carries different meanings and levels of importance in various cultural spaces. He argues that when looking at close queer bonds, it is imperative to include the topic of intersectionality within the queer community and not look at every argument as absolute. The intersection of a person’s various social and political identities produces different forms of privilege and discrimination.

Another term used to describe close relations between queers is kinship. Often it is used interchangeably with found/chosen family. However, for some, kinship allows for a more accurate description of one’s close relationships and it lacks the negative legacy that “family” can sometimes include. For Uibo (2021: 45), kinship is mainly about belonging in its manifold various ways, and she chooses to use it instead of found/chosen family.

Uibo’s research about queer people’s close relationships in Estonia is also closely connected with kinship. Her research subjects, for instance, gained a whole new avenue for describing their closest bonds when they were allowed to use the word *lähedane* in Estonian (“close one” in English as translated by Uibo (2021: 25)). Thereafter they were “no longer bound by the more normative concept of family and could reflect the various constellations of care, dependency, and intimacy that relationships with their close ones were comprised” (Uibo 2021: 25-26).

However, the research into such close bonds between queer people is also not perfect. Roseneil and Budgeon (2004) point out that queer research itself is in some ways flawed, for it often only focuses on romantic or sexual intimate couple relationships, omitting other close bonds between queer individuals. Moreover, Uibo (2021: 20) brings out that one of the pitfalls of talking about queer relationships in their manifold forms is the idealization of queer people as always contradicting the societally normative idea of family. That is not

always the case, however. All queer people are different and thus not everybody feels the urge to, finds themselves in a position to, or wants to oppose societally “acceptable” forms of familial relationships. (Wesling 2008)

Another issue pertaining to this is how white versus non-white people are talked about in relation to kinship in academic literature. As observed by Nelson (2014), there is a noticeable discrepancy in the way the terms “fictive” and “voluntary kinship” are used regarding non-white people. She brings attention to the fact that the term “fictive kin/kinship” has been and is mainly used in relation to non-white people, mainly African Americans. “Voluntary kin” on the other hand is a newer term that is more often than not applied to white people. Even if white people belong to some marginalized groups, such as the queer community, it is as if they are offered more of a choice regarding their kinship bonds than people of color.

1.3. Kinship in Queer Young Adult Literature

Linville and Carlson (2016: XIV) point out that even if young queer folk might be struggling with rejection from their families of origin, for instance, literature about relatable people can let them know that there is still hope for connections, belonging, and community for them. Similarly, Jenkins and Cart draw attention to the idea that YA literature can offer “community on the page” (2018: xiii), particularly for queer folk who would prefer to explore their identities in privacy. The authors seem to agree that showing close bonds between queer characters can be a valuable source of support, even without the reader necessarily having close queer kinship bonds of their own.

Although the likelihood of young queer people receiving comfort and support from their peers is increasing (Jenkins and Cart 2018: xiii), many of them still lack completely developed social skills and are thus left wanting for support through other means. Moreover, Jenkins and Cart (2018: 142-144) observe that queer youth lack spaces where they could

meet other queer folk and form close connections, whereas older community members have access to the more numerous adult-only queer spaces. Joyce Hunter (as cited in Jenkins and Cart 2018: xiii) points out that such young people need support as well and books that deal with queer themes and issues with compassion and honesty can offer that.

Carlson (2016: 33) highlights that kinship represented in queer YA literature can possibly help its readers find and accept themselves. As he observes, “Self-acceptance is not garnered in isolation, it requires help from others.” (Carlson 2016: 33) These literary works serve as a starting point for discussions with young people about the transient nature of identities as well as their absolute significance. Linville and Carlson also aim to highlight how the connections made between queer folk may differ from those most often depicted in media about dating, friendship, or families. They demonstrate to young people that their experiences are seen and heard. (Linville, Carlson 2016: XIV) This shows how valuable it is to represent close bonds and kinship in texts geared toward young people, especially within marginalized communities.

Hermann-Wilmarth and Ryan (2016), for instance, highlight a specific book, Jacqueline Woodson’s novel *After Tupac and D Foster*, as containing positive depictions of queer kinship. They observe that the novel operates on non-cis-heteronormative notions of family (Hermann-Wilmarth, Ryan 2016: 86). Although not all of the characters are related to each other by biology or law, many of them still refer to one another using language that is usually reserved for families of origin. Furthermore, the queer character Tash places equal amounts of importance on his family of origin and the bonds he forms with other queer folk. (Hermann-Wilmarth, Ryan 2016: 92-93) The authors note that through such actions, he reinforces non-cis-heteronormative conceptions of queer kinship to other characters in the book as well as to the reader.

Queer YA literature also has the potential to educate its readership. Hermann-Wilmarth and Ryan (2016: 97-98) maintain that the models provided by the characters in queer stories can help readers reshape and reconsider “their own roles in reifying homonormative notions of LGBT people, and heteronormative notions of gender, family, and community”. Moreover, as Jenkins and Cart (2018: 126) note, an increasing number of queer YA titles have “multigenerational appeal”, for queers of all ages.

On the other hand, alongside the recognition and exploration of queer relationships in YA literature, there exists a significant body of criticism regarding certain prevalent elements within this genre. A notable concern revolves around the perpetuation of stereotypes in the portrayal of queer individuals and queerness itself within various queer YA literary texts. Frequently, these narratives depict queer individuals as having limited prospects for a fulfilling, happy, and enduring life (Jenkins, Cart 2018: xii). Such portrayals risk reinforcing harmful narratives and undermining the diverse realities and potential of queer individuals.

The lack of intersectionality within queer YA narratives has also been criticized. According to Linville and Carlson (2016: VIII), there seems to be a tendency to spotlight stories about white, middle-class, and able-bodied queer characters, which could make it seem as if there is only one acceptable way to be queer. This could alienate a large part of the community. Immigrant, trans, non-white, and non-middle-class youth are comparatively less represented. (Linville, Carlson 2016: VIII) Rodríguez (2013) agrees with Linville and Carlson (2016: VIII) that not taking an intersectional approach can have a negative effect on young queer readers, and the authors advocate for more diverse non-cis-heteronormative representations.

Diaz and Kosciw (as referenced in Linville and Carlson 2016: 73) bring attention to statistics that show that queer youth of color face notably more harassment because of their

sexual orientation and race/ethnicity. Durand (2016: 73) also adds that the intersection between race and racism and the queerness of youth of color is given comparatively less consideration. According to Durand (2016: 74), stories that depict intersectionality can serve as potent counter-narratives that draw attention to inconsistencies within particular cultural communities and call into question established conceptions of racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual identities. While Jenkins and Cart (2018: 128) acknowledge that people of color are still underrepresented within the genre, they also reassure that narratives about/for queer people of color have increased in number. They observe that whereas queer YA literature has historically been “almost exclusively white and middle class”, such a tendency seems to be changing.

The focus of many queer YA stories is often on the process of “coming out”. According to Haertling Thein and Kedley (2016: 3), it is often seen as a “rite of passage” for queer youth in YA literature, signifying that they have indeed come of age. The connection that these narratives make between the coming-out process and the coming-of-age process, therefore, conflates happiness and fulfillment with coming of age by coming out of the closet (Haertling Thein, Kedley 2016: 4). The authors argue that instead of (or in addition to) it often being a continuous life-long process, such narratives frequently limit it to a single instance. Benezzo et al have labeled the closet as a “liminal state”, by asserting:

Because of the heteronormative imperative someone is never in or out of the closet. When individuals come out of the closet in one context, they will find themselves shortly afterwards in a different context in which they will be back in the closet. For this reason, coming out is a repeated act, a never-ending story. (Benezzo et al 2016: 49)

Haertling Thein and Kedley (2016: 7) maintain that while such stories are important to some extent, they can also perpetuate the idea that coming out, and therefore one’s gender or sexual identity, is the most important aspect of a queer person's life.

Making coming out central to queer youth’s experiences normalizes narratives where queer people are in danger of facing violence, rejection, and grief from the people around

them. This is substantiated by Haertling Thein and Kedley (2016: 18), who state that emphasizing stories that counter such normative depictions is imperative. This is considered particularly important regarding connections and kinship with people close to them – not everybody in a queer person's life is going to reject them for their identity.

However, many queer folk regrettably *do* receive negative reactions to their coming out. This is why narratives where coming out does not essentially signify the end of a person's story are important. Jenkins and Cart (2018: 127), however, find that many published novels have retreated from such depictions. Many newer titles focus on what comes after a person has come out. Portrayals of queer people who have gone through the coming-out process and managed to form new kinship connections are crucial to provide hope to young queer folk. They require representation of the joy that can be found in their identities, communities, and shared queer kinship.

Although the genre merits some of the criticism it receives, Jenkins and Cart (2018: 125-146) maintain that the situation has significantly improved since the start of the 2010s. For one, the historical melancholy, seriousness, and realism of queer YA literature have slowly shifted toward more humor, a lighter tone, and other genres as well (Jenkins, Cart 2018: 127-128). Moreover, there has been a decline in the use of possibly harmful stereotypes, as many queer YA books nowadays depict characters whose queerness is just one facet of their identities (Jenkins, Cart 2018: xii).

Even though the number of various kinds of representation has increased in queer YA books, queer kinship and families seem to remain among the minority. As Jenkins and Cart (2018: 142-144) claim, between 2010 and 2016 only 25 YA books, that heavily feature queer *community*, were published. Although these numbers have possibly increased by today, the figure remains small. The books that the authors highlight also mainly include teen characters. That could in part, however, be credited to whatever criteria they had for a

“YA novel”. Although finding a community among peers is possible, it might be worth considering why kinship among queer people of various ages is not as often represented. It could be credited to a harmful archaic notion, as Jan Goodman (as cited in Jenkins and Cart 2018: 18) notes, that children should be kept away from queer adults for fear of them being dangerous or queerness being contagious.

Stereotypes such as this tend to create rigid boundaries which can make it difficult for queer youth to find confidence in seeking and existing in kinship relationships that do not conform to what is most often represented. Linville and Carlson (2016: VIII-IX) have remarked that “young people and the adults who work with them seek images that counter stereotypes and offer possibilities for identities beyond the current boundaries.” Furthermore, Jenkins and Cart (2018: xiii) “believe that what is stereotypic, wrongheaded, and outdated needs to be exposed and what is accurate, thoughtful, and artful needs to be applauded”. It could thus be argued that unconventional non-cis-heteronormative ideas of kinship and families are also something that young queer people seek out.

2. QUEER KINSHIP IN THE HOUSE IN THE CERULEAN SEA

The empirical part of the present thesis focuses on the representation of queer kinship in *The House in the Cerulean Sea*. The themes highlighted in the literature review above serve as the foundation for the discussion. The analysis is divided into three subchapters: the formation of non-normative family/non-normative kinship, queer kinship's healing ability, and how queer kinship within the novel fits into queer YA literature.

2.1. The Formation of a Non-Normative Family/Non-Normative Kinship

The House in the Cerulean Sea by T. J. Klune follows the main character Linus Baker, a 40-year-old man who lives a rather dull and lonely life working for the Department in Charge of Magical Youth (or DICOMY for short). Some of the magical beings within this universe possess special abilities, while others are from mythical non-human species. Linus's responsibility at DICOMY is to report to his employers whether the orphanages dedicated to the magical youth are safe for the children inhabiting them. Linus is not entirely unhappy with his life, yet he is not satisfied either. One day he is sent to review a level 4 classified case at the Marsyas Island Orphanage. His reports are also expected to show whether the orphanage's master, Arthur Parnassus, should be removed from his position as the children's official ward. This turns out to be his last assignment at DICOMY, as he and the inhabitants of the island become closer, eventually forming a family/a strong kinship bond.

One possible reading of the magical beings within the world of *The House in the Cerulean Sea* could be as a metaphor for queer people. Just as queer folk are often treated rather harshly in our world, the magical beings in the book's universe are also discriminated against for who they are. When a mother is seen ushering her children away from them, Zoe (the island sprite who helps Arthur take care of the children) describes the prejudice: "They fear what they don't understand. And that fear turns to hate for reasons I'm sure even they

can't begin to comprehend. And since they don't understand the children, since they fear them, they hate them." (Klune 2020: 67) This corresponds to the current state in the real world where various kinds of discrimination against queer folk have been on the rise in recent years (Parliamentary Assembly 2022). In addition, two of the children, Talia and Chauncey, could be read as gender non-conforming individuals. Talia is a gnome and has a long beard, but she also identifies as a girl. Hence, her gender presentation does not align with what is typically considered feminine. Chauncey's gender nonconformity is exemplified by his saying: "I'm a boy! [...] I think." (Klune 2020: 183) As seen here, as well as in the previous quote by Zoe, their nonconformity is seen as scary by outsiders, as it breaks the established rules. This notion is also corroborated by Arthur: "You fear what you don't understand. You see us as chaos to the ordered world you know." (Klune 2020: 326)

Although the content of the novel is quite positive and humorous throughout, and the story has a happy ending, cis heteronormativity is still present in the world. Linus's queerness is established quite early at the beginning of the book, when his neighbor, Mrs. Klapper, asks him with a condescending tone "No lucky lady friend? [...] Oh. Forgive me. It must have slipped my mind. Not one for the ladies, are you?" (Klune 2020: 30) Despite none of the other characters experiencing straightforward queerphobia, there is still an underlying expectation of a person being cisgender and heterosexual, unless proven otherwise. For instance, when the topic of marriage arises, Linus is immediately asked about his wife (Klune 2020: 110). Despite the world they inhabit being a fantastical one, this decision to include cis heteronormativity roots the characters and the world in our reality. Moreover, it also establishes the expectation of families and other close kinship bonds fitting into cis-heteronormative structures.

The connections that the characters build with one another do not follow such cis-heteronormative patterns typically expected of families. This can be noted in how by the end

of the novel the “family” that is created does not resemble a cis-heteronormative family unit, as defined by Hermann-Wilmarth and Ryan (2016: 92-93). None of the characters are related to each other by blood and the children have three caretakers, instead of two. Moreover, two of the caretakers are two men in a romantic relationship and the third caretaker, Zoe, is not romantically linked to either of them. Yet, they still form kinship bonds with one another and the children. One of the children’s (Phee’s) words could also apply to queer kinship bonds that do not require any sort of previously designated legal or genetic connections: “It wasn’t there, and now it is. That’s all that really matters in the long run.” (Klune 2020: 199) Even by the end of the narrative, the relationships between all of the characters are not strictly defined, as it can often be difficult to do so in the case of queer kinship (Uibo 2021: 45). As Linus notes in one of his reports to his employer: “I find it fascinating, the bond [Arthur’s] created with the children. They care for him greatly, and I believe they see him as a father figure. [...] While it’s certainly unusual, I think it works for them.” (Klune 2020: 238)

For most of the book, the characters do not use language that is typically reserved for families of origin (Uibo 2021: 112), such as father, sister, or brother. However, it does gradually start happening as time goes on, increasing in frequency by the end. They do it for the first time when they all collectively experience discrimination by a stranger who refuses to serve them at his shop for their non-normativity by saying “I don’t serve your kind here.” (Klune 2020: 273) During that altercation, one of the children, Lucy, refers to Sal as his brother for the first time (Klune 2020: 274). Although many queer people struggle with vocabulary usually reserved for families of origin, it can also offer a sense of validation (Uibo 2021: 46). Arguably, that is what happens within this novel. Later, when Linus is trying to console Sal, he turns to him and asks: “Did you hear when Lucy called you his brother? I think all the other children feel the same.” (Klune 2020: 278). This indicates that

such language is important to the characters and reinforces the idea that their kinship with one another is just as real as the bonds within cis-heteronormative bonded units. It legitimizes their feelings for one another (Uibo 2021: 126-127) by way of finding new positive connotations for the terminology. It can also reinforce non-cis-heteronormative conceptions of queer kinship to the reader (Hermann-Wilmarth, Ryan 2016: 92-93).

Although by the end of the book, all the characters adapt to the language, their non-normative kinship does get invalidated at times. At one point toward the beginning of the book when Arthur refers to the kids as “his children” (Klune 2020: 124), it is Linus who reprimands him. “[But] that didn’t sit right with Linus. ‘But they’re not yours. You’re the master of the house, not their father. They are your charges.’” (Klune 2020: 124) Queer people may also often experience internalized shame for experiencing relationships in a way that might differ from the norm (Linville, Carlson 2016: XIV). That ridicule might express itself in ridicule for others or for one’s own kinship bonds. For instance, this can be observed in the case of Lucy when he mentions his “real dad” (Klune 2020: 266), inadvertently invalidating the bond that he shares with Arthur.

2.2. Queer Kinship as Healing

All the inhabitants of the island, as well as Linus, are shown to have gone through traumatic experiences related to their identities. That is also why the children and Zoe are distrustful of him when he first arrives on the island. On his first evening there, Linus gets asked a question by Sal: “Are you going to take our home away from us?” (Klune 2020: 112) The question is met with silence in the room, indicating that everybody else – the rest of the children, Zoe, and Arthur – also silently fear being separated. It is later revealed that at the time of Linus’s visit, the 14-year-old Sal has lived on the island for only three months, making it his longest stay at any orphanage since he was seven (Klune 2020: 115). What is more, he also experienced physical abuse in his previous homes (Klune 2020: 121). This

mirrors the experiences of many queer youths who experience rejection, if not violence, from non-queer people, often from their parents (Friedman et al 2011). Many of the characters within *The House in the Cerulean Sea* have likewise been shunned by their families of origin for being the way they are.

The way intersectional experiences may affect kinship may also be observed in this story. Although one reading of the magical beings within the narrative is that they are queer, their non-normative identities could also be interpreted as other marginalized identities. For instance, although Linus is queer, the narrative makes it clear that even he has certain preconceived notions about how intersecting identities affect other queer people's experiences of the world. He might experience discrimination for his sexuality, but his being non-magical provides him with a certain amount of privilege that magical beings may lack. The narrative acknowledges this kind of intersectionality when Zoe tells Linus that "Just because you don't experience prejudice in your everyday life doesn't stop it from existing for the rest of us" (Klune 2020: 140). The intersectionality of a person's queerness and their other identities may also affect the way their relationships with others are received by the rest of the world. Although the novel does not delve into these intersections too much, even storylines such as this can serve as potent counter-narratives that draw attention to inconsistencies within various cultural communities and call into question established conceptions of racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual identities. (Durand 2016: 74)

The characters have all experienced discrimination for their identities, but this book also shows how queer kinship can act as a healer. Within the narrative, Arthur is one of the main mediums of healing for the other characters. He is a prime example of the belief in people's capacity to recover from both past and present traumas. This stands in contrast to Linus, who earlier thinks that equitable treatment for the children was the best that could be hoped for. Thus, Arthur's caregiving goes beyond just physical and emotional support. In

addition to ensuring that the children are happy and healthy, he strives to boost their self-esteem and assist them in their healing from negative experiences. These qualities put Arthur in a unique position to create and maintain their kinship bonds. As Linus says: “It is *because* of [Arthur] that these things are possible. This isn’t simply an orphanage. It is a house of healing, and one that I think is necessary.” (Klune 2020: 240) However, Linus also plays an instrumental role in the healing process – his own as well as the children’s. At one point, Arthur tells Linus that his influence has helped Sal in his process of healing (Klune 2020: 227). As he puts it: “You did something remarkable for a boy who came to us only used to derision” (Klune 2020: 228).

The journey of healing and finding kinship of the internal narrator, Linus, is largely told through the use of the imagery of color, with “cerulean” playing an especially important role. At the start of the narrative, Linus is rather insecure and lonely because he does not believe that he deserves to be cared about, exemplified by his thinking as follows:

He’d accepted long ago that some people, no matter how good their heart was or how much love they had to give, would always be alone. It was their lot in life, and Linus had figured out, at the age of twenty-seven, that it seemed to be that way for him (Klune 2020: 34)

One of the ways that color comes into play in this is in the juxtaposition of the city (where Linus originally lives and works) and the island. The gray, rainy, concrete-filled imagery that the city evokes contrasts with the bright, lush, and sunny imagery of Marsyas. When Linus is on his way there for the first time “the gray darkness gave way to a bright and wonderful blue like Linus had never seen before” (Klune 2020: 53). This could be read as a foreshadowing of his realization at the end of the novel that he does not want to live his life the way he had been thus far. It might also indicate Linus’s first step in his journey to finding happiness and self-acceptance through his connections with the other characters. This corresponds with what Carlson (2016: 33) has said about self-acceptance not being achieved in solitude but with the help of others.

The color “cerulean” could be interpreted as standing for Linus’s newfound kinship with the others. At one point in the story when he has gone back to the city before realizing that he should return to Marsyas, his longing for the others can be inferred, for instance, from the fact that “his thoughts were all cerulean” (Klune 2020: 367). Furthermore, in the epilogue, when Arthur proposes to accept a new child into their lives in the future, it is the boy’s cerulean eye color that immediately makes Linus agree (Klune 2020: 395). A life filled with color is thus correlated with happiness and queer kinship within the narrative.

As Treuthart (1990-1991: 91-92) contends, a family can be defined as a group of people who show its members love and support. Regardless of the specific labels used, this book demonstrates how queer kinship can fulfill these roles. The narrative encompasses diverse forms of love, including not only romantic connections but also platonic and familial bonds. Linus's affection extends beyond his feelings for Arthur, encompassing the children, Zoe, the setting, and his own self-discovery. The transformative nature of queer kinship becomes evident during their reunion, as Linus expresses his admiration for the entire group and his realization that he can no longer exist in a world devoid of their presence:

I think you’re lovely. All of you. And though I’ve lived in a world where you didn’t exist for most of my life, I don’t believe that’s a world I can be in any longer. It started with the sun, and it was warm. And then came the sea, and it was unlike anything I’d ever seen before. It was followed by this place, this island so mysterious and wonderful. But it was you who gave me peace and joy like I’ve never had before. You gave me a voice and a purpose. [...] We’re not alone. We never have been. We have each other. If I were to leave again, I would wish I were here. I don’t want to wish anymore. If you’ll have me, I would like to stay. For always. (Klune 2020: 381)

This portrayal highlights the power of queer kinship to profoundly reshape one's perception of the world and oneself, fostering a significantly more positive outlook. In essence, love – queer, unconditional, and independent of blood relations – can serve as a healing force for queer individuals.

2.3. Queer Kinship within the Book in the Context of YA Literature

Although the novel has been categorized as YA fiction, it contradicts some of the elements that are often present within the genre. The quote above (Klune 2020: 381)

indicates that Linus falls in love with the tangible possibility of a life filled with happiness and kinship. Such a narrative choice contradicts the stereotype present in several YA titles that suggests that queer people have little to no prospects for a long and happy life filled with people who care about them *for* who they are (Jenkins, Cart 2018: xii).

What is more, the fact that the main character is not a young adult himself could show to its intended young queer audience that meaningful connections with other queer individuals can be forged later in life. Additionally, the main adult characters in the story are never shown to be anything but loving, caring, and kind to the kids. This defies antiquated beliefs that that queer adults pose a risk of predation or the transmission of queerness to younger individuals (Jan Goodman as cited in Jenkins and Cart 2018: 18). This novel effectively illustrates the overwhelmingly positive impact of queer adults in the lives of these children and their ability to provide a valuable source of support. As noted by Jenkins and Cart (2018: 142-144), older members of the queer community often possess greater experiences, enabling them to guide younger individuals into their community. Consequently, portraying close bonds between queer characters of diverse ages can offer support and resonance, even in the absence of the reader's own immediate queer kinship ties.

Even if the intended YA audience might not relate to Linus as an older protagonist, there is still a possibility of them finding solace in the way he, as well as Arthur and Zoe, treat the younger people in their lives. They are all shown to offer unconditional support and care, despite what identities the children might have. As Arthur puts it: “[Hope] is what we must give [Lucy], what we must give all of them. Hope and guidance and a place to call their own, a home where they can be who they are without fear of repercussion.” (Klune 2020: 162) The strength of their affection shows young adults who have had negative experiences with either their parents in their families of origin, or other adults in their lives, that not everybody is out to get them (Linville, Carlson 2016: XIV).

Furthermore, it could be said that queer kinship is modeled to the reader through the novel's protagonist, Linus. The reader experiences the progression of relationships between him and the other characters from the start. His journey from an initial outsider into someone who cares enough about the kids to tell them that "For you, I would do anything" (Klune 2020: 382) acts as a clear demonstration of how queer kinships can form. The representation of an adult queer protagonist and/or adult queer relationships could help with the identity-building of young adult readers, especially regarding kinship issues. The latter might often not be fully explored in YA literature, as many narratives frequently prioritize coming-out stories (Haertling Thein, Kedley 2016: 3-4).

Similar to other works in this genre, this book may provide a sense of community for readers. This is especially true for queer people who may prefer to explore their identities in private. (Jenkins, Cart 2018: xiii) During Linus's speech at the reunion with the other main characters at the end of the novel, he says: "We're not alone. We never have been." (Klune 2020: 381) His use of the word "we" could have been a deliberate choice of the author to directly address the queer community. The message that queer folk will always have a community can be comforting to its diverse readership. As Jenkins and Cart (2018: xiii) and Joyce Hunter (as cited in Jenkins and Cart 2018: xiii) have pointed out, messages such as this can be a valuable source of support.

The House in the Cerulean Sea also encourages visibility and normalization of queer kinship. At the end of the novel, Linus tells the children, Arthur, and Zoe that "nothing would have changed if it weren't for all of you" (Klune 2020: 381). Although in this instance the character is talking specifically about the inhabitants of the island, the author's choice of words in addressing "all of you" could potentially be construed as an address to the novel's queer readers. The underlying message being conveyed suggests that the visibility of fellow queer individuals (along with their non-normative kinship) is what exerts such a profound

impact on Linus's life. Despite the inherent risks to safety and the threat of discrimination, visibility remains a potent tool. It normalizes and reinforces non-cis-heteronormative conceptions of kinship, and queer people, to the characters and readers alike (Hermann-Wilmarth, Ryan 2016: 92-93).

The visibility of individual queer experiences, as well as of the community at large, can make other queer folk feel less alone and encourage them to live their lives as their authentic selves. The protection and safety that a queer person maintains when not openly expressing their identity is embodied by the “bubble” that Linus talks about when he says, “I popped my bubble [...] It kept me safe, but it also kept me from living.” (Klune 2020: 374) Based on the particular cultural and social context, visibility and the risk that accompanies it is not always viable. However, being visible in one’s non-normativity may help others in similar situations. Hence, depictions of queer kinship that do not demonize it give young people the chance to recognize that their experiences are seen and heard (Linville, Carlson 2016: XIV).

CONCLUSION

This thesis examined the representation of queer kinship in TJ Klune's contemporary YA fantasy novel, *The House in the Cerulean Sea*. While the subject of queer kinship has received considerable attention in the field of queer studies, this novel remains unexamined in scholarly literature due to its novelty. The aim of this thesis was to explore the various ways in which queer kinship is portrayed within the genre by analyzing the novel's narrative, word choices, and use of imagery.

The introduction and literature review provide contextual information on the terminology employed throughout the text, particularly regarding the term "queer". The literature review suggests that the term "family" may carry complex and predominantly negative connotations for queer individuals. These connotations arise from experiences of discrimination by their families of origin due to their queerness, as well as the term's association with hetero-patriarchal and binary norms. Consequently, some queer people may prefer alternative terms like "kinship" that lack these negative associations. However, criticism has been directed towards the existing research on this topic for its inadequate consideration of other intersecting identities, such as race and cultural context.

The literature review also indicates that the exploration of queer kinship within YA literature remains limited, but existing research may point toward its potential for positive impact. YA literature depicting queer kinship has the capacity to educate readers, foster a sense of visibility and a hope for a better future, and provide a sense of community. Despite improvements, the genre still faces challenges that undermine these positive aspects. These challenges include the perpetuation of outdated stereotypes, insufficient representation of intersectional queer identities, and an overemphasis on certain narratives, particularly those centered on coming out.

The empirical section focused on analyzing the different ways in which queer kinship is represented within TJ Klune's *The House in the Cerulean Sea*. The analysis revealed that one possible interpretation of the magical beings in the novel is that they serve as symbolic representations of queer individuals. Within the narrative, the societal expectations imposed on families and other close kinship bonds adhere strictly to cis-heteronormative structures. Consequently, the characters themselves occasionally question the validity of their own kinship bonds, driven by internalized shame because their kinship deviates from the established norms. Although the relationships formed among the characters do not conform to the conventional cis-heteronormative patterns typically expected of families, they still employ familial language to validate their kinship bonds.

The analysis also revealed that the story somewhat explores the influence of intersectional experiences on kinship dynamics, as the magical beings symbolize not only queer but various other marginalized identities as well. It highlights the need to address intersecting prejudices across diverse communities, challenging prevailing notions of racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual identities. Additionally, the novel explores how queer kinship can serve as a powerful source of healing, with Arthur playing a central role in nurturing emotional well-being, boosting self-esteem, and aiding in the recovery from past traumas. Linus also contributes significantly to the healing process. Throughout the narrative, the imagery of color, particularly "cerulean", conveys the journey of self-acceptance, healing, and finding kinship primarily of the internal narrator Linus, emphasizing the significance of queer connections in achieving these goals.

The analysis demonstrated that the narrative challenges the stereotype of queer individuals being denied happy endings and companionship through the main character Linus. Additionally, Linus, being older than the typical YA protagonist, conveys the message to young queer individuals that kinship can be discovered later in life. Furthermore,

the story defies the outdated belief that queer people pose a threat to children, showing the overwhelmingly positive influence queer adults have on the children in the narrative. By featuring an adult queer protagonist and emphasizing adult queer relationships, the novel may help with the formation of young queer readers' identities, particularly in terms of kinship matters. Similarly to other YA works, this book fosters a sense of community and support, offering solace to readers who may lack it in their lives. Moreover, the novel normalizes and advocates for the visibility of queer individuals and queer kinship. Although it may not always be feasible, it can serve as a source of support for others facing similar circumstances.

This thesis has demonstrated the intricacy and importance of queer kinship in the YA literary genre, and its potential influence on readers, particularly the intended young adult audience. Researching topics important to queer people, recognizing the validity of non-traditional kinship bonds, and utilizing young adult literature to introduce queer kinship to young individuals, particularly queer youth, highlight the crucial need for diverse narratives in fostering understanding and acceptance. Further research may be conducted by examining and comparing a broader range of YA novels, including *The House in the Cerulean Sea*, and exploring how they represent queer kinship in distinctive ways. Further analysis in this direction could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic and contribute to the advancement of research on queer kinship in YA literature.

REFERENCES

- American Library Association. 2021. 2021 Alex Awards. Available at <https://www.ala.org/yalsa/2021-alex-awards>, accessed March 27, 2023.
- Benezzo, Angelo, Mirka Koro-Ljungberg, and Sergia Adamo. 2016. Billy Elliot, Swan Lake, and Shifting Queering Effects. In Darla Linville, David Lee Carlson (eds). *Beyond Borders: Queer Eros and Ethos (Ethics) in LGBTQ Young Adult Literature*, 35-53. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- Brontsema, Robin. 2004. A Queer Revolution: Reconceptualizing the Debate Over Linguistic Reclamation. *Colorado Research in Linguistics*, 17: 1, 1-17.
- Butler, Judith. 1993. Critically Queer. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 1:1, 17-32.
- Carlson, David Lee. 2016. Queer Recognition and Independence. In Darla Linville, David Lee Carlson (eds). *Beyond Borders: Queer Eros and Ethos (Ethics) in LGBTQ Young Adult Literature*, 21-34. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- Cart, Michael. 2008. The Value of Young Adult Literature. Available at <https://www.ala.org/yalsa/guidelines/whitepapers/yalit>, accessed March 27, 2023.
- Chandler, Daniel, and Rod Monday. 2011. "Queer theory". Available at <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780199568758.001.0001/acref-9780199568758-e-2220;jsessionid=7678D1BC44FEDDE500F01E6462226651>, accessed February 24, 2023.
- Edmondson, Daniel. 2021. Word norms and measures of linguistic reclamation for LGBTQ+ slurs. *Pragmatics & Cognition*, 28: 1, 193-221.
- Fiorillo, Katherine. 2022. 'The House in the Cerulean Sea' is a fantasy novel that's all over TikTok and Instagram. I've read it twice and understand why readers can't get enough. Available at <https://www.businessinsider.com/guides/learning/house-in-the-cerulean-sea-book-review>, accessed March 27, 2023.
- Foldy, Michael S. 1997. *The Trials of Oscar Wilde: Deviance, Morality, and Late-Victorian Society*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Friedman, Mark S, Michael P. Marshal, Thomas E. Guadamuz, Chongyi Wei, Carolyn F. Wong, Elizabeth M. Saewyc, and Ron Stall. 2011. A Meta-Analysis of Disparities in Childhood Sexual Abuse, Parental Physical Abuse, and Peer Victimization Among Sexual Minority and Sexual Nonminority Individuals. *American Journal of Public Health*, 101: 8, 1481-1494.
- Goodreads. The House in the Cerulean Sea. Available at <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/45047384-the-house-in-the-cerulean-sea>, accessed March 27, 2023.
- Haertling Thein, Amanda, and Kate E. Kedley. 2016. Out of the Closet and All Grown Up. In Darla Linville, David Lee Carlson (eds). *Beyond Borders: Queer Eros and Ethos (Ethics) in LGBTQ Young Adult Literature*, 3-20. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- Haggerty, George E., and Molly McGarry. 2015. Introduction. In George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry (eds). *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies*, 1-14. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.
- Hermann-Wilmarth, Jill M, and Caitlin L. Ryan. 2016. Destabilizing the Homonormative for Young Readers. In Darla Linville, David Lee Carlson (eds). *Beyond Borders: Queer Eros and Ethos (Ethics) in LGBTQ Young Adult Literature*, 85-99. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

- Herbst, Philip. 2001. *Wimmin, wimps & wallflowers: an encyclopaedic dictionary of gender and sexual orientation bias in the United States*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.
- Jagose, Annamarie. 1996. *Queer Theory: An Introduction*. New York: New York University Press.
- Jenkins, Christine A. and Michael Cart. 2018. *Representing the Rainbow in Young Adult Literature: LGBTQ+ Content since 1969*. Lanham, Boulder, New York, and London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Klune, TJ. 2020. *The House in the Cerulean Sea*. London: Pan Macmillan.
- Linville, Darla, and David Lee Carlson (eds). 2016. *Beyond Borders; Queer Eros and Ethos (Ethics) in LGBTQ Young Adult Literature*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing Incorporated.
- Miller, Shaeleya D, Verta Taylor and Leila J. Rupp. 2016. Social Movements and the Construction of Queer Identity. In Jan E. Stets and Richard T. Serpe (eds). *New Directions in Identity Theory and Research*, 443-469. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mythopoeic Society. 2021. Mythopoeic Awards. Available at <https://mythsoc.org/awards/awards-2021.htm>, accessed March 27, 2023.
- Nay, Yv E. 2015. 'Happy as in queer' – The affective paradoxes of queer families. *Sociologus*, 65: 1, 35-53.
- Nelson, Margaret K. 2014. Whither Fictive Kin? Or, What's in a Name? *Journal of Family Issues*, 35:2, 201–222.
- Nordling, Em. 2020. Finding Family & Breaking Rules in *The House in the Cerulean Sea* by TJ Klune. Available at <https://www.tor.com/2020/04/10/book-reviews-the-house-in-the-cerulean-sea-by-tj-klune/>, accessed March 27, 2023.
- Parliamentary Assembly. 2022. Combating rising hate against LGBTI people in Europe. Available at <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/29712/html>, accessed March 27, 2023.
- Pearson, Jennifer, and Lindsey Wilkinson. 2013. Family Relationships and Adolescent Well-Being: Are Families Equally Protective for Same-Sex Attracted Youth? *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 2013: 43, 376-393.
- Peters, Wendy. 2005. Queer Identities. Rupturing Identity Categories and Negotiating Meanings of Queer. *Canadian Woman Studies/Les Cahiers De La Femme*, 24:2, 102-107.
- Publisher's Weekly. 2012. New Study: 55% of YA Books Bought by Adults. Available at <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-industry-news/article/53937-new-study-55-of-ya-books-bought-by-adults.html>, accessed March 27, 2023.
- Rodríguez, Richard T. 2013. Transnational Adoption and Queer Diasporas. In Donald E. Hall, Annamaria Jagose, Andrea Bebell, and Susan Potter (eds). *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, 324-332. London and New York: Routledge.
- Roseneil, Sasha, Shelley Budgeon. 2004. Cultures of Intimacy and Care beyond 'the Family': Personal Life and Social Change in the Early 21st Century. *Current Sociology*, 52: 2, 135-159.
- Sayers, William. 2010. The Etymology of Queer. *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews*, 18:2, 17-19.
- The New York Times. 2021. Paperback Trade Fiction. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/books/best-sellers/2021/01/31/trade-fiction-paperback/>, accessed March 27, 2023.
- Trans Legislation Tracker. 2022. 2022 anti-trans legislation. Available at <https://translegislation.com/bills/2022>, accessed March 27, 2023.
- Trans Legislation Tracker. 2023a. Tracking the rise of anti-trans bills in the U.S. Available

- at <https://translegislation.com/learn>, accessed March 27, 2023.
- Trans Legislation Tracker. 2023b. 2023 anti-trans bills tracker. Available at <https://translegislation.com/>, accessed March 27, 2023.
- Treuthart, Mary P. 1990-1992. Adopting A More Realistic Definition of "Family". *Gonzaga Law Review*, 26: 1, 92-124.
- Uibo, Raili. 2021. "*And I Don't Know Who We Really Are to Each Other*" *Queers Doing Close Relationships in Estonia*. Huddinge: Södertörn University.
- Uphaus, Adele. 2020. Local author TJ Klune's new book is 'a slice of happiness'. Available at https://fredericksburg.com/news/local/local-author-tj-klunes-new-book-is-a-slice-of-happiness/article_6c82c6f8-eed9-53fd-b39c-0d1699a863df.html, accessed March 27, 2023.
- Waller, Martha W, Rebecca P. Sanchez. 2011. The Association Between Same-Sex Romantic Attractions and Relationships and Running Away Among a Nationally Representative Sample of Adolescents. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 28: 1, 475-493.
- Wesling, Meg. 2008. Why queer diaspora? *Feminist Review*, 90, 20-47.
- Worthen, Meredith. 2020. *Queers, Bis, and Straight Lies: An Intersectional Examination of LGBTQ Stigma*. New York: Routledge.

RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Miina Valgma

Building Families Beyond Boundaries: Queer Kinship in *The House in the Cerulean Sea* and Young Adult Literature

Perede loomine väljaspool piire: Lähedased kväär-suhted raamatus „Maja taevasinise mere ääres“ ja noortekirjanduses

Bakalaureusetöö

2023

Lehekülgede arv: 36

Annotatsioon:

Käesoleva lõputöö eesmärk on analüüsida kvääride lähisuhete erinevaid representatsioone TJ Klune'i 2020. aastal avaldatud noorteromaanis „Maja taevasinise mere ääres“. Kuigi kväär-kogemuste nähtavus ja aktsepteerimine on ühiskonnas üldiselt viimaste aastakümnete jooksul suurenenud, on viimastel aastatel kväärinimeste diskrimineerimine jälle suurenenud. Kväärinimeste avaliku diskrimineerimise kasv on üks peamistest põhjustest, miks kogukonna ja kuuluvustunde teemat on eriti noorte kväärinimeste kontekstis oluline uurida.

Lõputöö koosneb sissejuhatausest, kirjanduse ülevaatest, empiirilise kirjanduse analüüsist ja kokkuvõttest. Sissejuhatuses tutvustatakse antud romaani ja noortekirjanduse žanrit ning antakse taustainfot praeguse kvääride nähtavuse ja aktsepteerimise olukorra kohta. Sissejuhatuses esitatakse ka töö eesmärk. Kirjanduse ülevaade koosneb kolmest alapeatükist, millest esimeses antakse ülevaade „*queer*“ (eesti k. „kväär“) mõistet ümbritsevast diskursusest. Teises alapeatükis vaadeldakse kvääre lähisuhteid ning kolmandas nende kujutamist noortekirjanduses.

Empiirilises osas keskendutakse kvääride lähisuhete kujutamisele romaanis „Maja taevasinise mere ääres“. Peatükk on jagatud kolmeks osaks, milles käsitletakse vastavalt kväär lähisuhete kujunemist antud teoses, selle võimet soosida paranemist ning romaani paigutumist noortekirjanduse žanrisesse. Kväärinimestele oluliste teemade uurimine, normiväliste lähedaste suhete väärtuslikkuse tunnustamine ning noortekirjanduse kasutamine kvääride lähisuhete tutvustamiseks (eriti kväär-) noortele, rõhutavad mitmekesiste narratiivide vajalikkust mõistmise ja aktsepteerimise edendamisel.

Märksõnad: TJ Klune, noortekirjandus, kväär-kirjandus

Lihtlitsents lõputöö reprodutseerimiseks ja lõputöö üldsusele kättesaadavaks tegemiseks

Mina, Miina Valgma,

1. annan Tartu Ülikoolile tasuta loa (lihtlitsentsi) enda loodud teose

Building Families Beyond Boundaries: Queer Kinship in *The House in the Cerulean Sea* and the world of Young Adult Literature,

mille juhendaja on Raili Marling

1.1. reprodutseerimiseks säilitamise ja üldsusele kättesaadavaks tegemise eesmärgil, sealhulgas digitaalarhiivi DSpace-is lisamise eesmärgil kuni autoriõiguse kehtivuse tähtaja lõppemiseni;

1.2. üldsusele kättesaadavaks tegemiseks Tartu Ülikooli veebikeskkonna kaudu, sealhulgas digitaalarhiivi DSpace´i kaudu kuni autoriõiguse kehtivuse tähtaja lõppemiseni.

2. olen teadlik, et punktis 1 nimetatud õigused jäävad alles ka autorile.

3. kinnitan, et lihtlitsentsi andmisega ei rikuta teiste isikute intellektuaalomandi ega isikuandmete kaitse seadusest tulenevaid õigusi.

Miina Valgma

Tartus, 23.05.2023

Autorsuse kinnitus

Kinnitan, et olen koostanud käesoleva bakalaureusetöö ise ning toonud korrektselt välja teiste autorite panuse. Töö on koostatud lähtudes Tartu Ülikooli maailma keelte ja kultuuride kolledži anglistika osakonna bakalaureusetöö nõuetest ning on kooskõlas heade akadeemiliste tavadega.

Miina Valgma

Tartus, 23.05.2023