

**Superheroes**  
**KS4**  
**Friday - English**

**Now that we've got a female Thor, let's topple every pale, male and stale superhero character we can**



**Stealing a few spots from original characters at the front of the box office race is not only positive, but absolutely necessary if underrepresented actors are to have a fighting chance**

- [KT Roberts](#)

Superhero movies are important – that's not an opinion, it's just true.

*Avengers: Endgame* is the top box-office film of all time – raking in \$2.79bn and watched by millions. Superpowers get bums on seats... and sneaking in social justice messages under the radar is a tried and tested way of speaking to the masses.

These stories have always been about underdogs proving their worth, or those who are “Other” finding their place – and the recent wave of heroes who truly reflect these traits is one we should cheer as it builds into a tsunami.

Since Saturday's announcement of a female Thor, the internet has blown up with people wailing that the historically straight, white, male pool of superheroes is being drained for a more diverse roster.

Many can be safely ignored. I saw one person on social media bemoaning the betrayal of the Norse myths – a complaint curiously absent for *Thor: Ragnarok* – I'd love to know which myth has Jeff Goldblum swanning about in an orgy spaceship.

It's the ostensibly more reasonable complaints of “I don't mind female/POC/LGBT+ characters, but why can't they make their own?” that nettles me – because make no mistake, we are! *Villain, Interrupted*, my play about supervillains in prison therapy, runs at the Camden Fringe in August – highlighting my point perfectly. Original characters, even the ones created by behemoths like Marvel or DC, have nothing like the traction of old favourites, meaning we're starting the race seconds before



the big boys cross the finish line. Stealing a few of their spots at the front is not only positive, but absolutely necessary.

Quite apart from anything else, it genuinely makes the art better and *bigger*.

Audiences tire of the same old stories, told by the same old people, with the same old characters just dressed up in different superpowers. Look at the success of films like *Black Panther*, *Captain Marvel*, or the aforementioned *Thor: Ragnarok*, which took a risk, hired a minority director, let him get on with his (frankly insane) ideas and reaped the rewards in the form of a massive box office smash (\$854m), fawned over by critics. Likewise, *Into the Spideverse* re-imagined Spiderman as a black teen graffiti artist – and won an Academy award and \$375.5m at the box office.

It clearly makes for more successful movies with better bottom lines – which a cynic might say is all Hollywood cares about.

But just consider the raw potential harnessed by films seen by millions. Giving audiences superheroes (and spies and princesses) different to themselves normalises diversity in a way targeted campaigns can only dream of. This is the power of representation – I can't tell you how good it felt to watch women, PLURAL, fight alongside the men in *Endgame*, and how disappointing it was to have Marvel swerve an (onscreen-or-it-doesn't-count) bisexual superhero in the form of Valkyrie – something they have pledged to correct in Phase 4.

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So yes, let's plunder the male heroes – and Thor is an excellent place to start. There's a simple mechanism by which someone else can gain his powers – as shown in *Endgame* with Steve Rogers (to whoops of glee from the fanboys now complaining). Plus, Marvel women have a history of relegation to the sappy love interest or worse, the "feisty" girl whose only power is the super-boyfriend backing her up. Jane Foster's a particular victim of this casual misogyny: she spent 2011's *Thor* demanding S.H.I.E.L.D give back her life's work (they capitulate when Thor asks) and the sequel, *Thor: The Dark World*, as a swooning damsel, showing her mettle by giving Loki a good slap... while he's in cuffs and Thor is standing right there.

Finally this is a chance for the character to (ironically) step out of Thor's shadow.

And that should be a call to arms for the rest of us, in front of and behind the cameras.

Women directors are few and far between and are only just starting to helm blockbuster films without a single female lead, with Chloe Zhao directing *The Eternals*.

We're stepping out of the shadows – and if we can step on our male predecessors along the way, all the better.

1. Using evidence from the text, explain the writer's opinions on female superheroes.
2. How does the writer use language to influence the reader?
3. Do you think there should be a female Thor?