

Neither Savage nor Sensational : Female Masculinity in *She-Hulk: Attorney At Law*

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Abstract

In her essay ‘Fetishization of Female Masculinity in She-Hulk, Big Barda and The Mighty Thor,’ Hailey J. Austin reads the physicality of superheroines like the She-Hulk along the lines of Judith Butler’s ‘transferability of the phallus’ which problematizes the notion that masculinity is exclusive to normative male bodies. The possession of a muscular/masculine physique facilitates the transgression of such superheroines into traditionally male-dominated spaces, and this constitutes a threat to the male audience. This threat is neutralized, or at least somewhat made bearable, by punishing the masculine woman in the comic book. This punishment is meted out to her by making her perform what Laura Mulvey refers to as ‘to-be-looked-at-ness.’ Alternatively, if conventional tropes of fetishization are absent, the female superhero suffers hostility in the form of what Anastasia Salter and Bridget Blodgett call ‘toxic geek masculinity.’ This paper will adopt Austin’s methodology and apply it to Marvel Studios’ adaptation of the character in the Disney+ series *She-Hulk: Attorney at Law* (2022). By doing so, this study will attempt to demonstrate how Marvel Studios’ She-Hulk is not portrayed as a mere derivative of her male counterpart as the symbolic phallus is not merely transferred to her but also becomes more phallic in her body. Moreover, this study will also attempt to illustrate how the OTT series subverts tropes of fetishization and chastises toxic geek masculinity.

Keywords: *Comics, Female Masculinity, Gender Studies, Laura Mulvey, Marvel, She-Hulk, Toxic Geek Masculinity.*

Introduction

Although Marvel Studios can be credited with being somewhat progressive in its interpretation of characters from Marvel Comics, one could argue, without facing any strong opposition, that the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) has always had male superheroes at the forefront. From making Robert Downey Jr.’s Iron-Man and Chris Evans’ Captain America the poster boys of the MCU in its glorious first decade to exploiting the inability of the

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fandom to get over the deaths of these two characters even five years after the events of *Avengers: Endgame*, Marvel Studios has never let go of an opportunity of milking the myth of the male superhero.¹ Even *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* (2022) which devotes itself to the process of moving on from the untimely demise of Chadwick Boseman, the actor who played King T'Challa, and establishes T'Challa's sister, Shuri, as the protector of the fictitious nation of Wakanda, ends with the promise of a male Black Panther in T'Challa's son and namesake. Although this particular trend is not exclusive to the MCU, it has made major contributions to making the MCU by far the most successful and popular on-screen superhero franchise ever. This primacy of the male hero, however, has come at the cost of his female counterparts. MCU's female characters have largely occupied a secondary position in the canon. In spite of all its inventiveness and attempts at being progressive, Marvel Studios has rarely made efforts to break its female characters out of their conventional feminine moulds. For the longest time since her introduction in *Iron-Man 2* (2010), the popularity of Scarlett Johansson's Black Widow lay in her hypersexualized body. This lopsided nature of Black Widow's appeal and its popularity was apparent in the sustained objectification of Johansson on social media. More recently, Elizabeth Olsen's Scarlet Witch, who is supposed to be superior to most of the MCU's male superheroes in terms of superhuman abilities, was typecast in *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness* (2022) as the mad (m)other stereotype who loses her mental bearings in her attempt to be united with her kids who never existed in the universe she inhabited. In summary, I reckon it is safe to say that the preservation of the myth of the masculine superhero and the successful appeasement of the cis-gendered heterosexual male geek community has been made possible by deliberately underplaying the potential of female superheroes through systems of feminization. Anastasia Salter and Bridget Blodgett hold that as far as superhero comics are concerned, 'feminization is very directly equated to deprecation of value.'²

This also holds true for superheroines who exhibit traits that have been traditionally associated with masculinity. The deliberate feminization of their characters or their treatments involve punishing them for blurring conventional gender boundaries. In her essay, 'Fetishization of Female Masculinity in She-Hulk, Big Barda and The Mighty Thor,' Hailey J.

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Austin notes how a female superhero like She-Hulk embodies an anomaly as far as depictions of female superheroes are concerned since she is 'physically larger than the conventional heroine and has noticeable muscles.'³ Through her muscular physique, she performs female masculinity which not only exposes the constructed nature of masculinity but also, and perhaps more importantly, draws attention to how alternative forms of masculinity have been framed as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be the real thing.⁴ Austin reads this physicality along the lines of Judith Butler's 'transferability of the phallus' which problematizes the notion that masculinity is exclusive to normative male bodies.⁵ The possession of a muscular physique facilitates the transgression of superheroines like She-Hulk into traditionally male-dominated spaces and this constitutes a threat to the male readers and audience. Austin argues that this threat is neutralised, or at least somewhat made bearable, by punishing the woman in the comic book.⁶ This punishment is meted out to the female performing masculinity by making her the object of what Laura Mulvey refers to as 'to-be-looked-at-ness' for the pleasure of the cis-gendered heterosexual male consumers and by making her the victim of what Anastasia Salter and Bridget Blodgett call 'toxic geek masculinity.'⁷ This paper will adopt Austin's methodology and apply it to the Marvel Studios' adaptation of She-Hulk in its recent Disney+ series, *She-Hulk: Attorney at Law*. By doing so, the paper will attempt to demonstrate how the MCU's She-Hulk is a more sensitive and empowering approach to the character and its portrayal in how it resists fetishization and ridicules toxic geek masculinity.

Since one of the central arguments of this paper is based on the concept of the transferability of the phallus, it is important to understand what qualifies as the phallus first. Anne Allison explains:

As argued by Freud and reargued by psychoanalytic feminists, the phallus is a representation of power that is modelled on the bodily lines of those subjects assigned power in society. In a masculinist society, this would be the male anatomy, namely the part treated as most distinctly 'male'- the penis. This does not mean that the phallus is the same thing as the penis, of course, nor even a realistic representation of it. Rather, it is something of a linguistic sign (of/for power), which means it is the semiotic language

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assigned the way power is sought, navigated, imagined, and secured by the members of a particular world at a particular time. So, the shape of the phallus comes from both the real world (of material relations) and beyond the real (into symbols and desires), and is an ideological construction as well as a fantasy.⁸

As beings with powers or enhancements that are beyond the human, superheroes have, as Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas point out, ““more” of the phallus than the average being.”⁹ In most cases these superhuman powers find a cosmetic manifestation in the overly large muscles of male superheroes like the Hulk, Captain America, Superman and Thor. They become the epitome of ideal masculinity and their physique becomes aspirational and something to be marvelled at. In other cases, where elaborate bodily transformations do not take place, as is the case with Iron-Man, the superiority of the heroes is established by donning a futuristic suit replete with lasers, missiles, artificial intelligence and technologies of surveillance. Austin identifies disparities in the portrayal of male and female superheroes. She writes,

While superheroines, like She-Hulk, are depicted with massive mammaries plunging out of her ripped hospital gown, male superheroes like The Incredible Hulk appear to be missing any kind of genitalia. Close-ups on the Hulk and other male heroes do not emphasise bulges or penises in the majority of superhero comics. In most comics the bulge or penis does not exist. In this way, the phallus and phallic power remain invisible while the power and privilege of male heroes remain through their muscles. Yet, even muscular superheroines continue to be fetishized.¹⁰

Male superheroes are never fetishized. The pleasure in watching them lies in identification with their muscular physique and/or futuristic suits. Female superheroes, on the contrary are almost always coded for fetishistic pleasure.

From ‘Savage’ and ‘Sensational’ to ‘Fun Lawyer’: She-Hulk vs. Fetishization

Austin goes on to illustrate her point by putting the portrayal of She-Hulk in both her original comic book run titled *Savage She-Hulk* and in the later adaptation, *The Sensational She-Hulk* under the lens of Laura Mulvey’s theory of visual pleasure as explained in her essay ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.’ According to Mulvey, both the male protagonist and the

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male audience member allay the fear of castration engendered in the woman on screen by fetishizing her, thus turning her into something more ‘reassuring’ than ‘dangerous’. This ‘fetishistic scopophilia’ turns the woman on screen into an object and ‘something satisfying in itself.’¹¹ This is facilitated by the fragmentation of the performing woman’s body which, in turn is achieved by ‘conventional close ups of legs’ or other body parts that ‘integrate into the narrative a certain mode of eroticism.’ She holds that ‘one part of a fragmented body’ gives the woman ‘flatness, the quality of a cut-out or icon.’¹² As mentioned earlier, Austin draws attention to how in Stan Lee’s ‘The She-Hulk Lives!’ (1979) when Jennifer Walters transforms into She-Hulk for the first time after receiving a blood transfusion from her cousin Bruce Banner (The Hulk), her breasts are seen ‘bulging from her ripped hospital gown.’¹³ She-Hulk is visibly different from her cousin in that ‘she still maintains a toned body and hourglass figure, and even wears make-up.’¹⁴ Her sexual difference is accentuated by what Taylor, in line with Mulvey’s argument, refers to as ‘formal strategies of dismemberment’ like chopping up her body by panel borders.¹⁵ This becomes the comic book equivalent of close-ups in films. Thus, her masculinity in terms of increased height and bigger muscles must be compensated for by the trappings of conventional femininity to make her less threatening to the cis-gendered heterosexual male fandom. Austin then turns her attention to John Byrne’s She-Hulk series titled *The Sensational She-Hulk* (1989). *The Sensational She-Hulk* is significant in the context of this paper because it served as a major inspiration for Marvel Studios’ OTT adaptation of the character. This paper will discuss how the OTT series departs sharply from the problematic elements of its inspiration and refuses to fetishize the character. Austin argues that in John Byrne’s hands She-Hulk’s ‘fetishization is furthered in that she poses seductively for pin-up posters in select issues of the comic.’¹⁶ In the cover of *The Sensational She-Hulk* #43, Jennifer Walter’s alter-ego is seen seductively taking off what seems to be a shirt to reveal her brightly coloured undergarments, all the while being decked up with earrings and make-up.¹⁷ Her self-awareness that it is something necessary to sell the book may seem empowering to some, but it is only an illusion of agency as it only reinforces the notion of the woman as something that doesn’t desire but is *only desired*. Even worse is *The Sensational She-Hulk* #40. On the cover of the issue, the Comics Code

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Authority Seal is the only thing that stands between the reader and She-Hulk's insinuated nudity.¹⁸ In Marvel Graphic Novel No. 18: *The Sensational She-Hulk*, she wears an outfit reminiscent of the Playboy Bunny costume on a date under the rationalisation that people are going to stare at her anyway because of her height and the colour of her skin. It only gets worse as the graphic novel progresses as She-Hulk is forced to strip out of that outfit by male S.H.I.E.L.D. operatives while they ogle her.¹⁹ *The Sensational She-Hulk* was written and illustrated by a man (John Byrne) for the male gaze. One cannot help but agree with Mithcell when he says 'The image of a woman being forced to perform a sexual act by a masculine voice is truly disturbing.'²⁰

Austin notes the She-Hulk's transition of the character from 'savage' to 'sensational' between her two comic book runs. She demonstrates how in *Savage She-Hulk* series, the titular character, in addition to being an object of the male gaze, is also made monstrous in her appearance, and in the potential danger that she represents because of her inability to integrate the two identities. In *The Sensational She-Hulk*, she makes considerable progress in terms of integrating the two identities, but is left 'permanently big and green!'²¹ This 'seemingly punishes her for attempting to perform female masculinity and return to normal society.'²² On top of this she is even more acutely fetishized than her predecessor. As Donald E. Palumbo notes, she 'sometimes battles evil in Victoria's Secrets attire, and an issue often begins with her writhing deliciously in bed.'²³ Thus her portrayal as either savage or sensational becomes very important to underplay the threat she poses by performing female masculinity. In a welcome relief, the OTT adaptation consciously avoids using adjectives like 'savage' and 'sensational' and is subtitled 'Attorney at Law' in line with the titular character's claim that it is a 'fun lawyer show.'²⁴

According to *Fandom*, a prominent pop culture entertainment site the head-writer of the *She-Hulk* series Jessica Gao revealed how Byrne's comic was a major inspiration for her. Elaborating on her choice of including She-Hulk's penchant for breaking the fourth wall, a feature started and popularised by Byrne's handling of the character, she said:

For me, breaking the fourth wall is quintessential She-Hulk.
John Byrne's run is the one that made me fall in love with her.
And I think it's the most iconic run. So there was no scenario

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where I would have made a She-Hulk show without the fourth wall [breaks].²⁵

Fortunately, the inspiration that she took from Byrne seems to be limited to the character's habit of breaking the fourth wall only, and it did not adopt the problematic elements of that particular comic book run.

In sharp contrast to its comic book inspiration, the show resists using what Mulvey calls 'conventional close-ups of legs...or a face.'²⁶ The camera only moves in to take a close-up shot when either Jennifer Walters (Tatiana Maslany) or She-Hulk breaks the fourth wall in order to talk to the viewers and provide commentary on herself, the other characters, or on the making of the show itself. Like her sensational predecessor, she possesses the awareness that she is being watched by an audience. She also retains her hourglass figure. However, nowhere in the show does she use her awareness of the camera and her body in order to sell the show. She rejects Victoria's Secret attire in favour of more convenient clothes and is seen mostly in formal suits navigating her professional career as a lawyer both as Walters and as She-Hulk. Even when she is decked up, the camera avoids reducing her to a cut-out. This does not mean that the show is completely devoid of desire and sexuality. In Episode 4, She-Hulk brings an attractive man – her date for the night – home, and what ensues thereafter is not coded specifically for the pleasure of the male gaze. In fact, it is the well-built man who undergoes a certain degree of undressing as She-Hulk deliberately hides his shirt. Throughout the sequence it is She-Hulk's desire that comes out as the more pronounced of the two, as the audience, her closest confidante gazes *with* her and not *at* her. Even in the sequence in episode 6, titled 'Just Jen', which is devoted to showing how appealing She-Hulk looks in a dress, the male audience is denied a male stand-in within the narrative to identify with and fetishize her through. Fetishization becomes difficult because She-Hulk's female friends control the gaze in the sequence, and their appreciation of her body is devoid of any undertones of violence. Jennifer Walters' intimate sequence with Matthew Murdoch's Daredevil also refuses to fetishize her. In what seems to be a deliberate creative and political choice, the makers substitute unnecessary erotic visuals with visuals of connotation like a shot of their costumes lying on the floor. There is a shot of their legs from the calf down, but it's far from a conventional close-up and has Murdoch's legs almost concealing Walters.

The next morning, Walters, questioned by her ever-curious paralegal and friend, says that the events of the night before left her ‘happy.’²⁷ Although the depiction of Walters in her human form is not the focus of the paper, this becomes another instance in the show where a sexual encounter is seen and experienced from the point of view of a woman and not a man, a relatively rare instance in the MCU. Jennifer Walters during her confrontation with an AI version of Kevin Feige reminds us, ‘Bruce smashes buildings. I smash fourth walls and bad endings... and sometimes Matt Murdoch.’²⁸

She even gets the Kevin Feige stand-in to admit that as far as prioritising women’s needs are concerned, Marvel has been ‘historically light’.²⁹

Who’s the Real Hulk Anyway? She-Hulk vs. Toxic Geek Masculinity

The *She-Hulk* series begins with Jennifer Walters turning into a Hulk after getting an accidental blood transfusion from her cousin, Bruce Banner. The rest of the show devotes itself to Walters’ journey of finding the right balance between her identities as a Hulk and, as the subtitle of the show says, an attorney at law. Walters spends almost the entirety of the show trying to establish that she is a lawyer who just also happens to be a Hulk. Kat Coiro, who directed the first four episodes of the series, along with episodes 8 and 9, told *Fandom* that a major part of Walters’ identity ‘is based on her career,’ and that the idea of just abandoning something she has probably sacrificed a lot for and donning an identity that she did not want in the first place do not appeal to her.³⁰ It is important to note that, unlike her cousin in his initial days, her attempts to reject the identity of a Hulk and the destructive powers that come with it are not predicated on her inability to control her alter-ego. From the very beginning, she seems to be in complete control of her second self. Walters retains language, reason and law (she practises law as She-Hulk) even in her Hulk state, the only exception being her first ever transformation following the accident. This, according to her cousin, is an impossible feat as he himself had to constantly wrestle with his volatile alter-ego for years on end before he could successfully combine the brawn and the brain. This also works as a critic of the humanist assumption that rationality is exclusively the domain of men. When the Hulk explains that anger and fear are the usual triggers for transformation, Walters makes it known to him that ‘those are, like, the baseline of any woman just existing.’³¹ Later, in the same episode, when the Hulk attempts to lecture her

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on how she will need to regulate her emotions and especially her anger, she replies:

Here's the thing, Bruce. I'm great at controlling my anger. I do it all the time. When I'm catcalled in the street, when incompetent men explain my own area of expertise to me. I do it pretty much every day because if I don't, I will get called emotional or difficult, or might just literally get murdered. So, I am an expert at controlling my anger because I do it infinitely more than you.³²

Thus, as far as appropriating her rage in order to (not) access her phallic powers is concerned, she turns out to be superior to her male counterpart as she does it 'infinitely more' than him. It is also noteworthy that her ability to seamlessly integrate with her alter-ego is not only the result of her disadvantageous social identity as a woman. There are hints of her being even biologically superior to her male counterpart as far as affinity with the Hulk genes is concerned. Her cousin reveals that he used her superior genetic ability to synthesize with gamma radiation to heal his own arm which had been injured when he had used the infinity gauntlet in *Endgame*. Furthermore, she proves herself to be at par with the Hulk if not stronger than him when the cousins spar with each other in the first episode, a fact that makes the Hulk quite visibly insecure and jealous. Thus, in this case, the phallus not only gets transferred to a non-normative body but becomes *more* phallic there.

Another significant aspect of the show, as mentioned earlier, is its treatment of toxic geek masculinity. Toxic geek masculinity refers to stand-ins for conventional performances of masculinity by the geek community. Unable to assert their masculinity through popular and conventional modes, male comic fans turn hostile to individuals whom they don't consider worthy to be in and around the comic space. These unworthy individuals are often female, or people of other sexual orientations and gender identities. Their hostility is also often directed to characters who are masculine yet not male. It is no secret that the success of the superhero myth rests largely on the possibility of the reader or the audience's identification with the persona on page or screen. A large section of the male comic book fan community which is not conventionally masculine and is often collectively referred to as geeks is motivated by the drive to fulfil masculine aspirations through this sort of identification. These geeks see themselves in the high school nerd who, after being bitten by a radioactive

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spider, attains the ability to climb walls, the mild-mannered scientist who becomes big, green and infinitely stronger after being exposed to a certain kind of radiation, and the skinny patriot who becomes an American as he almost singlehandedly defeats the Nazis after being administered a supersoldier serum. The underdog story is an important essence of a superhero narrative. This process of identification is disrupted when the character is not a cis-gendered heterosexual white man. Thus, as discussed earlier, female characters performing masculinities are fetishized to appeal to the male geek fandom. When this does not happen, the female superhero faces total rejection both within and without the realm of the comic book or the screen for intruding into so-called exclusively male spaces. In the Disney+ show, this refusal to accept the female superhero is seen in reactions of various men as they have difficulty in trying to come to terms with the fact that there is a Hulk who is a 'she'. One man when asked by a reporter about what he thinks of the She-Hulk asks, 'They took the Hulk's manhood away, but then they gave it to a woman?'³³ 'The Hulk's manhood' here most definitely refers to his phallic muscles, the transfer of which to a female body seems alien and threatening to them. Another man also sharing her opinion on She-Hulk thinks that there has been a drastic and unnecessary increase in the number of female superheroes. He complains, 'I don't get it. Why are they turning every superhero into a girl?'³⁴ The show, however, makes sure that the joke is on them as it makes it clear at the very beginning that She-Hulk is not just a mere derivative of the Hulk and his masculinity but quite possibly a better version of him.

Toxic geek masculinity finds its most pronounced representative in the series in the form of an online trolling group that calls itself 'Intelligencia'. The website of this group is found to be a platform for discussion threads like '#CANCELSHEHULK',³⁵ 'HOW DO WE SWAT SHE-HULK?'³⁶ and '8 REASONS SHE HULK NEEDS TO DIE.'³⁷ One meme has a picture of her in a formal suit and has the caption, 'GUILTY OF DRESSING AS A MAN.' By (re)appropriating Hulk's phallic physique, and dressing in a business suit, She-Hulk effects a double disruption of gender roles by performing a two-fold masculinity as a Hulk and a lawyer. Interestingly, it is not just the Hulk's physique that is masculine and deemed unfit for the non-normative other, but also the moniker itself. In the show, this is highlighted in the pseudonym of the founder of Intelligencia –

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HulkKing. The ‘king’ in the name seems to be an effort to prevent dilution of the male-ness of the title of ‘Hulk’. In Episode 3 of the series, a group of men who are later revealed to be working for Intelligencia attacks Walters. She obviously makes short work of them by turning into the She-Hulk. The inadequacy of the phallic weapons with which they come armed to steal her blood is revealed when she takes stock of said weapons and says, ‘Did you rob an Asgardian construction worker?’³⁸ Running for his life, when one of them is asked by his fellow assailant if he could get her blood sample, he replies, ‘No. Once she turned into She-Hulk, I couldn’t pierce that nasty green skin.’³⁹ Indeed, the phallic needle bends against her indestructible skin. She refuses to be submissive both sexually and in terms of strength. A similar refusal to accept She-Hulk’s masculinity occurs outside the screen as well, on the internet and review platforms. *Rotten Tomatoes* shows a huge disparity between critics’ and audience’s reviews at 77% and 33% respectively. The reasons why a large section of MCU’s usual fanbase disliked the show included, but were not limited to, the satirical approach of the show; its decision not to explore the story-lines of the Hulk, his son Skaar and Daredevil more; and shows portrayal of the Hulk as weak.⁴⁰ However, by far what appears to be the biggest problem of the audience as seen on the *Rotten Tomatoes* website is She-Hulk’s penchant for breaking the fourth wall. Although the limited scope of this paper does not allow me to quote extensively, I am especially tempted to share one review, which I think will further reinforce the point this paper is trying to make. One concerned fan who goes by the username Mikelov D gives the creators a piece of his mind as he writes,

HORRIBLE show, I just watched from start to end because I’m a fan of Marvel, but sometimes the CRINGE was really making it difficult. The worst part of them all is the breaking of the Fourth Wall, like is She-Hulk some type of Deadpool? Was it the point of making of destroying a good established character and making it goofy and stupid? This was a great opportunity to take on Banner’s backstory and Hulk’s unexplored universe, but instead they turned into a ‘try wanna be satire comic mess’. The WORST episode of them all is the finale and the only salvageable one is the one where Daredevil is presented. You don’t have to take this opinion as truth just look at the TERRIBLE RATINGS from viewers and fans everywhere and skip this show if possible. By the way the CLEARLY payed “Critic’s Reviews” are totally pathetic.⁴¹

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This fan clearly is not satisfied with the degree to which Marvel Studios has already explored its masculine heroes. Like Intelligencia in the show, his response to a non-normate body in She-Hulk stealing the limelight away from the white male superheroes, is reflective of toxic geek masculinity. What also becomes significantly important here is the gross misinformation that his rage is fuelled by. When he refers to She-Hulk as a derivative of Deadpool (played by Ryan Reynolds on the screen) when it comes to breaking the fourth wall, he forgets that She-Hulk has been breaking the fourth wall from before the latter even existed in the comics. While John Byrne's *The Sensational She-Hulk* debuted in 1989, Deadpool made his first appearance in *New Mutants* #98 in the year 1991. This ignorance or amnesia goes on to show that apart from the more obvious indicators of masculinity it is taken for granted that any sort of innovation in the comic space is also exclusively male. It is under this bigoted rationalisation of "taking back" what is 'rightfully' theirs that the trolls in the show continue their attempts to attack and appropriate She-Hulk. They try to shame her publicly they release a private video of hers, and when this sends her into a fit of rage, they make sure to publicise that as well in order to show the world her 'monstrosity' (It also becomes important to note that the video is not shown to the audience). This fit of rage even becomes the segue for an ironic nod to *Savage She-Hulk* series where Walters' alter-ego was beyond her control. Finally, the founder of the group, a ridiculously entitled man and the butt of numerous jokes in the show, injects himself with She-Hulk's blood to get the powers of a Hulk. It is in She-Hulk's response to the antagonist getting her powers that the show becomes its metafictional best. She comes out of her show, into the Disney+ home screen and enters another Marvel Studios production where she finds the people who are supposed to be the writers of her show. Thereafter, she finds the Kevin Feige stand-in mentioned earlier and convinces it to make an exception in what it calls its perfect 'entertainment algorithm' and delete the entire plot point of the bad guy reappropriating her powers.

Conclusion

The Marvel Cinematic Universe's She-Hulk shows a lot of promise. By refusing to fetishize its heroine and sharply critiquing toxic geek masculinity, the show marks a step in the right direction as far as depiction of superheroines in popular culture is concerned. However, it seems that

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She-Hulk is only going to occupy a fringe position in the Marvel Cinematic Universe canon. Even after the creators' and the writers' insistence that the show is exclusively hers, it ends with a cliffhanger where the Hulk introduces his son Skaar to his family, a move that seems to be more the choice of the production house than the writers' desk. Furthermore, with Disney showing no intention of making a second season, and with *The Marvels* (2023) becoming one of MCU's lowest-grossing projects ever, it seems highly unlikely that Marvel Studios will abandon its lazy "entertainment algorithm" to create a more inclusive superhero universe that will blur more boundaries rather than popularising them further.

Endnotes :

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- ² Anastasia Salter and Bridget Blodgett, *Toxic Geek Masculinity in Media: Sexism, Trolling and Identity Policing* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 140.
- ³ Hailey J. Austin, 'Fetishization of Female Masculinity in She-Hulk, Big Bara and The Mighty Thor', in *The Routledge Companion to Masculinity in American Literature and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2022), pp. 381-405, p. 385.
- ⁴ Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, Twentieth Anniversary Edition (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), pp. 1-2.
- ⁵ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.57.
- ⁶ Austin, 'Fetishization of Female Masculinity in She-Hulk, Big Barda and The Mighty Thor,' p. 381.
- ⁷ Salter and Bridget, *Toxic Geek Masculinity in Media: Sexism, Trolling and Identity Policing*, p. 13.
- ⁸ Anne Allison, 'Playing With Power: Morphing Toys and Transforming Heroes in Kids' Mass Culture', in *Power and the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 85.
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- ¹⁰ Austin, 'Fetishization of Female Masculinity in She-Hulk, Big Barda and The Mighty Thor', p. 386.
- ¹¹ Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16.3 (1975), 6-18, 13-14.
- ¹² Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', p. 12.
- ¹³ Austin, 'Fetishization of Female Masculinity in She-Hulk, Big Barda and The Mighty Thor', p. 386.
- ¹⁴ Elizabeth Settoducato, 'Savage Sexism: Examining Gendered Intelligence in Hulk and She-Hulk Comics', *Journal of Fandom Studies* 3.3 (2015), 277-90, p. 282.
- ¹⁵ Aaron Taylor, 'He's Gotta Be Strong, He's Gotta Be Fast, and He's Gotta Be Larger Than Life: Investigating the Engendered Superhero Body', *Journal of Popular Culture* 40.2 (2007), 344-60, 348.
- ¹⁶ Austin, 'Fetishization of Female Masculinity in She-Hulk, Big Barda and The Mighty Thor', p. 390.
- ¹⁷ John Byrne, 'What's Xenmu With You?', *The Sensational She-Hulk*, 1.43 (New York: Marvel, 1992), cover.
- ¹⁸ John Byrne, 'One Potato, Two Potato', *The Sensational She-Hulk*, 1.40 (New York: Marvel, 1992), cover.
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- ²⁰ Dale Mitchell, 'Paradoxes and Patriarchy: A Legal Reading of She-Hulk', *Griffith Law Review*, 24.3 (2015), 446-81, 452.
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- ²² Austin, 'Fetishization of Female Masculinity in She-Hulk, Big Barda and The Mighty Thor', p. 390.
- ²³ Donald E. Palumbo, 'Metafiction in the Comics: The Sensational She-Hulk', *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 8.3 (31) (1997), 310-30, p. 315.
- ²⁴ 'A Normal Amount of Rage', dir. By Kat Coiro, She-Hulk: Attorney at Law (Disney+, 2022), 00:02:45.
- ²⁵ Jessica Gao quoted in Eric Goldman, 'Why Breaking the Fourth Wall and including Daredevil were Musts for "She-Hulk"', *Fandom*, 2022 <<https://www.fandom.com/articles/she-hulk-tatiana-maslany-daredevil>> Accessed: 13.08.2024.
- ²⁶ Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', p. 12.

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- ²⁷ ‘Ribbit and Rip It’, dir. by Kat Coiro, *She-Hulk: Attorney at Law* (Disney+, 2022), 00:24:55.
- ²⁸ ‘Whose Show Is This?’, dir. by Kat Corio, *She-Hulk: Attorney at Law* (Disney+, 2022), 00:23:30.
- ²⁹ ‘Whose Show Is This?’ dir. by Kat Coiro, 00:22:49.
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- ³¹ ‘A Normal Amount of Rage’, dir. by Kar Coiro, 00:13:51.
- ³² ‘A Normal Amount of Rage’, dir. by Kar Coiro, 00:22:16-00:22:41.
- ³³ ‘The People vs. Emile Blonsky’, dir. by Kar Coiro, *She-Hulk: Attorney at Law* (Disney+, 2022), 00:03:45.
- ³⁴ ‘The People vs. Emile Blonsky’, dir. by Kat Coiro, 00:29:10.
- ³⁵ ‘Just Jen’, dir. by Anu Vaila, *She-Hulk: Attorney at Law* (Disney+, 2022), 00:22:39.
- ³⁶ ‘Just Jen’, dir. by Anu Vaila, *She-Hulk: Attorney at Law* (Disney+, 2022), 00:22:43
- ³⁷ ‘Just Jen’, dir. by Anu Vaila, *She-Hulk: Attorney at Law* (Disney+, 2022), 00:22:42
- ³⁸ ‘The People vs. Emile Blonsky’, dir. by Kat Coiro, 00:26:08-00:26:11.
- ³⁹ ‘The People vs. Emile Blonsky’, dir. by Kat Coiro, 00:26:47-00:26:49.
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- ⁴¹ Mikelov D’s review as posted on ‘She-Hulk: Attorney at Law: Season 1 - TV