

Juan Pablo Zendejas

Dr. Draz

LGBT 322

23 June 2024

Deep Dive 3

Keywords: *religion, youth, representation*

This week in class we have touched on a number of categories of queer literature, which serve various purposes to the public. Of importance to me is children's literature, one of the first ways growing minds see worlds outside their own and gain useful reading skills in ways that enrich and entertain. For this deep dive, I chose to read Part I of *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* by author Emily M. Danforth. Set during Summer 1989, the first part follows the titular character Cameron Post as she navigates her first kiss with her close friend Irene and the death of her two parents, leaving her a teen orphan. In her grief, she distances herself from Irene and internalizes her taboo lesbian feelings. Danforth beautifully explores teen love as a queer individual and interweaves it with the grief of losing a loved one to impart on the reader the impacts that homophobia can have on developing minds.

On her summer vacation, Cameron Post spends most of her time with her best friend Irene Klauson. Together they do typical teen things, daring each other to shoplift, exploring the Montana nature, and sleeping over at their houses. On one occasion, Irene dares Cameron to kiss her, with several undertones that the kiss wasn't just a simple dare: "If it had been that one kiss ... [it] would have been no different than anything we'd done before. But after that kiss, ... Irene kissed me again. And I hadn't dared her to do it, but I was glad that she did" (10). Afterward, they let it hang in the air between them, refusing to acknowledge the obvious romantic tension between them. Cameron is scared of what her feelings imply for her sexuality, her internal

monologue reflecting on how she never sees instances of two girls kissing. This can be taken as an instance of “gay panic” because of the lack of representation of queer figures in her life. She then tentatively agrees with Irene that they should kiss again, sometime.

In the second chapter, Cameron deals with the news of her two parents’ death on top of her growing unease with her own sexuality. She even internalizes her feelings and blames herself, connecting her taboo kiss with Irene and thinking to herself “*Mom and Dad don’t know about us. They don’t know, so we’re safe*—even though there was no more Mom and Dad to know about anything” (29). She begins to ignore and push away Irene for fear of their relationship and feelings. This could be considered part of the *Miserable Lesbian* trope discussed in Chapter 11 of the textbook, but is still a reflection of many common experiences of young lesbians during these time periods.

Especially of interest is the way in which Cameron begins to use media as a way to cope with the loss of her parents and the revelations of her sexuality. As her evangelist aunt Ruth moves in with her and her grandma, Cameron begins watching VHS tapes as a way to connect with her dead parents. She describes herself as watching everything and more, bargain movies and even movies rated R. It’s there where she finds her first reflection of queer people. Danforth writes, “I watched Mariel Hemingway kiss Patrice Donnelly in *Personal Best*. I watched them do more than kiss. I rewound that scene and watched it again and again until I was afraid the tape might break...” Just like literature, media can also serve as a window and a mirror, and in those raunchy tapes she saw herself and Irene, but in a way that was intended for male consumption and fetishism. Later, her aunt Ruth convinces her to join a Christian youth chapter, and she gets tastes of the homophobic sentiment present. “My *Extreme Teen Bible* had explicit notes in the margins: ‘*Man with a man*’ can be expressly understood to mean any and all forms of same-sex attraction and same-sex acts. I read that line probably ten times. Things seemed clear enough” (Danforth).

Stories like that of Cameron Post spell out the clear need for positive queer representation across media forms. In addition, media can serve as a sort of map or guide for how to act and how communities work. This is described in Chapter 11 with examples of how Lesbian Pulp Fiction was used by many to form their identity and find fellow queers even in areas where it might have been hard to be out. Combining the general sense of not belonging with the active homophobia experienced is incredibly demoralizing and makes the lives of children, teens, and adults more difficult and can push family members away. In this story, it is preventing Cameron from properly processing her grief from the death of her parents and preventing her from seeking connections with her peers. While this sort of suffering displayed in Danforth's book could be taken as a negative queer trope to move away from, or skews the audience to be more cis and hetero, Danforth still manages to write a compelling story that weaves these two aspects of queer youth together.

Works Cited

Danforth, Emily M. *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*. Balzer + Bray, Feb. 2012.