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Ineffable Husbands[1]

Sentimental Queerbaiting in the TV Series *Good Omens*

Abstract: Queerbaiting is a strategy by which media producers hint at a queer relationship between two same-sex characters in a text, with no intention of delivering. This paper proposes a method of analysis that may be used to systematically examine queerbaiting by combining audio-visual aesthetics, narrative motifs, and discourses. This is exemplified by an analysis of the friendship between the two main characters, the angel Aziraphale and the demon Crowley, in the first season of the Amazon Prime TV series *Good Omens* (2019–). In doing so, this essay investigates how sentimentality plays a crucial role in queerbaiting. I propose, ultimately, that formulas borrowed from romance films can be found in contemporary buddy TV series featuring two male-staged protagonists by comparing *Good Omens* to other TV series in which queerbaiting takes place, such as *Sherlock* (2010–2017) and *Supernatural* (2005–2020).

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[1] This essay is based on the conference presentation Ineffable Husbands – Die Inszenierung und Rezeption sentimentaler Männerfreundschaften in Buddy-Filmen und -Serien. Versuch einer Systematisierung des Verhältnisses von Queerbaiting, Affizierung und Fandom on April 1, 2023 at the Film- und Medienwissenschaftliches Kolloquium (ffk36).

1. Introduction

Good Omens: The Nice and Accurate Prophecies of Agnes Nutter, Witch was first a fantasy novel, published in 1990 and written by Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett. It has been adapted as a TV series for Amazon Prime Video, beginning in 2019 (showrunner: Neil Gaiman). In *Good Omens*, the angel Aziraphale and the demon Crowley try to save humanity by preventing Armageddon, the final battle between Heaven and Hell, because they find themselves enjoying life on Earth – and each other's company.

Since the book's publication, fans of *Good Omens* have been writing homoerotic fan fiction and creating fan art (slash)[1] in which they ship[2] Aziraphale and Crowley, giving the two male-staged[3] characters the name *Ineffable Husbands*.[4] In doing so, fans pick up an expression from the novel in which God's plans are described as 'ineffable'.[5] After the release of the TV series, fans have continued in that fashion,[6] which raises the question, why fans read the two protagonists, who are portrayed as just friends in the original text, as a homosexual couple. I propose in this essay that queerbaiting, which occurs both in the novel as well as in the TV series, is the reason for that phenomenon, and that sentimentality plays a crucial role in queerbaiting. This article will therefore examine how sentimental queerbaiting operates in the first season of *Good Omens*.[7]

First, this paper will address the terms 'sentimentality' and 'queerbaiting' and define them in more detail. Regarding sentimentality, earlier approaches in film studies that address the concept, such as Kathrin Mädler's approach to melodrama, will be considered and developed further. Regarding queerbaiting, this article will build on a definition of the term by Judith Fathallah. A queerbaiting analysis method will be presented that may be used to systematically examine queerbaiting, combining audio-visual aesthetics, narrative motifs, and discourses. Since the relations between sentimentality and queerbaiting in audio-visual media have not yet been explicitly defined in media studies, this article aims to contribute to the further development of these conceptualizations.

1 'Slash' refers to fan stories in which two characters of the same sex and gender are in a romantic or sexual relationship or situation; cf. Fanlore contributors 2023a: N. pag.

2 In fandom, the term 'shipping' describes the transformation of two characters into a couple, e.g., in fan fiction; cf. Fanlore contributors 2023b: N. pag.

3 Thus, Aziraphale and Crowley are described in the novel as "they were both men, or at least men-shaped creatures"; Pratchett/Gaiman 2019 [1990]: 41.

4 Cf. "Ineffable Husbands Rule Good Omens - Aziraphale & Crowley" ShippersGuideToTheGalaxy, *YouTube* (21.06.2019), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0V8kcSrcX3E (20.06.2023).

5 Cf. Pratchett/Gaiman 2019 [1990]: 344.

6 Cf. "Ineffable Husbands Rule Good Omens - Aziraphale & Crowley" 2019.

7 When writing this article, the second season of *Good Omens* had not been released yet.

This is followed by a queerbaiting analysis of the TV series *Good Omens*. As the analysis and the comparison with *Sherlock* (2010–2017) and *Supernatural* (2005–2020) will show, there are certain aspects in the series that apply to queerbaiting strategies and that can be found in other contemporary buddy TV series as well featuring two or more strong male lead characters. In doing so, these shows share similarities with formulas of romance movies, like the use of love songs and certain plots, such as 'forbidden love'.

2. Sentimentality

If one reads a genealogy of the term 'sentimentality', it is noticeable that the term acquired a negative connotation from the end of the 18th century to the present day,[8] often being used to describe bad taste.[9] According to Charles Burnetts, sentimental texts have often been accused of being manipulative.[10] Concerning film, Burnetts specifically criticizes that 'sentimentality' is not used objectively and as a term of analysis:[11]

> Indeed, all too often, calling a film or film sequence sentimental tells us more about the critic than the film itself, especially in cases where the term is used at the expense of substantive textual analysis.[12]

This paper aims to return to a neutral use of the term and ties in with more recent approaches that do not equate sentimentality with bad taste but understand it as an aesthetic or narrative mode, like the approaches of Mädler and Faye Halpern, as discussed in the following.

Halpern associates "sentimentality with certain kinds of plots and themes. I divided up the universe of sentimental novels into plots of ascent […] and descent."[13] However, in her opinion these criteria are not sufficient, and she continues, "we should see sentimentality as less a *what* than a *how*: how does a sentimental text direct its audience to read?"[14] Mädler, too, understands sentimentality in melodramatic cinema as a narrative strategy or structure that

> emotionale Zustände verarbeitet und diesen Bilder verleiht – häufig auch mit der Absicht, ähnliche emotionale Zustände zu erzeugen. Sentimentalität bildet dabei

8 Cf. Burnetts 2017: 33.
9 Cf. ibid.: 24.
10 Cf. ibid.: 3–4.
11 Cf. ibid.: 6.
12 Ibid.: 6.
13 Halpern 2013: xii.
14 Ibid.: xv.

> ein Repertoire von Mustern und Inszenierungen, die Emotionen in einer Form erstarren lassen und sie so öffentlich machen.[15]

She adds in terms of sentimental narratives that such stories focus on groups of people and the bonding of characters rather than individualistic heroes. Moreover, Mädler views sentimentality as a strategy that is used intentionally:

> [Sentimentalität] kann als Gestus, der um Bindungen statt Individualität bemüht ist, verstanden werden, als auf Verständnis Anderer und somit Einfühlung, Sympathie und Identifikation statt Abgrenzung zielend. Eine sentimentale Narrative erzählt von Bindungen der Figuren, von Kollektiven und deren Bildung, sowie deren Scheitern eher als von individualistischen Helden. […] Auf der Rezeptionsebene strebt sie beim Zuschauer die Einfühlung in eine Figur an, eine emotionale mehr denn eine rationale Aufnahme und verkörpert damit eine zielgerichtete Darstellungsstrategie [sic].[16]

In both definitions of the term, narrative strategies such as narrative motifs play a role, as well as how and with which intention sentimentality is staged in media texts, e.g., audio-visual aesthetics. Halpern refers to the nineteenth-century American novel[17] and Mädler to melodramatic cinema in her remarks, so genre-specific stagings may also be of significance. This essay will follow these approaches, with certain additions.

Since this paper will consider sentimentality in relation to queerbaiting in *Good Omens*, it is first necessary to classify the TV series in more detail. As mentioned earlier, I would categorize *Good Omens* as a buddy TV series with supernatural elements. Thus, in reference to the first season, actor Michael Sheen (role: Aziraphale) states that *Good Omens* is a "buddy story".[18] Indeed, the aspect of friendship between the two main characters is key to the narrative. In general, it can be observed that sentimental queerbaiting is often staged in TV series that focus on friendship, such as *Sherlock* or *Supernatural*.

Further, analogies with the romance film or romantic comedies can be found in the layout of the main characters and their friendship. For example, in reference to the

15 Mädler 2016: 41. [English translation of the quote: "processes emotional states and gives them images – often also with the intention of generating similar emotional states. Sentimentality thereby forms a repertoire of patterns and stagings that congeal emotions into a form and thus make them public."]

16 Ibid.: 42. [English translation of the quote: "[Sentimentality] can be understood as a gesture that strives for bonds rather than individuality, as aiming at understanding others and thus empathy, sympathy, and identification rather than detachment. A sentimental narrative tells of the bonds of the characters, of collectives and their formation, as well as their failure rather than of individualistic heroes. [...] On the level of reception, it strives for the viewer's empathy with a character, an emotional rather than a rational absorption, and thus embodies an intentional representational strategy."]

17 Cf. Halpern 2013: xii.

18 Sheen as quoted in "Ineffable Husbands Rule Good Omens - Aziraphale & Crowley" 2019: 00:07:52–00:07:56.

buddy film, Philippa Gates notes: "In buddy films, the male-female romantic couple is replaced with the male-male couple, setting up a contemplation of intimacy relatively free from social convention."[19] Anette Kaufmann describes in her book on the love film (*Liebesfilm*) that certain formulas in these films recur,[20] such as the use of love songs[21] and certain plots like 'forbidden love',[22] i.e. sentimental aesthetics and narration that can also be found in buddy TV series. Accordingly, I understand sentimentality in this essay as a form of romance – a romantic code – albeit not between a couple, but within a bond of two male friends.

In accordance, Heike Paul et al. conceive sentimentality as a "communicative and relational code which can draw on emotional knowledge and activate empathy."[23] This is because through sentimental aesthetics and narration in TV series, communication occurs between the characters and objects on the screen and the viewers, triggering an emotional and empathetic response in the viewers. In order to grasp the staging of sentimental queerbaiting in more detail, the term queerbaiting will be defined in the following along with discussions on such romantic motifs.

3. Queerbaiting

The term 'queerbaiting' is still relatively new in academia and has received little attention so far. For this reason, there is no unified definition of the term. Queerbaiting has a genealogy that can be traced back to the 1980s.[24] This essay will refer to the definition of the term that became established in fan studies: when producers of a media text attempt to attract viewers through hinted queerness.[25] The most commonly used definition of queerbaiting comes from Fathallah, who defines queerbaiting

> as a strategy by which writers and networks attempt to gain the attention of queer viewers via hints, jokes, gestures, and symbolism suggesting a queer relationship between two characters, and then emphatically denying and laughing off the possibility.[26]

In this paper, I will follow up on this definition by first distinguishing between queerbaiting and queer reading. As Fathallah writes, *queerbaiting* comes from the networks and authors and will be understood in this essay as a strategy that is used

19 Gates 2003: 74–75.
20 Cf. Kaufmann 2007: 63.
21 Cf. ibid.: 143.
22 Cf. ibid.: 63.
23 Paul et al. n.d.: N. pag.
24 Cf. Nordin 2019: 25.
25 Cf. ibid.: 26.
26 Fathallah 2015: 491.

intentionally. Thus, Emma Nordin states in this context: "What we see is a slow revival of the author, with the author eventually taking back ownership, publicly and overtly making promises that they then fail to deliver on."[27] *Queer reading*, on the other hand, originally comes from literature studies,[28] but has been adopted by fan studies and is defined by some scholars as fans reading into a media text a queer representation that may not be there.[29] Nordin indicates, to put it briefly, that queer reading is one possible interpretation of many,[30] and adds: "queer reading was also a necessity for people who wanted queer content in mainstream media."[31] The term queerbaiting therefore pertains to the production side, while queer reading relates to the reception side and presupposes the 'death' of the author.[32]

Based on Fathallah's definition, a further delimitation of queerbaiting becomes clear. Queerbaiting is not about single characters negotiating their gender identity, gender fluidity, or about transgender people. As Fathallah writes, it is about "a queer relationship between two characters",[33] that is, more about sexuality or homoeroticism.

Queerbaiting, however, sometimes cannot be clearly distinguished from queer representation. For example, in an analysis of fan forums, Nordin notices fans discuss what differences there are between[34] "subtext, queerbaiting, heterosexism, and poor representation."[35] Indeed, it can be argued that TV series accused of queerbaiting might also address asexuality or portray sexuality as a continuum. In the case of the analysis example, the TV series *Good Omens*, the term 'queerbaiting' is being used because the two male-cast protagonists refer to each other as "best friend"[36] and there is no explicit dialogue between the two (e.g., "I love you") that suggests a romantic relationship.

The term queerbaiting in today's sense originally caught on in fan forums like Tumblr, where fans heatedly discussed how queer representations in media texts are only hinted at but then ultimately fail to materialize.[37] Queerbaiting, like sentimentality, is thus a concept with a rather negative connotation that is deemed to be manipulative. However, queerbaiting has also been used in the past to

27 Nordin 2019: 40.
28 Kosofsky Sedgwick is often referred to as the 'inventor' of queer reading; cf. Cuntz-Leng 2015: 52.
29 Cf. Nordin 2015: 20.
30 Cf. Nordin 2019: 26.
31 Ibid.: 26.
32 Cf. ibid.: 28.
33 Fathallah 2015: 491.
34 Cf. Nordin 2019: 27–28.
35 Ibid.: 28.
36 S1E5, 00:12:00–00:12:02. In the following, the number of an episode (e.g. "E1") is given after the number of the season (e.g. "S1") in the footnotes. Unless otherwise stated, this always refers to *Good Omens*.
37 Cf. Nordin 2019: 26.

circumvent censorship in countries where explicit queer representations are not allowed.[38] In this paper, I will not consider the term as either negative or positive but will simply establish *that* queerbaiting takes place in *Good Omens*.

So how can one recognize queerbaiting in a TV series? As Fathallah writes, there are "hints, jokes, gestures, and symbolism",[39] that suggest queerbaiting and that recur in buddy TV series.[40] Chris Winkle goes into more detail on such hints and asks in an article, "Is that queerbaiting intentional? Here's how to tell"[41] and spells out "Twelve Signs a Storyteller Is Building Romantic & Sexual Chemistry"[42] by referring to TV series like *Good Omens* and *Sherlock*.[43] Some of those signs are "Emphasis on Hugs and Physical Contact", "Activities Associated With Dating", "Staring & Close Eye Contact", "Voicing How Much They Care", "Bonds of Magic or Destiny", or "Onlookers Assume They're Dating."[44] In the following, I want to extend and systematize the list of "signs" or "hints" mentioned by Fathallah and Winkle that indicate queerbaiting and that show parallels to romance films.

I propose a method for analyzing queerbaiting that unites three parameters: audio-visual aesthetics, narrative motifs, and discourses. Audio-visual aesthetics that indicate queerbaiting can be romantic music (e.g., love songs), suggestive acting and cinematography (e.g., the male-male gaze), romantic set design (e.g., candlelight dinners), and physical contact. Narrative motifs may include ambiguous or suggestive dialogues, the protagonists being mistaken for a couple by other characters, fatherhood, romantic activities, voicing their affection, the representation of an odd couple, and a supernatural bond. Discourses, finally, mainly involve interviews with creators and fan-producer[45] interactions (e.g., on the Internet), such as the publishing of ambiguous trailers by streaming providers or other promotional material that fans then comment on. Thus, Nordin notes:

> The relationship between fans and producers has been defined as a big part of the queerbaiting strategy, since it is an ongoing process where they react to and comment on each other's actions.[46]

38 Cf. ibid.: 26.
39 Fathallah 2015: 491.
40 Cf. Venzmer 2023: N. pag.
41 Winkle 2020: N. pag.
42 Ibid.: N. pag.
43 Cf. ibid.: N. pag.
44 Ibid.: N. pag.
45 When the term creator or producer is used in this article, it refers to fan studies in which not only the authors or producers of a TV series are referred to as creators or producers, but *all* persons involved in a production, e.g., also streaming providers or actors; cf. Nordin 2019: 26.
46 Nordin 2019: 31.

In the following, a queerbaiting analysis of the TV series *Good Omens* will be undertaken that combines all three parameters of sentimental queerbaiting – audio-visual aesthetics, narrative motifs, and discourses.

4. Sentimental Queerbaiting in *Good Omens*

In the following analysis, one example will be given for each of the three parameters, since it would go beyond the scope of this article to give examples for all of the mentioned possible hints of queerbaiting.[47] As an example for audio-visual aesthetics, I will discuss the romantic music in *Good Omens*. As an example for narrative motifs, I will examine the aspect of the supernatural bond. And finally, as an example for discourses, I will briefly analyze two posters for the second season of *Good Omens* by Amazon Prime.

4.1 Romantic Music: "You're My Best Friend"?

In the novel *Good Omens,* the demon Crowley likes to listen to the band Queen.[48] Therefore, Queen songs are also part of the first season's soundtrack, especially in the fifth episode. At the beginning of that episode, Crowley drives to Aziraphale's bookshop looking for the angel, and the song *You're my best friend* by Queen is playing.[49] This song was written by the band's bass player, John Deacon, who wrote it about and for his wife.[50] It is therefore a love song. For this sequence, the creators of *Good Omens* chose the part of the song that says:

> Ooh, you make me live. Whenever this world is cruel to me. I got you to help me forgive. Ooh, you make me live now, honey. Ooh, you make me live. You're the first one when things turn out bad. You know I'll never be lonely. You're my only one and I love the things, I really love the things that you do. Oh, you're my best friend.[51]

The lyrics hint at a romantic relationship between Aziraphale and Crowley by referring to central motifs of the TV series: struggles with life on Earth, loneliness, forgiveness, and friendship. First of all, as an angel and a demon, the two characters are ethereal beings living alone in the human world, but they have each other and that is why they never feel lonely. Without one another, they would probably not want to live anymore after all those years they have been on Earth, since Crowley is

47 I explored more hints in another (blog) article, e.g. "Other Characters Mistake the Protagonists for a Couple", "The Male-Male Gaze and Romantic Activities", and "Suggestive or Ambiguous Dialogues"; cf. Venzmer 2023: N. pag.

48 Cf. Pratchett/Gaiman 2019 [1990]: 15.

49 Cf. S1E5.

50 Cf. Chilton 2023: N. pag.

51 S1E5, 00:00:05–00:00:53.

considering suicide in the third episode.[52] They are also each other's "only one" because it is obvious that they are not interested in connecting with other people or their fellow angels and demons. They have only close contact with each other.

Secondly, Aziraphale is the first one for Crowley to turn to when things turn out bad and vice versa, like in the first episode of the TV series when he calls Aziraphale after he is informed about the imminent Armageddon.[53] Third, Crowley loves the things that Aziraphale does, like listening to music. Although the song *You're my best friend* is first played in Crowley's car when Crowley drives to Aziraphale's bookshop, the song continues to play in the bookshop on an old gramophone when Crowley enters.[54] So apparently, Crowley and Aziraphale share their interest in music. Last, Aziraphale helps Crowley to forgive – or rather, he forgives him. In the third episode, Aziraphale states that Crowley may be forgiven as a demon in case Heaven will win the final battle between Heaven and Hell.[55] Crowley then responds: "I won't be forgiven. Not ever. […] Unforgiveable. That's what I am."[56] In the fourth episode, they pick up on that line again and Aziraphale says to Crowley after a fight "I forgive you"[57] in a sentimental tone, trying to save his life and stop Crowley from leaving him.[58] Thus, forgiveness is a major theme in the TV series.

Another musical clue follows shortly in the fifth episode. When Crowley stands in the middle of Aziraphale's bookshop – assuming his angel is dead – he shouts: "Somebody killed my best friend! Bastards! All of you!"[59] Devastated, he then leaves the bookshop and the Queen song *Somebody to love* – another love song – plays while he drives off in his Bentley quite depressed,[60] with the lyrics "Find me somebody to love" being repeated in a loop.[61] The lyrics can be interpreted to mean that he wants Aziraphale back in his life.

Kaufmann states that in movies, such as the love film, music has the function of controlling affects.[62] Fans are affected by such sentimental aesthetics in *Good Omens*, which can be seen by the fact that they reproduce these aesthetics in their fan products. They take a similar approach to the TV series and relate the lyrics of the songs to the plots of *Good Omens*, such as the YouTube fan video *Crowley & Aziraphale || My Best Friend* by the user CTippy. This vidder uses the whole song *You're my best friend* by Queen and cuts scenes from the TV series to fit the lyrics. For example, at

52 Cf. S1E3.
53 Cf. S1E1.
54 Cf. S1E5.
55 Cf. S1E3.
56 S1E3, 00:51:20–00:51:28.
57 S1E4, 00:34:16–00:34:18.
58 Cf. ibid.
59 S1E5, 00:01:09–00:01:18.
60 Cf. ibid.
61 Ibid., 00:03:26–00:04:17.
62 Cf. Kaufmann 2007: 142.

one point the lyrics say "It's you, you're all I see" and during that part of the song, the reflection of Aziraphale's face in Crowley's sunglasses is shown.[63]

At another point in the video, the lyrics "Been with you such a long time" accompany a scene from *Good Omens* in which Aziraphale and Crowley meet for the first time in the Garden of Eden 6000 years ago.[64] At another part of the video, the lyrics "Ooh, I've been wandering round but still come back to you" correspond with the visual material by showing scenes in which Crowley threatens Aziraphale to leave him and to go to Alpha Centuri, but eventually ends up staying with Aziraphale on Earth.[65]

Martin Chilton calls *You're my best friend* by Deacon "one of Queen's most emotional songs",[66] which is why I believe it to be a deliberate choice by the producers in order to provide the audience with suggestive music that allows the fan to respond to the characters empathetically and create a romantic narrative around the *Good Omens* characters trying to advance and deepen their relationship. There is a communication between the characters and aesthetics on the screen and the viewers. Thus, as Mädler notes, sentimentality forms a repertoire of stagings that allow to transfer emotions into a form[67] and thus, in this case, invite active reception and fan-creator interactions.

Music is also used in other buddy TV series in the form of sentimental queerbaiting, such as in *Sherlock*. In the final sequence of the last episode, for example, Sherlock Holmes plays the sentimental song (with the ambiguous title) *Who You Really Are* on his violin with his sister and meanwhile one sees his future life with John Watson in pictures, e.g., the two of them as father figures for Watson's child[68] – a narrative that in combination with the song gives the viewer the illusion of them being an old married couple. Sentimental music is often used at the end of the final episode of a TV series. In *Good Omens*, Aziraphale and Crowley are reunited at the end of the first season and have a candlelight dinner at the Ritz in the last sequence, while the love song *A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square* by Tori Amos is playing in the background.[69] The song, combined with the set design, again gives the viewer the illusion of a romantic relationship without the relationship ever being confirmed.

4.2 The Supernatural Bond

As mentioned above, the demon Crowley and the angel Aziraphale are two ethereal beings. For this reason, they are connected by a supernatural bond, which I will use

63 Cf. "Crowley & Aziraphale || My Best Friend" CTippy, *YouTube* (03.06.2019), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1VRA8gMh64M (20.06.2023): 00:00:16–00:00:20.
64 Cf. ibid.: 00:00:35–00:00:38.
65 Cf. ibid.: 00:00:56–00:01:10.
66 Chilton 2023: N. pag.
67 Cf. Mädler 2016: 41.
68 *Sherlock* S4E3: 01:25:54–01:28:24.
69 S1E6, 00:51:45–00:52:16.

as an example for the usage of narrative motifs for queerbaiting. About bonds of destiny or magic, Winkle states:

> Our culture has countless stories about characters thrust into roles that make them essential to both the world and each other. These characters might be magically linked together, perhaps even hearing each other's thoughts. The bond might be one of prophecy, with the characters needing each other to save the world. […] Storytellers have used this trope so many times in their romances that it carries a strong romantic connotation.[70]

In *Good Omens*, Aziraphale and Crowley, as mentioned earlier, want to save the world and humanity, as well as prevent the war between Heaven and Hell, even though they are on opposite sides as angel and demon. Since Aziraphale and Crowley are the only demon and angel who do not want to participate in the war, they depend on each other to save the world. This narrative can also be found in other buddy TV series such as *Supernatural*, in which two brothers and an angel battle demons and other creatures to save the world. From the fourth season onwards, *Supernatural* even has a similar plot to *Good Omens*, as Armageddon is also to be prevented and the character Dean Winchester and the angel Castiel develop an affection for each other.[71]

Aziraphale and Crowley do not seem to hear each other's thoughts, but they seem to 'sense' each other, for example, when the other one is in trouble. Although their jobs as angel and demon is to perform miracles and temptations all over the world, in the TV series they meet suspiciously often in certain places and save each other. During the cold open of the third episode, for example, they meet in Rome, London, Paris, among other places.[72] Whenever they meet in this sequence, each is surprised that the other one is also there, which suggests that they do not arrange to meet beforehand but can probably sense each other when they are in trouble and therefore have a supernatural connection. In the fifth episode, when Crowley finds Aziraphale's bookshop burned down, he knows that Aziraphale is dead and does not look for him in another place because he can sense that he is gone (or 'discorporated').[73]

Halpern recognizes plots of descent and ascent in sentimental narratives.[74] In terms of buddy TV series, plots of suffering and empowerment can be found. Crowley obviously suffers when he assumes that Aziraphale is dead, as he is getting drunk and crying in a bar afterwards.[75] Death and resurrection are also a common theme in the TV series *Supernatural*. After Dean Winchester dies, the angel Castiel saves his

70 Winkle 2020: N. pag.
71 Cf. *Supernatural* S4E22.
72 Cf. S1E3.
73 Cf. S1E5.
74 Cf. Halpern 2013: xii.
75 Cf. S1E5.

life and brings him back from Hell at the beginning of the fourth season.[76] Similarly, Aziraphale tries to save the life of a human, Sergeant Shadwell, dies in the process and is resurrected later.[77] But there are also other moments of suffering in *Good Omens*, such as break-up scenes. The two protagonists are generally presented as an odd couple (angel/demon), and although they are friends, conflicts arise due to their different 'backgrounds' (Heaven/Hell). As Aziraphale states in one scene, "I am an angel. You are a demon. We're hereditary enemies. Get thee behind me, foul fiend"[78] (which is also a suggestive dialogue).

There are several break-up scenes in *Good Omens*. For example, Crowley and Aziraphale disagree on what to do with the Antichrist – a child – when they find him, whether or not to kill him to save the world. In the third episode, Aziraphale is having doubts about whether he should continue to work with Crowley. When Crowley suggests they can run away together, Aziraphale responds:[79]

> Go off together? Listen to yourself. […] We're not friends. We are an angel and a demon. We have nothing whatsoever in common. I don't even like you. […] Even if I did know where the Antichrist was, I wouldn't tell you. We're on opposite sides.[80]

To this, Crowley responds, "We're on our side."[81] Aziraphale finally makes it clear: "There is no 'our side', Crowley. Not anymore. It's over."[82] Crowley then is seen walking off feeling rejected, and the scene concludes with Aziraphale crying and standing alone in a gazebo.[83]

In this scene, a narrative formula of the love film is used, namely "forbidden love".[84] According to Kaufmann, this formula is characterized by obstacles such as a different origin,[85] which is the case in *Good Omens*, where the two are not actually allowed to work together. Crowley sees himself and Aziraphale on the same side, as both want to save the world. Aziraphale, on the other hand, has doubts and emphasizes that they are on different sides. In the end, however, Aziraphale changes his mind and the collaboration between him and Crowley proves to be empowering. Together with a group of people, they save the world without having to kill the Antichrist, and there is a happy ending. Aziraphale and Crowley can be friends in the end without having to hide and are granted immunity from Heaven and Hell.[86]

76 Cf. *Supernatural* S4E1.
77 Cf. S1E4.
78 S1E1, 00:29:48–00:29:56.
79 Cf. S1E3.
80 Ibid., 00:52:19–00:52:43.
81 Ibid., 00:52:43–00:52:45.
82 Ibid., 00:52:45–00:52:50.
83 Cf. ibid.
84 Kaufmann 2007: 63.
85 Cf. ibid.: 63.
86 Cf. S1E6.

As one can see and as Mädler describes, sentimental narratives are about collectives and bonds of the characters, their formation, as well as their separation.[87]

4.3 Suggestive Posters

To conclude the analysis, I will briefly discuss two posters that Amazon Prime published to promote the second season of *Good Omens* and which are intended to serve as an example of queerbaiting discourses. The first poster was published at the end of 2022[88] and shows Aziraphale and Crowley standing next to each other (fig. 1).

As one can see, the alignment of their wings forms a heart, suggesting a romantic relationship. If you look closely, you can see a vertical line in the middle between the two characters that looks like a lightning bolt. The line is formed by the two different colors of the protagonists' clothing, which stand out from each other. This detail could indicate that there could be further break-up scenes in the second season. As in the first season, there could be an oscillation between suffering and empowerment. Nordin notes in this context:

> Promotions such as trailers, posters, and interviews all help to create and give each other meaning, and queerbaiting could occur with the help of campaigns, interviews, and trailers, as well as previous films/episodes.[89]

87 Cf. Mädler 2016: 42.
88 Cf. Boccella 2022: N. pag.
89 Nordin 2019: 35.

Fig. 1: *Good Omens* 2 Poster

The wing theme is often taken up by fans in the *Good Omens* fandom, such as in fan fiction, in so-called *wing fics*,[90] and is accordingly appealing to fans. It remains to be seen whether this poster suggests that queerbaiting will continue in the second season or whether a romantic relationship will develop between the two characters.

In another poster for the second season, the two protagonists are seen walking in the rain from behind (fig. 2). References to romance films are also evident here. The rain and the umbrella on this poster evoke associations with films such as *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) and *Les parapluies de Cherbourg* (*The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*; 1964). Rain is generally a trope in romance movies and is often used in dramatic break-up scenes or to stage a kissing scene. The postures of the two protagonists indicate that they are slowly getting closer, as Aziraphale tilts his head towards Crowley and Crowley stretches his leg towards Aziraphale. Once again, a romantic relationship between the two is hinted at, but not clearly staged.[91]

90 Cf. "Ineffable Husbands Rule Good Omens - Aziraphale & Crowley" 2019.

91 The description of the second poster was inspired by an exchange with Dr. Vera Cuntz-Leng.

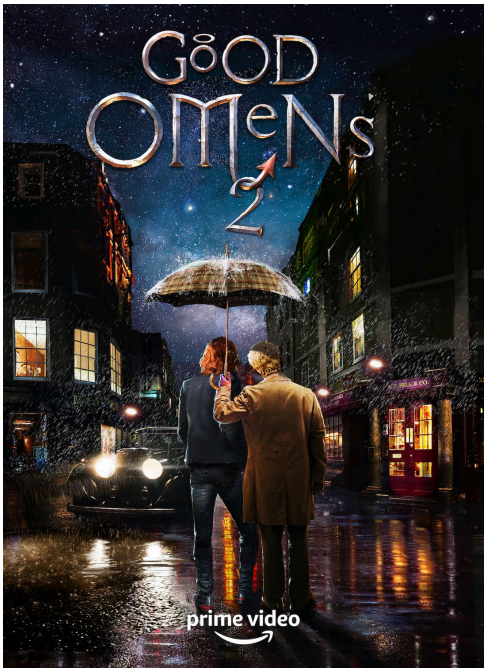

Fig. 2: Another Good Omens 2 Poster

Until the second season is released, such posters have the function of retaining old fans who are interested in LGBTQIA+ themes or homoeroticism, such as shippers, and in attracting new ones.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to give an example of how sentimental queerbaiting in TV series can be systematically examined by following aesthetic and narrative hints, as well as looking at surrounding discourses. If certain aesthetics, narratives, and discourses are repeated in buddy TV series – the ineffable husbands-formula – I argue that it can only be a strategy that is used on purpose and that it is queerbaiting and not queer reading. Ultimately, the aim of queerbaiting is to attract fans, queer audiences and slash fans alike, and let them play with these references in their own fan products and stimulate participatory culture, as the example of the YouTube fan video shows. The act of queerbaiting thereby fosters a particular interpretation.

Sentimentality is used to trigger an empathetic response from fans who are emotionally invested in the protagonists' relationship. By turning more people into fans, producers ensure people to engage with their media texts for a long time and that they acquire a cult following. Thus, queerbaiting can be perceived primarily as a marketing strategy for commercial reasons, as more fans lead to more sales and are game to buy expensive and exclusive Blu-Ray box sets or other transmedia

products. In addition, it can lead to media producers rebooting their franchise in the future.

In this paper, I have focussed on the aesthetic and narrative hints in the TV series itself. For future research, it would certainly be useful to take a closer look at the discourses and the reactions of fans to queerbaiting. Actors Michael Sheen and David Tennant, who play Aziraphale and Crowley in *Good Omens*, are also friends in real life. They were seen together in the TV series *Staged* (2020–2023), in which they communicate via Zoom during the COVID-19 pandemic and play themselves.[92] Joseph Brennan and Michael McDermott call such a phenomenon *celebrity queerbaiting*, when queerbaiting can be found among people in real life.[93] It would be useful to look at what role actors play in queerbaiting and what connection fans have to them.

A further research gap can be identified in modes of feeling in connection with TV series. It can be observed that most academic books that deal with emotions or sentimentality refer to films. It would be useful to investigate whether the bonds between the characters in TV series are transferred to the viewers and have a community-building effect on them, e.g., in fan communities. Thus, sentimentality in TV series could be the thread that connects us to characters and their stories, bridging the gap between the screen and the audience.

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92 Cf. Golby 2021: N. pag.

93 Cf. Brennan/McDermott 2019: 123.

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