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## Book Review

### Carolin Rolf: This may be a shitshow, but it's our shitshow! Fanmanagement in Zeiten von Social TV am Beispiel des Marketingtools Queerbaiting

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## Book Review

**Carolin Rolf: *This may be a shitshow, but it's our shitshow! Fanmanagement in Zeiten von Social TV am Beispiel des Marketingtools Queerbaiting* Hagen: Hagen UP 2025 (Schriften zur Literatur- und Medienwissenschaft, 8), 332 pp., ISBN 9783987674976, EUR 29.80 ([OA](#))**

The monograph, *This may be a shitshow, but it's our shitshow! Fanmanagement in Zeiten von Social TV am Beispiel des Marketingtools Queerbaiting* by Carolin Rolf, addresses a phenomenon that, while widely discussed in contemporary media culture, often appears theoretically underdeveloped: queerbaiting as a strategic instrument situated at the intersection of fan management, seriality, and social TV. The study is grounded in the observation that serial productions increasingly depend on the affective engagement of their audiences and deliberately play with their viewers' expectations. Rolf develops her argument on the basis of a theoretical framework informed by fan studies and media economics, which she combines with detailed case studies. Particular emphasis is placed on the TV series *The 100* (2014-2020) and *Wynonna Earp* (2016-2021), through which different forms and effects of queer representation are examined.

The choice of focus is noteworthy in itself. While much of the existing literature discusses queerbaiting primarily in relation to male-male character constellations, Rolf deliberately shifts attention to female characters and lesbian relationships (cf. 14). This perspective is not merely additive; it significantly alters the analytical trajectory. The inclusion of femslash, in particular, opens up a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics between production, text, and reception. Rolf demonstrates how relationships coded as female function both as projection surfaces for fans and as sites especially susceptible to instrumentalizing narrative strategies.

The analysis of *The 100* is among the strongest sections of the book. Here, the author precisely traces how narrative promises are constructed and ultimately broken. The consequences are discussed not only on the level of the text but also in terms of their impact on fan cultures. Rolf makes clear that queerbaiting is not a harmless marketing tool but a strategy that can produce real disappointment, erode trust, and contribute to experiences of marginalization. The argument is convincing because it consistently interweaves theoretical reflection with empirical observations.

In contrast, *Wynonna Earp* functions as a deliberately chosen counterpoint. The series is read as an example for a successful and respectful portrayal of queer relationships that does not rely on suggestion or calculated ambiguity. Particularly compelling is Rolf's account of the interplay between production and fandom: representation emerges not as a static outcome but as an ongoing process of negotiation. This juxtaposition lends the study a degree of argumentative clarity that extends beyond a mere identification of problems.

In its critical engagement with the topic, the book is especially persuasive in its balance between analytical distance and a discernible position. Rolf does not write in the name of a supposed neutrality; rather, she adopts an implicit stance without lapsing into polemical simplification. The integration of

fan perspectives is handled with care. Fans are neither idealized nor pathologized but taken seriously as active agents whose interpretations and reactions form part of the media ecology.

Methodologically, the study remains largely qualitative and interpretative. This approach is consistent, though at certain points a more systematic selection of case studies might have added further precision. The focus on *The 100* and *Wynonna Earp* is analytically productive, yet at the same time somewhat narrowly framed. Precisely because the author demonstrates so convincingly how differently queer representation can be configured, a broader comparative basis—such as additional TV series with divergent production contexts or target audiences—would have further strengthened the generalizability of the findings. As it stands, it remains unclear at certain points to what extent the identified dynamics are specific to these examples or extend beyond them in a more structural sense.

Further, the theoretical and historical section of the book is considerably longer than the analytical section. Nevertheless, this might not constitute a fundamental shortcoming so much as a matter of emphasis. Rolf does not examine in detail how queerbaiting is performed in the TV series itself, but instead focuses on the history of lesbian representation as well as on fan-creator interactions online and economic consequences that play a significant role in queerbaiting.

An additional aspect that invites criticism is the absence of a clearly articulated definition and sustained conceptual development of the term ‘queerbaiting’ that would move beyond established formulations—such as that proposed by Judith Fathallah (“Moriarty’s Ghost: Or the Queer Disruption of the BBC’s *Sherlock*.” In: *Television & New Media* 16 [5], 2015, 490-500)—or beyond its more general framing as a marketing strategy (cf. 108f.). Although Rolf does, at times, gesture toward additional dimensions—for instance, by mentioning the role of affect—these lines of thought are not pursued with full analytical consistency.

To some extent, this openness proves productive. The concept remains flexible and closely tied to distinct media practices, particularly insofar as the later analyses demonstrate how queerbaiting operates in specific cases. Yet from the perspective of scholarly applicability—especially with regard to operationalizing the concept or transferring it to other contexts—a more explicit and clearly delimited definition at a central point in the study would have been beneficial. While the normative critique of queerbaiting is convincingly substantiated, it occasionally appears somewhat unequivocal. This is understandable given the selected case studies; however, it tends to sideline more ambivalent or even contradictory modes of reception. In the context of fan cultures in particular, which are characterized by heterogeneity, such tensions might have been explored in greater depth.

Another point of criticism: it should be noted that occasional typographical errors—such as verbs repeated by mistake—as well as sporadic use of colloquial language slightly detract from the otherwise coherent overall impression; in addition, the frequent use of the subjunctive mood in German at times conveys a sense of tentativeness and imprecision in the argumentation.

That said, the study represents a substantial contribution to current debates in media studies on queer representation and fan practices. It fills a recognizable gap in the literature by placing lesbian characters and femslash at the centre rather than treating them as marginal phenomena. Rolf succeeds in producing a study that is closely attuned to its objects of analysis. The combination of critical perspective and constructive counterexamples makes the book worth reading—not only for scholars but also for anyone interested in the dynamics of contemporary serial media culture, especially from a media history and media economics standpoint.

