GENDER FORUM

An Internet Journal for Gender Studies

Queer Film and Television

Edited by
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About

Gender forum is an online, peer reviewed academic journal dedicated to the discussion of gender issues. As an electronic journal, *gender forum* offers a free-of-charge platform for the discussion of gender-related topics in the fields of literary and cultural production, media and the arts as well as politics, the natural sciences, medicine, the law, religion and philosophy. Inaugurated by Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier in 2002, the quarterly issues of the journal have focused on a multitude of questions from different theoretical perspectives of feminist criticism, queer theory, and masculinity studies. gender forum also includes reviews and occasionally interviews, fictional pieces and poetry with a gender studies angle.

Opinions expressed in articles published in *gender forum* are those of individual authors and not necessarily endorsed by the editors of gender forum.

Submissions

Target articles should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition) and should be between 5,000 and 8,000 words in length. Please make sure to number your paragraphs and include a bio-blurb and an abstract of roughly 300 words. Files should be sent as email attachments in Word format. Please send your manuscripts to gender-forum@uni-koeln.de.

We always welcome reviews on recent releases in Gender Studies! Submitted reviews should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition), have numbered paragraphs, and should be between 750 and 1,000 words in length. Please note that the reviewed releases ought to be no older than 24 months. In most cases, we are able to secure a review copy for contributors.

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Editorial

By Frederic Rukes, University of Cologne, Germany

1   Queer discourse is not limited to dimensions of sexuality and gender. However much these are essential to the lived realities, representations, and perceptions of queer subjects, they usually transcend and are complemented by other areas of identity construction such as race, ethnicity, origin, age, occupation, culture, political attitude, ethics, taste, beliefs, and many more. This fluidity is by definition part of the term *queer* and further represented by the interdisciplinary claim of queer and gender studies, which are inseparably connected to numerous other fields ranging from postcolonial to disability studies. It is thus no surprise that queer film and television continue to explore and extend the boundaries of queer representation and identity formation.

2   Accordingly, this issue of *gender forum*[1] presents articles focussing on films and television series with complex approaches to their diverse representation of queer subjects. These films feature characters that are divided by and often remain ambiguous about their sexuality, gender, nationality, morality, or religion. In respect of this division – as well as in the wake of the increasing mainstreaming of queer film – this collection of essays poses important questions about the intersection between gender and nation trouble, the limits of the liberation of being out of the closet, the notion of queer failure, and the marginalization within minorities.

3   In "Drawing the Border, Queering the Nation: Nation Trouble in *Breakfast on Pluto* and *The Crying Game*", Maureen E. Ruprecht Fadem analyzes two films by Irish director Neil Jordan about the Troubles. Drawing on theoretical concepts by Butler, Muñoz, Deleuze, and Guattari, the article depicts how, to the protagonists of both films, national borders are just as real as those of gender, making the normative pressure that is

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exerted on them twofold. Both *Breakfast on Pluto* and *The Crying Game* engage with different meanings of partition and its implications in terms of content and form. In this process, genderqueer transgressions become prerequisites for the director's deconstruction of nation and nationalism and his revelation of what Fadem terms "nation trouble".

4   Sean Donovan's "Becoming Unknown: *Hannibal* and Queer Epistemology" challenges the assumed liberating effect of the recent inclusion of LGBTQ+ characters in mainstream television shows by opposing them to the horror series *Hannibal*'s seemingly "antique methods of queer coding" (Donovan) that conceal the romance between its two male protagonists. In its mystification of knowledge that refuses to label its leads' sexualities, the show favors expressions of queer anxiety over opening closets. Drawing on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's works, the essay displays how *Hannibal* instead derives its queerness from its form of ambivalent un-knowing, using the glamor and mystery of queer villainy to resist normative incorporation of LGBTQ+ cultures.

5   Joshua Adair scrutinizes queer negativity in the film adaptations of two of Sarah Waters's neo-Victorian novels. In his essay "Loser Lesbians: Failure in *Affinity* and *Fingersmith*", based on J. Jack Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011) Adair reads Waters's novels as narratives of queer failure that offer negative potential for disrupting normativity and disclosing false expectations of queer progress. In applying Halberstam's theory, the article offers a way to embrace Waters's bold and often ugly depictions of lesbians as difficult and potentially violent characters, as an expansion of the representational space of lesbianism beyond the normative pressure of narratives of success.

6   "Jenny Schecter and the Strange Case of the Present Absent Jewish American Woman on the Queer Screen: The Ghostly Failures of Jewish American Assimilation"

by Amy Karp concludes this issue of *gender forum*. The essay deals with portrayals of young queer Jewish American women, with a focus on the character of Jenny Schecter in the series *The L Word*, a series created by Jewish American lesbian producer and writer Ilene Chaiken. In contrast to the notion of perfect Jewish assimilation into 'whiteness' that is evoked by other famous female Jewish television characters, Jenny is relegated to the fragile position of the stranger. In this regard her Jewishness is paradoxically both highly marked and yet highly invisible which is reflected in its lack of acknowledgement by the other characters on the show.

7   All of these articles discuss screen narratives that are concerned with normative pressures on queer subjects ranging from political nationalism, biased notions of sexuality, an obligation to success, or an assimilation to 'whiteness'. These examples prove the potential of queer film and television to trouble established boundaries between nation and gender and to foreground and deconstruct normativities through queer coding, queer negativity, or through a re-evaluation of the past. Thus they are part of the formation of complex queer narratives challenging compulsory normativity in contemporary societies.

Drawing the Border, Queering the Nation:

Nation Trouble in *Breakfast on Pluto* and *The Crying Game*

By Maureen E. Ruprecht Fadem, The City University of New York / Kingsborough, USA

> *Do you think we are stupid enough to perjure ourselves*
> *again and again with the fiction of nationhood? How*
> *dare you talk to us of duty when we stand waist deep*
> *in the toxin of your past…*
>   ~Toni Morrison, 1993 Nobel Lecture in Literature

Part I | Drawing the Border

1   This article examines films set in Ireland by writer and director Neil Jordan. Thus far, Jordan has made eight Irish films. Here, I focus on two of those: the whimsical picaresque piece adapted from Patrick McCabe's novel *Breakfast on Pluto* (2005), and the controversial blockbuster that put him and (actor and Field Day co-founder) Stephen Rea on the map, *The Crying Game* (1992). The title of the latter film is a pun referring to both the heartbreak involved in romantic relationships and the state of occupied Northern Ireland. This split film offers juxtaposed crying games—a historico-political conflict as against an invented romance-gender conflict—so that viewers recognize the issues as linked. Perhaps needing no introduction, it gives us main character Fergus (Stephen Rea), a Volunteer in the Provisional IRA.[1] He befriends Jody (Forest Whitaker), a Black-British policeman of West Indian

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[1] The next generation of the IRA, following the Easter Rising, the wars and partition, whose specific aim is to reunify Ireland and fully dissolve the tenets of colonial occupation. Founded at the moment of partition and widely considered responsible for assassinating Michael Collins, this Northern "Provisional" IRA has over time splintered into multiple factions; e.g., the "Real" IRA carried out the largest single moment of violence in the North, the bombing civilians in County Omagh in 1998, and the "Continuity" IRA has waged mostly guerilla protests. The "official" Provisional IRA deconstructed itself in 2005 and re-inaugurated as a democratic political program under the auspices of *Sinn Féin*. In the previous era, the Provisional IRA worked hand in hand with *Sinn Féin*; now they are essentially one, a non-militant, political organization that, since 2005 and especially in the last three years, has made much headway in all-Irish, cross-border politics.

descent on patrol during Operation Banner.[2] Fergus participates in abducting Jody, is charged with overseeing him, and later ordered to assassinate Jody. But he does not follow this direction, and Jody is hit and killed by a British lorry instead of by the bullet Fergus was ordered to hit him with. Now, Jordan's protagonist "cross[es] the water, lose[s] [him]self for awhile," traveling to London in a symbolic cattle boat. Fergus is thus reborn, alighting in the colonial mainland as a second self, a Scottish immigrant named Jimmy. On the lam and now newly employed in construction, he is not just hiding from the paramilitaries; Fergus is there to fulfill the romantic mission which comes to trump his political involvements. It is the errand requested by his new, now dead friend to deliver a message to Dil (Jaye Davidson), a second order he fails to complete.

2   Instead, Fergus finds and falls in love with Dil, a development that comprises this halved, bordered film's second and concluding segment. From the time of his first film *Angel* (1982), through to *The Crying Game* and then *Breakfast on Pluto* in 2005, it is to the queer radical represented by orphan, adoptee, and gay transvestite Irish(wo)man, Patrick "Kitten" Braden (Cillian Murphy) that Jordan has always sought to represent visually.[3] *Breakfast on Pluto* is a bizarre tale, in his words, "part fantasy, part fable, part almost burlesque" (DVD voiceover). As a perfectly circular narrative,[4] it "avoids any orientation toward a culmination point" (Deleuze and Guattari 21 – 22). The protagonist crosses multiple borders

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[2] Operation Banner was the name given to the entry of British troops to and occupation of Northern Ireland during the period between August 1969, when the violence precipitously escalated, through July 2007 when the operation was finally brought to an end after implementation of most provisions of the Good Friday Agreement.

[3] The gender identity of Jordan's protagonist in this film is ambiguous; she is a transgender figure as well as being a drag performer and transvestite. She identifies as female and feminine, and, like Dil (of *The Crying Game*) before her, is biologically male. In the cases of both figures, their biological maleness cannot be ignored as it is, in both cases, an ineffaceable part of the narrative. In the literature on this film, the main character is typically designated simply a transvestite. She is alternately referred to as an "Irish drag queen" (Gale Literature Resource Center summary, 2013), a "glam rock transvestite" (Macnab 2006), a "gay transvestite" and (though unclear and undefined) a "(true) transvestite" (Kauffmann 2005).

[4] It begins and ends in not just the same moment, but the very same shot, as Kitten walks Charlie's baby in a pram while being cat-called by construction workers.

multiple times and is continually embroiled in misadventures, as her queer subjectivity abuts Irish orthodoxy and conservatism. She does not make the simple, singular leave-taking of a Fergus Hennessey or a Stephen Dedalus;[5] Kitten leaves then returns then leaves again, her two-hour film in thirty-six episodes charting the piecemeal movement toward piecemeal, accumulating freedoms. Lines of story beget lines of flight in a web of incidents of leave-taking and crisis involving five exiles and three bordered water-crossings. *Breakfast on Pluto* and *The Crying Game* are set in the "border country" (Hughes 2) of the partitioned North, a territory "not so much enclosed by its borders as defined by them" (Hughes 3)? And Jordan's chief interest, in these narratives, is that location. Both films come together as stories of the Troubles sharing the tripartite themes of partition, gender and nation. Both represent how political strife invades the lives of ordinary citizens, causing them to make choices they would not otherwise, as well as how gender functions as an arm of presumably distinct political processes. The films employ bifurcated narrative structures and general partition aesthetics: each concerns the conflict that raged in the North between 1968 and '94 and the struggle for independence of those counties; each one offers a nuanced look at the North that is tied to, interrupted and intersected by distinct gender troubles.

3   This article theorizes the meanings of the border (and partition more broadly), the literal partitionings of the films themselves, and their portrayals of the complex normative pressures facing post-partition Irish subjects. It extends the intersectional analysis on Jordan's work, already in progress, looking at how he tethers gender to the nation through genderqueer characters and deconstructs nationalism through transgressions of gender. Any analysis of these films, it seems, begins with the Irish border. Richard Kearney notes how many Irish writers speak of "being in transit between two worlds, divided between opposing

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[5] A reference to the conclusion of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist.*

allegiances" (14).[6] And there is no better exemplifier of this than Neil Jordan, who self-consciously and conscientiously deploys literal and metaphorical borders. Along with that, the specific films in question orbit a set of signature tropes: the gothic, vampires and demons, mythologies and fairytales, interior narratives and dream narratives, symbolic spaces of performance and performativity, as well as individual identity and subjectivity, social relations and socialized violence. Over the years and the many films, a handful of concerns have emerged in the criticism. He is viewed as a highly eclectic filmmaker, having worked prolifically within "local and international markets" (Rockett 1) producing one of the most varied contemporary filmographies in terms of subject, aesthetic and genre. His cinematic work "resists categorization" (Pramaggiore 1 – 2)[7] and remains intensely committed, also, to interrogating gender. Indeed, Jordan is an originator of contemporary queer cinema; he has made a number of films known for unpacking and radicalising normative conceptions of sexuality especially. But this aspect of his work is complicated, in the sense that, though the portrayals of masculinity and sexuality are progressive, even radical, his representations of women are frequently troubled. Notwithstanding that this filmmaker sometimes produces gender-burdened "castrating women narratives" (McLoone 182), at the same time, they almost always offer shrewd, scrupulous interrogations of the essential concerns for this article—that is, masculinity and (homo)sexuality.

4   When set on the island, Jordan's films deal prominently with its political history. How they do that, what Jordan is doing with the border, these are questions that often go unattended in the scholarship despite the staging of unbroken dialogues with them. In the extensive discourse on *The Crying Game*, for example, historical and local specificities get trumped by a focus on gender and race, many reviews only slightly concerned with the

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[6] On this point, also see Muldoon 2000.
[7] Also see Zucker 2013, ix – x.

political and paramilitary frames to which Fergus, Jody and Jude are tied, and from which Fergus flees. The criticism is thus, in part, defined by a conception of this director as politically escapist.[8] Without dismissing any existing methodology or viewpoint, I advocate for analysis that pays greater attention to the historicity and materiality of the geography, an awareness we see in some more recent readings.[9] Of the critics who do acknowledge and address Jordan's political content, Joseph Cleary's 2002 assessment was groundbreaking and significant. It teased out the way narratives of the Troubles elide partition as a factor in the conflict known as the Troubles. *The Crying Game* is one of several romance tales Cleary uses to show how state structure is erased from the milieu as represented; in it, he says, the border is obstructed as Jordan fails to deal with the politics underlying the social issues (110 – 112). Far from detaching sectarian hostility "from the question of the existing state order" or "underestimat[ing] the degree to which the sectarian conflict is rooted in conflicting national and state allegiances" (Cleary 109), however, the Irish border is actually the most visible register of the nation in these films. J. Boozer agrees, saying Jordan cannot be "accused of unawareness of the crises and conditions that exist" (179), that his work is "firmly placed" within and "directly related to modern Irish history and […] [the] Troubles" (McCann 69). Maria Pramaggiore, in her incisive study *Neil Jordan*, likewise shows how it is entirely possible to read *The Crying Game* as not just a response to historical cultural change but to "the creation of the province of Northern Ireland, a legacy of the eighteenth-century British plantation of the North" and related "political disputes over the geographical and symbolic borders of the Irish nation" (Pramaggiore 8).

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[8] See Cleary 2002 and Kearney, 1982 and 1988. For the other view, that Jordan's work is *not* escapist, a view I share, see Rockett 2003, Pramaggiore 2008 and McCann 2010.
[9] A positive example is McCann 2010.

5   The films assessed visualize proliferate borders and boundaries and derive critical meanings from the trope. All were crafted through a poetics of partition: a series of inevitably contingent metaphors signifying inevitably contingent Irelands, stagings of scrims and pivotal intersections as well as sect, gender and race lines. The border 'doubled' Ireland and these films are doubled, too—at the level of genre, narrative structure, character and location. Both a political thriller and a romance tale, *The Crying Game* is bifurcated in terms of genre, and both films feature gender-split protagonists—a character riven by dual sexualities in *The Crying Game* and dual genders in *Breakfast on Pluto*. In the 1992 film, an Irishman called Fergus becomes a Scotsman named Jimmy, and Dil is forcibly, visibly 'trans-gendered' as Fergus dresses her in Jody's masculine attire (his cricket uniform) in order to disguise and safeguard her. Kitten is 'doubled' across her story, too. In the late scene when she finally finds her mother, the character's dividedness is spectacularly clear: posing as a British Telecom clerk, she is torn between her identity as a transgender woman and the bizarre double-drag she hides behind.[10] In this case, it is a literal disguise as she does not reveal her true identity to her mother. In yet more partitionings, Fergus's key relationships (with Jody, then Dil) are distinguished by the divide between Ireland and England—that is, the geographical parties to the conflict. There and in *Breakfast on Pluto*, a dramatic shift from one to the other political terrain occurs. Both are prised down the middle by a common water crossing: in chapter eighteen of the thirty-six installments of *Breakfast on Pluto,* and at the precise middlepoint of *The Crying Game*, Kitten and Fergus cross the water to London.

6   Even while, as Cleary outlines, many narratives of the Troubles do indeed sever the tie between political and communal realities, Jordan is simply not one of these storytellers.

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[10] In this case, a literal disguise, as she is unwilling to reveal herself to her mother.

But, an understanding of how the films draw and deploy the border is crucial to a full appreciation of that. Jordan's protracted concern with gender and political history, the ways he toils to conjoin and ally them, leads to a recognition of these films' intersectionality. They are narratives that demarcate an interlocked assembly of identifications and ideologies—nationalism, colonialism, history, North/South locatedness, religion, political trauma, gender—in the lives of Irish subjects. Complex, intersectional work like Jordan's is often treated using "single-axis frameworks" (Nash 2), where one or the other issue comes to the fore as preeminent concern—gender *or* nation *or* race—and the analysis is shorn of the range of pertinent issues. Emer and Kevin Rockett suggest his work "has not received the critical engagement […] it deserves" (1), and that "it is only by refusing to accept closed categories that one can truly engage" it (2). He is drawn, they say, "to the 'in-between'—the confusion, richness and complexity at the site of boundaries" (2). This is certainly the case. In fact, the "'ethnosexual' categories" Jordan often works with may be "so ethnic and sexual at once that it is difficult […] to separate the two, so one or the other is simply neglected" (Gamson and Moon 55). Rooted in feminist thought, an intersectional grounding betrays this absence as oversight: "triad analytics" (Peterson *passim*) take as first supposition not only the interlocking nature of identifications but that their performance and performativity are "co-constituted" (Dhamoon 230), that subjectivity is simultaneously defined "by mutually reinforcing vectors" (Nash 89; Collins 63).

7   This intersectionality is part and parcel of Jordan's border work. The films resonate a split ground and mimic their subject matter—a partitioned place—thus earning the designation of partition narrative. That is, cultural production that foregrounds a larger evaluation of the border and functions as analogue to the material, political fragmentation through deconstructed narratives and characters. Jordan's films outline a "richer ontology"

(Collins 63) and "permit the asking of 'new' questions and the exploration of different connections" (Cole 566). This means the questions asked of these films are often not the always the best ones. We should ask, for example, what they would do, what they would look like, say and stage, were they to foreground partition and the life of state structure. How represent, on film, the border separating the two Irelands? How embed the trope in a way that retains the tie to the historical, political swathe such that it is un-occluded and maintains a presence? I think when a film does that it looks like *The Crying Game* and *Breakfast on Pluto*. Seen as intersectional—seen as talking to and critiquing nationalism, gender and postcoloniality, seen as responding to the traumatizations of political history— we are reminded of the miscellanies of representation, that range of methods for representing politics, commenting on state structure, making a historical film, or focusing on subjects caught within Joyce's socio-political "nets."[11]

8   When we approach Jordan using the conjuncted lenses urged by an intersectional hermeneutic, other interpretations begin to emerge. For instance, in placing Cathy Caruth's historiographical trauma theory next to these films, we recognize them as examples of a political history that is necessarily traumatic and (thus) largely un-writeable.[12] Because it is traumatic, history, she argues, often finds expression in the form of an ostensibly unrelated dream narrative, comes to fruition through a narrative mimicry, a second shadow account imitating the spectral, silent history.[13] The narrative is split, mirroring the break or wound of trauma as well as, in this case, the imposed border (read: trauma) splitting the place represented. This reading applies less directly to *Breakfast on Pluto* in the sense that Kitten is,

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[11] Another reference to the conclusion of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist.*
[12] This is an issue Egoyan struggles with in *Ararat* as well, in telling the history of the Armenian genocide. In that film, he tells it several times in several ways, none of which are ultimately satisfactory, all true and false, etc.
[13] I reference chiefly the argument developed in chapter two, "Literature and the Enactment of Memory."

from *before* the beginning, uncompelled by gender codes. Like John Cameron Mitchell's protagonist in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001), she is a child of the traumatic borderlands mirrored in the surreal quality of her film. Unlike *The Crying Game*, her film visualizes not a path toward embracing homoerotic desire as the means to break the nationalist embrace but an *a priori* state of genderqueerness that propels Kitten to flights of discovery, travel and leave-taking *from* the nation and from a very young age. Caruth's notion of a 'partitioned' history is sharpest in *The Crying Game*, where Jordan can be seen as having made a first attempt to write and film a straightforward, realist (hi)story of the Troubles—comprising its first half—but then displaces this ostensibly failed account, midway, by sending Fergus to London and converting him from lead figure of a political thriller to the romantic hero of a romance tale.

9   In this interpretation, Jordan's first endeavor to grasp and convey the Troubles seems, paradoxically, disassociated from the second echo story. Narrative one, a realist, historical thriller, is replaced by narrative two, a fraught gender-bending romance about political others victimized by geopolitics, colonial occupation, nationalist aggression and compulsory gender norms. In this sense he filmed both of Caruth's (hi)stories, intersected them, and provided an intermission: the visual pause and momentary quiet at the halfway mark, as Fergus crosses the water in a boat. As with a dream narrative, the film now takes on a "noirish glow and […] the characters lack the 'realism' associated with their Irish [narrative] counterparts" (Rockett 129). The displacement of the realist narrative self-reflexively mirrors Jordan's displacement of realism across his work. From the start, he "eschewed the formal codes and conventions of bourgeois realism" (Ging 142), betraying a real "impatience" (Glicksman 71) with that as with Irish filmic conservatism; he prefers cinema "that doesn't belong to any kind of realism" (Macnab 22). Charting the transition from *The Crying Game* to

Breakfast on Pluto, one quickly comprehends how, as the films and years advance, this horizon is pushed ever outward until we come to 2005 and his least transparent, most ornate film.[14]

10   Although this reasoning applies chiefly to *The Crying Game*, recall, in Caruth's frame, that the film was made during the Troubles. It is a historical narrative representing a conflict that was still in progress and which personally "affected Jordan" (Zucker *Dark Carnival* 24). This fact manifestly alters literally *everything* about what can be scripted, symbolized, visualized or even inferred.[15] This awareness of the shared temporalities of historical film and traumatic history, this understanding of the bordered, doubled nature of such accounts, this awareness of the intersectional grounding from which Jordan works are all crucial to discerns of (at least) his Irish films. The primary concern of this article, a matter of discourse theory, is the constitution, deconstruction, and re-constitution of the representative subject whereby discourses seen as distinct are shown to profoundly converge and transform, one to the next. Accepting, as intersectionality mandates, that socially constructed ideologies and identifications interconnect, the question then becomes, how do they interact? Is their intersecting neutral or are there traceable dynamics of relation that occur *between* nation, class, gender, race and other facets of (a necessarily intersectional) identity? Perhaps one of the most interesting questions we can ask of *The Crying Game* and *Breakfast on Pluto* is, how does the filmmaker's representation of a series of intersectional Irish lives "explore undoing

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[14] Many years into Jordan's filmmaking career, it was this film that challenged him as he struggled to find a form to tell *Breakfast on Pluto* (DVD voiceover).

[15] On this point, see Zucker 2008 20 - 21. …*The Crying Game*, released two years before the ceasefires were called and peace talks commenced, is a film of the pre-peace-process, late-Troubles era, a transparently critical response to the failed efficacy of militant resistance. With it, too, the Troubles continued to rage, though with less intensity: 1992 saw a bombing at Teenane, attacks on RUC officers and *Sinn Féin* members, and multiple, random shootings by Loyalist and Republican paramilitaries from various wings. The same is true of Jordan's first feature, *Angel*, made in 1982 at the height of the Troubles—the Blanket protests, the hunger strikes, the deaths of those martyrs, the disturbing exploits of the Thatcher regime, the many bombings—at Belfast, Derry, Magherafelt, Armagh, Ballykelly, Ballymena, Bessbrook in Ireland, and Hyde Park and Regent's Park in London—all playing out, historically, as this film played out on set.

gender"? (Cole 565) Jordan's poetics of partition works together with what perhaps seem superfluous gender questions, it incites an intense reflection on matters touching the performance and performativity of nation, nationalism and postcoloniality.

11   The films' intersectional meanings articulate the critical role gender plays vis-à-vis other aspects of identity and other ideologies, chiefly nationalism. These narratives are reliant, for their progress, in Andrew Parker's words, on a "recognition that—like gender—nationality is a relational term whose identity derives from its inherence in a system of differences" (5). Whereas V. Spike Peterson asks how "the valorization of masculinized identities, ideologies and actions operate in contexts of militarism and war" (16), it is important to consider how national partition and the conflicts it produces comes into play in this context. How does the legitimization of masculinity operate in divided Ireland? Why does *The Crying Game*, a historical narrative about a political conflict, transform into a gender-bending romance? Cleary asks this question, too, but now, it becomes: what does Kitten's will to wear 'girls'' clothing have to do with the political life of the island and/or the *longue durée* of partition? According to her film, they are inextricably related. Why does Jordan initiate his second film about the Troubles featuring a drag performing transgender woman by immediately setting it down at the border? Within moments of the opening, a voiceover tells us that Kitten was "born near the border, in a small Irish town"—a sign that the story is to be understood as 'leaning' against that line, read as a partition narrative. Kitten's is a border story, then. How does it coalesce as an illustration of an Irish "self in partition" (Mufti 211)? And what does it reveal about the meaning of the border in the lives of Irish citizens?

12   The narrative is, in this way, rested on the political ties and the political divides between colonizer and colonized; it deconstructs not just colonialism but also (concomitant)

anti-colonial nationalism. Even as *Breakfast on Pluto* appears to be the tale of a crossdressing, willful, endearing adventurer, in fact, it (also) tells a story of divided Ireland and the long-term impacts of the partition, where the line re-mapping a previously mapped terrain transformed it into the proliferation of unhomely locations staged in Jordan's fragmented narrative. That is, as Homi Bhabha expressed it, the critical spaces visualized in these narratives function to "negotiate the powers of cultural difference," especially gender, "in a range of transhistorical sites" and narratives and subjects and intersectional identifications (9). Caruth posits the existence of a historical narrative that, because not directly articulable, appears as a partitioned, alternative dream story, a 'true' history that, as with Freudian dream condensation, translates real things into meta-symbolic objects, figures, places, scenes, sequences. What may be most important, in the analysis of *The Crying Game*, started above, is to recognize that it is the *second* story—part two, relocated to London and cohering as partitioning and displacement—that articulates the film's most important revelation regarding the historical politics at play. That is, how seemingly unaffiliated gender structures foreclose the deconstruction of Irish nationalism, and how the intersectional hinge to gender functions to consolidate it. In this historical imaginary, a 'false' (hi)story supplants the 'real' one but the second iteration has nonetheless captured it, is nonetheless 'history.' This suggests that, in the pre-treaty era during which the film was made, irrespective of one's opinion about partition and the continuation of the colonial state, it is not merely self-evidently germane discourses—nationalism, imperialism, colonialism, postcoloniality—but other intersectional normativities that work with them to constitute the subject and preserve the hegemony. This meaning is stymied in the initial realist telling (part one of the film) and does not find conveyance until after the gender borders are crossed and symbolically crossed out—*after* Fergus leaves a (narratively purloined) note in Dil's mailbox, *after* he returns to the

bar The Metro looking for her—this time, with full knowledge that she is biologically male. This brings us to an answer to the question, why is a single film narrative spliced apart as two bordered, inevitably proximate stories? Why do Jordan's juxtaposed "crying games" need each other? And how do these facts of the films explain how "restrictively normative conceptions of sexual and gendered life" are undone in the Irish context? (Butler *Undoing Gender* 1)

13   Ultimately, these bordered Northern narratives deterritorialize and queer nation, nationalism and national identity through reconfigurations of normative masculinity. If we grant this suggestion, it means the relationship of identifications—the premise of an intersectional reading—is *more* than simple concurrence. Gender forms an original captivity but it must do so as a "core constitutive element of race, ethnicity, and the nation" (Nagel 255). Jordan addresses this construction through filmic spectacles in which transformations of nationalist ideology—a performativity of nation—are predicated upon, sanctioned and impelled by gender transgressions. Seemingly unallied discourses form intersectional, unhomely 'houses of cards' in which, remove one piece, other pieces fall, performatively undo one compulsory normativity, undo others. We speak of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich *passim*) and, now, of an allied compulsion—nationalism. In an apparent will to move beyond standard postcolonial or nationalist, revisionist or feminist representations, Jordan's Irish films illustrate the domino effects of gender trouble as theorized. That is, how radical transformations of gender and sexuality are instantiated, articulated and performed (Butler *Gender Trouble passim*) by means of "peripheral [modes] of […] undoing" (Butler *Undoing Gender* 15) and "improvisation within a scene of constraint" (Butler *Undoing Gender* 1). Jordan's nation-work is hitched to instances of this kind of trouble. He stages movements we might, after Butler, see as instances of *nation trouble*: that would be, how radical shifts in

nationalist ideology—toward post-nationalism or transnationalism—are likewise enacted, how nationalist identification is not simply inscribed and internalized but maintained, or deconstructed and progressively re-inscribed, by the subject, through scripted performance or performativity. The work of Judith Butler informs this analysis which takes as first assumption her view of gender performativity, of discursivity and subjectivisation, as a fluid, malleable process and of the subject as agent through performativity. Thus we participate in undoing gender by refusing to perform gender according to established norms, by rewriting the meaning and materiality of sex, gender and sexuality as Jordan participates in doing in these films.

14   Owing to the absence or the assertion of gender performativity, this interaction is either going to normatively consolidate other points of identity or belief, or open up and reform them. "[R]earrangements of the real" (Zucker *Interviews* xi) and "trope[s] of mutability" (Rockett 1) occur in Jordan's cinematic line of sight through a sophisticated imbrication of gender, the nation and the border. Jordan's representations align with Gerardine Meaney's ideas in working from the assumption that "[a]ny evaluation of nationalism in the Irish context has to be conditioned […] by an understanding of the kind of state it produced and what that state and its dominant church […] perpetrat[ed]" (xv), perpetrations that must be deeply intertwined with gender. Recorded by the conspicuous presence of the border, the alliance of gender and nation is, we see, a tightly wound knot which has functioned, along with colonialism and Catholicism, to wind nationalism into the force it is—and, for Jordan, gender is the string which, when pulled, unravels that binding. While this line of reasoning does not map on to every postcolonial context—Jasbir Puar speaks of homosexuality being appropriated by nationalists and aggressor nation states to re-

intensify rather than deconstruct colonial discourses—it does appertain in Jordan's vision.[16]

As Joanne Nagel says, in Ireland, queers are "problems for nationalists" (163). And if, as she

further maintains, "nationalist politics is a major venue for 'accomplishing' masculinity"

(160),[17] then the movement toward a post- or transnational collectivity may be operational,

first, through contraventions of gender.

Part II | Queering the Nation

15   If the borders of nation, which locate and house the subject, are built together with

gender, then, in re-signifying what male and female, masculine and feminine mean, other

meanings embrangled therewith are inevitably redefined: nation, people, us, them, the

meaning(s) of 'Irish.' *The Crying Game* and *Breakfast on Pluto* lay claim to this idea. They are

intersectional, historical films positing gender as critical modality of change, growth and

denouement. Each is positioned, in a sense, as Joyce's narratives were, envisaging a

metaphorical escape from Irish nationalist-conservatism. Constituting a substantial evolution

of this type of narrative's Joycean roots, Jordan's special contribution to the paradigmatic

modern Irish story is in positing *gender* as the decisive performative for the obligatory, now

quintessential flight. This is why he needs the partition, why he fashions a border aesthetic,

why he attends with such care and consistency to the North. Jordan's particular crafting of

stories of the Troubles works to pull the intersectional performativity up to the surface, a

nation trouble that is as visible in Kitten's use of the ultimate weapon to battle

paramilitaries—a perfume bottle—as it is in Fergus's 'failure' to murder Jody as against Dil's

fatally wounding a very determined Jude with multiple bullets.

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[16] This is a major point Puar makes across *Terrorist Assemblages*.
[17] This point is well established in the literature. The most important work on it is Mosse 1985. See
developments of his ideas in Nagel 2003; Jeffords 1994; Parker et al 1992; Puar 2007; Walshe 1997.

16   This performativity of nation is identifiable through key tropes: the skilled use of interior narratives, the crafting of intensely symbolic spaces, shots and settings, and, the films' dramatic, centripetal transgressions of gender. Jordan's staging of nation trouble is writ large, most of all, as aspects of the protagonists' gender identities are (re)defined in ways that pull them away from the sway of entrenched Irish nationalism. This thesis is developed through Kitten's disownments and expatriations, a horizontal, fractional odyssey tuned to the "tempo of always-becoming" (Puar xvii). The original exile involves Kitten's transfer from mother (Eva Birthistle) to father (a priest played by Liam Neeson) and from there to adoptive mother, Ma' Braden (Ruth McCabe). A second, double exile occurs when she is ousted from school and home after writing a salacious tale of her own conception followed by placing a note in a problem box at retreat, asking where she might obtain a sex change operation in Ireland. Kitten then encounters a band called The Mohawks which sets off a series of mostly political mishaps and ends with her emigration. In London now, she commences the search for her long-lost mother but finds, initially, only a death-defying trek through torture, imprisonment, and danger, including a date with a serial killer, participation in a peep-show, and even a foray as a Womble. A fourth exile occurs when Kitten is wrongly accused of committing a bombing and is then incarcerated; after her release, she returns to Ireland for the funeral of a friend murdered by the IRA. This homecoming is short-lived and unrecuperative: she and Charlie (Ruth Negga) must journey back to London after neighbors burn them out of the rectory where Father Liam had put them up, a rejection not by mother or father or sister but by a mass of citizens allegorizing the *nation*.

17   Compromising the integrity of the borders separating-and-connecting politically distinct Irelands and politically distinct islands, Kitten's location slides around them. We are

rarely certain about whether she is on the Irish border's Northern or Southern side. She seems to 'slalom' from one exilic plateau to the next, a perception exacerbated by Jordan's use of "sweeping montages, [and] odd shots" creating the effect of a "kaleidoscopic whirl" (Kauffmann 23). A postmodern narrative of Deleuzian roaming that is *not* without a political core, this film (and the novel it is adapted from) satirize nationalism through Kitten's detachment from and disdain for it. But these actions depend on her *a priori* status as gender outcast. Her identification as female places her definitively outside the cultural swathe: as a girl-identified boy, she is automatically exiled and, so alienated, enacts her political disaffection in the thousand plateaus of a complicated narrative. Another in a long line of Irish bildungsromans, observe Kitten's snowballing need to confront and negotiate the border, the Troubles, the nation. As its too-many incidents accumulate, her distance from the ideological swathe grows rather than diminishing. Whenever Kitten could have been interpellated by the nationalist hail she simply becomes more queer, more gay, more queen. This protagonist is allegorical deterritorialization of the defining Irish ideology as she stands in a six-foot hole almost-murdered by the IRA; as she is heckled by that same group in Native American drag; as, in childhood, when draped in the Irish flag she plays a dying for Ireland game—play that takes on serious consequences when, as an adult, it is no longer just a game. 'Serious' is the signifier Jordan uses for the nationalist critique provided by his film, a one-word conceit contesting the altogether serious rhetorics of republicanism and unionism. Unlike Fergus, Kitten merely orbits politics. She is wholly un-serious about the Troubles and displays a "general air of nonchalance and [...] a kind of innocence" (Kauffmann 22 – 23). Her troubled world likewise does not take her seriously: as multiple characters say, Kitten is a "Nancy boy," and so she escapes murder because the provisionals

fail to see her as a threat despite knowing that she destroyed a stockpile of their weapons and ammunition.

18   The manner by which *Breakfast on Pluto* deconstructs nationalism through gender trouble is writ larger still, more spectacularly and more completely, in the symbolic architecture that closes the film. The second to last scene visualizes the contrasted paths taken by Kitten and her biological mother by means of a crosswalk—green tenting that reaches in the four cardinal directions. The action here is almost surgical, as Kitten and Charlie head west and her biological mother and half-brother head east—two sets of characters follow conspicuous 'green' borderlines (read: the structure of the nation) in diametrically opposed directions. This structure, filmed on the Deleuzian diagonal, is simulacrum of an invisible, fabricated partition border: the walls giving nation and nationalized self-existence, the demarcations of colonial history and a protracted resistance struggle. This image figures the complex intersectionality of Jordan's film and Kitten's subjectivity: it is meta-sign for the borderlands of gender and nation and visual analogue of the film's perfectly split structure. Viewers realize that, since Kitten never outed herself, the mother she at long last locates does not know she had encountered her abandoned son, now her transgender daughter. Just as Kitten tries but cannot go home again, despite finding her mother, she does not actually get all the way to 'mom,' that is, all the way 'home.' That biological connection, held so dear culturally and of a piece with the work of nation, has lost its grip, its importance ameliorating across all the exilic plateaus of Kitten's tale. Finally, this tie is severed in the diametrical culminating movements of mother and son. This movement unequivocally decenters biological heritage: that Kitten refers to her biological mother as the "Phantom Lady" ensures viewers identify her as negative national allegory, metaphor for an

illusory, mythic, phantom nation. Ireland as national simulacrum and Mother Ireland as therefore farcical, 'phantomized,' and rebuked.

19   Kitten's various steps outside the borders of the known, imagined Irish world are akin to Fergus's double exodus in *The Crying Game*: he crosses the water to London and engineers an incarcerated-escape at the close. Whereas Kitten resides outside state and para-state infrastructures, the earlier protagonist is part of the militant revolt in the North, used here partly to critique the repression of homosexuality within such groups (Pettitt 270 – 71). If taking seriously, as Lance Pettitt recommends, that Jordan intends Fergus as closeted and gay (272), recognize how, rather than "remain[ing] baffled, [and] beyond attainment" (Cleary 133) his sexual desire is actually liberated. When Jude finds Fergus in London, he refuses her request to rejoin the paramilitary effort saying "No way, I'm *out*." These words, an admittedly overused metonym, are a pun suggesting Fergus' release from both nationalism and heteronormativity; he comes out of the closet *and* out of the nation, literally and ideologically. Staged is a normative gender performance by a queer, closeted protagonist: after Jody's death, Fergus thinks, consciously, he's just doing a favor for a straight guy like himself. In masculine protector mode, he will look after Jody's girl, not only because he was asked to but to assuage his guilt and honor their profound, if brief, connection. As the story develops, this reading cannot hold. Recalling that Jody asked Fergus merely to locate Dil and give her a message, appreciate how things fundamentally change for Jordan's lead character, how his motive in engaging her comes untethered from the original task.

20   Dil refers to him several times using terms of endearment, "honey," "darling," "my sweet," and Fergus responds according to the normative interpellation: "Don't say that," "Don't call me that." But this is an obvious charade as we witness his concrete choices, first

and foremost to stay with her to the point of losing the freedom he risked his life for as a republican militant. Initially, Fergus feigns having any knowledge that Dil is biologically male or that The Metro is a gay bar. A *true* unawareness—regarding Dil's biological sex, her status as drag performer and transgender woman, or the bar as gay bar—is simply implausible. Once he is no longer able to deny that Dil is biologically male, rather than simply complete Jody's task and end the relationship, Fergus returns to The Metro looking for her. Then, he leaves her a note, the purloined letter viewers do not see. Is it Fergus's coming out and confession? The heroic fulfillment of the mission? We know it is not the latter, as he confesses this to her at the close. The question is answered when, after receiving the note, Dil visits Fergus at work. In an abundantly dramatic moment, she literally bursts through the shot, walking boldly across a cricket field. Resplendent, perhaps also victorious, her entry eclipses the game, the score board, the frame. Noticing her, Fergus drops a glass pane, shattering it—an action and object mimicking the frame of the shot, the border, the deconstruction of circumscribing discourses in progress. The broken glass, the building Fergus (literally) tears down, Dil's infringement of the shot: all metaphors of a line of flight from discursive captivities, exiting the house of the nation and of compulsory heterosexuality through a 'windowed' escape.[18]

21   Jordan and Rea both seem aware of this understanding and of the "centrality of the masculine body" (Jeffords 13) and the importance of specularity to Irish nationalism—how "a nation exists […] as something to be *seen*" (Jeffords 6), that is to say "performed," and which, here, through a brilliant rendition of nation trouble, is ruthlessly undercut. The

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[18] See Macnab on this point. …In *Breakfast on Pluto*, it is hard *not* to read the moment when Bertie (Stephen Rea) confesses his love to Kitten as a winking rewrite of the analogous scene from *The Crying Game*. It clarifies the sexuality question: Rea's character, this time, admits to himself that his love interest is a biologically male transgender woman. He says he wants a "girl like her" and Kitten responds saying she's not a girl. Bertie tells her—*this* time, in *this* film—he already knew that, that he wants a "girl" like her.

protagonist's refusal of the patriarchal, heteronormative nation is overtly predicated on gender transgression: he is driven to renounce the compulsory alliance with republicanism, to cross the IRA, to betray his Irish nationalism, but, before he can loosen those grips, he must cross the borders of permissible sexual desire. This two-part film works through doubles: two Fergus's, two Dil's, two narratives, two settings, two key moments unlocking Fergus Hennessey's normative subjectivity, part one, occurring in the first narrative, part two in the second. His initial undoing unfolds during the "'love' scenes in which Fergus feeds Jody, tells him his name" (Cullingford 174) and twice touches his penis. He takes Jody outside to urinate in a scene that doubles, and foils, the opening action. Jordan images the progression from conformity to transgression by opening with a urination scene—the one in which Jody holds his own penis while tethered to heteronormativity, he is holding Jude's hand—and following that with one in which Fergus holds not Jody's hand but his penis. The second major transformation of Fergus is that most familiar, most controversial scene when he encounters Dil's body and seems to have just then discovered her biology. He becomes ill, and knocks her down while running to the bathroom. Traumatized and bleeding, Dil asks: "You did know, didn't you? What were you doing in the bar if you didn't know?" The conflict staged is not what it appears to be—that Fergus confronts her male body, is shocked and vomits. I read this critical moment differently, as more heteronormative catharsis (Aristotle *passim*) than homophobic abjection. Although Fergus performs the prescribed masculinist response—revulsion upon encounter with the situation of the homosexual—his paroxysm, in truth, is a purgation of compulsory heterosexuality. 22 "Dil: 'Do you like me even a little bit?' and Fergus responds, with strong feeling: 'More than that.'" On careful inspection, reading intersectionally, we recognize that Fergus's true exodus regards his sexuality, and the other domino that falls with it is his

nationalism.[19] To underscore that, perhaps because Jordan fears it will not be easily grasped, he takes part two to the fullest generic extreme: his main character transitions from militant jailor to prisoner of the state *and* queer romantic hero. This understanding is important to sussing out the tie between gender and nation, between the genitalia controversially on display and the fact that Fergus's desire is contained and closeted in connection with his nationalism. The moment of a dawning awareness of same sex desire occurs concurrent with the (more important, for Jordan) refusal of nationalism. If Fergus is to get beyond that, and by extension beyond the imperialism that structures his Northern Irish Catholic life (and the political life of his split homeland), he must break free of the gender limits forestalling a closeted desire. He must reimagine and reinvent what it means to be a body, to have a sexuality, to be a sex, to have sex. Tracking Fergus' linked exoduses, it is clear that the film instantiates a teleology of escape and reifies a transgressive Irish ontology and identity. Having taken the fall for Dil, Fergus concludes his journey toward two freedoms incarcerated by the state that colonized his people and lit the fire of his anti-colonial militancy in the first place. In Jordan's tragi-comic conclusion, he is seated behind a Plexiglas divider, and Dil visits him. The brick and mortar structure, the Plexiglas, both symbols of not just the colonialism always-already imprisoning him but all his prisons. The transgendered figure is transparently free, a fact highlighted by the extreme long-shot Jordan uses to visualize her entry, underscoring her freedom of movement and location outside the 'walls.'

23   Allegory of Jordan's Deleuzian horizon, she is *transparently* unbound, literally and with regard to the discourses at play in the film. Perhaps the most significant articulation of nation trouble in the 1992 film is the director's deployment of a threaded interior narrative,

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[19] This is the only reading in which his return to The Metro actually makes sense.

the tale of the toad and the frog which Dil hears for the first time in the film's closing minutes. Through it, the intersectional domino effects of a performativity of gender-and-nation are loudly clarified. Jordan's characters often "discover that they are empowered […] to invent fictions" and then his viewers realize how those stories often come to "acquire the status of reality" (Pramaggiore 7). In *The Crying Game*, like baton hand-offs, the tale is told once, twice, thrice. Consolidating its central meaning and playing meta-filmically off of Jordan's multi-part film, the fable is told twice by Jody to Fergus, with different meanings but both regarding the Irish *nation*. And it is narrated a third time, by Fergus to Dil, the meaning again re-converted, this time referring to *gender*. This closing chorus re-signifies the tale as Fergus employs it to explain his sexuality and not his Irishness. Dil says, "You're doin' time for me, no greater love." Fergus responds, "As the man said, *it's in my nature,*" and finally, "Can't help it, it's in my nature." That line tracks the multiple experiences of captivity and exodus and is reified, in the end, as a "movement of deterritorialisation and destratification" (Deleuze and Guattari 3) by which it "change[s] in nature and connect[s] with other multiplicities" (Deleuze and Guattari 9). A line of articulation redoubles as line of flight: the lovers' dialogue outlasts the fade, is thus uncontained signaling escape, eventually, despite Fergus's spectacularly captive finish.

24   Three urination scenes metaphorically chart the gender transformation, and, a story standing first for nationalist meanings mutates into one signifying the critical gender implications of this film. What Jordan achieves here is rather remarkable: forced to confront Dil's body, Fergus is likewise forced into consciousness of his homoerotic desire, and this occurs at the expense of a commitment to paramilitary service to the nation. His relationships with Jody and Dil bring him out of inscribed masculinity, out of the closet. Illustrated forcibly, as in *Breakfast on Pluto*, there is no known beyond once he's 'failed' in

this regard. Having chosen not to reject his sexual desire, he thus confronts the loss of every key belonging and, like Kitten, cannot get back to any of the state or political or traditional identifications he was born into and is forever interpellated by: his *de facto* citizenship in the anti-colonial nationalist para-state; as a Catholic and nationalist, he never owned membership in the *dejure* colonial state; and his belonging to the Irish nation was canceled with the re-mapping of Ireland. However, and this is important: all of these belongings depend on *gender* conformity, induce heterosexual performance and a unfailingly enacted cisgender. He can 'sell out' his nation, swear allegiance to the Crown and still be Northern Irish; he can re-declare a former fidelity to the paramilitary anti-state and atone for his transgressions in that context. But he cannot love the biologically male Dil and belong to either or indeed any apparatus.

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25   That romance, if maintained (which it is, and dramatically so), categorically exiles Fergus, hence, Jordan's development of nation trouble as an "enabling response" (Butler *Excitable Speech passim*). This understanding of the film's content and the director's intent, this view of Fergus as a "'homo Provo'" (Pettitt 269),[20] makes it possible to freshly explain and explore this film's instructive characterisation of the gendered Irish subject. We recognize analogous movements in other instances of queer cinema, such as Mitchell's *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* or Eytan Fox's *Walk on Water* (*Lalekhet Al HaMayim*, 2004), partition narratives that work, also, through genderqueer characters and deconstructions of normative masculinity in a penultimate critique of nations and nationalisms. Atom Egoyan's *Ararat* likewise tethers the representation of a violent national-political history, and a historiographical meditation on whether, in Caruth's frame, such histories are articulable at

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[20] The term "provo" is slang for Provisional, that is, a Volunteer in the Provisional IRA.

all, to a radical gender sequence the narrative fully depends upon. The "gender play" (Meaney 95) in these films "fuses anxieties about sexual identity with questions of nationalism" (Pettitt 269, quoting Wheelwright), a theme "usually imagined as devoid of connection to sexual politics in general and queer politics in particular" (Puar xii). These films all instances reveal the "crucial link[s] between nationalism, state power, and the policing of gender and sexuality" (Scarlata 3).

26   Although unclouded by an (in my view critical) awareness that partition holds forth as testament to the force (and *not* the failure) of imperialism, Jordan's films remind us that it stands as "monument to the failure of Irish nationalism to achieve its central goal" (Scarlata 12). In colonial contexts, nationalist intersectionality surges and race forms the hinge of a "heightened nationalism" by which the yoking to sexuality becomes more "immediate and direct" (Mosse 133). Racism brought "to a climax tendencies that had been inherent in the alliance between nationalism and respectability" (Mosse 133), and colonialist nationalism, having defined "civilized" males as "capable of mastering [their] sexual urges as soon as they came into conflict with the demands of society," labors to designate Irish and African men as libidinally out of control (Mosse 10 – 11). In this vein, Graham Huggan argues that postcolonial praxis is by definition comparatist and intersectional (*passim*). But the join thus created is dialed up in circumstances defined additionally, and more complexly still, by border politics. While it is always true that coming out of gender scripts is troubled by the co-constitution with colonial discourse—that "[p]ostcolonial countries like Ireland have particular difficulty with the real presence of the homoerotic" since the "gendered power relationship […] casts the colonizing power as masculine and dominant and the colonized as feminine and passive" (Walshe 5)—add to this the further complication that gender is transformed in other ways in response to partition. Jordan capitalizes on this, aware that an

already gender-burdened postcoloniality needs a dramatic gender performativity, a palpable breaking through or out, as we witness Kitten do time and again, and as we see in *The Crying Game* through Fergus's two key relationships.

27   Characterizations of both lead figures reflect the way the beloved, ontologically necessary locale is 'broken' and no longer provides a sense of place.[21] Their stories articulate the incapacity of male protagonists to be constituted by the subjectivity carved out for them by histories of border politics. Their places in the world are not just burdened, they are fragmented by the political processes that leave them adrift. Much as they endeavor to, Fergus and Kitten cannot get back to the nation, cut off from it as they are by the border cutting Ireland, by their place in the colonial structure, as by their gender identities. The damning exile Fergus comes to conceptualizes, simultaneously, a breakdown of nation: in the walls he literally pulls apart, the partitioning window he splinters, his chosen fall into culpability and penal colonization, the final image in which he is literally surrounded by Plexiglas borders. His film draws the border, signs the nation *and* "[queers] the colonial allegory" (Cullingford 176) and this reveals why partition is so exhaustively present. As Colin Graham theorizes, "contemporary postcoloniality has the potential to shatter the self-image of nationalism as much as it might function to radicalize it" (87). The gender work of these films is underwritten by the partition context, a political situation that by definition renders nation-state(s) contingent, puzzled, intersectional and also beckons an ardent, hyper-performed masculinity. A poetics of the border together with gender crafts a politics of location for divided Ireland that does precisely that: it visualizes the "rapid transition from an insular […] culture" to a multicultural, global one (Pramaggiore 7), "reinvigorating the dissidences of gender and subalternity, undermining the complacencies of historiography,

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[21] A reference to Heidegger's geographical ontology, developed in "Building, Dwelling, Thinking."

and moving towards a notion of Irish culture which views the dialogic hybridity of 'Irishness' in empowered ways" (Graham 98).

28   The two films of the Troubles under review betray the inextricable links between Irish nationalism, geopolitical and colonial history and the life of gender and sexuality there. This is an awareness Jordan mines in Irish film after Irish film. In giving us the Irish subject in alternative guises—the drag performers of *The Crying Game* and *Breakfast on Pluto*, the vampires of *Byzantium* and *Interview, Angel's* vigilante cowboy—Jordan circles back to the link between the border symbolising the split nation and the genders of his split protagonists. Fergus's betrayal of Irish nationalism cannot stand alone, it *needs* his gay transformation, his refusal of compulsory heterosexuality, his purloined letter. In order for Kitten to live free of nationalist ideology, as precondition of her characterisation, she needs to like boys, to identify and dress as a girl. These protagonists are part of the continuum of Irish narrative that reveals "how difficult it is to maintain one's own proper identity as the man in the heroic story" (Meaney 5), in particular one that "challenge[s] discourses of nationalism, [and] sexuality" through the "disintegration of boundaries" and a "postmodern skepticism" (Pramaggiore 23). This is seen in the way Kitten is determined to escape the inescapable and that Fergus's only potential for freedom from that nexus is to land himself in jail for two thousand three hundred and thirty five *more* days—the future following the fade to black.

29   Jordan gets "beyond the circular return to the sanctity of the nation" (Pramaggiore 23), is clearly only "reluctantly beholden to [it] post-nationally" (Graham 92), clearly "transcend[ing], yet epitomiz[ing], nationality" (Rockett 2). In his hands, splits of setting, character and story are symbolic modes of escape from the nation rather than returns to it: in the 'trans'-social structure embodied by allegorical characters like Kitten and Dil, exemplified in the fractured, foiled outing of Fergus. In the strategic moments charted—

Kitten's neverending odyssey and Fergus's incarcerated exodus—the key is in hitching the gender metamorphosis to the political transformation. In *The Crying Game* and *Breakfast on Pluto*, a domino effect is set up between masculinity and the nation. And Jordan uses the border—signifier of a bordered condition, of life under partition—as the third integral point in queering and crossing the nation. The toughened, masculine figure in *The Crying Game* is ultimately incapable of killing in the name of the nation and the genderqueer protagonist of *Breakfast on Pluto* has nowhere to run or hide or truly 'be' in contemporary Ireland, and so cuts across national and partition borders in search of a home (read: homeland) she never finds.

30   These are dualisms Ireland may have "no wish to construct but through which we pass" (Deleuze and Guattari 20)—must pass—in Jordan's cinematic vision. By means of a border aesthetic, Jordan envisions and invites "forward-dawning [Irish] futurit[ies]" (Muñoz 23): the key space in *The Crying Game*, the gay gathering place called The Metro where Dil performs the title song, is signifier of the kinds of futurities José Muñoz and Deleuze and Guattari separately theorize and which Jordan struggles to visualize. It coheres as discursive opening in which a radical nationalist critique is permitted to occur and unfold, as locus of Fergus's dawning self-knowledge. A queer metropolitan circuit opposes the heteronormative national one, and the bar is an unhomely allegorical 'house' denoting the difference. It embodies the rhizomatic social configuration sought as against the conception of the modern nation—Dil's queer nation, a (re-)imagined community as hybrid, open, fluid gathering. Their respective endings land both protagonists in the precise place Jordan where wants them: the dramatic movement toward a queer Irish identity and ontology. They are propelled by a desired exodus from compulsory nationalism even if the leave-taking is exilic, as in *Breakfast on Pluto* and even if the figure inciting that movement ends his tale literally

incarcerated, as in *The Crying Game*. Just as Kitten is freed into a frightening world she yet boldly navigates, and Fergus is saved by imprisonment from a too-homophobic world and its too-many cultural laws, these stories speak to metamorphoses that will depend on the thriving of various queernesses in Irish national and social life.

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Becoming Unknown: *Hannibal* and Queer Epistemology

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1   In the fifth episode of *Hannibal*'s first season, "Coquilles," Hannibal Lecter (Mads Mikkelsen), an elegant psychiatrist by day, cannibalistic serial killer by night, leans over and smells the neck of his patient, FBI profiler Will Graham (Hugh Dancy). This moment of intimacy follows a lengthy series of shots emphasizing a diagonal tie between the two men, Will Graham placed in the foreground, moving nervously back and forth while discussing the perversions of his latest criminal assignment. Hannibal stays grounded, in the background of the shots, moving in and out of focus. His presence is felt as an enormous weight, a vague binding grasp around Will Graham. The men only appear side by side in one shot when Hannibal finally moves, walking forward to slowly, sensuously inhale Will's scent. "Did you just smell me?" Will asks, perturbed. "Difficult to avoid" Hannibal quickly answers, redirecting conversation to the gauche stench of Will's aftershave. A queer moment has been activated, fully demonstrated, and then 'resolved' within the text. (Figures 1 - 4)

2   No matter how libidinously the moment is played by Hannibal's portrayer Mads Mikkelsen, the added contextual baggage of Hannibal's cannibalism complicates the image of Hannibal smelling Will. The blurry mystification of boundaries between carnal and carnivorous desire is a primary tool in *Hannibal*'s arsenal, used throughout the show's three-season run on NBC (2013 – 2015). And it all happens inside the closet. The queerness of Hannibal and Will's cannibalistic courtship was instantly archived by fans of the series, resulting in a prodigious well of fan-fiction and fan-art literalizing the queer flirtation of the show. The series avoided a direct verbal allocation of romance within Hannibal and Will's tortured relationship, at least until its penultimate episode, when Will Graham trepidatiously

asks psychiatrist Bedelia Du Maurier (Gillian Anderson) "Is Hannibal...in love with me?," to the collective "OBVIOUSLY!" of *Hannibal*'s viewing public.

3   This closet romance marks *Hannibal* as an especially Gothic outlier to how American television engages queer topics in the 2010s. In a moment when liberal audiences put television under increasing pressure to nourish openly LGBTQ characters, *Hannibal* relies on antique methods of queer coding to hide its central romance in plain sight. This narrative choice runs contrary to the spirit of post-marriage equality LGBTQ inclusion in American television, favoring 'positive representation' of queer individuals that too often results in incorporative normative models of family, gender, and sexuality. In this article I will prove shows like *Modern Family* advocate an open transparency of queer characters that is never as liberating as it may appear. *Hannibal* demonstrates queer anxiety over forms of representation, an awareness that sexual freedom can never come from simply 'opening' the closet, a closet queerness never had any role in creating.

4   In this article I analyze the show's re-appropriation of queer textual motifs throughout film history, in service of several guiding questions: what does it mean to be 'known' as queer on television, what are the political stakes of such knowledge, and why is a show about a decadent cannibal so comfortably queer? To contrast with the show's 'silence' on clearly marked identities, I focus on the visual expressiveness of *Hannibal,* and how its insistence on elaborate displays of murder performs the series' foundational anxiety of knowing. Ultimately this form of ambivalent un-knowing becomes a kind of resistance to the normative incorporation of LGBTQ cultures. *Hannibal* centers on the glamor and mystery of queer villainy to proudly defy a rhetoric of knowable normativity.

5   *Hannibal* is the television incarnation, under the creative direction of Bryan Fuller, of a substantial corpus of characters and plotlines, introduced in novels by Thomas Harris, and

later transferred to cinematic adaptation, most notably Jonathan Demme's 1991 film of the second novel, *The Silence of the Lambs,* which found immense success critically and at the box office.[1] The television series' first and second seasons act as a prequel to the first novel *Red Dragon,* depicting events within the chronology of Harris' established canon with a few minor alterations. In the television series, Will Graham is an FBI profiler, working on cases of eccentric serial killers, all the while becoming increasingly suspicious of the elegant Dr. Lecter. Hannibal's murders are presented alongside Will's investigations, as are both men's relationships with Will's FBI superior Jack Crawford (Laurence Fishburne), and psychiatrists Alana Bloom (Caroline Dhavernas) and Bedelia Du Maurier. Bedelia, Hannibal's therapist with dark desires of her own, was an invention for the series, while Alana took on various roles within the show's universe, often relegated to the position of a love interest, first for Will, and later for Hannibal. The third season of the show was no longer a prequel, completely covering the ground of *Red Dragon* as well as re-contextualizing the plot of the third novel, titled, like the show, *Hannibal.*

6   Although Bryan Fuller and the rest of *Hannibal*'s writers and directors elevate and valorize the queer potential of its characters, the franchise has always been marked by locating its horror within the transgression of normative gender and sexuality. *The Silence of the Lambs* flaunts a central villain, the male serial killer Buffalo Bill (Ted Levine), that makes dresses out of women's skin to wear in an act of gender transformation, without Harris' novel nor Demme's film ever specifying an exact gender identity category for the character.

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[1] The novels are *Red Dragon* (1981), *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988), *Hannibal* (1999), and a prequel depicting the early years of Hannibal Lecter, *Hannibal Rising* (2006). All were later adapted into films: *Manhunter* (adaptation of *Red Dragon,* Michael Mann, 1986), *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991), *Hannibal* (Ridley Scott, 2001), a second attempt at *Red Dragon* (Brett Ratner, 2002), and *Hannibal Rising* (Peter Webber, 2007).

The Silence of the Lambs, particularly its film adaptation, has been a site of useful gendered ingenuity for some critics. Jack Halberstam[2] writes of the film's display of gender horror:

> Buffalo Bill, of course, has become Frederika just as Frederika has become Buffalo Bill – he wears her, she is upon him, he is inside her. Victim and murderer are folded into each other as Starling enters gun in hand to attempt to fix boundaries once and for all...Not simply murderer-monster, Buffalo Bill challenges the heterosexist and misogynist constructions of humanness, the naturalness, the interiority of gender even as he is victimized by them. He rips gender apart and remakes it as a mask, a suit, a costume. Gender identity for Buffalo Bill is not the transcendent signifier of humanity, it is its most efficient technology. (582)

This potential innovation of the film was lost on a 90s culture wars audience that was more immediately concerned with the film's connection to negative stereotypes about LGBTQ populations than any philosophies of gender. Both *Silence of the Lambs* and the thriller *Basic Instinct* (Paul Verhoeven, 1992), with its threateningly queer femme fatale Catherine Tramell (Sharon Stone) were subject to wide protests from gay rights groups at their initial release (Weir). But Halberstam's awareness of the gender-based horror of the Hannibal Lecter franchise, and its queer vitality as a text for thinking through gender and sexuality, reads like a foundational totem for the televisual *Hannibal.* The language of gendered and sexualized extremity emerging from the Hannibal Lecter transmedial corpus found its use for Halberstam interpreting the 90s just as it evolved to serve different ends in the 2010s.

Out on Television in the 2010s

7   Queer cinema in the 2010s is faced with the unique dilemma of facing out against a changing political landscape wherein threats to queer sovereignty take on new forms. Whereas previous generations of activists praised the mere increase in positive LGBT

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[2] The article, "Skinflick: Posthuman Gender in Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs,*" was published prior to the author's gender transition, under the name Judith Halberstam.

representation on screen, retreating from the feared negatives of *The Silence of the Lambs* or *Basic Instinct,* the contemporary moment necessitates a more nuanced and analytical approach to the stakes and implications of such representation. Queer cinema in the 2010s finds itself concerned with, to quote Jodi Brooks' article on *The Kids Are All Right,* sifting through "the losses and gains of inhabiting privileged social institutions and cultural forms" (117). To be 'out on television' is to affirm a television that takes as its directive showcasing an inclusive and multi-cultural portrayal of gender and sexuality, celebrating rather than parading simply to mock or vilify. The egalitarian spirit often verbalizes this inclusivity as 'the same, but new.' Open. These are the supposed gains: access and space granted to LGBT individuals that exceeds what has come before.

8   But there is an undertow of loss. The dimensions of LGBT representation in contemporary television frequently take the form of absorption, queerness being shaped and structured specifically to fall in line with heteronormative standards. I find no better place to look at this phenomenon than in *Modern Family,* an immensely successful program stressing its modernization of antique institutions in its very title. *Modern Family* (ABC, 2009 - present) traces across three sub-branches of one big family that includes the lives of two gay men, Cameron (Eric Stonestreet) and Mitchell (Jesse Tyler Ferguson), and their adopted children. The gay plotline of the season three premiere "Dude Ranch" introduces the couples' plans to adopt a second child, a boy. The extended Pritchett family takes a family vacation to a dude ranch in Wyoming. Surrounded by icons of a traditional masculinity, Mitchell's own gay shame and self-loathing brings him to a kind of panic, concerned he will not be masculine enough to raise a son. He says direct-to-camera, "I realized if I was going to raise a boy, I needed to butch up my life! I wanted to be able to teach my son all the things my dad taught Claire [Mitchell's sister]!" The moment is played as one of ironic comedy, but not satire.

Mitchell is complicit in this bizarre erasure of his own queer identity: no matter how Mitchell diverges from traditional gender stereotypes, the familial institution he is attempting to grow must be one of heteronormative values. Mitchell and Cameron may be a gay male couple, but their theoretical child can only be produced to enter a field of predetermined patriarchal gender narratives, their own queerness a blip on a generational radar that quickly reorganizes to maintain a normative status quo. Queer representation in shows such as *Modern Family* seeks to incorporate and devour queerness: surrounding it in normativity structures and, ultimately, destroying it. The show is every bit the polemical extreme of "reproductive futurism" defined by Lee Edelman in his landmark work *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004), in which he argues that the rhetorical figure of the child in culture becomes a means of solidifying heteronormative stability, as well as Lisa Duggan's model of homonormativity.

9   It is telling that the only children to appear in *Hannibal* are murderers. In season one's fourth episode "Oeuf"[3], child would-be assassins gather around a powerful mother figure, kill their birth parents, and claim loyalty to a coerced redefinition of family. In the horizon of LGBT possibility stressed by GLAAD (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation), there has been a clear and expressed effort to support programs like *Modern Family* and its more unchallenging 'inclusive' representation. To do so is to uphold a closet of reproductive futurism that does nothing to liberate queerness on television. Lacking a free closet to jump out of, *Hannibal* slinks back into the grave, a grave of queer representation's history with criminals and villainy.

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[3] This episode was never aired on American television. NBC and Bryan Fuller jointly made the decision, out of cultural sensitivity related to the Boston Marathon bombing, which occurred days before the episode was slated to air, and the lingering trauma over the school shooting at Sandy Hook, particularly relevant for "Oeuf" given the association between children and violence (Marechal).

The Glamour of Queer Villainy

10   Villains, outlaws to the bitter end, are always sexier. As a rhetorical position, the romance and thrill of fenceless transgression, swallowing up all manner of dangerous activity in conflation with queer sexuality, is undeniable. Michele Aaron, writing on the dynamics of "Cinema's Queer Couples Who Kill" particularly in lesbian cinema, writes:

> These filmic lesbians with their deadly potential yet passionate desires – their frenzied, almost joyful acts of murder – embody the simplest perilous pleasure that the films have on offer. Yet it is not only the characters who own such pleasures, for identification with the women of spectatorial enjoyment of the diegesis immediately implicates the spectator within these dangerous desires. The cultural desire for these representations, evidenced in their coming so closely together and in their popularity as well as their cultural context, speaks of more pervasive, more generally risky or risqué delights being indulged by these films. (71-72)

And this form of brazen, anti-normative villainy is the legacy *Hannibal* lives within, repurposing its icons for the 21st century. In *Monsters in the Closet: Homosexuality and the Horror Film* (1997), Harry M. Benshoff argues that the portrayal of villainy in American horror cinema is thoroughly aligned with queer characters and queer subject matter. His argument is totalizing and historically expansive, defining a paradigm of rules that outline queer horror representation: the "monster queer" constitutes either a threat to the individual, a threat to others, or a threat to community/culture (1). The monster queer deviates away from traditional gender norms, and ravenously displays a homoerotic attachment to the (usually male) protagonist (2-3). Queer sexuality is positioned as something threatening, capable of engulfing heterosexual people who do not stay vigilant against its creeping embrace. In films like *White Zombie* (Victor Halperin, 1932), Benshoff analyzes the depiction of queer villains as coercive, manipulative masters threatening to fool good, honest, typically white civilians into their lifestyles (66-70). The studio horror films of James Whale from the 1930s, such as *The Old Dark House* (1932), are some of his primary case studies.

11   Benshoff's analysis falls victim to a Culture War mentality structuring his arguments around heteronormative culture fearing and destroying queer deviance. Dreaming for the potential future of LGBTQ inclusion defangs the queer villain, and making them the misunderstood monster that *would* partake in all the normative world has to offer, if only that world would allow it. Even when discussing monster queers in a context where the villainy has deliberate political stakes, such as New Queer Cinema's *Swoon* (Tom Kalin, 1992*)* or *The Living End* (Gregg Araki, 1992), Benshoff remains more concerned with the reactions of a theoretical mainstream heterosexual viewer. He writes, "even when the films themselves problematize these figures by linking them to social oppression […] they nonetheless still reaffirm for uncritical audiences the semiotic overlap of the homosexual and the violent killer" (232). It is inarguable that queerness has been conflated with villainy in normative cinema to bolster and solidify heteropatriarchal institutions, but Benshoff is, to a fault, unconcerned with queer power and direction over the icons previously used to disempower and stigmatize.

12   More recent critical texts engage differently with the postmodern deployment of the queer villain. In his article on *True Blood,* Darren Elliot-Smith acknowledges the post-modern saturation of queer horror archetypes, how a show like *True Blood* complicates the topic by placing openly queer characters next to a metaphorical system equating the vampire to queerness. Elliot-Smith takes the critical discourse of queer horror out of simple closeting schematic, one rooted in queer people demonized by heteronormative visual narrative culture. Elliot-Smith, additionally, has a more complicated understanding of queer spectatorship strategies than Benshoff. Elliot-Smith writes, "configuring the queer vampire in heteronormative narratives can be considered a temporary reveling in the frisson of alternative sexuality, only for it to be disavowed and destroyed in their destruction" (145). It

is not purely about heteronormative destruction of queer lifestyles: the spectacle of horror has its own qualities of power and glamour attributed to the queer villain. Benshoff describes the demons in the film *Fear No Evil* (Frank LaLoggia, 1981) as "fabulous," yet this admission of pleasure does not affect his larger analysis of the film (238). The tendency to disavow the grandeur of the queerly horrific – often draped in fantastic clothes, powerfully posed, holding the camera in full loving command – is rooted in shame and culpability to a politics of representation utterly refused by the contemporary queer filmmaker.

13   A larger historical canvas of the queerly horrific informs *Hannibal*'s cultural archive. The show relies on existing tropes of queer men associated with the high arts and aestheticism, grounded historically in the late Victorian era, in aestheticism, decadence, and Oscar Wilde. Thomas Waugh argues Victorian innovations in painting and sculpture codified a queer male sensibility of representing the queerly sexualized body in the discreet underside of high-class art, only barely concealed by little more than politeness and institutional heteronormativity (26). Maria Ionita, one of the first scholars to analyze *Hannibal,* discusses Hannibal Lecter as the ultimate aesthete:

> It's a reflection of Lecter's refined tastes, but also a subliminal echo of his obsession with transformation through artifice. Lecter's highly dissimulative nature is predicated on the sublimation of violence into art. From murder to sophisticated dish or artful death *tableau*, his concern is primarily with the creation of emotion through extravagant spectacle. He is conceived as a deadly variation on the 19th century *dandy*, an artist whose sole creation is his very existence. (27)

The queer danger posed by Hannibal has historical roots and calling cards, tracing the viewer back to patterns of Victorian aestheticism. Oscar Wilde's use of the Gothic in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1980) brought a distinctly queer gaze to power dynamics between men, and in its erotic over-stylized queer masculinities feels like an indisputable influence on *Hannibal.* George E. Haggerty affirms the queerness of Gothic literary work such as *The*

Picture of Dorian Gray in his 2006 book *Queer Gothic,* citing the genre as "a historical model of queer theory and politics: transgressive, sexually coded, and resistant to the dominant ideology" (2). Gothic horror, with its cauldron of aestheticism and sexualized power dynamics, produces the elegant menace of the queer villain.

14   The iconography of queer villainy, often taking form in dangerous, coercive seduction, defines *Hannibal*'s textuality in essential ways. *Hannibal* retreats back to this stylistic register, in loving, elegiac pattern, crowning Mads Mikkelsen's well-dressed cannibal as a queer villain of old, disjunctive against an 'out' television landscape warmly receptive to openly queer characters. Antique queer villainy returns to reactivate a position of dangerous queerness increasingly chased out of homonormative television.

Policing Queer Artistry

15   Within its first few episodes, *Hannibal* looked to be every bit the procedural crime series with which network television was well familiar. Standing out from other procedurals, the show boasted a prodigious archive of material related to its central villain, and an eccentric display of visual expressiveness that, over the duration of the show, grows more and more overpowering to the series' diegesis. The costuming is always impeccable, with well-tailored suits and dresses in deep bold colors. This assembly of high-class pretense interacts disjunctively with the grim realities of the show's subject matter; a strategy of disgusting brutality dressed in ornate exteriors of high-class opulence. Tension between this visual spectacle and procedural justice is a fulcral dynamic in *Hannibal,* destabilizing the viewer's direct response to both. *Hannibal* provides an example of how the crime procedural genre might be queered: with a prideful procession of style over substance, and a tactful obstruction of traditionally normative concepts of 'justice.'

16   If any television genre speaks to coherency and a clean, easy acquisition of knowledge it is the crime procedural. Shows like *C.S.I., Law & Order,* and *NCIS*[4] thrive on the establishment of clear narrative patterns that emphasize crime and its attendant diegetic roles: victim vs. aggressor, police vs. criminal. These shows also triumph clear resolutions that satisfy the detection work preceding them. Mapping out the textual effects of the traditional crime procedural structure, Michael Arntfield argues that crime in these programs provides "the material evidence not only of a crime but of the city's inherent dangers," setting off a chain reaction in the episode's narrative signaling "the shift from the individual to the state, from the human to the machine, as the police are summoned and we see the assembly line activated and production set into motion" (88). Crime procedurals work to highlight a taxonomic process; the 'machine' is always the star of the show, functioning to ensure proper police response to a recognizable crime, usually one 'ripped from the headlines.' Artnfield writes that the typical detective-protagonist "is doggedly followed by interpersonal complexities that simultaneously subvert the reliability of the human and exalt the supremacy of the machine" (89). In this context, *Hannibal* eventually reveals itself to be in very convincing crime procedural drag. Will Graham cannot be the procedural's dream of a rational detective-protagonist. Where other characters are buoyed by the strength of their faith (and the show's faith) in processes of police detection, Will is colored submissively, willfully enchanted by the decadent source of historic queer villainy he has supposedly been tasked with blotting out of the world for good.

17   While the show initially sports a structure one could describe as 'serial killer of the week,' pairing Hannibal's storyline with a one-off showcase of an eccentric killer Will

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[4] *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (CBS, 2000 - 2015); *Law & Order* (NBC, 1990 - 2010); *NCIS* (CBS, 2003 - present). Both *CSI* and *Law & Order* have produced many spin-offs.

Graham can more easily bring to justice, this approach gradually disappears from the show during *Hannibal*'s second season. In the early episodes of season two, 'serial killer of the week' sideshows stop having any autonomous function within *Hannibal*, existing entirely to underscore long-term character plotlines. In season two's fourth episode, "Takiawase," an acupuncturist lobotomizes patients she believes to be suffering, a serial killer methodology tied intimately to another storyline in the episode, Jack's cancer-stricken wife Bella attempting to kill herself with an overdose of morphine. In season two's eighth episode "Suzakana," the final time the 'serial killer of the week' device is utilized, the side killer is a social worker who pins his murders on a vulnerable client, evocative of the twisted psychiatrist/patient relationship of Hannibal and Will.

18   The 'serial killer of the week' elected to fill the first two episodes of *Hannibal*'s second season, ambitious artist James Gray (Patrick Garrow), creates a spectacle utterly essential to *Hannibal*'s concepts of epistemology and art, an abomination that, following FBI agent Beverly Katz's (Hettienne Park) keen descriptor, I will call the human color palette. The gruesome evidence of Gray's murderous handiwork consists of meticulously arranged victims in a perfectly coordinated spiral, the bodies painfully sewn to each other with needle and thread. The spiral is based on gradations of skin color: the darkest bodies are in the center, spiraling outward to bodies of lighter skin tones (Figure 5). For all its grotesquerie, the human color palette is the work of an artist, and Hannibal, predictably, has a very intimate reaction to the serial killer's design. Season two begins with Hannibal serving as a replacement for Will on the FBI's team, albeit not a very responsible one. In response to Beverly Katz correctly guessing the killer's color palette intentions, Hannibal remarks, "The color of our skin is so often politicized. It would almost be refreshing to see someone revel in aesthetics for aesthetics' sake...if it weren't so horrific." Hannibal's comment on "aesthetics

for aesthetics' sake" is a direct reference to Oscar Wilde, summoning late Victorian artistic bravado.

19   The forensic researchers of *Hannibal* (accompanied by the eponymous cannibal) gather around a medical table where an escaped body, with visible tears from the mural, is under examination. The visual vocabulary is very structured and efficient, favoring bird's eye view shots over the entire body, even shots at the foot of the examining table getting every character in frame, and extreme close-ups to specific body parts as they come up in the character's forensic discussion. The taxonomic structure of the cinematic language contrasts profoundly with the absurdity of the crime, forensic research against the art-minded ambition of *Hannibal*'s serial killers. As Wilde himself writes in the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*:

> The artist is the creator of beautiful things./To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim./[...]We can forgive a man for making a useful thing as long as he does not admire it. The only excuse for making a useless thing is that one admires it intensely./All art is quite useless (3-4).

Wilde's vision of a decadent, and ultimately queer, artistry, unfettered art for art's sake, boldly runs against any doctrine of 'usefulness' that dominates the traditional crime procedural. In this way, *Hannibal*'s emphasis on visual expression is both a reference to a moment of great historical queer vitality, and a reaction to the sterility of the traditional police procedural. This is a rare scene to find Hannibal's presence treated as an awkward intrusion, as he finds himself blocking the path of doctors and researchers, a romantic aesthete clumsy and incongruous in such a dispassionate setting[5].

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[5] A similar example would be in the seventh episode of season one, "Sorbet," which cuts from a cold briefing a the FBI Academy to a stylized operatic performance. *Hannibal* is forever aware of the juxtaposition of taxonomic analysis against artistic excess.

20   Hannibal sneaks off to do his own investigating, finding the human color palette in a silo surrounded by a field of wheat. He looks in from the hole at the top, getting a perfect view of the spiral. Here the image is explicitly compared to the human eye, the image of the spiral reflected in Hannibal's eye as it widens to take in the sight, while a grand classical chorus sings on the soundtrack. Darker skin tones fill in a pupil in the center of the frame, with lighter skin tones spiraling outwards along the edge. Hannibal's earlier comment feels like a brazen moment of self-awareness for *Hannibal,* which traffics in a form of "aesthetics for aesthetics' sake." His words are a polarized exaggeration of an aesthetic worldview: all of humanity reduced to color and form. And yet, while Hannibal idealizes art as an indulgence free from the burden of representation, *Hannibal* has no such agenda, layering meaning in its lavish wealth of design.

21   Even beyond the show's clear deconstruction and exhaustion of the procedural format, its base use of the form never fits with Arntfield's prescribed values. If the procedural uses crimes, recognizable and clearly legible crimes, to highlight a well-oiled machine serving a public good, the absurd, extravagant crimes of *Hannibal* confound any political use to police process. Hannibal and the other serial killers of *Hannibal* work at an artistic extreme, their crimes resulting in ludicrous displays of artistic bombast. Killers that construct human color palettes are not pressing concerns of public safety. It is *Hannibal*'s insistence on visual spectacle that most separates it from the crime procedural format: the unapologetically lavish spectacles wrung from the grotesque murders serve to undermine clear crime-solving process, as if to evade knowledge and clarity when there is beauty to be had. *Hannibal* exists within a television genre often used to pay idolizing tribute to the public

service of the police, a body habitually aggressive towards queer populations[6]. Bowing out of incorporative acquiescence, *Hannibal* occupies the crime procedural only to confound and derail it.

"I Let You Know Me…"

22   In addition to its high-attention placement in the season two premiere, James Gray's human color palette gives significant attention to the victims of *Hannibal*'s aestheticized carnage. It's the first time in which the series follows a victim, Roland Umber (Ryan Field) from his last moments of freedom, through his capture, attempted escape, and final arrival as a corpse to be analyzed. In a whimsical touch, both the characters created for this plotline have last names that are also colors. This attention to the individual contrasts directly with the killer's aim, Gray's color palette as a vision of a human unity, different skin tones sewn together like options in a ghastly crayon box, differentiated within in a controlled oneness. One of the close-ups of the victim's body lingers on the seared patch of flesh formerly fused with other bodies in the color palette, rendering the tear of an imposed unity brutally clear.

23   This aspect of the human color palette – a mass of bodies subject to the violence of a totalizing definition – is *Hannibal*'s visual emphasis of queer theory railing against essentialist concepts of knowledge produced in heteronormative patriarchy. In her 1993 article "Privilege of Unknowing: Diderot's *The Nun*," Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes, "Knowledge is not itself power, although it is the magnetic field of power. Ignorance and opacity collude or compete with it in mobilizing the flows of energy, desire, goods, meanings, persons" (23). This obsession with knowledge creating a strict code of the human relates intimately to the

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[6] For a brief overview, see "Reclaiming Our Lineage: Organized Queer, Gender-Nonconforming, and Transgender Resistance to Police Violence" by Che Gossett, Reina Gossett, and AJ Lewis, included in the Works Cited page.

history of sexuality. The text first establishing Sedgwick as a instrumental thinker in queer theory, 1990's *Epistemology of the Closet,* reveals the representational structures at work in articulating queer sexuality. Sedgwick uses the widely-circulated metaphor "coming out of the closet" to reflect a representation eternally constructed by a dominant culture, a "closet" that one can never control. She uses the instructional phrase "definitional stranglehold" to emphasize the corrosive effects of insisting upon essentialist knowledge to confirm such a nebulous category as identity (92). Sedgwick writes of the nature of sexual definition:

> What these proliferating categories and especially their indissoluble contradictions do unflaggingly sustain, however, is the establishment of the spectacle of the homosexual closet as a presiding guarantor of rhetorical community, of authority–someone else's authority–over world-making discursive terrain that extends vastly beyond the ostensible question of the homosexual (230).

Heterosexuality and homosexuality, terms coined around the same time, strictly to oppose one another, lay over the inscrutable realm of human sexuality and cast a definitional net that confines more than it makes tangible. The social realities of these definitional signposts are coercive and not subject to individual ownership. The closet is a structural device that results in the devouring of a queer subject under the boundaries of established identities and established knowledge.

24   Sedgwick's "Privilege of Unknowing" – a less canonical work but no less profound – considers power as a construction of knowledge that is not permanent, formed by heteropatriarchal dimensions of "knowing." She further analyzes how such a construction can be manipulated for queer gain. Discussing the 1780 novel *The Nun* by Denis Diderot, Sedgwick reads the lesbian sadomasochistic relationship acted out between Suzanne and her mother superior as motivated by plausible deniability at its most passive, and outright denial at its most assertive. Sedgwick quotes the text, a line from Suzanne perfectly illustrating the strange ambivalence of knowledge as it is attached to sexuality: "I know nothing, and I

would rather know nothing than acquire knowledge which might make me unhappier than I am now. I have no desires, and I don't want to discover any I couldn't satisfy" (38). Trying to determine what Suzanne exactly *does* know, what she is repressing willfully, and what her subconscious suggests is hazy and intermingled together in one milieu of knowledge. Sedgwick writes of Suzanne, "The situation that Suzanne through her ignorance finally manages to create is one in which there is, as there has been from the start, a question of her own legitimacy, formulated – this time – as the legitimacy of her desires and sensations" (40). The ambivalence of insisting upon a lack of knowledge – refusing to outright label her relationship with the mother superior as sexual abuse, but also refusing not to – results in a continuation of queer affect and sexual activity that hides under a blanket of ignorance, un-represented in a patriarchal vocabulary. This despite endlessly hovering over the sex and its supposed significance, as Sedgwick goes on to write:

> Not only has she both seen and experienced orgasmic sensations with the Mother Superior, but she has repeatedly mused on whether they might be prohibited, how prohibited they might be, reasons why they might be prohibited; in the process of actively repelling sexual "knowledge," she has done a thorough survey of the territory where that "knowledge" might live, and only her refusal to ever allow anyone to attach a name to anything differentiates her state from that of the most deeply endued initiation. (45)

In this outlined paradigm of the erotic use of queer unknowing, Sedgwick moves through the concept of gender melancholia outlined by Judith Butler – heteronormative regret and nostalgia for the possibilities closed off by normative definition (57) – and raises it to a kind of kink, the unspoken presumption of heteronormative innocence when the queer is actually fully explored – just not sufficiently "known."

25   *Hannibal* generates this time warp for viewers: a Gothic vocabulary of queer deviance blissfully unaware of the time in which it has been released. In a show about detection, Will Graham is moving ever closer to unlocking the key to Hannibal Lecter's brutality and put

him behind bars. But under this guise of building knowledge, the show luxuriates in a radically unknowing detective-protagonist, blurring labels of good and evil, romanticizing a villain, and avoiding a decisive labeling of homoerotic infatuation to let it continue for an endless horizon of serial narrative. *Hannibal* queers the basic nature of the police procedural and accentuates its every factor with opulent spectacle. In doing so, the show generates a kind of queer unknowing, a refusal to occupy traditional knowledge structures uncritically, steadfast in enjoying a precious moment of queer un-knowledge, uncorrupted and unknown.

26   The second season of *Hannibal* opens with a human color palette that is revealed as a monument to sight and artistic authority. It ends with a specific reference to the cunning power of seeing as knowledge in the season finale "Mizumono." Everyone has underestimated Hannibal Lecter. The plans to bring him to justice have failed miserably, as most of the principal cast lies bleeding in Hannibal's stately mansion. After stroking Will's hair one last time, Hannibal stabs him through the stomach with a knife and the two men enter a warped, morbid embrace. Faced with Will's betrayal of his trust, Hannibal laments with a quiet, sad fury "I let you know me....see me. I gave you a rare gift, but you didn't want it." This is the only way *Hannibal* could represent a breakup speech, complete with an enactment of phallic penetration. Once again Hannibal's words are telling: underneath the confident performativity of the murder art pieces, *Hannibal* has an almost pathological fear of being known. Clear-cut links to being known become the most dangerous thing in the *Hannibal* universe. Sight and feeling exchanged person to person, from Hannibal to Will, becomes a precious gift, the chance at connection and intimacy rendered difficult in a world overrun by the coercive, often coded and invisible powers of heteronormativity.

27   To return to the scene I mentioned briefly at the start of this article, *Hannibal* builds a vast milieu of queerness – in its deployment of villainy, in its visual expressiveness with

historical links to aestheticism, in its interrogation of knowledge structures, and its cannibalistic intimacies – only for Will Graham to ask, in disbelief, in the series' penultimate episode "Is Hannibal...in love with me?" Will's question, to which the entirety of *Hannibal* has been providing the answer for thirty-seven episodes, finally attempts to verbalize a romantic language the show had long been flirting with, and broadcasting visually. Anticipating the end, *Hannibal'*s third season forms some cracks into the closet door concealing the show's queerness, most demonstrably in an entirely different zone than the gay love between Hannibal and Will, in the relationship between Alana Bloom and Margot Verger (Katherine Isabelle).

28   Margot was previously referenced as queer in *Hannibal'*s second season, but her sexuality was never fully exhibited on the show, and her only sexual encounter was with a man, Will[7]. Alana's representation on the show was even more of an issue, one actively admitted by Bryan Fuller, who lamented the character's reduction to "girlfriend fodder" in the second season, and saw the third season as an opportunity to "rectify" Alana (Goldman). For both characters a relationship presented a calculated opportunity to course-correct where the show had failed in the past, as well as a chance to expand the gendered dimensions of *Hannibal'*s queerness. Alana and Margot's love affair includes a decadent and gorgeously filmed sex scene in the episode "Dolce," complete with vaginal imagery and face morph effects, everything a queer sex scene would be in the baroque den of iniquity that is *Hannibal.* The couple also receives the closest thing to a conventionally happy ending of any of the

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[7] Margot's queer sexuality is adapted directly from Thomas Harris' original 1999 novel *Hannibal.* In the book, Margot is in a committed relationship with a woman named Judy and is desperate to obtain her brother's sperm in order to have a child with her, a plotline also adapted to the television series with Alana in place of Judy. The character of Margot in the written text is a grotesque caricature of lesbians reflecting patriarchal fears of butch women. Margot in the novel is a body-builder, and the text is so overt with its castration fears she is frequently shown cracking two walnuts in her hand. Margot was entirely re-written for the television series in a more respectful characterization, but the shift to a more feminine-presenting character does strangely suggest a more butch Margot couldn't fit within *Hannibal'*s narrative universe.

show's characters – escaping Hannibal's wrath by helicopter, as a happy family with the son Alana conceived from the sperm of Margot's monstrous twin brother[8]. The gendered difference in how *Hannibal* presents queerness is curiously proportioned: a male couple is given an entire series' length of time to explore sexual attraction, albeit in a closeted and elliptical manner, while a female couple has only a slim fraction of the time, but is presented with more immediacy. For a show that bases its largest exploration of queerness in concealment and unknowing, the treatment Alana and Margot receive ultimately looks like something of a divergent consolation prize.

29   Yet this spirit of making queerness more literal in *Hannibal's* final season does extend to Hannibal and Will in a different form, their coupledom sealing itself with a kiss, fully emphasizing the romantic end its subtext demanded. The final scene takes place at a secluded home atop a cliff. In a slow-motion onslaught of violence, Hannibal and Will team up to physically overpower the serial killer the Red Dragon, to the croning of an elegiac torch song written for the show – fittingly titled "Love Crime," by Siouxsie Sioux. After a close-up exchange between the two blood-drenched men – Hannibal: "This is all I ever wanted for you Will...for both of us," Will: "It's beautiful" – an embrace from Will to Hannibal culminates in the FBI profiler willfully toppling both of them off the side of the cliff to the depths below, an effective reversal of the season two finale, previously described, where an embrace between the two men indicates violence from Hannibal towards Will. The camera inches forward, swiftly panning down off the edge of the cliff where Hannibal and Will fell. But any move for closure once again is thwarted, the camera catching no final

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[8] Margot's brother Mason is a queerly sexualized villain in the 1999 Harris novel *Hannibal.* When describing his first meeting with Hannibal to FBI agent Claire Starling, Mason recounts wearing a risqué leather ensemble, and describing his cherished act of autoerotic asphyxiation. Hannibal then commands "Show me," and Mason follows suit (Harris 61-62). In the television series, Mason's monstrosity is sexual but does not stand out as queer compared to the rest of the show, and such a masturbation scene never occurs.

breaths of life from either protagonist. No bodies anywhere, just the crashing dark tides against the cliffs, the credits rolling over the image. In its final statement, save for an elegant post-credits self-mutilation from Bedelia, *Hannibal* prioritizes the unknowable fantasy of oblique queer presentation over any code of secure identity.

30   *Hannibal* is a unique portrait of queer fantasy, appearing at a time when the crossover potential of queer cinemas and heteronormative media forms is at its most hopeful. The gothic drama of a cannibal, cloaking its queer romance in silent, unknowable identifiers, but enjoying every bit of its intoxicating essence, presents an aesthetic of anxiety over LGBTQ representation, romanticizing a position of villainy when obedience to heteronormative standards is growing more and more invisibly coercive.

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Appendix

Figure 1

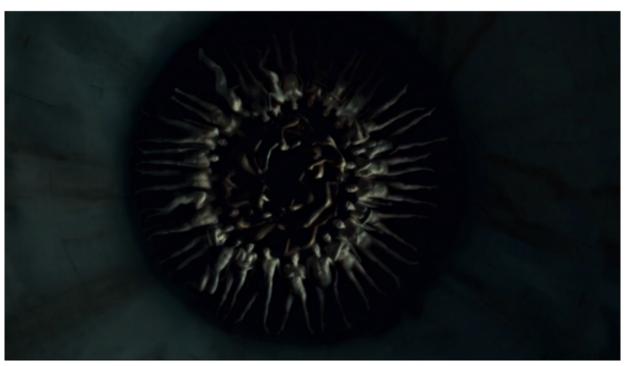Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 5

Loser Lesbians: Failure in *Affinity* and *Fingersmith*

By Joshua G. Adair, Murray State University, USA

Prelude

1   Sarah Waters's work stirs me up; her novels and their filmic adaptations attract and repel me in nearly equal measure. I have engaged with them for over a decade now and each time I do so, I find myself wondering why works like *Affinity* (novel 1999, film 2008) and *Fingersmith* (novel 2002, film 2005) ooze aggression, duplicity, and violence while daringly – and admirably, I would suggest – inserting lesbians into an imagined version of the Victorian era that so completely denied their existence. I find both the narratives and their characters unruly, spiteful, and defiant – by which I mean to say I love them – and I am regularly confounded by their refusal to tell the story the liberal, progress-minded part of me wishes to hear. They present an authenticity – I would say 'truth,' but the pitfalls are too obvious and unavoidable – that resonates with, and disconcerts, me. This 'authenticity,' as I term Waters's frequently unflattering, unresolved, unappealing depiction of lesbians, routinely portrays them as cruel, conniving, crass individuals bent upon securing their own survival, furthering their social position and power, and eschewing loyalty for all others. This is not to say that I am some sunny-dispositioned academic seeking tales that deliver a narrative wherein sexual minorities band together in solidarity to form a community and combat the heteronormative hierarchy. If I am completely honest, though, I resent Waters slightly for resisting that impulse to improve so completely, though I admire her restraint. We get too much of Hollywood, Americanized 'happy endings' these days; especially since our lived experiences rarely resemble such frippery. Waters foils our expectations on the page and the screen; she forces us to interrogate our desires and leaves me, for one, feeling vaguely insecure.

2   I have long wanted to say something about Waters, though more frequently I wanted to shout them. I engaged in dialogues with an imagined Waters – much as I would with a lover who has angered me – wherein I demanded to know why her lesbians lie to one another to such cruel effect, why they perpetrate violence against one another. "Why do these lesbians have no fathers?" I imagined demanding of Waters should I ever meet her, and then following up with "does the Victorian world even matter here, aren't you just writing about the contemporary world cloaked in velvet gowns?" I read all the Waters-related articles and interviews wherein great thinkers analyze the neo-Victorian novel, their relation to Victorian criminal discourses (Gamble), intersubjectivity (Madsen), historiography (Boehm), and, of course, postmodernism (Costantini), and feminism (Kaplan), even ones that investigate the architecture of Milbank (Armitt and Gamble) – all excellent, enlightening – and yet not one of them quells the sick discomfort I frequently feel when I encounter Selina Dawes, Margaret Prior, Sue Trinder, and Maud Lilly, among others. As interesting and potentially satisfying academically as the aforementioned investigations prove, they still left me wanting an explanation for my visceral reaction. I wanted to understand my unwillingness to embrace the painful authenticity of Waters's construction of lesbianism. The answer, I argue, is that we must engage with Waters's narratives as ones of queer failure, rich with negative potential for scuttling normativity and dismantling schemas of queer progress.

Only Connect

3   My Waters problem started with E. M. Forster and found some resolution with J. Jack Halberstam, a queer crew to be certain. I intend this essay as both literary analysis, personal exploration, and a proposal for a mode of reading that embraces the inherent

negativity in Waters's authenticity. I originally embarked on this study imagining an analysis of the texts using Marilyn R. Farwell's theories about "spaces of sameness" as a frame for examining what I saw as a lesbian genealogy rooted in a violent matriarchy capable of fostering, but indifferent to sustaining, lesbian desire and sex. While I think the idea has merit, I also kept thinking of *Maurice* and Forster's insistence upon sending the titular character and his gamekeeper lover, Alec, into the Greenwood so that they might forge a life wherein their kind might be accepted and find fulfillment. I have published elsewhere about this ending and its role as a model of queer community formation, in addition to its ability to inspire subsequent authors who share a similar impulse to imagine a world which contains spaces for queer people to thrive. Forster's solution to Maurice and Alec's problem, however, I recalled, had unsettled me in a similar, if less academic, manner in my early 20s. I found it improbable and contrived; I later discovered that many critics level the same criticism at the novel. In addition, as a closeted queer kid at a tiny Midwestern liberal arts college in the mid-90s, I did not thrill at the assertion that I had to abandon all society in order to discover a place for myself. Years later, I wanted to connect Waters's insertion of lesbian narrative into her imagination of the Victorian era to Forster's project because I imagined each telling a version of the same story, the endgame of which was to forge an imagined space – intellectual, artistic, quasi-historical – for queer folks. The problem, as it turns out, is that both Forster's and Waters's narratives, despite their respective merits, present scenarios in which queer folks must either flee or commit criminal acts and endure/perpetrate physical and emotional violence to survive. At least I believed that was a problem; it turns out the problem was my own perspective and the lens of progress through which I was attempting to read.

4   Only a few pages into *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), J. Halberstam convinced me it was time to shift my frame of reference. Interrogating everything from animated films to the erotics of Nazi Germany, Halberstam forcefully argues that

> *The Queer Art of Failure* dismantles the logics of success and failure with which we currently live. In certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world. (2)

Could it be, I wondered, that Waters's *Affinity* and *Fingersmith* might be better understood using such a principle? I had long fought my political, and admittedly emotional, response to these novels; a response that demanded a resolution of redemption, full of progress. I wanted a model that might provide some insight into how to improve the difficulties queer people face in the contemporary world, and baselessly I assumed that was what Waters wanted to deliver. No matter how I tried to 'spin' them, though, I ended up in a world that I found ugly and treacherous, not unlike the one I currently inhabit with antiqueer 'religious freedom' legislation and hate crimes like the mass shooting in Orlando adding up each day. And yet there is also something captivating in Waters's worlds (and perhaps my own, too). Indeed, I felt I was being held captive by a mode of representation that I consider significant, one that hearkens to earlier narrative traditions about lesbians wherein things end badly – from *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) to the salacious pulp novels of the 50s like *The Fear and the Guilt* (1954) – but that manages to establish, perhaps even promote, a formidable agency and perseverance absent from those earlier narratives wherein the characters appeared to receive retribution for their so-called aberrance. Waters's lesbians endure betrayal, violence, poverty, and loneliness, among other things, but they are not destroyed or perhaps even diminished, ultimately; their failure propels them forward defiantly. Prodding at the nature of failure, Halberstam asserts,

Perhaps most obviously, failure allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development with the goal of delivering us from unruly childhoods to orderly and predictable adulthoods. Failure preserves some of the wondrous anarchy of childhood and disturbs the supposedly clean boundaries between adults and children, winners and losers. And while failure certainly comes accompanied by a host of negative affects, such as disappointment, disillusionment, and despair, it also provides the opportunity to use these negative affects to poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life. (3)

Using Halberstam's assertion of failure as a potentially fertile state of being, I contend that

Affinity and *Fingersmith*, through depictions of lesbians enduring interpersonal violence,

dysfunctional (and illegitimate) families, and unstable and/or unsuccessful relationships,

shoehorns lesbian existence into an era curiously silent on the subject without falling prey to

the temptation to glorify, valorize, or redeem lesbianism after staking a space for them. In

short, *Affinity* and *Fingersmith* claim space for lesbians surviving, though not succeeding, in

the Victorian era at a century's remove – valiantly proclaiming "We exist!" – while

staunchly refusing to present prettified, politically efficacious tales of them as a unified,

community-minded group who are victims of a world that will not acknowledge their

existence, let alone accept them. Halberstam says it best when discussing masochism and

passivity, but I think her words prove just as applicable to Waters's narratives:

I refuse triumphalist accounts of gay, lesbian, and transgender history that necessarily reinvest in robust notions of success and succession. In order to inhabit the bleak territory of failure we sometimes have to write and acknowledge dark histories, histories within which the subject collaborates with rather than opposes oppressive regimes and dominant ideology. (23)

And so, ignoring the lust we have been taught to nurture for redemption, we must accept

representation in the form it comes and quit squinting for, and/or reading in, redemption.

We must stop contriving that with which we are presented.

Who's Your Daddy?

5   Waters's representation of families in both *Affinity* and *Fingersmith* defies our contemporary mania for positivity to great effect. Halberstam assures us that "Relieved of the obligation to keep smiling through chemotherapy or bankruptcy, the negative thinker can use the experience of failure to confront the gross inequalities of everyday life" (4). Indeed, Waters's world affords such an opportunity by refusing to offer any explanation or justification for the existence of lesbians, presenting families that would be appraised as 'broken' by virtually any standard today. Abusive mothers, non-existent fathers, and lecherous, abusive relatives unapologetically abound – no one proves trustworthy or stable in either novel – highlighting the meritlessness of our culture's long-standing fixation upon the so-called traditional family and refusing to offer an origin or causation narrative for lesbian existence.

6   While readers may fantasize about Margaret Prior's recently deceased father and the nature of her nuclear family while it remained intact, clues abound that the situation never resembled the picture of idyllic Victorian domesticity. Margaret, functioning as her father's helpmeet, appears to have taken on what would have been considered a masculine role in helping with his research and writing. In his absence, she seems at once aimless and yet more free to pursue her own desire. Her mother proves intent upon managing her unwieldy daughter with the aid of drugs: "Mother came, half an hour ago, to bring me my dose. I told her I should like to sit a little longer, that I wished she would leave the bottle with me so I might take it later—but no, she wouldn't do that. I am 'not quite well enough', she said. Not 'for that'. Not yet." (30). We also discover that Margaret has proven herself a failure – and a *de facto* criminal – by attempting to commit suicide. Finally, her family situation is further complicated by her failed romantic overtures with Helen, her love object and now sister-in-

law. We learn of this now-defunct relationship early on, which sets the tone for the dysfunctional but physically intact Prior household when Margaret's locket goes missing:

> I do not care if Ellis broke it, or if the dust-man's sweet-heart has it—she might keep the locket, though I had it from Pa. There are a thousand things, in this house, to remind me of my father. It is the curl of Helen's hair I am afraid for, that she cut from her own head and said I must keep, while she still loved me. I am only afraid of losing that—for God knows! I've lost so much of her already. (91)

The ideal middle-class Victorian family, Waters suggests through her characterization of Margaret, never existed – even if it appeared to – and while Margaret is miserable to the point of self-destruction, alienated among, but bound to, her relatives, her existence as a lesbian goes without question. If anything, her stern facial expressions and icy demeanor towards her entire family underlines for viewers that she feels little connection with any of them, including the father they repeatedly assert she cannot quit mourning. In fact, when Theophilus, her fiancé, suggests they might continue her father's scholarship as a mutual endeavor, she makes quite clear that she had worked on the projects during his lifetime only out of a sense of obligation and held no wish to continue doing so. Margaret understands the conventions of Victorian respectability and acquiescing to the patriarch, but upon his death she begins to edit the narrative to suit her own desires.

7   Sue Trinder's family exists outside Victorian respectability from the start. Throughout the course of the novel we learn that identity in this world is fluid and that Maud and Sue function somewhat interchangeably in a dizzying narrative wherein fathers appear not to exist and mothers are absent, dead, and/or masquerading as another. Something as simple as slipping on one's employer's elegant seafoam gown can erase one's identity, at least temporarily. In this world, one's mother easily becomes another's, as with Sue and Maud, and children function as capital we learn from Mrs. Sucksby, who declares, "I should like to farm infants" (14). Origins and root causes prove indiscoverable here; we cannot discern the

reasons for Sue's or Maud's desires or existence. Early on we encounter Sue's self-narrative about her own life:

> I liked to hear them say it. Who wouldn't? But the fact is—and I don't care who knows it, now—the fact is, I was not brave at all. For to be brave about a thing like that, you must first be sorry. And how could I be sorry, for someone I never knew? I supposed it was a pity my mother had ended up hanged; but, since she *was* hanged, I was glad it was for something game, like murdering a miser over his plate, and not for something very wicked, like throttling a child. (12)

For Sue and Maud both, mothers are failures, not the angelic matriarchs depicted by Coventry Patmore and so many others in the period. They are lunatics, criminals, and grifters. They show up on screen looking dirty, disheveled, and disgusting; they embody some nightmarish incarnation of maternal power. In this world, the family and its environs become the site of confusion, unknowing – such as Maud laboring tirelessly in her Uncle's library without realizing it is replete with pornography – and fear rather than the bastion of safety and moral rectitude so frequently cited as the Victorian achievement. Waters's worlds are chockablock with blind spots, which *Fingersmith* reminds us of frequently with moments like Maud's first encounter with the brass hand embedded on her uncle's library floor insisting that no one – except he, of course – pass further. Knowledge and information are strictly controlled in these narratives and no one can see clearly, not even viewers who are easily tripped up by the labyrinthine plot twists played out on the screen.

Girl Fight!

8   As if difficult and unstable family relationships were not enough for Waters's lesbian protagonists to contend with, they also face various forms of interpersonal violence – both physical and psychical – from their love objects. Facing the dissolution of her romantic attachment to Helen, her now sister-in-law, in *Affinity*, Margaret Prior decides to become a

"Lady Visitor" to Milbank, a prison for women inmates. Fulfilling what has become a somewhat clichéd role for the needy, wayward woman who seeks love from a prisoner, Margaret falls in love with Selina Dawes, an inmate convicted of fraud for her role as a spiritualist medium. The two hatch a plan to spring Selina from Millbank and abscond together, in an odd parody of the Forster plot of escape and renewal. Near the time of her escape, the relationship reaches its fever-pitch as Selena demands,

> 'Not sure? Look at your own fingers. Are you not sure, if they are yours? Look at any part of you—it might be me that you are looking at! We are the same, you and I. We have been cut, two halves, from the same piece of shining matter. Oh, I could say, *I love you*—that is a simple thing to say, the sort of thing your sister might say to her husband. I could say that in a prison letter, four times a year. But my spirit does not love yours—it is *entwined* with it. Our flesh does not love: our flesh is the same, and longs to leap to itself. It must do that, or wither! *You are like me*. You have felt what it's like, to leave your life, to leave your self—to shrug it from you, like a gown. They caught you, didn't they, before the self was quite cast off? They caught you, and they pulled you back—you didn't want to come.' (275)

While their love always comes across as obsessive, if not unhealthy – we witness Margaret cuddled up to Selina's prison-shorn ponytail as a surrogate for human contact – we ultimately learn that it is also a ruse, along the lines of the séances that got Dawes convicted. Selina, in cahoots with Vigers, Margaret's maid, swindles Margaret out of her personal wealth, wardrobe, and passage out of England. She goes so far as to steal her identity, running off with Vigers, her lover, in spiced-up Forsterian style, to live together, though not in the Greenwood. As the tale winds down, Margaret is left broken, a failure; yet, her life has meaning as she has thrown off middle-class Victorian respectability and defied social convention. She will not marry, nor will she be silenced. We watch her imagined drowning as she sinks the last remnants of her former self and marshals her strength to confront the world more aggressively. Her downfall leaves intact lesbian desire tinged with a strong strain of unrequited – not to mention self-destructive, perhaps even delusional – love, suggesting

that not even the noblest of emotions are free of the potential for failure. Vigers's final line to Selina, "'Remember,'… 'whose girl you are'" ends, though it does not settle, the narrative with its unnerving proclamation of ownership and domination – Vigers even insists on holding her cigarette to Selina's lips rather than acting autonomously – suggesting that their escape will prove solely physical and that jealousy and control issues will plague the relationship (352).

9 The relationship which coheres at the end of *Fingersmith* suggests a slightly better chance of survival, though it boasts as great a history of failure. Switched at birth for the purpose of pulling a long con, Maud and Sue engage in a shell game of deception and interpersonal violence that results in Sue's institutionalization at Maud and Gentleman's instigation, and Maud's captivity in Mrs. Sucksby's house, all in the service of attempting to capture the fortune of her Uncle, a bibliographer of pornography. About Maud we learn early on that "The bitch knew everything. She had been in on it from the start" (184). Through a mind-boggling series of twists and about-faces, Waters weaves a narrative wherein desire may exist as the sole point of authenticity even though self-interest and greed frequently overtake it. Even so, Sue repeatedly complicates our understanding of her desire, noting early on in an analysis of her response to Maud, "*It's like you love her,* I thought" (144). Her lack of certainty suggests a failure to conceive of herself as a lesbian or to trust her own feelings and her inner monologue further serves to complicate the nature of her feelings for Maud: "Kissing Maud, however, was not like kissing her. It was like kissing the darkness" (149). Safety does not exist in this world and sharing a sense of similarity, if not identity, fails to establish solidarity or common purpose. Feelings transpire as if from a distance, and are always regarded with suspicion, as though they might be masking darker,

more nefarious impulses. Even witnessing Maud's sham marriage to Gentleman, not realizing she was enabling her own commitment, Sue observes,

> I stood and held my poor, bent twig of honesty, and watched Maud standing at Gentleman's side, holding tight on to hers. I had kissed her. I had lain upon her. I had touched her with a sliding hand. I had called her a pearl. She had been kinder to me than anyone save Mrs Sucksby; and she had made me love her, when I meant only to ruin her. She was about to be married, and was frightened to death. And soon no-one would love her, ever again. (165)

Because the narrative unfolds through a series of flashbacks, it is difficult to know at this point whether Sue's final words – that no one would ever love Maud again – serve as a recollection of her thoughts at the time or as an assertion of her lack of love, if not a dearth of physical desire, for her.

10   For Maud's part, her goals are always fashioned by self-interest, it would seem. Her initial mission is to find a route out of her uncle's house, an uncle whom "For to Priapus and Venus he has devoted me, as other girls are apprenticed to the needle or the loom" (211), she establishes. Once she escapes with Gentleman, who amply demonstrates the irony of his nickname, she aids in the snare that institutionalizes Sue and becomes bate in the larger trap engineered by Mrs. Sucksby. Surviving a byzantine elaboration of plot twists, both women manage to free themselves and Maud retreats to Briar to write the pornography for which her uncle had apprenticed her – a failed move by any standard of the era both because of her sex and the nature of the profession. Once she makes her escape, though, she makes no effort to seek out Sue, enacting her earlier assertion that she "could not want a lover, more than…freedom" (253) and raising the specter of the possibility that her work as a pornographer – a potentially lucrative failure – holds greater importance to her than a love match. In fact, all evidence suggests that Maud's conception of love bends toward a kind of self-obsessed sadomasochism, most visible in their moments of physical intimacy which

always verge on violent. When defending her decision to use Maud she observes, "And so you see it is love—not scorn, not malice; only love—that makes me harm her" (302). While this assertion and her behavior throughout the novel certainly do not suggest a cuddly, Hallmark-sentimental relationship, her unconventional desire and willingness to inflict suffering upon her beloved represent a variety of love or obsession which few would laud although I suspect many have experienced. It proves difficult, I would suggest, to imagine the possibility of future safety and happiness – both in the relationship and in the larger world – because of the couple's history and their penchant for deception and violence a la Vigers and Selina. Nevertheless, we're left with an image of Maud writing her own sexuality, to which she gives Sue access: "Her silk skirts rose in a rush, then sank. She put the lamp upon the floor, spread the paper flat; and began to show me the words she had written" (582). While access of some variety exists between the women, danger lurks still with their fidelity focused on different marks and their self-interest carefully preserved.

11   The mistake in the cases of *Affinity* and *Fingersmith* is to read them as the 'triumphalist' accounts against which Halberstam inveighs. These are not great romances, nor fairytale endings; they are visually scrumptious in their excess and even decay. They depict various failures: pain-ridden, destructive romantic relationships; untrustworthy, manipulative families; and harsh, treacherous communities. It is only by 'failing' in this world, by remaining single or at least self-centered, by committing crimes and betrayals, by exploiting one's self and others (even of one's own kind), that lesbians may exist and stake claim to a space which previously denied their existence. The results are unconventional narratives of survival that are about as far away from a feel-good tale as one can get: we cannot easily admire the characters, their choices, nor their destinations. The key, however, is recognizing that engaging with a narrative with these goals in mind is the problem and it

colors our understanding of the message. Waters provides us with characters whose lives seem real – if historically unverifiable – because they confront profound disappointment, danger, and deception. Theirs are not the lives we would choose; they are ugly, frightening, and disorienting on the screen. These are not stories we laud as emancipatory or even flattering. Rather, they are a catalog of failures gathered to demonstrate the antinormative power of non-conformity, of the sometimes transformative power of unconventionality. Ultimately, they present marginalized people triumphant only in continuing to exist, in defying the pervasive message that they should not, especially with the methods they adopt. They are what Halberstam identifies as "marginalized subjects":

> Marginalized subjects in particular tend to be situated in an active relationship with the dilemma of betrayal, if only because normative models of citizenship situate the minoritarian subject as a kind of double agent, one who must be loyal to the nation but cannot fail to betray it. The queer and feminist dimensions of disloyalty and betrayal open onto a different kind of politics, a politics which, at various times […] comes to be associated with masochism, unbecoming, and negativity. (163-64)

In the end, it seems, masochism, unbecoming, and negativity, are all living and lively parts of contemporary queer experience, as we continue to bargain for equality – not daring to mention justice – and frequently witness the results as something far less redemptive or satisfying. Advances have been made, certainly – many cite same-sex marriage and civil unions in Western countries as the prime example of this – but we are still inundated with hatred, vitriol, and violence and this does not always just crop up from outside the queer community. One need only consider a case like that of now-convicted murdered Elliot Morales[1] to see strains of Waters's worlds resting palimpsestically over our century. And perhaps, in the end, what they have to teach us is that we continue on in – not in spite of – failure, violence, selfishness and to assert that, in the final analysis, that our world is

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[1] See http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/10/nyregion/elliot-morales-convicted-of-hate-crime-murder-in-west-village-shooting.html?_r=0

predominantly otherwise, highlights the much larger failure at play here. Maybe it's not the Forsterian Greenwood filled with promise and potential that we need, but rather a Watersian mirror reflecting our failures to help us better recognize and interrogate ourselves.

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Jenny Schecter and the Strange Case of the Present Absent Jewish American Woman on the Queer Screen: The Ghostly Failures of Jewish American Assimilation

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I seek to avoid the problem of hierarchies of suffering by working, as it were, horizontally rather than vertically, extending a wide embrace beyond the immediate site of suffering to look at the experiences of those who are feeling its effects even if they are removed from it (whether historically or spatially). In looking at emotional responses that are tangential to trauma yet that still touch on it, I am arguing not that they are the equivalent of trauma but that they help illuminate its emotional dynamics. The nuances of everyday emotional life contain the residues that are left by traumatic histories, and they too belong in the archive of trauma… They can make one feel totally alone, but in being made public, they are revealed to be part of a shared experience of the social.
  - An Archive of Feelings, Ann Cvetkovich

1   Jewish American assimilation is currently understood to be a completed, and highly successful, project. Yet the persona of the young queer Jewish American woman (whether real or fictional) in popular culture who is maligned or caricatured problematizes this notion of completed Jewish assimilation into whiteness, such as Jenny Schecter on *The L Word*.[1] What proves most interesting and revealing about such personae (and to some extent, the writers who created the fictional iterations) is that they have all been deeply influenced by post-WWII ideologies of Jewish American identity. Not only have they absorbed the notion that they are assimilated, and thus cannot acknowledge the omnipresent 'ghost' of the

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[1] I use the term *persona* to emphasize that both fictional characters and real women (especially those presented to us through the media) are understood through cultural understandings of specific kinds of identities, as well as the fact that even real women are known only as they are mediated through news or entertainment venues. The persona is an image, of course, but is also more than that to the extent that readers or viewers develop "relationships" with characters (perhaps especially so in TV and film, in which there is a face to go with the personality). Finally, the concept of "persona" also addresses the blurring of actor and character, (such as with Jerry Seinfeld as Jerry Seinfeld in *Seinfeld*, Fran Drescher as Fran Fine in *The Nanny* or Roseanne Barr as Roseanne Conner in *Roseanne)* and the way that news and social media create a "character" out of anyone in the spotlight, such as Monica Lewinsky as explored by Lauren Berlant and Lisa Duggan's *Our Monica, Ourselves*. NYU Press, 2001.

process of assimilating, but they have also been deeply influenced by stereotypes of Jewish American women created and reiterated by various aspects of popular culture.[2] Rather than coming to terms with traumatic Jewish historical ghosts as the personae of young Jewish American men often do, the personae of the queer Jewish American woman is concerned with the struggle to maintain normalcy (e.g., a WASP-like whiteness), the struggle of living as a stranger, or both. While Jonathan Safran Foer, a secular contemporary Jew in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*, goes to the Ukraine to try to find remnants of his family from after the Holocaust, the characters/personae examined here cannot afford to spend much time listening to the whispers in the walls, although they are troubled by the ghosts that they sense are there.

2   I contend that the myriad stories being told by queer Jewish American women artists, particularly in cinema and television, are important and complicate the standardized notion of completed Jewish American assimilation. I focus here on the story that Jewish American lesbian television producer and writer Ilene Chaiken tells in *The L Word* of a California queer/lesbian women's community in which the queer Jewish American woman still inhabits the tenuous, fragile position of the stranger. contradicting the portrayals of assimilated Jewish American females such as the Monica Geller character on *Friends*, those personae who are relegated to being strangers—such as Jenny Schecter on *The L Word*— serve to illuminate the failures, problematics, and questions left in the wake of supposedly completed and closed inclusions. To that end, I will examine the persona of Jenny Schecter, a highly marked and yet highly invisible queer Jewish American character on Showtime's *The L Word*. Jenny Schecter is clearly marked as Jewish by her explorations of her Jewish

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[2] Alexander Portnoy's mother in *Portnoy's Complaint* and Harry Block's disapproving, whining Zionist sister in *Deconstructing Harry*. Roth, Philip, *Portnoy's Complaint*. Vintage International, 1994. And *Deconstructing Harry*. Directed by Woody Allen, performances by Woody Allen, Judy Davis, and Julia Louis-Dreyfus, Fine Line Features, 1997.

history and present in numerous story lines, yet her Jewishness (or her Jewish matters, as I call them, evoking Avery Gordon's "ghostly matters") is ignored by the other characters on the show creating the paradox that the persona of the Jewish female stranger may be highly visible and invisible at the same time. Ghostly matters, according to Avery Gordon, are those manifestations we can feel haunting—particularly in theory this can manifest as a feeling—a feeling that something is being left out, that there is some 'matter' that hasn't been attended to, that there is something one cannot put one's finger on though one knows it is there. She addresses how slippery this becomes in academic scholarship where we are taught to only validate that which can be expressed in terms and frameworks with which we are already familiar. The persona of Jenny Schecter disrupts the notion that all Jewish Americans are completely assimilated though this remains a ghostly matter within *The L Word*.

3   This disruption continues a curious historical flip-flop observed by multiple scholars. Joyce Antler notes that in the first half of the twentieth century, "popular culture representations of Jewish life became increasingly masked, indirect, and invisible as opposed to the full-bodied representations of the preceding half century," and contends that this invisibility continued throughout much of the twentieth century (Antler 247). "American assimilation was closely allied to the modern distinction between the public and private sphere," writes Jon Stratton (152). Partly due to this distinction (and an assimilation imperative amplified by there being no 'home' to return to), Stratton posits that "in the fifties and sixties Jews are portrayed as assimilated whites in Hollywood films" (145). However, as Vincent Brooks contends, "the period from 1989 through the early 2000s has seen an unprecedented upsurge in American television featuring explicitly Jewish protagonists (e.g., *Seinfeld*, *Brooklyn Bridge*, *The Nanny*, *Mad About You*, *Friends*, *Dharma and Greg*, *Will and*

Grace)" (1). Rather than reading this expanded depiction as evidence of Jewish American assimilatory progress, however, Brooks argues that "the trend also points to a renewed crisis in Jewish identity formation, which, in turn, reflects a broader struggle over incorporation and diversity in U.S. television and society" (2).

4   Karen Brodkin also recognizes this struggle when she observes that Jewish Americans have been shuttled back and forth between being white and non-white for most of the twentieth century, and frames this malleability as inhabiting the position of the stranger (175). Following Zygmunt Bauman, unlike the assimilated Jew who poses no threat to the status quo, the stranger is dangerous because she has the ability to masquerade as an insider until her movements begins to seem stilted, her speech too precise and careful, and a hint of something foreign emerges suddenly and irrevocably. At that moment, the solidity of category and identity is dislodged in a way that disturbs both the insider and the outsider, often with dire consequences for the stranger (Bauman 59). In some cases the stranger has the ability to mediate her position by positioning herself in opposition to designated outsiders or attempting to align herself with insiders. In other cases there is no choice but for the stranger to make a home in this homeless state. I will work to show how the stranger*,* exemplified here by Jenny Schecter, is often ousted to discipline insiders and outsiders alike, and how sometimes strange*r*s attempt to make homes in stranger spaces only to find that there, too, lies a normal body with whom the stranger will be compared and disciplined. In this topography, the stranger is as important as the insider and the outsider in creating and maintaining punitive systems of hierarchical order, and Jenny Schecter inhabits this necessary stranger space throughout the duration of *The L Word* series.

5   Stratton continues, "in the 1980s Jews begin to become racialized subjects again and this is troped as performance" (145). In this re-ethnicization, "in film, as in life, markers that

are thought to signify Jewish phenotypic difference are bound together with cultural differences" (149). Indeed, the actor who portrays Jenny Schecter, Mia Kirshner, has a biography that reads similarly to Jenny's storyline. The grandchild of Holocaust survivors—her father is reported to have been born in an internment camp—tells of a childhood in which she was a strange, 'dark' child with the history of the Holocaust imprinted in her paternal grandparents' cells, and displacement and diaspora written into her Bulgarian maternal grandparents' hearts" (Pfefferman). She tells of Shabbat dinners where "I would watch my grandfather vanish. His eyes dark slits, mouth open in mute horror. Sometimes, he would stop talking for days…. Now my father likes to travel; they never want him to leave. Hysteria accompanies his departures, my father repeating his itinerary over and over again" (Pfefferman). Kirshner, here, suggests that her appearance that was read as ethnic and her inherited Jewish matters through her grandparents as third generation holocaust survivor made her a kind of stranger herself.

6   The tale told by Ilene Chaiken is a sad one in which the queer Jewish woman is, at any given moment, made invisible, disciplined and reformed, or excised from the group of friends — and indeed, Jenny's eventual murder at the hands of an unknown individual decidedly excises her from the community forever. In the rare moments when we are privy to Jenny Schecter's 'private,' unspoken thoughts, we are told ghost stories of unutterable and unreachable memories of abuse and violence, both her own and her grandparents' Holocaust narratives—experiences doubled or mirrored by the actor playing Schecter. Further, the group response to Jenny Schecter on the show allows us to understand the positionality of being both a highly visible and yet also invisible stranger and serves as an illumination of the current crisis in visibility/invisibility of Jewish identity in popular culture identified by Joyce Antler, Jon Stratton, Vincent Brooks, and others. The particular crisis for the queer Jewish

American woman (exemplified here by Jenny Schecter) is that her story has no viable way to be illuminated through the narrative lens of white femininity, despite the notion that she is seamlessly white, and yet it is the queer Jewish woman whose strangerhood illuminates some of the failures of Jewish assimilation. While Jenny cannot be read as a simple caricature fitting into the role of the Yiddishe Mama, overbearing mother, or JAP, she also cannot be read as a fully fleshed-out, nuanced character; her psychic pain cannot be made manifest in any meaningful way, because her presumed assimilated whiteness precludes her queer Jewish matters from becoming visible, even to the viewers who watch her gruesome story unfold.[3]

Jenny Schecter And Her Jewish Matters

7   While the show focuses primarily on the sexuality of its characters, I posit that Jenny's ongoing strangerhood is tied simultaneously to her queerness and her Jewish ethnicity, and the lingering traces of trauma that stem from it. Jenny first appears as a stereotypical straight white woman, with long hair and a boyfriend, as a new neighbor and a recent graduate of the renounced Iowa Writer's Workshop. Over the course of the series, layers of her persona are peeled back to show those elements that make her a stranger—her Jewishness, her family trauma, her tormented private dreams, her complicated and hard to define sexuality. Addressing the construction of the character of Jenny Schecter and how she came to understand portraying her, actor Kirshner says, "I was attracted originally to the naiveté and innocence of Jenny, she was sort of this very classic character who was a blank slate. I had no idea what I was getting into. Every year I sort of had a different character for Jenny, that's how I approached it because she's so radically different each season" ("Preview

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[3] Identified caricatures in U.S. television identified by theorists such as Joyce Antler.

for Season Six"). While Jenny could conceivably be read through multiple lenses, it is her Jewishness that functions to tie many of these elements together and make her a stranger rather than an outsider, and that best illustrates that Jewish assimilation into whiteness is still far from complete or unproblematic even in the queer white world of *The L Word*.

8   As Jon Stratton explains, "For Jews to be fully accepted as white, as differentiated from American, meant to be thought to have Anglo-American culture, an achievement made possible by the assumption of what, following Brodkin, we could call prefigurative acquisition" (145). For Jenny Schecter, this acquisitive assumption of Anglo-American culture is a recent one, according to the third season opener, in which we find ourselves in Jenny's childhood home and first discover that her parents are Orthodox Jews. Throughout this episode—the first we have seen her parents—we learn that Jenny has grown up in an enclosed community in which she was expected to marry a "nice Jewish boy," and her introduction to non-Jewish communities occurred only when she went away to college. Jenny's Jewishness is both known and unknown; she is explicitly identified as Jewish, yet none of her friends seem to know just *how* 'Jewish' her upbringing actually was (only as viewers are we privy to the private scenes between her and her parents in Skokie, Illinois). Nor do they know how personal the Holocaust is to her with her grandmother having been a survivor of Auschwitz. The profound markers of her ethnic Jewish identity are visible only to the viewer, yet the kitschy markers of her 'Jewishness' are thrown around the group with witty repartee (of rather poor taste), such as when Jenny is campily dubbed the "Jewish star" ("Lone Star"). It is disorienting to the viewer, who is left to connect, disconnect, or reject these private scenes from Jenny's public appearances.

9   Jenny is clearly aware of her status as a stranger. In "Left Hand of the Goddess," the last episode of Season Three, Jenny confronts Max (who she is dating, and who is

undergoing female-to-male gender reassignment) explicitly about identity and belonging. In a dramatic scene set in a lavish hotel, Jenny attempts to dance with a stranger, another feminine appearing woman in a room full of older, wealthy, conservatively dressed people. Moira/Max tries to stop her by reminding her that the two women dancing may cause these conservative straight people discomfort. Jenny retorts with one of the last utterances of the last episode of the season, and says angrily:

> You're great the way you are and the way you were. And you know what happens when you walk into this room (looking back at the straight people dancing on the dance floor and then looking back into his eyes, this time the camera shooting from above so we can see Jenny looking up into Max's face)? They start watching you, looking at you closely and then they begin to feel uneasy because they realize that you're not. You're always going to be one of the others (Max shakes his head, Jenny pauses). You're like us. ("Left Hand of the Goddess")

In this statement Jenny sums up how she is first received as an insider in almost every situation until the way she embodies and enunciates herself betrays that she is in some way 'passing.' However, she is never completely an outsider, either. Jenny first dates a cisgendered man, then later begins dating Moira—who then transitions to being Max. Sexually, she is thus never fully an insider in the lesbian group because of her attraction to masculinity, but not really an outsider, either, inasmuch as dating Moira/Max also prevents her from being a straight outsider. Jenny even becomes obsessed with helping Max transition (going as far as calling it what they are doing) because she has no outlet for openly cultivating and perfecting her own ethnic passing. Currently there is no transmittable discourse to explore Jenny's passing as a queer Jewish American woman attempting to live in a white Christian L Word so Jenny necessarily becomes obsessed with Max's transition because there is a language to describe this process that she yearns for. Like Max (whose name is not officially changed from Moira), Jenny risks being 'outed' every time she has to

utter her last name, Schecter. However, unlike Max, Jenny is able to 'pass' even while being 'out'—and this paradox makes for an interesting case in identity politics indeed.

10   I start with this late (in the series) scene simply because this is the first time in the entire series that Jenny acknowledges and embraces her position as stranger. Rather than reading Jenny's outburst as an assumption about Max's desire to pass as a cisgender man, I suggest this scene be read as Jenny's acknowledgement that her history makes her a perpetual, palpable stranger. As Avery Gordon writes in *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination,* "And therein lies the frightening aspect of haunting: you can be grasped and hurtled into the maelstrom of the powerful and material forces that lay claim to you whether you claim them as yours or not" (166). In this scene Jenny lays claim to these matters that she has been thrown into, rather than disavowing them in order to assimilate.

11   Jenny's grandmother is necessarily an Auschwitz survivor, just as it is necessary to reveal her parents as Orthodox at the height of the re-emergence of her traumatic memories. If we are to believe that Jenny's trauma lives beyond her own bodily scars, then it is necessary to be offered the trope of the Holocaust survivor, as U.S.-based viewers are generally not familiar with more subtle, nuanced manifestations of Jewish traumatic memories and matters. Further, the coupling of her sexual abuse with her family's trauma is necessary as a mechanism for both characters on the show and viewers to legitimize Jenny, at least for a moment, as worthy of sympathy, because sexual trauma is experienced, albeit differently, by women of all identities and thus can transcend the specificity of ethnic traumatic matters. It is her sexual trauma that will eventually ground Jenny into a character with whom we can sympathize, for a few episodes, when the other characters on the show become privy to her private pain, pushing viewers into considering "the wide range of effects of trauma on those who are not strictly speaking survivors" (Cvetkovich 282).

12   Jenny is also necessarily a writer. In order for the viewer to be granted access to the nuances of Jenny's internal life (inaccessible in her passing as a fully assimilated white woman), we need a lens. Writing is also appropriate for Jenny as a representative of the 'people of the word.' Jenny is the only character who we see alone in almost every episode in the first two seasons, where she writes stories such as one where she is walking around a carnival scene where everyone besides her has a pig face and they all whisper "monstrosity" as she passes by, a stranger amongst the strange, a Jew amongst the Gentiles. As a stranger, she is an observer of both the insiders and the outsiders of the show, serving as a receptacle of confession for the show's insiders when they momentarily find themselves as outsiders, such as Bette, a bi-racial character who is masculinized through racialization, or Shane, who is masculinized through her class and gender identity.

Fictions Speak the Unspeakable Strangeness

13   Writer and producer Ilene Chaiken has stated that Jenny Schecter's story was loosely her own, adding that "there are bits and pieces of me in Jenny and one or two other characters I channel myself through" (Scheir). Like Jenny, when Chaiken moved to L.A., she met an older woman, fell in love, and ceased dating men within a year or so. This is not to suggest we read Jenny as a factual account of Chaiken and her family, but rather as a metaphor for Chaiken reaching to understand and tell 'what happened' (or 'telling the little secrets,' as theorist Janet Burstein might suggest) (Burstein). More important than the similarity of their trajectories is the fact that there are stories that cannot be told directly but rather can only be accessed through fiction, partially because of the difficulty of accessing traumatic memory and partially because these stories must be reached for through the haze

of inherited memory and trauma passed down in code through generations — e.g., through Chaiken's creation of *The L Word*, and Jenny's writing of her stories and memoir.

14   While Jenny attempts many times to transmit to her friends the fragmented memories and residues of inherited traumas coming back to her, her friends are unable to take her seriously, partially because they believe she is seamlessly white with no inherited traumas. However, when she is revealed as a victim of sexual assault she becomes illuminated, and then, worthy of 'remediation' (or normalization, or whitening). As Jenny writes a story in "Luminous," we watch what Jenny is writing come to life before us, accompanied by eerie-sounding Yiddish Klezmer music. An adolescent version of Jenny appears in a blue gingham dress reminiscent of Dorothy from the *Wizard of Oz*. She begins riding a bicycle out of a garage into daylight where there is a Ferris wheel and a trailer in the background.[4] She rides on into glaring sunlight until she reaches a pink trailer and knocks on the door. A man with dark, thick stubble emerges in a ratty bathrobe. The colors of the scene continue to get brighter and more surreal. She looks confused and looks down again at a piece of paper as if she's made some mistake. She says, "I'm looking for the Venus de Mylar. I was told she lives here" ("Luminous"). The man replies, "I'm her girly," as the lighting gets brighter and more disorienting, mirroring the girl's confusion at how the woman in the poster could also be this bearded man. She looks again at the poster, furrowing her eyebrows in confusion. The Venus de Mylar sighs, waves his hand and closes the door of the trailer.

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[4] The Ferris wheel and carnival motif will become prevalent in Jenny's writing as we come to understand that she was sexually assaulted outside of a carnival. However, these scenes almost always have a Jewish element, with klezmer music playing and often Chasid's being portrayed having a holiday celebration underneath a big top tent in the background. A letter to Ilene Chaiken, published on afterellen.com a few seasons into the show, proposes to Chaiken that she should put Jenny on a Ferris Wheel spinning out of control--the proposed Ferris Wheel would kill Max and give Jenny amnesia so she becomes a new and improved, *pleasant* character. This illuminates that what makes Jenny *strange* is her refusal, or inability, to be a pleasant and sweet properly gendered white woman.

15   From behind the closed door we hear moaning and banging, things falling down around the trailer. Finally, he emerges with a pink beehive wig, red painted toenails and high, clear stiletto heels. He throws his hands out to the side and says, "That better?" ("Luminous"). The girl smiles and he walks over to her, puts his hands on her shoulders, towering over her, and says, "So, what's your name, little girl?" ("Luminous"). "Didi. Didi Steinberg" she replies ("Luminous"). "Victor Bernstein" he shrieks in surprise, grabbing Didi's hands in both of his own and shaking them profusely, saying, "It wouldn't fly in Peoria" ("Luminous"). In this moment, both characters are revealed as Jews and Bernstein assesses that their Jewishness, coupled with their strangene*s* (read as gender/sexual queerness), in the context of a Middle American town, just wouldn't "fly."

16   Bernstein/Venus de Mylar asks Didi Steinberg why she wants to join the circus and what her story is, to which she replies, "I don't belong anywhere else, everybody in my family thinks I'm a freak because…" trailing off at the end of her sentence. He shrugs this aside, wanting to know if besides being a freak, or stranger, she has any talents. The scene ends with Didi lifting up her skirt and Venus de Mylar/Victor Bernstein saying, "Holy Jesus, that is special, but it'll never fly in Peoria!" ("Luminous"). Viewers are led to believe Didi Steinberg has shown Bernstein seemingly 'strange' genitalia, symbolic of her latent queerness and worthy of being included in a circus freak show.[5]

17   It is significant that we are watching a scene in which Jenny is *writing*, creating a fictional vision of her younger self, showing how she is left to turn to fiction to grapple with the strange excesses and remainders that do not fit—first her queerness in Skokie, then her Jewishness into the white, queer world of *The L Word.* Here we are given a window into

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[5] This is clearly reminiscent of enslaved women of color who were forced into traveling freak shows to exhibit genitalia that was understood to be abnormally large and "grotesque"—always in reference to an absent and "normal," demure white woman's genitalia. See

Jenny's previous life in the Midwest, where she is eager to get away and join the other strangers like Victor Bernstein. This is one of the first moments where we engage with Jenny's life before Los Angeles, albeit through a distorted, fictional lens, and we can begin to imagine that both her Jewishness and her (then latent) queerness troubled her seamless assimilation into Midwestern white straight cultures, as well as her queerness troubling her inclusion in the Orthodox spaces from which she emerged. It is also important to note that many of Jenny's stories include a Jewish presence and thematic, as did the first story we find her writing in the first season that takes place at a Jewish funeral. Why then, we must ask, do we never see any mention of her Jewishness other than when she is writing her stories, alone? Clearly the matter troubles her mind and consequently contributes to her queer/stranger status, and yet there is no reckoning with what is troublingly unearthed in her stories, either within the show with other characters or any of the scant criticism that has emerged about the show.

Trauma, Memory and Confrontation

18   One of the most troubling moments in which Jenny confronts her ghostly Jewish matters occurs midway through the series after she discovers that her roommate Mark has been secretly taping her and Shane in every room of their house. She steals his camera and begins her own video project, as well as her demise into what will be framed as a nervous breakdown. In "Land Ahoy" we find Jenny with the camera in her hand, with pictures of religious Eastern European Jews in the 'old country' in front of her. We hear Jenny's voice and see her hands manipulating the pictures, but we do not yet see her face. She begins to speak, saying:

> Hi mom… I would like to know if Zayde lost his mind when he began to transcribe the Torah (Klezmer music rises in the background) by hand or did that cause him to lose his mind? Do you remember the day they took him away? And then I wanted to ask you questions about Grandma. Grandma, if you're watching this, I wanted to ask you questions about your experience in Auschwitz. I wanted to know if when you arrived in Auschwitz did they separate you from your daughter? And I wanted to know if you remember the name of the Unterscharfuhrer who took your arm and branded you with that tattoo? Do you remember his eyes? Do you remember if he used a steel plate or did he use a needle? ("Land Ahoy")

Here, Jenny begins to re-enter traumatized spaces that she has tried, desperately, to distance herself from—removing herself physically from the Skokie community in which she was raised, removing herself from marking herself as an Orthodox Jewish woman as she morphs into expressing her strangeness (or 'ethnic excess' beyond the parameters of white femininity) as a manifestation of her queerness.

19   Clues begin to emerge that part of her ghostly Jewish matter is related to sexual abuse—denoted by stories she writes in which her younger self is being chased by young boys outside of a carnival, connecting to the carnival theme in the Venus de Mylar story—both a clichéd trope and an apt way to get at the ways Jews in United States popular culture are often both queered and made strange/grotesque regardless of sexuality. These matters will be the most illuminated and in some ways, embraced, as something intelligible in the narrative of breakdown and recovery that will extend Jenny some short-lived sympathy from the other characters on the show and critics of the show. However, the images of Jenny being raped in the woods watching Chasids celebrating in a carnival tent will never really be addressed but will instead linger there, ghosting, leaving us to wonder what connections remain uncovered between Jenny's own personal traumas and the larger traumas of her familial history. Scenes in which klezmer music speeds up as Stars of David populate her drawings of men leering at Jewish people with mob hatred will be dropped into the plot and then left there. This leaves viewers to forget these scenes and leads the other characters on

the show to not even notice these moments as they are happening as Jenny continues to intuit the need to privatize these inexplicable and ghostly connections and disturbances ("Loud and Proud").

20   In the tense confrontation Shane and Jenny have after Jenny strips at a seedy club as "Yeshiva Girl," Shane asks Jenny why she is stripping. Jenny responds by saying stripping helps her to feel in control of feelings she can barely explain or understand. She goes on, saying, "it helps me remember all of this childhood shit that happens to me, you know, like, I have to, it's important. Do you remember the shit that happened to you as a child that makes you not want to trust people as an adult?" ("Lacuna"). When Shane responds that she does, Jenny tells her that she is lucky because she can get on with her life. She tells Shane, "You're not dogged down by these horrible childhood memories. You know, you stand a chance of being a normal, productive person" ("Lacuna"). Shane asks if she remembers and Jenny stammers, "I don't know. You know, like I remember things and then I think, is this true? Did this stuff really happen or am I making it up? You know because the older I get, the memory becomes a little blurry and it's like I can't. I don't know, but you just don't know the truth anymore." ("Lacuna"). Jenny refuses a ride home from Shane, gets on a bus, and sits down in a seat next to what appears to be her as a child, dirty from the ground she was pummeled into as she was raped by several boys, and rocks this version of herself back and forth as she cries. The bus seems to have left Los Angeles and entered a world where all of the storefronts bear Hebrew and Yiddish writing and Jewish stars, denoting once again that Jenny's sexual abuse trauma is directly linked to her Jewish matters.

21   Here Jenny describes being dissociated from the traumas her body has experienced and watching them re-emerge in confusing fragments. Later we will learn, in a dramatic

scene at her Orthodox parents home in Skokie, Illinois, that her parents had been silent about Jenny's rape as well as silent about the family's Holocaust past. It is important to consider that dissociation is passed down to her as a survival mechanism from people who themselves have been highly traumatized by history and its events. Even later in the series—when Jenny will have been turned into a complete caricature[6] —in an interview about the movie she writes and directs, Jenny will say that this silence shaped her into the pathological liar she became for most of her early adulthood. It may be useful to reframe this self-designation as not necessarily simply lying, but also as an attempt to find a mask that suitably allowed her to pass into this group of friend's *L Word* insider space. And we begin to understand, though briefly, how Jenny strangely may have no idea how to 'act,' if you will, in this Los Angeles queer white setting, when we meet her parents in the third season opener where she is living as an outpatient to the local mental hospital.

22   Jenny has been hospitalized after Shane found her cutting her thighs with a razor ("Lacuna"). Though we have been getting clues as viewers throughout the season that Jenny is suffering from the re-emergence of collective and personal psychic and ghostly matters, this is the first time in the season that Jenny is granted visibility and sympathy (but not empathy) by the other characters on *The L Word*, in contrast to the depressive without a cause persona of the seasons preceding episodes. However, it is only through the language of pathology, and its subsequent expected remediation, that Jenny becomes a character with whom we may sympathize, for a moment, though she becomes no less strange. It is important that the solution to the ghostly matters Jenny presents to the viewers and *The L Word* characters is to fix her rather than to acknowledge the ghosts to be real and to allow

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[6] As the series continues, Schecter will be played as the materialistic JAP figure, the conniving and sneaky Jewish figure, the manipulating and money-hungry Jewish figure, and by the end of the series the murdered villain in a dizzying series of character reincarnations.

Jenny to put them in view as opposed to the private, fictional spaces in which these matters are allowed to emerge. To put it more bluntly, Jenny needs to either shape up or ship out, and since she cannot shape up, or become politely white, she is shipped out to Skokie and only comes back when she has been diagnosed, remediated and medicated, until she becomes an evil stranger again only to be murdered at the hands of one of the other characters in the last season of the show.

23   The next season of *The L Word* begins six months after Jenny's breakdown. Midway through the first episode we find her setting Shabbos candles with her mother at her childhood home in Skokie. Her mother's hair is covered, as is her entire body, denoting an Orthodox level of religious piety. While they set the table, Jenny's mother tells her that her father would like them all to go to temple that evening and that her father has invited over a family with a nice young Jewish man for Jenny. Jenny protests, saying that she is a lesbian, while her mother argues with her, asking why her psychiatrist has not fixed her gay problem. Jenny walks out of the room when her mother tells her that obviously her shrink is as sick as she is because he thinks that her being a lesbian is not a problem ("Labia Majora"). Here Jenny is made slightly less strange to the viewer by her mother being framed as reactionary and Jenny, as consequence, the survivor of not just sexual abuse but familial homophobia, perhaps easier matters for the mostly white lesbian world of *The L Word* and its viewers to contend with and relate to. This underscores not only the schism between religious and secular U.S. Jews, but the ways in which Jenny's belonging in the *The L Word* white world, even as a stranger, is dependent on her complicity in seeing her mother as oppressed and beholden to backwards and "old world" ideologies. Jenny, a stranger in her family, her culture, and the *L Word* world is a fragmented character for whom cultural/linguistic tools are unavailable to be clearly enunciated and, thus, she becomes a caricature.

24   Later in the episode, we find Jenny having sex with the very butch Moira (who will later transition to Max) on her childhood bed. Suddenly the door swings open and we meet Jenny's father, a large man in a yarmulke with a big bushy beard. He begins to scream, yelling, "Get up! What the hell do you think you're doing? How dare you treat us this way after we opened our home to you! How dare you bring a man back into this house" ("Labia Majora"). Jenny replies, "I would never do that, Warren. I want you to meet Moira. She lives over in Wilmette" ("Labia Majora"). Her father keeps screaming for her to get out, that he wants her out immediately. Jenny replies:

> Actually, you've wanted me out of this house from the moment I stepped foot in here. [She stalks closer to him.] What is it, Warren? Am I too fucked up for you? Am I too perverted? Look at me. Do I remind you of how messy and out of control your life is? [He begins to walk away, and she follows him.] Warren? I'm just not the girl you wanted me to be.

Her mother attempts to get her to stop, but Jenny only continues, "No, you stop! When are you going to start being an actual person? Not this silent slave to this man?" ("Labia Majora"). Her father tells her to stop disrespecting her mother and throws his hands up, exclaiming, "I don't know what more we can do!" ("Labia Majora"). Jenny retorts:

> Nothing. There's nothing more that you can do for me to make me into the person you're comfortable with, because I'm not going to marry that nice Jewish boy. I'm not going to have those nice Jewish kids. I'm not going to shut up and be subservient. I'm not going to set the dinner table and pretend that things don't happen. Because when you don't talk about them, they get worse, Warren. ("Labia Majora")

Here Jenny is addressing the myriad silences that led her as an adult to not know "the fucked up shit that happened to her as a kid," as well as what happened for her when trauma was passed down but never acknowledged by anyone around her.

25   In these moments, Jenny Schecter is illuminated as a character caught in the challenges of assimilating. Her passing is clumsy and full of seams, and the storyline of *The L Word* rests on attempts to discipline Jenny's body free of these ghostly Jewish markings

that become manifest to the rest of the characters, as well as viewers/critics, simply as strangeness. And, yet, try as she might, she cannot cut these parts of her out.

Writing Ghost Stories

26   Surely, once Ilene Chaiken secured a deal with Showtime to film and air *The L Word,* the characters, including autobiographical characters, were no longer solely in her hands. Perhaps the interventions of the other writers on the show say as much about their perceptions of queer/lesbian female Jewish Americans as the Chaiken-authored storylines might say about hers. Chaiken may not have imagined Jenny would end up as much of a stranger at the end of six seasons—murdered by one of her friends, no less—as she had been when the series began.

27   We watch Jenny Schecter unfold in *The L Word's* six seasons as a character who is shuttled back and forth across what can be read as an ethnic line, made manifest and visible through the consistent trajectory of Jenny as a stranger character who is neither insider nor outsider. Where, then, is there room for Jenny's queer Jewish matters that haunt her throughout the series?   Perhaps unconsciously, Chaiken asks where is there room for these stories, both in Jewish and queer/LGBTQI discourses, and what happens if there is no language and there are no listeners? The answer we are given—quite suddenly, as well as quite predictably—is that what happens is that Jenny Schecter ends up dead.

28   At different times, viewers of *The L Word* are given different indications of when Jenny is a friendly stranger and when she is to be read as a malevolent stranger through the way she is dressed, through the way the camera 'views' her as bigger than life or small and vulnerable, through the way she moves her body, whether she is included in group outings, or whether she is acting 'crazy' or 'normal,' as defined by the group's unspoken social

norms. The groups' social norms, to name a few, include being cheerful, not speaking about painful or difficult subjects, maintaining consistency always in sexuality and identity, and surrounding oneself only with those who do not seriously offend heterosexual people or their norms. Jenny's designation as 'crazy' or 'normal' is dependent primarily on Jenny's proximity to other strangers and outsiders. However, even in the moments when Jenny is read as a friendly stranger next door, she must still be rendered strange because it is only through this strangeness that we are able to see and understand the troubling of the assumption of completed Jewish American assimilation in this particular story. Jenny carries remainders of a life tied to soil and memories that her counterparts on *The L Word* cannot fathom, nor does she have the necessary tools to transmit this information. Even if she did, however, we must wonder if the presumed narrative of successful and complete Jewish American assimilation is too powerful for anyone to hear what she would have to say?

29   Jenny can only confront her Jewish matters through fictional writing where she is free to imagine "what might have happened," in both her own life and to her family during the Holocaust, much like Octavia Butler imagines "what might have happened" to the silenced bodies of women slaves in the United States in her novel *Kindred*. There is no other way for her to give voice to the disturbances of mind that plague her and do not only bear the markings of her own individual experiences. She finds, invariably, that even when she speaks, no one can hear her over the stories that precede her of Jewish American assimilation.

30   Jenny Schecter is also used as a symbol of the danger of the stranger. Scheming, manipulative, exotic and seductive, devourer of people's life stories as she writes with no compassion of her friends' foibles, an eventual murderer of a dog in order to get back at a book reviewer who critiqued her novel, *The Sum of Her Parts*. An example of the

untrustworthiness of those not easily identified, Jenny's sexuality is called into question over and over again, first by herself and then by the other characters. Her inability, or refusal, to be boxed into one particular sexuality renders her more queer than her more mainstream *L Word* counterparts, though they are hardly satisfied by what they perceive as her inability to choose or commit to a sexual identity. However, it is not just her sexual identity that is slippery, it is also her ethnic identity as she 'runs out of skills' in trying to 'act white' and her Orthodox Jewish family is outed. Her ethnic identity is privatized and emerges only in the privacy of her creative writing and scenes between her and her religious family, suggesting one of the methods Jenny must use to try to completely assimilate is to sublimate and hyper-privatize her ghostly Jewish matters. And in doing so, she breaks down, showing the fissures, calling in to question her assimilated status as solid, evidencing her identity as more slippery, more in the process of assimilating, more in the process of becoming and failing than anything else.[7]

31   Avery Gordon asserts that, "to write stories concerning exclusions and invisibilities is to write ghost stories" (17). Here, I have attempted to tell a ghost story of the Jewish matters that plague Jenny Schecter and *The L Word.* Though other characters perpetrate a variety of offenses, they are never marred and marked by these actions, allowing for somewhat complicated characters to emerge. However, Jenny is indelibly marked as strange, unworthy of empathy, not necessarily because of her fumbles as a character, but because something about her is simply too strange, too slippery, too uncomfortable. I have tried here to show these matters more plainly and to question how the story of completed Jewish assimilation

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[7] Jenny's failures, her breakdowns, are reminiscent of other Jewish American women "failures" that have played out in the "real world." For example we might look to the depiction of Monica Lewinsky's Jewishness in the Clinton scandal, or the language used to describe Elizabeth Wurtzel, and her memoir, after the publication of her memoir, *Prozac Nation*. Lewinsky, Wurtzel, and Schecter exemplify the need for some Jewish American women to constantly work on assimilating in order to transcend this strangeness, and the ways in which this work often fails.

may make her psychic matters effectively inaudible. I also echo Gordon in my hope "to draw attention to a whole realm of experiences and social practices that can barely be approached without a method attentive to what is elusive, fantastic, contingent, and often barely there." (26).

32   This is only the beginning of a need to examine contemporary stories by secular queer Jewish American women. Here I've tried to attend to the queer and strange matters of Jenny Schecter, a character raised Orthodox but living a secular life in the queer white world of *The L* Word. The majority of work on Jewish American women in the United States focuses on religious Jewish American women. In *Telling the Little Secrets* author Janet Burstein notes that she chooses to focus on those who claim themselves as Jewish and religious in her literary studies because doing so is far less messy. She suggests that looking at more secular characters who are less assuredly 'Jewish' causes the critic to need to really on inference, reading between the lines, and in some ways supplementing fiction by the author with fiction by the critic. However, I suggest such a project is necessary if we are to more fully understand the ways in which assimilation and assimilating is working for queer Jewish American women, and also if we are to heal the ghostly matters of the past that seem to haunt those of us, like Jenny Schecter, who live liminally, hovering neither here nor there.

33   It is necessary, too, to examine not just the stories (the testimonies of survivors, etc), but the silences, the clues that let us a little closer to those who could not, but still do, speak. We see them in the patterns in behavior of our parents, our grandparents, the feelings that are cultivated, the feelings that are sublimated, the ways we look at each other or do not, in the aftermath of all of this. We must speak of what survives of the past in the present, how to sight these hauntings, and how to listen to those who are haunted by trauma, those who have become the designated receptacles for all the excessive strangeness that did not fit into

the relentless narrative, and project, of Jewish American assimilation. Without this we continue to cultivate Jenny Schecter's, women tortured, so very tortured, and yet dismissed as depressives without a cause. I, for one, am listening.

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Miriam Gebhardt. *Als die Soldaten kamen. Die Vergewaltigung deutscher Frauen am Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs*. **München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2016.**

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1   Miriam Gebhardt's work bravely and expertly reorients the discourse concerning rape committed against German women at the end and in the immediate aftermath of World War II. Like many of her predecessors, Gebhardt attempts to uncover why so many women fell prey to the occupational forces. Refreshingly, she does not repeat Helke Sander's and Erich Kuby's oft-cited scholarship on the subject, choosing to innovate upon it instead. For Gebhardt, rape is not simply an unfortunate byproduct of war, caused by hatred and revenge against the enemy Other. Rather, it is a symptom of the early twentieth century's gender insecurities. Traditional gender hierarchies were at stake as the West opened up to alternative lifestyles for men and women, and as the East established a state-decreed gender equality law. Many soldiers were threatened by the collapse of the old order when they entered the war, which, according to Gebhardt, abetted sexual violence in Germany. The author believes that mass rape might be the persecutors' subtle wish for a clear-cut gender hierarchy, in which the supposedly masculinized strong overpower the feminized weak. Gebhardt's unique argument is perfectly in line with the overall progressive tone of her work. In her five chapters, she systematically dispels predominant myths that have thus far pervaded the scholarship, including the misidentification of the Red Army as the main persecutors of rape, as well as the assertion that German men repudiated children who resulted from the abuse.

2   In chapter one, "Siebzig Jahre zu spät", Gebhardt reckons with the delayed general interest in sexual violence against German women after World War II. Women,

unlike soldiers, were classified as second-rate victims who had no public venue for their suffering. Even though interest in the mass rapes of that era has recently gained momentum, historians' critical analyses of eyewitness accounts are complicated by the fact that definitions of what legally constituted sexual violence have changed drastically in the intervening years. Sexual assault without vaginal penetration, for instance, did not usually qualify as a sexual crime in the early postwar period. Despite these moral and legal shifts in understanding, Gebhardt remains optimistic. Determined to reengage with Sander's 1990s estimate of two million rape victims during this period, Gebhardt proposes that the more conservative figure of 860,000 be used for future research. Instead of limiting her scope to Berlin like Sander, Gebhardt bases her estimate on the number of illegitimate children occupying all of Germany during the war's aftermath. Gebhardt claims her count is more accurate than Sander's calculation, which relied in part on dubiously interpreted hospital abortion records. An informed reader familiar with the discourse on rape will appreciate Gebhardt's methods, especially since Sander's numbers have been difficult to substantiate.

3   In chapter two, "Berlin und der Osten – Chronik eines angekündigten Unheils", Gebhardt continues to question established perceptions concerning the past. She specifically criticizes stereotypical representations of Red Army soldiers, who are defined either as unschooled and violent rapists or as well-educated and respectful gentlemen. While Gebhardt is not the first to demand that this exaggerated view of the Red Army be corrected, she also insists that scholars reconsider cliché depictions of female victims. Eyewitness accounts in particular, she argues, should be analyzed with caution as they often reflect outdated gender norms. Women of that time generally presented themselves as resourceful, disciplined resisters of the occupiers' advances, resembling the culturally admired strength and virtues of German soldiers.

4	In chapter three, "Süddeutschland – '"Wer schützt uns vor den Amerikanern?"'", Gebhardt stresses that wartime rape was not only a typical phenomenon fueled by flight and expulsion of Eastern Germans or the citizens of bombed-out Berlin – it affected women in the privacy of their homes in Southern Germany as well. These women, typically victimized by American GIs, experienced a radically different sort of sexual oppression than did their Berlin counterparts. Since the GIs, unlike the Red Army, enjoyed a comparatively positive reputation, women struggled to prove what had been done to them. The public suspected women all too quickly of fraternization or even prostitution if they were under even the slightest suspicion of leading an unchaste lifestyle. Unfortunately for these women, the decision makers in their rape cases were usually American authorities. But that is not all: Gebhardt reminds us that incidents of sexual violence happened well into the fifties in Southern Germany. The supposed American-German friendship, spurred by the Cold War, added to women's struggles to successfully protect themselves from rape and to hold their perpetrators accountable.

5	Chapter four, "Schwanger, krank, verfemt – der Umgang mit den Opfern", illuminates the inhumane conditions under which female rape victims fought for child support in the mid-fifties and onwards. The West German authorities reacted unsympathetically to their claims and even accused rape victims of intentional fraternization, because the German State did not want to assume the financial burden and because the postwar culture, obsessed with rebuilding Germany based on a hetero-normative family morale, systematically outcast all women who did not reflect that ideal. In short, indecency became the new public enemy in the form of misfit women. Even though indecency was not technically punishable by law, the measures that were taken to fight the supposed moral decay posed a real threat to many women: female citizens had to undergo

medical examinations for venereal diseases, many homeless girls were brought to reformatories, and some women even fell prey to forced sterilizations. Despite these harsh conditions, rape victims with children kept on fighting for monetary compensation, and many of them found support from their husbands. By taking a closer look at the repeated demands and the women's personal stories, Gebhardt vehemently rejects the preconceived notion that rape was ever silenced in postwar Germany and that women (and men) repudiated the children born out of sexual violence.

6   The final chapter, chapter 5, "Der lange Schatten", demonstrates that the phenomenon of coldheartedness towards female rape victims is not unique to the postwar era. In the twenty-first century, we still find considerable ignorance concerning women's suffering. Infamous scholarly texts, like Erich Kuby's 1968 *The Russians and Berlin,* still shape the discourse on rape today. Kuby falsely depicts German women as stoic bearers of sexual violence, whose emotional efforts solely went into rebuilding both the country and its men. Gebhardt brings into consideration that Kuby's view, adopted by many scholars as fact, merely recycles the feminine ideal of the 1950s and 1960s. Hence, the true interest of his text is not women's stories, but the story of the masculine postwar resurrection. Male expectations of women have, and still do, dominate the discourse. Gebhardt concludes her work with another example of needy masculine dominance, namely, the perception of the 2003 republication of *A Woman in Berlin.* Its anonymous author has been harshly criticized for her confident and detailed depictions of rape, provoking many critics to doubt her account's authenticity. With her unconventionally written text, the author has broken the patriarchal rules of how to remember rape as a female victim. Her narration triggered critics' masculine pride, which lead, according to Gebhardt, to the violent act of exposing her identity.

7   *Als die Soldaten kamen* does not hide behind repeated arguments of well-established leaders of the discourse on wartime rape. Gebhardt reckons with false perceptions and even gives guidance for future analyses of eyewitness reports that are sensible towards the differences between today's and early postwar culture. Her clear prose, attention to detail, and thought-provoking arguments are certainly suited for graduate students who would like to educate themselves on the existing scholarship. At their stage of academic education, they would certainly benefit from considering Gebhardt's unique perspective as a way to think about the possible root causes of sexual violence during war. Established scholars of the occupation period will appreciate Gebhardt's courage and confidence to break with past research patterns that favored a patriarchal view on women as victims.