

Uncertain Futures: Tradition, Balance, and Change in The Legend of Korra “Book Two: Spirits”

Premiering on April 14, 2012, *The Legend of Korra* (LOK, 2012-2014) was the highly anticipated sequel to the award-winning Nickelodeon cartoon *Avatar: The Last Airbender* (ATLA, 2005-2008), created by Michael Dante DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko. Though the shows take place in the same fictional universe, DiMartino and Konietzko are not retreading the same narrative ground. Where ATLA is a fantasy-adventure more akin to *Star Wars* in tone and structure, LOK is “a show about big ideas”, placing a greater emphasis on the nuances found in sociopolitical and philosophical conflicts (Hyden). LOK is also set approximately 70 years after the first series and offers viewers a new main cast, new locations, and, most importantly, a new Avatar protagonist. Described early on as the only person who “can master all four elements and bring balance to the world”, Korra is markedly different from her predecessor-Avatar Aang (DiMartino & Konietzko). As Avatars cyclically reincarnate through the four element-themed nations, she was born into the Southern Water Tribe. In ATLA, water is described as “the element of great change” and it’s no surprise that change is one of the “big ideas” that factors heavily in LOK (DiMartino & Konietzko). We would argue that in LOK, because of her duty to “bring balance” to a world constantly in flux, change is simultaneously Korra’s greatest adversary and her greatest strength in way not explored in the first series.

This presentation focuses on the show’s second season, “Book Two: Spirits”, which largely takes place in Korra’s homeland and features a conflict born from her own family history, casting her paternal uncle as the chapter’s main antagonist. Through this conflict, the book plays change against core series concepts: tradition, legacy, and balance. Furthermore, two episodes mid-chapter chronicle the history of the first avatar, highlighting the above three tenets and creating a significant connection between the inner and outer narratives. By having these four ideals in conversation, DiMartino & Konietzko reach beyond the world of *Avatar* to address the complexities and anxieties of past’s role in a fluctuating present and uncertain future.