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QUEER SUBVERSION AND COMMODIFICATION IN *PLEASE BULLY ME, MISS VILLAINESS!* BY CIWEI**Gilang Sobana Pratama¹⁾, Thesa Izfaddlillah²⁾**^{1,2)} English Literature Department, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Sebelas AprilEmail: gilangsobana@gmail.com¹, thesaiz@unsap.ac.id²**ABSTRACT**

Queer representation in popular culture often operates within a tension between resistance to heteronormative norms and the market-driven commodification of queer identities. This study examined how lesbian relationships were portrayed in the *manhua* “Please Bully Me, Miss Villainess!” by Ciwei, focusing on the functions of the narrative as queer subversion or as a commodified cultural product. Despite the growing evidence of female–female romance in *yuri* narratives, limited research has explored how such representations simultaneously negotiate identity and market logic. Drawing on Butler’s theory of gender performativity and Kellner’s theory of the cultural industry, this study employed a qualitative descriptive method. The data, which consisted of dialogues, narrative scenes, and visual interactions from the first ten chapters of the *manhua*, were analyzed through discourse and textual analysis. The findings revealed that queer subversion was the dominant representational strategy, particularly through resistance to heteronormativity, role reversal, and gender performativity, which affirmed same-sex intimacy and emotional commitment. However, the study also identified commodification strategies, mainly emotional selling points and simplification of queer identity, which framed queer intimacy as market-friendly. These findings indicated that while lesbian representation in the *manhua* was explicit and affirmative, it was also shaped by popular culture conventions and commercial interests. Overall, this study concluded that queer identity in “Please Bully Me, Miss Villainess!” existed within a negotiated space between visibility, resistance, and commodification in contemporary popular media.

Keywords: *Queer theory, lesbian, commodification, subversion, literary criticism***ABSTRAK**

Representasi queer dalam budaya populer sering kali menampilkan perdebatan antara norma heteronormatif dan komodifikasi identitas queer yang didorong oleh kepentingan pasar. Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana hubungan lesbian direpresentasikan dalam *manhua* “Please Bully Me, Miss Villainess!” karya Ciwei, berfokus pada fungsi narasi tersebut, apakah sebagai bentuk subversi queer atau sebagai produk budaya yang dikomersialisasikan. Meskipun semakin banyak ditemukan representasi hubungan lesbian dalam narasi *yuri*, penelitian yang mengkaji representasi tersebut bersamaan dengan negosiasi identitas dan logika pasar masih sangat terbatas. Data penelitian deskriptif kualitatif ini terdiri atas dialog, adegan naratif, dan interaksi visual dari sepuluh bab pertama *manhua* yang dianalisis melalui analisis wacana dan analisis tekstual. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa subversi queer merupakan strategi representasi yang cukup dominan, ditunjukkan melalui pertentangan terhadap heteronormativitas, pergeseran peran gender dan performativitas gender, yang menegaskan keintiman dan komitmen emosional sesama jenis. Namun, penelitian ini juga mengidentifikasi strategi komodifikasi, terutama melalui daya tarik emosional dan penyederhanaan identitas queer, yang membingkai keintiman menjadi sesuatu yang diterima oleh pasar. Temuan tersebut menunjukkan bahwa meskipun representasi lesbian dalam *manhua* tersebut bersifat eksplisit dan afirmatif, representasi tersebut juga dibentuk oleh konvensi budaya populer dan kepentingan komersial. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa identitas queer dalam “Please Bully Me, Miss Villainess!” berada di antara visibilitas, resistensi, dan komersialisasi dalam media populer kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: *Queer theory, lesbian, commodification, subversion, literary criticism*

INTRODUCTION

In the realm of popular culture, modern literary works such as manga, webtoons, and novels function as mirrors of social ideology (Storey, 2018). These stories are not only made for entertainment, but also influence how people see identity, especially when it comes to gender and sexuality.

Among the rising popularity of *isekai* and *villainess* genres in Japan, the representation of women, commonly shaped by traditional, heteronormative standards, tends to become more diverse nowadays (Rozenberg, 2023). Although recent studies indicate that female characters in contemporary manga are still depicted through passive or romanticized roles, some of them challenge gender stereotypes (Adilbaeva, 2024). At the same time, while female–female romance narratives may challenge heteronormative conventions, they remain embedded within capitalist media industries that transform progressive themes into consumable cultural products (Levy, 2023). Consequently, when narratives like *Please Bully Me, Miss Villainess!* feature romance between women, readers might continue to question whether these narratives genuinely challenge heteronormative norms or simply use queer themes as a marketing device.

This debate has grown among readers as more audiences become aware that media can both challenge and exploit social issues for profit. Cultural industries frequently adopt progressive themes not purely for ideological reasons, but because such themes can be transformed into profitable market strategies (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2013). To address this issue, this study draws on Butler’s theory of gender performativity (1990) and Kellner’s theory of the cultural industry (1995). Using these frameworks, the research examines how female–female relationships in *Please Bully Me, Miss Villainess!* function whether they operate as merely queer subversion or as commodification within popular culture. Through Butler’s (1990) perspective, gender is viewed as a social construct shaped through repeated performances. Meanwhile, Kellner’s (1995) framework explains how cultural products, including popular literary works, are produced within capitalist systems that transform subversive ideas into marketable commodities.

Gender performativity explains that gender is not a fixed identity but a set of repeated actions that society interprets as natural (Butler, 1990). Later research shows that gender performance continues to be shaped by cultural and power structures, allowing individuals to resist rigid gender categories through more flexible expressions (Kotliuk, 2023). In literary studies, queer performativity, an example of resistance to gender performativity, is used as a framework to explore non-normative identities and challenge traditional representations of sexuality (Ramadhani & Mustofa, 2021).

As an extension of the concept of gender performativity, queer theory has several main characteristics that distinguish it from traditional identity theories. First, it rejects the notion that gender and sexuality are fixed, arguing instead that both are shaped through ongoing social processes (Butler, 1990). Second, queer theory emphasizes the fluidity of identity, allowing individuals to negotiate and express themselves beyond rigid heteronormative boundaries (Zappino & Vercellone, 2025). Third, it is interdisciplinary

in nature, meaning that it can be applied to analyze how power, culture, and representation operate across various forms of media and social practices (Gowlett & Rasmussen, 2014). Through these characteristics, queer theory functions as a critical tool for understanding how identities are formed, negotiated, and often politicized within modern society.

According to Ahmed (2019), queer theory helps explain how identity and power shape the representation of gender and sexuality in cultural texts. This approach allows researchers to see whether media challenge or repeat heteronormative norms (Sittichane, 2025). Furthermore, queer theory also helps analyze how identity and representation are formed and controlled in popular culture (Kotliuk, 2023).

Heteronormativity in Popular Culture

Heteronormativity refers to a social belief system that positions heterosexuality as the natural and normal foundation of social life (Rich, 1980). This idea is strengthened by the view that male–female relationships are considered the only legitimate form of love (Warner, 1991). Over time, heteronormativity has expanded to include wider power structures that influence how society understands gender roles and social expectations (Mello & Guimarães, 2020).

Heteronormativity can be recognized through several key characteristics. First, it assumes that romantic and sexual relationships between men and women are the only natural or acceptable forms of intimacy, reinforcing the idea that heterosexuality is universal (Warner, 1991). Second, it promotes the binary understanding of gender, positioning men and women as two opposite yet complementary roles within society (Mello & Guimarães, 2020). And the last, heteronormativity operates through institutions such as family, education, and media, which reinforce these norms and marginalize queer identities (Santonniccolo et al., 2023). These characteristics show that heteronormativity is not merely a belief about sexuality but a system of power that maintains social order by defining what counts as “normal” or “deviant.”

In popular culture, heteronormativity appears through the constant portrayal of heterosexual romance as the most natural form of love, while same-sex relationships are often minimized or overlooked (Ahmed, 2019). In many *shōjo* manga, female characters are still depicted as dependent on male love interests, which reinforces familiar gender stereotypes and traditional ideas about femininity (Adilbaeva, 2024). These patterns show how heteronormative values continue to shape media narratives and limit how audiences imagine love, gender, and identity, especially the one that challenges heteronormativity (Rozenberg, 2023).

Stereotypes of Lesbians in Asian Popular Culture

The *yuri* genre, which depicts emotional or romantic relationships between women, has evolved from early schoolgirl affection stories into narratives that express more explicit queer identities (Humble, 2025). In many cases, lesbian characters are portrayed through the idea of “pure love,” where they appear gentle, passive, and are primarily used

for visual or emotional appeal (Wellington, 2015). These stereotypes reinforce traditional gender roles and restrict queer narratives by emphasizing beauty and emotion over identity and struggle (*ibid.*).

In recent years, feminist scholarship and digital fan activism have increasingly questioned the superficial and stereotypical portrayal of lesbian identities in Asian popular culture, arguing that such representations often prioritize fantasy and commercial appeal over authentic depictions of queer subjectivity (Chalmers, 2019). This criticism has pushed for deeper forms of representation that depict queer emotional experiences and identity more authentically, rather than relying on moral judgment or market-driven gimmicks (Ghose, 2020). Thus, many depictions of lesbian characters in Asian popular culture continue to rely on the butch–femme pattern, where one character is assigned a more masculine and dominant role while the other is portrayed as feminine and emotional (Xu & Zheng, 2025). This framing often makes female–female relationships resemble heterosexual dynamics, reducing the complexity of queer identities and limiting the space for more authentic expressions (Galbraith, 2025).

However, more recent works such as *Bloom into You* (2018) and *Citrus* (2012) challenge these conventions by portraying female characters who navigate emotional complexity, personal agency, and sexual ambiguity without reverting to heteronormative resolutions. These newer narratives suggest a growing recognition of queer subjectivity in Asian media, where lesbian representation functions not only as a theme of romance but also as a site of resistance (McLelland et al., 2015).

Queer Subversion and Commodification in Popular Narratives

Queer Subversion in Popular Narratives

Queer subversion refers to representational strategies in media and literature that challenge dominant heteronormative norms by presenting alternative constructions of gender, sexuality, and identity; such subversion emerges when gender expression contradicts socially prescribed expectations, thereby destabilizing the assumption that identity is fixed, natural, and stable (Butler, 1990). In this sense, queer subversion opens space for diverse experiences and sexual orientations that exist beyond the male–female relationship (Callis, 2009). From a heteronormative view, relationships are typically framed as male-dominated and female-submissive; however, queer subversion shifts the meaning of love toward emotional equality and mutual understanding, rather than gender roles (Mello & Guimarães, 2020).

Queer subversion can be recognized through several main characteristics. First, it rejects the stability of gender by showing identity as something performed rather than biologically determined (Butler, 1990). Second, it often includes ambiguity and role reversal, where characters or relationships do not follow traditional, fixed structures (Ahmed, 2019). Last, it represents resistance to social systems, where queer characters symbolize a challenge to patriarchal control and heteronormative norms (Zappino &

Vercellone, 2025). Through these traits, queer subversion not only presents different identities but also exposes the cultural systems that define what is considered “normal.”

The Commodification of Queer Identity in Popular Narratives

The commodification of queer identity refers to the process by which queer expression is transformed into a marketable product within the cultural industry; a mechanism in which capitalism strips political meaning and repackages identity for public consumption (Fuchs, 2020). Under capitalist systems, even expressions that are critical or subversive can be reproduced as profitable cultural products (Kellner, 1995). In this process, queer identity often experiences a “domestication of meaning,” where its queer dimensions are softened to make it more acceptable to wider audiences (*ibid.*). As a result, queer identity is no longer only a form of resistance but also becomes an aesthetic style or commercial image crafted to attract consumer interest (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2013).

Commodification of queer identity can be recognized through several main characteristics. First, queer narratives are often simplified and made less confrontational so that they can be sold without provoking resistance from conservative audiences (Kellner, 1995). Second, their elements are often used as emotional selling points such as portraying romantic yet ambiguous relationships between women to create intrigue and attract heterosexual readers who consume the tension rather than the identity itself (Sarracino, 2024). Third, queer characters are often added as “diversity symbols,” meaning they are included to make a story look inclusive, even though they are not given meaningful roles and mainly function as marketing tools (Galbraith, 202). These characteristics show how commodification turns the potential of queer resistance into something beautiful, safe, and profitable.

An example of commodification in popular culture can be seen in how the entertainment industry uses queer themes as a visual appeal without offering meaningful representation. Many anime and manga present ambiguous female–female relationships to attract heterosexual male audiences rather than to give space to authentic queer identities (Sarracino, 2024). This phenomenon shows that queer identity is often used as a safe and profitable marketing strategy instead of functioning as a genuine social critique (Galbraith, 2025).

Previous studies have discussed queer representation and same-sex relationships in manga and Japanese popular culture. Pae, Mamat, and Rashid (2025) discussed queer representation in Malaysian popular media, which was often negotiated between morality and market demands. Rokiah (2025) examined the consumption of *Yaoi* and *Yuri* in Southeast Asia and found negotiations of identity within conservative cultural contexts. Lastly, Crawford (2025) studied Western readers’ reception of *A Tropical Fish Yearns for Snow* and the phenomenon of *yuri bait*, which created ambiguity between friendship and female romance. However, there has been limited research focusing on *Please Bully Me, Miss Villainess!* as a work that balances queer resistance and the commodification of queer themes within Japan’s cultural industry. Therefore, this study offers novelty

through the application of Butler's gender performativity and Kellner's cultural industry theory to analyze how female–female relationships function as a negotiation between identity and market in contemporary popular culture.

Accordingly, this research aims to identify whether the portrayal of lesbian relationships in *Please Bully Me, Miss Villainess!* functions as a form of queer subversion or as commodification within popular culture. The concept of queer subversion is grounded in Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity, which views gender and sexuality as fluid performances that can be used to challenge normative structures. Meanwhile, the notion of commodification draws upon Kellner's (1995) theory of cultural industry. In doing so, the research seeks to expand discussions of popular literary criticism and queer theory, particularly in understanding the negotiation between identity, market forces, and power in contemporary media.

METHODS

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach, as it aims to describe and interpret the representation of female–female relationships in *Please Bully Me, Miss Villainess* (Sandelowski, 2000).

Subjects

The primary source of this research was the digital *manhua Please Bully Me, Miss Villainess!* by Ciwei 2023. This *manhua* was chosen because it portrays a female–female romantic relationship and presents narrative elements relevant to queer subversion and commodification. The analysis was limited to the ten chapters of the *manhua*, as qualitative research prioritizes depth and relevance of data over quantity to achieve meaningful interpretation (Creswell, 2014). Moreover, the data analyzed was also limited to narrative events, character interactions, dialogue, visual framing, and recurring tropes, supported by secondary data such as scholarly literature on queer theory, gender performativity, commodification, feminist media studies, and queer representation in Asian popular culture.

Data Collection Technique

The data collection technique employed in this study is document analysis, in which the researcher examined the digital *manhua Please Bully Me, Miss Villainess!* as the primary source of data (Bowen, 2009). Following O'Leary's (2014) framework for conducting document analysis, which involves skimming to gain an overall understanding, close reading to identify relevant content, and systematic interpretation based on analytical categories, the researcher conducted several close readings of the *manhua* to identify narrative elements, dialogues, and visual cues that indicated queer subversion or commodification (McKee, 2003). Relevant scenes, character interactions, and recurring tropes were then selected and categorized according to theoretical

indicators derived from Butler's (1990) concept of gender performativity and Kellner's (1995) theory of the cultural industry.

In collecting the data, researchers used a set of guidelines to determine whether each data point met specific theoretical indicators. After that, the data were categorized into the categorization table as shown in Table 1. The table is presented as follows:

Table 1. Categorization Table of Queer Subversion and Commodification Indicators

No	Utterances	Speaker	Category	Indicators	Chapter
1.	"The floor is so cold, I'd rather seek warmth by hugging you, Evie."	Elsa	Queer subversion	Ambiguity and Role Reversal	7

Data Analysis

The next step was data analysis, following the general analytical stages proposed by Gee (2014). The process consisted of three main phases:

- **Preparation Phase**

Researchers identified and selected dialogues, scenes, and narrative elements in *Please Bully Me, Miss Villainess!* that reflected indicators of queer subversion or commodification based on Butler (1990) and Kellner (1995).

- **Organization Phase**

The selected data were categorized based on theoretical indicators, such as gender performance, role ambiguity, narrative softening, emotional selling points, or symbolic diversity. After that, the data was coded into the analysis table, as shown in Table 2. Repeated coding and cross-checking with theoretical indicators were conducted to ensure its reliability. The example of the analysis table can be seen as follows:

Table 2 Coding Table of Queer Subversion and Commodification Codes

No.	Utterances	Category	Codes
1.	"The floor is so cold, I'd rather seek warmth by hugging you, Evie."	Ambiguity and role reversal	SUB
SUB = subversion		COM = commodification	

- **Interpretation Phase**

Researchers interpreted the meaning of each data by examining how language, character behavior, and narrative structure either subvert heteronormativity or transform queer elements into marketable commodities.

In summary, this study adopted a qualitative descriptive design supported by textual analysis to examine how *Please Bully Me, Miss Villainess!* represents female–female relationships. The analytical process connected the *manhua*'s narrative elements with Butler's gender performativity and Kellner's cultural industry theory, which would serve as the foundation for presenting the research findings in the next section.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the findings and discussion to provide a clearer interpretation of how queer representation is constructed in *Please Bully Me, Miss Villainess!*. Based on qualitative content analysis, the study identified 38 utterances and narrative scenes related to the relationship between Elsa and Yvonne, which were categorized into two major patterns: 23 utterances of queer subversion and 15 utterances of queerness commodification. This section focuses on the pattern of queer subversion and commodification, which is articulated through specific narrative strategies and indicators supported by textual evidence and theoretical discussion.

Subversive Strategies in Elsa and Yvonne's Relationship

Queer subversion emerges as the dominant representational strategy in the narrative, as evidenced by 23 utterances and scenes that challenge heteronormative expectations, shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3. The Distribution of Subversive Strategies

Indicators	Percentage
Gender performativity	4,3%
Role Reversal	26,1%
Resistance to heteronormativity	69,6%

These subversive strategies are expressed through several indicators, including role reversal, resistance to heteronormative norms, and gender performativity. Among these indicators, role reversal appears as one of the most prominent and recurring forms of queer subversion.

1. Gender Performativity

From the total 23 utterances categorized as queer subversion, only one utterance reflected gender performativity. This utterance could be seen in the scene when Yvonne offered financial support to Elsa, positioning herself in a role traditionally associated with masculine responsibility within romantic relationships. This is evident in the following utterance, "*If you have financial problems, tell me. Even though I am no longer a noble, I can still pay for your living expenses*" (chapter 20). Although represented by a single utterance, the sentence signified that gender performativity was portrayed through the act of economic responsibility, a role conventionally attributed to male characters in heteronormative romance narratives. By offering financial support, Yvonne performed a gendered role that disrupted traditional associations between masculinity and economic authority.

This finding was in line with Butler (1990) that gender is not an innate identity but is performed through repeated acts that produce stability. Although this performative act

appeared only once in the data, it carried significant symbolic meaning. Yvonne's action challenged the assumption that financial provision is inherently masculine, thereby contributing to the subversive construction of the female–female relationship in the narrative.

2. Role Reversal

From the total 23 utterances categorized as queer subversion, 6 utterances and scenes reflected the indicator of role reversal. These data portrayed a reversal of conventional gendered roles commonly found in heterosexual romance narratives, particularly through Yvonne's actions toward Elsa.

One clear example can be found when Yvonne rescued Elsa as she was about to fall, a scene portrayed in a prince-like manner (Chapter 9). This scene positioned Yvonne as the protective and authoritative figure, a role traditionally associated with male characters in romantic narratives. The portrayal of Yvonne as a protector and provider reflected a significant departure from heteronormative gender roles. In conventional romance narratives, such roles are typically assigned to male characters, while female characters are positioned as passive or dependent. By assigning these roles to Yvonne, the narrative destabilized traditional gender hierarchies.

According to Butler (1990), gender is not a fixed identity but a series of repeated acts that construct the illusion of naturalness. This scene met the aforementioned theory. Yvonne's protective behavior functioned as a performative act that challenged the assumption that authority, protection, and economic responsibility are inherently masculine traits. This role reversal exposed gender roles as socially constructed rather than biologically determined.

3. Resistance to Heteronormativity

The most dominant indicator of queer subversion found in the data is resistance to heteronormativity, represented by 16 utterances. These utterances explicitly affirmed same-sex desire, commitment, and emotional legitimacy between Elsa and Yvonne. Key examples included Elsa's declaration, "*We have been together for three years. I found my destined soulmate, and I hope we can be happy forever*" (Chapter 15), as well as repeated depictions of public hand-holding, verbal affirmations of love, and plans for long-term togetherness.

These utterances directly challenged heteronormative assumptions that positioned heterosexual relationships as the default or ideal form of romance. By portraying a same-sex relationship as stable, committed, and emotionally fulfilling, the narrative resisted dominant social norms. The dominance of this indicator suggests that the text actively affirmed queer relationships rather than merely implying them. In Butler's (1990) framework, such repeated affirmations function as performative acts that normalize queer intimacy and destabilize heterosexual normativity.

Overall, the strategy of queer subversion in the relationship between Elsa and Yvonne reflected the real-life experiences of queer individuals in their everyday lives, particularly in their efforts to express their identities and relationships within dominant

social norms. However, because this story is a part of popular culture, such representations are also influenced by market interests. Therefore, although the narrative provides space for queer resistance, it simultaneously presents elements that are made appealing and easily acceptable to readers. This condition indicates a shift from resistance toward commodification, which will be discussed in the following section.

Commodification Strategies in Elsa and Yvonne's Relationship

Although queer subversion strongly shapes the relationship between Elsa and Yvonne, the findings also reveal the presence of commodification strategies. Based on the data analysis, commodification was represented within 15 utterances, portrayed through two main indicators, namely emotional selling points and simplification of queer identity, as shown in Table 4 below. Among these, emotional selling points emerged as the dominant indicator, while simplification appeared in a limited number of utterances.

Table 4. The Distribution of Commodification Strategies

Indicators	Percentage
Emotional selling points	86,7%
Role Reversal	13,3%

1. Emotional Selling Points

From the total 15 utterances categorized as commodification, 13 utterances reflected emotional selling points. These utterances emphasized romantic tension, blushing, teasing, and other intimate interactions designed to evoke emotional enjoyment rather than ideological reflection on queer identity.

Examples included scenes where Yvonne blushed when Elsa bit food she previously ate (Chapter 8), Elsa fed her (Chapter 11), Elsa teased Yvonne while changing clothes (Chapter 8), and Yvonne performed a *kabedon* on Elsa (Chapter 16). *Kabedon* refers to a popular Japanese romance trope in which a character pins another against a wall using their arm, creating an intimate and emotionally charged moment (Cassiday, 2025). These scenes highlighted cuteness, embarrassment, and physical proximity as narrative attractions.

These utterances might function primarily as emotional hooks that maintain readers' engagement with the story. Rather than advancing a critical discussion of queer identity, the narrative focuses on moments of romantic excitement and playful intimacy. According to Kellner (1995), these moments of romantic intimacy in popular culture are often commodified by transforming them into emotional pleasure that can be easily consumed. In this case, queer intimacy is framed as sweet and romantic, making it appealing to a broad audience. As a result, queer representation becomes less confrontational and more market-friendly.

2. Simplification of Queer Identity

The second indicator of commodification is the simplification of queer identity, represented by 2 utterances. These utterances reduced the emotional and ideological complexity of queer commitment by framing it as exaggerated or unrealistic.

A key example appeared when Yvonne responded to Elsa's declaration of soulmate commitment by saying, "*Calm down, we're both girls. What do you mean by fated soulmates?*" (Chapter 15). This response downplayed the seriousness of Elsa's emotional expression. This simplification seemed to neutralize the potentially subversive meaning of queer commitment. Rather than rejecting queer desire outright, the narrative reframed it as playful or excessive, reducing its ideological impact. Kellner (1995) argued that commodification often maintains visibility while limiting depth. In this narrative, queer identity remained present but was softened to ensure it remained acceptable and non-threatening to mainstream audiences.

Overall, the relationship between Elsa and Yvonne in *Please Bully Me, Miss Villainess!* was primarily constructed not only through strategies of queer subversion that challenged heteronormative norms, but also through commodification, which was repackaged for public consumption. Queer subversion was represented particularly through gender performativity, role reversal, and resistance to heteronormativity, presenting a female-female relationship as legitimate, stable, and emotionally meaningful. This representation underscores that gender roles and romantic relationships are socially constructed rather than natural. However, this queer subversion was not entirely separated from the logic of popular culture and market interests, as some representations were presented in lighter and more romantic forms that might reduce their critical force. Even so, commodification did not completely erase the subversive meaning; instead, it functioned as a narrative strategy that allowed queer representation to remain visible and acceptable within popular media.

The findings of this study answered the research question proposed above. Also, this research both supported and extended previous research on queer representation in *yuri* manga, such as Tsabitah's (2018) research. While Tsabitah (2018) emphasized queer representation as a process marked by internal conflict and emotional tension, this study signified that *Please Bully Me, Miss Villainess!* portrayed same-sex relationships in a more open and positive manner through emotional commitment, public expressions of affection, and resistance to heteronormative norms.

Nevertheless, both works extend Butler's concept of gender performativity (1990) that queer representation was moderately influenced by the logic of the popular culture market, negotiating between subversion and market acceptability. In addition, this work extends Kellner's cultural industry theory (1995), particularly through the use of emotional appeal as a narrative and commodification strategies. Therefore, this study reinforced the view that queer identity in manga is negotiative in nature, while also offering a different perspective by highlighting a more explicit form of queer affirmation that still operates within the framework of market commodification.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that *Please Bully Me, Miss Villainess!* represented queer identity through a dynamic negotiation between resistance and market-oriented representation. The relationship between Elsa and Yvonne affirmed same-sex intimacy and challenged heteronormative norms, while simultaneously being shaped by emotional appeal and narrative strategies that align with popular culture demands. As a result, queer representation in the *manhua* functions both as a form of visibility and as a commodified cultural product.

However, this study has some limitations. First, this study was limited to analyzing selected chapters; therefore, the findings could not be generalized. Second, the analysis relies only on textual and visual interpretation and does not incorporate audience reception or reader response data. Thus, it is suggested to explore the novel *manhua* to examine how queer representation is portrayed as a whole. Besides, further research may be applied in different genres, platforms, or cultural contexts to observe how identity, resistance, and market logic interact in contemporary popular media. Comparative studies involving other *yuri* works or audience reception analysis may also provide deeper insight into how queer narratives are produced, consumed, and interpreted across diverse social settings.

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