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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*.

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Article Publishing

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Editorial

Laura-Marie von Czarnowsky, University of Cologne, Germany

1 With this issue, *gender forum*'s Early Career Researchers issue celebrates its third birthday. When we released the call for the first special issue three years ago, we were both excited and unsure of what to expect. Designed to be as inclusive as possible, the call featured no thematic focal point: all topics, as long as they had gender at their core, were of potential interest. We also did not prescribe a concise definition of what 'early career' actually means. This resulted in submissions ranging from BA students to postgrads, from PhD candidates to those who had already completed their doctorate. We have maintained this inclusive approach, and the third issue is therefore as thematically and compositionally diverse as the two that preceded it, unified by its intelligent discussion of the facets of gender in cultural studies, media studies, and literature.

2 The issue opens with Sarah E. Jones and Lisa K. Hartley's "Conferences, cultures and cutting: A review of Girl Summit 2014 and its approach to female genital cutting", which feeds into the lively academic debate on FGC that has been ongoing for more than thirty-five years. Despite decades of impassioned interventions by feminist, health and human rights activists seeking to eliminate the practice, FGC continues in a variety of forms around the world. In July 2014, Girl Summit sought to raise awareness around girls' and women's rights, launching a new campaign against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and Child, Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM). Jones and Hartley argue that Girl Summit 2014 presented an oversimplified conceptualisation of FGC, characterised by sensational language, questionable claims and minimal cultural analysis and reflexivity, as evident on United Kingdom Government web publications. A review of feminist, health and human rights literature instead suggests that effective work around girls' and women's rights requires cultural sensitivity and community-led action, wherein local agents are empowered to pursue agendas and objectives reflecting grass-roots concerns.

3 Daniela Miranda's contribution focuses on "The Queer Temporality of Gertrude Stein's Continuous Present", highlighting that Stein's work, like that of other Modernists, exhibits a powerful desire to innovate and to break with tradition. Miranda's essay argues, however, that Stein chose to do this not simply by exploiting or inventing 'new' poetic forms but by attempting to endow repetition, ordinariness, and habit with a certain disruptiveness. Through a close reading of two of her most experimental texts, *Tender Buttons* (1913) and

“Lifting Belly” (1915), and two of her best-known lectures, “Composition as Explanation” (1926) and “Portraits and Repetition” (1935), Miranda attempts to show how Stein locates her compositions in a continuous present that eschews linear views of temporality predicated on a progression from past to present to future. Drawing on queer temporality theory, Miranda finds that Stein’s commitment to re-imagining repetition as insistence in her compositions constitutes a decidedly queer endeavour. The recursiveness of her poetry forces the reader to inhabit a queer time that opposes the regulatory, ‘straight’ temporality of chrononormativity in favor of an ‘other’ time. This ‘other’ time, in turn, defamiliarizes us with traditional modes of signification and closure, asking us to question not only the naturalization of hegemonic temporalities but also the fixity of ontological categories.

4 In “‘Come Out, Come Out, Wherever You Are’: Queering *American Horror Story*”, Robert Sevenich posits that television is becoming an increasingly more inclusive space for the representations of marginalized communities. Yet many queer characters are sequestered to supporting roles, storylines dealing with queer themes are subordinate within the greater diegeses, and shows emphatically committed to foregrounding queer experiences are predominantly compartmentalized to the peripheries of television on identity-specific or niche cable networks. Thus, queer spectators have become accustomed to constructing secondary or alternative texts within predominant ones in order to derive pleasure from and solidarity with televisual narratives. As queer persons are discriminated against, violated, and coded with fear and contempt in society, FX’s anthology series *American Horror Story* (2011—present) is a unique and challenging text that confronts issues of queer visibility, provides queer performers and creators a vehicle to contribute to cultural conversations, and gives audiences a lens to glean meaning. Sevenich’s paper positions each of the four seasons as case studies to interrogate the show’s formal and textual approaches for illuminating queer subjectivities. Sevenich concludes that *American Horror Story*, as a horror anthology series, not only provides sustainable viewing pleasures for queer spectators but also a platform for contemporary discourse and televisual activism.

5 Brittany Barron, in “‘For What Crime Was I Driven from Society?’ Material Bodies in Mary Hays’s *The Victim of Prejudice* and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*” undertakes a reading of two novels that have not previously been considered together. Barron proposes that jointly, these novels dramatize the double bind that women face as material objects and thinking subjects during the nineteenth century. Applying Julia Kristeva’s psychoanalytic theories of the *chora* and the abject, in addition to Jacques Lacan’s theory of the law of the father, she argues that when Hays’s central character Mary Raymond and Shelley’s creature, whom

Shelley uses to provide a voice for the otherwise voiceless female characters, enter the symbolic order, they come to understand the significance of their material bodies and their lack of power. Acquiring knowledge and language only constricts and fragments Mary's and the creature's identities. When Mary and the creature become aware of their bodies, they attempt to reject society's confinements and transcend its boundaries. While they find transcendence when they escape in their imaginations, a place that transcends the symbolic, they are unable to transcend society's verbal reactions to their material bodies.

6 For the first time, the annual ECR issue also features a review, thus offering one more means of early publishing experience to young academics. The issue is thus completed by Eleanor Huntington's review of Claire Jenkins' *Home Movies: The American Family in Contemporary Hollywood*. We would like to thank our authors and reviewers for their contributions and already look forward to the fourth ECR, out next fall.

Conferences, cultures and cutting: A review of Girl Summit 2014 and its approach to female genital cutting

By Sarah E. Jones and Dr Lisa K. Hartley, Curtin University

Abstract:

In the past thirty-five years the issue of Female Genital Cutting (FGC) has been the site of much academic critique and debate. Despite decades of impassioned interventions by feminist, health and human rights activists seeking to eliminate the practice, FGC continues in a variety of forms around the world. In July 2014, Girl Summit sought to raise awareness around girls' and women's rights, launching a new campaign against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and Child, Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM). In this paper, we argue that Girl Summit 2014 presented an over-simplified conceptualisation of FGC, characterised by sensational language, questionable claims and minimal cultural analysis and reflexivity, as evident on United Kingdom Government web publications. Further, we argue that the lack of engagement with the rich and extensive debate around FGC resulted in Girl Summit 2014 advocating a cross-cultural feminist praxis uncritical in nature and limited in effect. A review of feminist, health and human rights literature suggests that effective work around girls' and women's rights requires cultural sensitivity and community-led action, wherein local agents are empowered to pursue agendas and objectives reflecting grass-roots concerns.

Keywords: Girl Summit 2014; female genital cutting/mutilation; female genital cosmetic surgery; post-colonial feminist critique.

1 The issue of Female Genital Cutting (FGC)¹ has been the site of much academic debate, highlighting the complexity of the subject and its inexorable connection to discourses of culture and agency, women's rights and group rights, Africa and imperialism (e.g., Boddy; Braun; Esho et al.; Hosken; Johnsdotter and Essén; Kalev; Obiora; Vissandjée et al.; Winterbottom et al.). In July 2014 the subject of FGC took the news headlines again as London hosted the first Girl Summit. Organised by the British Government and UNICEF, Girl Summit 2014 sought to bring together “campaigners, policy-makers and development professionals from around the world” in order to address the issues of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and Child, Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM) (*Girl Summit 2014: As It Happened* 2). The summit's agenda was threefold: “Sharing what works”, “[a]greeing on an agenda for change”, and “[e]ngaging people for change” (Cansfield et al. 1). On one hand, it was encouraging to see global media, civil society and political focus on issues pertaining to girls' and women's rights. On the other hand, concerns could be raised about the conceptualisation of FGC that Girl Summit employed. In this paper, we argue that there was a distinct lack of reference to the rich and extensive academic debate relating to FGC, demonstrative of the oft present disjunct between academia and activism. Perhaps as a result of this disconnect, we argue that the presentation of FGC at Girl Summit 2014 was characterised by sensational language, questionable claims and a lack of cultural analysis and reflexivity, as evident on United Kingdom (UK) Government web publications. As a result of this (mis)representation of the complex and varied practices of FGC, we argue that Girl Summit 2014 ultimately advocated a feminist praxis uncritical in nature and consequently, limited in effect. To support this argument, this paper reviews the conclusions of feminist, health and human rights theorists and practitioners in their engagement with FGC, highlighting key findings which could have informed more effective praxis at Girl Summit 2014.

The accidental casualties of sensational language

2 A key purpose of Girl Summit was to raise consciousness of FGC amongst the general public. In the first instance, it is important to reflect on the use of the term FGC, and not FGM. The World Health Organisation continues to refer to genital cutting as FGM, arguing that the term *mutilation* “emphasizes the gravity of the act” (*Eliminating Female Genital Mutilation* 3) and covers a range of stitching, burning and pricking practices.

1 The term Female Genital Cutting (FGC) is used to describe the vast range of non-therapeutic cutting procedures conducted on women's genitalia around the world, variously referred to as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Female Circumcision and Female Genital Cosmetic Surgery (FGCS).

However, in the past ten years there has been an increasing tendency to refer to the myriad of non-therapeutic alterations to female genitalia as Female Genital *Cutting* rather than Female Genital *Mutilation* (Johnsdotter and Essén 30; Khaja et al. 728). The change in language hails from the feedback of women who have undergone genital cutting and feel that the term *mutilation* is harsh and offensive. For example, in interviews with Somali-born women in North America who have undergone FGC, Khaja et al. note that some participants felt objectified by the term “mutilation”, saying that it implied that they were “less than other women” (734, 737). Likewise, women in a study by Vissandjée et al. described the term as “inflammatory”, “judgemental”, and “alienating” (16). Examples of negative reactions to the term abound (Alo and Gbadebo 1658; Mugo 466; Obiora 275). Khaja et al. note that in the use of sensational language, activists can “unwittingly re-victimise and re-oppress the children and women they believe they are helping” (727). From this perspective, the use of the term *mutilation* can be counter-productive to efforts to empower women.

3 Language is thus critical to advocacy and activism as how the procedure is talked about reflects how those who practice it are viewed. When British Prime Minister (PM) David Cameron referred to FGC at Girl Summit as a “preventable evil” (13) and Deputy PM Nick Clegg described it as “a form of child abuse” (34), they implied that practitioners of FGC are evil child-abusers. Discussing plans for UK schools, the PM reflected, “[i]n the past, we’ve been rather coy about advertising in schools about what needs to change, and worried about upsetting people’s cultural sensitivities. That’s changed” (*Girl Summit 2014: As It Happened* 34). Cameron’s remark suggests that it is impossible to respect cultural sensitivity whilst effectively engaging with subjects like FGC. Conversely, Lisa Wade notes that aggressive language and “fighting words” (41) are counterproductive, tending to trigger a defensive response from practising communities. For example, Winterbottom et al. cite an account of a mass exodus of Maasai women from an empowerment seminar in Tanzania, triggered by the speaker referring to female circumcision as “barbaric” and “primitive” (63). Consequently, the *Respectful Dialogue* report, advises commentators to “avoid being sensationalist” (4) and takes great pains to explain why practising communities often find the term *mutilation* so offensive. Likewise, in a study on CARE International's work around FGC in East Africa, Igras et al. emphasise that cultural sensitivity and respect are essential to engage in dialogue with communities who practice FGC and that the most successful interventions are founded in a non-judgemental stance. Perhaps this explains the publication of the *CARE International position on Child, Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM) and Girl Summit*, which only states support for the elimination of CEFM and does not mention FGC at

all.

4 However, rather than merely rejecting the use of emotive language in anti-FGC campaigns, it is necessary to identify and interrogate the knowledge claims which it seeks justify. Girl Summit 2014 provided little explanation for its rejection of FGC, rather, suggesting that the process was inherently evil. In order to locate practical and effective language for discussing FGC, the following section reviews the standard arguments of FGC opponents with relation to the latest research on the topic.

Marriage, sex and childbirth: Questionable claims around FGC

5 *The Girl Summit Charter* places specific emphasis on the role of research, pledging to “gather more and better data” (10) on FGC. Unfortunately, despite acknowledging the importance of research, Girl Summit did not make much reference to the large body of literature developed in the past decade, instead maintaining traditional assumptions, often without evidence.

6 Firstly, the proposed connection between FGC and CEFM is somewhat problematic. Cansfield et al. note that Girl Summit is the first international forum to bring these issues together, and indeed there is a link in some cases. The concept of circumcision -- for girls and boys -- being the rite of passage between childhood and adulthood is apparent in many cultures (Kalev 339; Prazak 20; Schultz and Lien 169). Thus, where the age of adulthood is concurrently ascribed to twelve or thirteen years of age, it follows that communities participate in what outsiders perceive to be *child marriage*. However, research suggests the drivers of CEFM are more complex than cutting and in many cultures the two practices are by no means connected. For example, *The State of the World's Children* report states that in Niger 36% of girls are married by the age of 15 and 75% are married by 18 years of age and yet only 2% of Niger's women have undergone FGC (133). Conversely, the report states that in Djibouti, 93% of women have undergone FGC and yet only 2% are married by the age of 15 and only 5% are married by 18 years of age (132). Thus, it is apparent that the link is more tenuous and conflating the two issues may de-legitimize the campaign among practising communities, as has been the case with other inaccuracies in abolitionist representations of FGC (Shell-Duncan 226).

7 Traditionally, feminist literature has depicted FGC as a means to suppress or remove a woman's sex drive, inhibiting her from enjoying sex and in fact deliberately making intercourse painful for a woman (Hosken; Rahman and Toubia). Indeed, this is the experience of some women and it is essential to recognise and respect their stories. However, the

Respectful Dialogue report notes that “other women experience no health effects and go on to enjoy good sexual and reproductive health” (10). Qualitative research with women who have undergone FGC and report a satisfactory sex life support such findings (Alo and Gbadebo 1659; Esho et al. 232; Johnsdotter and Essén 34). In a study by Catania et al. of 137 Somali women with various types of FGC, 90.51% (N=124) “reported that sex gives them pleasure” and almost 86% (N=118) “reported orgasm with penetrative vaginal sex” (1670). Studies have demonstrated that frequently infibulated women retain an intact clitoris beneath scar tissue which can still be stimulated and note that the majority of clitoral tissue is in fact internal (Catania et al. 1673; Paterson et al. 6). Esho et al. note that more traditional understandings of FGC have been guilty of an “oversimplification of the sexual response cycle” (224), highlighting that the focus on the external clitoris has inhibited the understanding of other facets of sexual pleasure. Paterson et al. (4) report that among Somali women who had undergone genital cutting, there was tendency to shift focus away from the external clitoris and towards the breasts or G-spot in sexual intercourse (see also Esho et al. 229). These interviews also indicated that whilst the partial loss of clitoral and labial sensitivity *was* linked with slower sexual arousal, this did not necessarily dictate an unsatisfactory sexual experience. This research illustrates that the impact of FGC on sexual function is by no means consistent and thus blanket statements claiming that FGC inhibits women from enjoying sex are misleading.

8 Discussing its role in Girl Summit 2014, the UNFPA stated that, “FGM/C can lead to haemorrhage, infection, physical dysfunction, obstructed labour and death” (*Girl Summit Aims* 7). Concerns around genital cutting’s impact on child birth represent a major category of abolitionist’s objections to the practice. FGC is said to create inflexible scar tissue around the labia minora, causing obstructed labour, vaginal tears, fistulas, trauma and potential loss of life to both mother and child (*Eliminating FGM* 34). However, research has indicated that the consequences of FGC vary enormously depending on which type is practised, with Type III, infibulation, causing significantly higher rates of difficulties than Type I or II (Bjälkander et al. 323; *Respectful Dialogue* 10). Yet, as seems to be the case with Girl Summit 2014, these distinctions are frequently absent from abolitionist literature, rather, statistics and descriptions of infibulation are presented as reflective of all types of genital cutting (Shell-Duncan 226; Wade 43), despite the estimate that Type III represents only 10% of all FGC cases (*Eliminating FGM* 5).

9 Moreover, recent research suggests that complications such as perennial tearing and obstructed labour are often avoidable when managed by appropriately trained and resourced

health practitioners. A study by Paliwal et al. at Heartlands Hospital in Birmingham, UK, which hosts a specialised African Women's Service, demonstrates that even women with Type III FGC can experience essentially unproblematic deliveries. Interestingly, Paliwal et al. present an openly negative stance toward the practice of FGC, choosing to refer to it as FGM and stating that the practice is "in direct violation of the rights of the child" (283). However, the study found no significant results connecting FGC to blood loss or perennial trauma during childbirth and FGC was not attributed to decisions for elective or emergency C-section. Moreover, regarding the health of newborns, there were no significant results to suggest FGC impacted APGAR scores. Paliwal et al. are eager to state that all these results must be treated with caution and recommend further research. Nevertheless, five criteria which were expected to show negative results indicating harmful obstetric complications associated with FGC came back clear. This is to be contrasted with British Deputy PM Nick Clegg's comment at Girl Summit, where he insisted that FGC inflicted "a lifetime of excruciating pain, trauma and serious health complications" (13).

10 The claims around FGC's impact on sexual and reproductive health are contested here not because we are necessarily proponents of vaginal alterations but rather because it is essential that issues are addressed in terms of evidenced risk. The contestable nature of the knowledge claims reviewed above highlights that the abhorrence towards FGC expressed by many abolitionists may in fact be more connected with cultural perception. The following section seeks to place genital cutting practices within their cultural contexts, demonstrating the variety of meanings attached to the ritual by practising communities around the world. Critically, when challenging the vaginal alterations of women from ethnically diverse backgrounds, Western women must explore their own cultural concepts of *normal*.

Exploring cultural significance and engaging in reflexivity

11 Despite naming FGC as one of its headline issues, Girl Summit 2014 included little to no discussion around the cultural significance of the practice to explain its salience despite more than thirty years of activism to eliminate the practice. Deputy PM Nick Clegg simply described it as "an outdated cultural norm" and one of "the oldest and most extreme ways in which societies have sought to control the lives and bodies of young women and girls" (2). No meaning is suggested, as if the procedure was merely a form of gratuitous violence against women. However, practising communities often discuss the ritual with regard to rich, complex cultural notions of femininity, aesthetics and coming-of-age.

12 In her work with Sudanese women, Janice Boddy notes that the procedure was

advocated by women as it “purifies, smooths [sic] and makes clean the outer surface of the womb” (696). The objective here, thus, is not to harm women but to beautify and cleanse them. Indeed, as Micere Githae Mugo (465) observes, over the ages women in all cultures have been prepared to endure various kinds of pain in order to obtain a localised concept of beauty. In Nigeria, a woman's genitalia is often perceived as “ugly” and “bulky” if left uncut (Alo and Gbadebo 1658). Likewise, Schultz and Lien note that in Somali culture, “unmodified genitals are seen as ugly, unrefined, uncivilised” (171). Apart from aesthetics, in many practising communities genital cutting rituals performed on boys and girls have analogous explanations regarding leaving behind an androgynous childhood and taking on a definitive gender in the transition to adulthood. For example, amongst the Dogon people of Mali, the clitoris is seen as *male* and is removed from girls to establish them as women, and the foreskin is *feminine* and thus is removed from boys to instate their manhood (*Respectful Dialogue* 14). In Sierra Leone, FGC is a pre-requisite to access a women-only led and run secret society, central to the role of women in the community (Bjälkander et al. 324). Finally, in Maasai cultures, the circumcision of both men and women has been used as a traditional cure for a genital infection known as *lawalawa* (Winterbottom et al. 52).² These beliefs are powerful drivers of FGC and yet are frequently absent from the accounts of abolitionists; certainly none were mentioned during Girl Summit 2014. Yet these contentions have been explored at length within literature navigating discourses of feminism and cultural relativism and such conversations are essential in order to engage in meaningful community consultation (Easton et al. 449; Igras et al. 257; Winterbottom et al. 54).

13 Awareness campaigns around FGC typically amplify accounts of girls who are forced into FGC against their will, often held down and mutilated by family and trusted community members (Mugo 470; Wilson 21). Conversely, interviews with some women who have undergone FGC reflect on their cutting as an exciting time involving gifts, special treatment, honour, and community celebration (*Respectful Dialogue* 13). A Somali respondent in the study of Schultz and Lien recounts her excitement when it was “finally her time” to undergo FGC and described herself as “happy” and “very proud” when the cutting had made her genitals look “normal” (168). In contrast to the typical abolitionist case study, the literature indicates that some girls actively initiate undergoing FGC. Indeed, Prazak records an interview with a teacher opposed to FGC whose daughter “defied” (20) his wishes and insisted on undergoing genital cutting. Similarly, Winterbottom et al. highlight the “*Ngaitana*

² Local people blamed campaigns to eliminate FGC in Tanzania in the late 1960s for outbreaks of *lawalawa* in 1970. Communities responded with mass circumcision in an attempt to cure the infection (Winterbottom et al. 52).

(I will circumcise myself) movement” in Northern Tanzania in which “pubescent and prepubescent girls circumcised each other en masse” (51), triggered by the passing of legislation outlawing the practice. Thus, far from being a procedure enforced on girls as an act of oppression, it seems some girls actively pursue participation in the ritual as part of their agentive process of cultural identity formation.

14 For the most part, as was the case with Girl Summit, it could be argued that there is a tendency for FGC abolitionists to interpret women’s experience of cutting in more restrictive ways. When women and girls express their support of the practice, abolitionists often argue that these women, unlike their enlightened selves, are victims of “false consciousness,” “prisoners of ritual,” and “mentally castrated” (Daly and Lightfoot-Klein in Johnsdotter and Essén 31). Sheldon and Wilkinson suggest that only a woman who is “coerced, manipulated or highly irrational will agree to undergo female genital mutilation” (271). Rahlenbeck et al. even propose that “a woman’s feeling of self-empowerment is proportional to the degree to which she takes a stance against the practice” (868), implying that any woman who supports FGC is devoid of self-empowerment. This argument becomes increasingly problematic when the connections between FGM and FGCS are explored.

15 In his opening address at Girl Summit 2014, PM David Cameron, announced:

It is absolutely clear about [sic] what we are trying to achieve, it is such a simple and noble and good ambition, and that is to outlaw the practices of female genital mutilation and childhood and early forced marriage. To outlaw them everywhere, for everyone within this generation. (14)

However, whilst Mr Cameron is advocating criminalising non-therapeutic genital alterations “everywhere for everyone”, FGCS is increasing rapidly. According to Crouch et al. the UK experienced a five-fold increase in procedures for labia reduction between 2001 and 2010 under the National Health System (1507). In the USA, the American Association of Cosmetic Surgeons estimated that 53,332 *vaginal rejuvenations* were performed in the USA in the year 2009 alone (Newman 4). Whilst, FGM and FGCS are often spoken about and understood as separate practices, in many cases, both are vaginal alterations motivated by aesthetics (Alo and Gbadebo 1658; Braun 233; Schultz and Lien 168). Plastic surgeons in the USA offer “The Full Barbie,” which involves complete inner labial removal and is advertised as a “refined” look – illegal for African immigrants, but American women will pay between \$3000 and \$6000 for the procedure (Newman 6). Braun and Kitzinger note that Western women often receive a “husband stitch” (265) after an episiotomy, tightening the post-delivery vaginal entry. However, we note the case of a UK doctor on trial for performing

FGM on a Somali-born women, who had been infibulated as a child, “through the way he sutured incisions” (Laville 1) after she gave birth. Are these qualitatively different procedures or, in fact, evidence of double standards? Johnsdotter and Essén (29) argue that ethnicity plays a significant role in how women and their vaginal alterations are perceived. Certainly there is a need to critically engage with concepts of consent, choice and agency.³

16 Post-colonial feminist theorists highlight that in the absence of meaningful critique, white/Western women are typically classified as powerful agents and black/Southern women are constantly referred to as passive victims (Collins et al. 306; Mugo 465). In the FGC debate, these assumptions manifest in the beliefs that an African woman only ever submits to genital cutting out of cultural oppression (Sheldon and Wilkinson 236), but a Western woman may elect to have cosmetic surgery on her genitals as an empowered form of self-expression (Braun 235). Post-colonial feminists counter these assumptions, arguing that African women may choose to undergo traditional FGC as part of their agentic process of building their own cultural identity from a range of choices presented (Oboria 275). Conversely, Western women undergoing FGCS may be victims of a materialistic, media-saturated culture which has coerced them into surgery to obtain the “designer vagina” (Braun 234). Significantly, within the complicated realms of culture, social pressure, culturally-constructed notions of femininity and adolescent identity-forming processes, these issues are far from “simple”, as Mr Cameron (5) suggests. Writing in *Marie Claire*, Faye Penn discusses the vagina and notes that “our relationship with her has never been more complicated” (1). The once *unmentionables* are now under incredible scrutiny as the concept of the “perfectible vagina” (Braun and Kitzinger 263) seeps into the conscience of women in the West. These are not new ideas – they have been present in the literature for nearly fifteen years – and yet Girl Summit 2014 made no reference to these important cultural nuances and critical debates. Ultimately, as will be argued in the final section, this disconnect from academic research resulted in Girl Summit advocating a feminist praxis uncritical in nature and limited in effect.

Invitations and interventions: Developing feminist praxis

17 A primary goal of Girl Summit 2014 was “sharing what works” (Cansfield et al. 1), gathering knowledgeable professionals in order to discuss effective strategies for engaging

³ The issue of consent, both broadly speaking and specifically within discourses of FGC, is typically discussed with regard to age. Variations in the perceived age of consent across cultures has been a key point of contention between Universalists and Cultural Relativists. While it is beyond the scope of this article to dive into this debate, it is important to acknowledge the body of literature that has explored the links between FGC, age and consent (Kalev; Schultz and Lien; Shell-Duncan). For the purpose of this article, we limit our discussion to the impacts of ethnicity and culture on perceptions of a woman’s capacity to consent to FGC in all its forms.

with the community around the issue of FGC. Ironically, whilst the Summit very effectively gathered celebrities, philanthropists, abolitionists and politicians, academics engaged in the FGC debate were not prominent amongst the presenters.⁴ Of the seventy-two experts invited to speak in the *Girl Summit 2014 Spotlight Sessions*, only nine speakers had contributed to academic publications on FGC, with a total fourteen pieces. Furthermore, when publications consisting of six pages or less were removed, only four speakers were left represented with a total of seven publications. In the 1990s, Efua Dorkenoo highlighted important gaps in the research on FGC, but unfortunately does not seem to have engaged academically with the extensive literature of the last fifteen years. Professor Hazel Barrett reviewed a behavioural change program targeting migrants to the EU, making brief reference to the importance of recognising the range of sexual experiences amongst cut women and the prevalence of labioplasty in the West (Brown et al. 3). However, there was no reference to these issues at Girl Summit 2014. Ann Wilson published an article on the success of abolishing foot-binding in China in order to apply the principles to eliminate FGC in Africa. Although an interesting idea in principle, Wilson's article lacks credibility due to conflating infibulation with FGC in general and suggesting that in Sudan "one-third of girls undergoing FGM will die" (21) referring to an obscure website as evidence for this claim. Most promising amongst the speakers, Naffisasto Diop has co-authored three academic journal articles on the subject of FGC, most recently conducting a review of eight FGC interventions, emphasising that campaigns with condemning messages are ineffective (Johansen et al. 4). However, Diop, who had so much to offer in terms of "sharing what works", was only invited to present on one panel. In the light of the large body of academic articles and studies discussed in this review, it is curious, and perhaps even alarming, that scholars with counter expertise were not invited and given adequate platform to share their findings, particularly as recent literature has so much insight to offer regarding creating effective cross-cultural feminist praxis around FGC.

18 In terms of "engaging people for change" (Cansfield et al. 1), Girl Summit 2014 seems to have been very successful, particularly in terms of engaging with multicultural Britain and the international community. The *Girl Summit Spotlight Session Outlines* indicate that representatives of the UK included Malala Yousafzai, Nasheima Sheikh and Jasvinder Sanghiera, and twenty-nine countries were represented by the panellists. Stelle Nkrumah-Ababio, Sonia Aziz Malik and Magreth Kibasa all talked about the importance of

⁴ Conversely, with regards to the issue of CEFM, Girl Summit invited widely published authors such as Dr Annabel Erulkar, Dr Anju Malhotra and Dr Caroline Harper to share their research.

meaningfully engaging with the practicing communities. UK Home Secretary Theresa May specified that efforts to reduce FGC would be led by “a network of community champions with the cultural knowledge and connections necessary to challenge beliefs and change behaviours” (16). This strategy of empowering local agents, rather than relying on external professionals reflects the best practice outlined in the literature and is a promising indicator of meaningful community engagement.

19 Regarding the last goal for the summit, “[a]greeing on an agenda for change” (Cansfield et al. 1), it is necessary to ask, to what extent was the agenda open for discussion? While Girl Summit 2014 was celebrated as a “swell of momentum surrounding women's and girl's rights” (Ramsden 5), the summit did not involve a critical examination of the concept of rights, or feminism, or the internal conflicts that have derailed former campaigns. Principal amongst these contentions, “mainstream feminism” has been criticised as representing the agenda of white/Western women and ignoring the perspectives of “other women” whose experiences are influenced by “race, ethnicity, class, colonisation, religion and/or sexual orientation” (Hunter 135). Collins et al. encourage Western feminists to recognise the “social life of rights” (301) and to focus their attention on how women in various contexts use the language of human rights to combat oppression and then partner with them in their work. In a positive sign, Guyo Jaldesa, Zsanett Shashorty, Danielo Colombo and Amal Mahmoud Abdalla advocated for greater community consultation in the *Girl Summit 2014 Spotlight Sessions*. When communities lead the way in social change, the objective of FGC campaigns frequently shifts from eradication to abandonment. The language may seem subtle but the implications are enormous, recognising that the most meaningful change comes from within the community.

20 In *Reaching Millions, Not Hundreds*, Ben Cislighi, representing Tostan,⁵ emphasised the importance of supporting communities in “values deliberation and collective action” (5). Tostan's involvement in Girl Summit was encouraging as their projects emphasise community ownership, empowering local people to set the agenda. Significantly, Tostan has been broadly praised as the organisation whose approach has been the most effective at reducing FGC (Easton et al. 446; Kristoff and WuDunn 227; Shell-Duncan 231). However, the irony is that Tostan was *not* founded with the intention of addressing FGC; rather, the focus was on strengthening agency. Easton et al. note that the “objective was to enable women to get to grips with their most pressing problems and to acquire the skills to design

⁵ Tostan is an empowerment program started in 1991 in rural Senegal. The name “Tostan” is a Wolof word meaning “breakthrough” (Easton et al., 446).

and manage their own projects as means of addressing those needs” (447). In time, local Senegalese women, not the Westerners working with the community, decided that FGC *was* a pressing issue that they wanted to address. Through projects initiated by local women, communities saw widespread reduction in FGC due to community-led “abandonment”, not an intervention campaign for “eradication” (451). Critically, whilst Tostan's work resulted in reducing FGC, there was no guarantee that this issue would even be addressed, since the campaign agenda was left entirely up to local women. This begs the question, would FGM have been selected as a headline issue at Girl Summit 2014 if the agenda had been determined by women in developing nations? Collins et al (306) illustrate that working *with* local women to help facilitate *their* goals creates an agenda reflecting grassroots concerns, which can be very different than donor-perceived needs, as qualitative research has frequently demonstrated. For example, Somali women have expressed frustration regarding the international community’s focus on FGC whilst they perceive civil war to have the greatest negative impact on human rights for women and children (Khaja et al. 735). When outsiders set the agenda, this runs the risk of missing the mark.

21 *Girl Summit* -- it is such a promising name. It could have been a gathering of young women from around the world to discuss the huge variety of obstacles impeding women's rights. However, the agenda of eliminating FGM and CEFM had already been decided by Britain's Department for International Development prior to the launch of the event. Yet even with the issue of FGC pre-selected, a review of the literature in the last fifteen years could have informed a dramatically different, holistic presentation of this complex issue. Instead, the hosts of Girl Summit 2014 used largely sensational language, which may well have offended many of the women they seek to reach. Moreover, Girl Summit maintained traditional assumptions about FGC, which will stand in stark contrast to the experiences of many who practice it. Lastly, without proper cultural contextualisation and reflexivity, Girl Summit 2014 painted the process of FGC as entirely *other*, irrational and cruel. A key aim of the summit was to gain momentum for change, but in the light of their (mis)representation of FGC it is difficult to see how this aim will be effectively achieved.

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The Queer Temporality of Gertrude Stein's Continuous Present

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Abstract:

As writers who embraced the Modernist maxim to “Make it New,” one might think that Gertrude Stein, T.S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound would want nothing to do with repetition. As critics Louis Menand and Michael North have shown, however, Pound’s now iconic phrase was, ironically, anything but new. North convincingly shows that Pound, an avid reader of Chinese literature, borrowed the phrase from an anecdote about the first king of the Shang dynasty (1766–1753 BC) (n.p.). Similarly, Menand draws our attention to the fact that “the ‘It’ in ‘Make It New’ is the Old—what is valuable in the culture of the past,” a past that plays a central role in most of Pound’s writing (n.p.). This complex relationship between the new and the old, the past, the present, and the future – rather than simply ‘the new’ – is what most contemporary critics see as the defining characteristic of Modernist American literature. Stein’s work, like that of other Modernists, exhibits a powerful desire to innovate and to break with tradition. This essay argues, however, that Stein chose to do this not simply by exploiting or inventing ‘new’ poetic forms but by attempting to endow repetition, ordinariness, and habit with a certain disruptiveness.

Through a close reading of two of her most experimental texts, *Tender Buttons* (1913) and “Lifting Belly” (1915), and two of her best-known lectures, “Composition as Explanation” (1926) and “Portraits and Repetition” (1935), I attempt to show how Stein’s reliance on techniques such as beginning again and again and using everything locate her compositions in a continuous present that eschews linear views of temporality predicated on a progression from past to present to future. Drawing on queer temporality theory, I further contend that Stein’s commitment to re-imagining repetition as insistence (a repetition that does not repeat) in her compositions constitutes a decidedly queer endeavor. The recursiveness of her poetry, I argue, forces the reader to inhabit a queer time that opposes the regulatory, ‘straight’ temporality of chrononormativity in favor of an ‘other’ time. This ‘other’ time, in turn, defamiliarizes us with traditional modes of signification and closure, asking us to question not only the naturalization of hegemonic temporalities but also the fixity of ontological categories.

History repeats itself anything repeats itself but all this had never happened before.

- Gertrude Stein, “Lecture 1” (from *Narration*, 1934)

1 Having embraced the Modernist maxim to “Make it New”, one might expect that Gertrude Stein, T.S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound would want nothing to do with repetition. As both Louis Menand and Michael North have shown, Pound’s iconic phrase was, ironically, anything but new. Through a detailed account of the phrase’s genealogy, North convincingly shows that Pound, an avid reader of Chinese literature, borrowed the phrase from a “historical anecdote”

about Ch'eng T'ang, first king of the Shang dynasty (1766–1753 BC) (n.d.). In his review of Peter Gay's volume on Pound, Menand also draws our attention to the fact that “the ‘It’ in ‘Make It New’ is the Old—what is valuable in the culture of the past,” a past that plays a central role in most of Pound's writing (n.d.). This complex relationship between the new and the old, the past, the present, and the future – rather than simply ‘the new’ – is what most contemporary critics see as the defining characteristic of Modernist American literature. Michael Trask, for instance, portrays writers' complex reactions to the drastic changes in American society between the Civil War and World War II as a “dialectical attitude” that was committed to both “redefinition” and “preservation of inherited assumptions” about class and sex (89) and, I would argue, progress, development, and fixed ontological categories in general. Stein's work, like that of other Modernists, exhibits a powerful desire to innovate and to break with tradition. Rather ambitiously, however, Stein chose to do this not simply by exploiting or inventing ‘new’ poetic forms but by attempting to re-envision repetition, ordinariness, and habit as ways to disrupt hegemonic temporalities and problematize essentialized identity categories.

2 Deciding how to approach Stein's work is a complicated endeavor, particularly in light of Stein's personal distaste for clarity. She famously stated that “clarity is of no importance because nobody listens and nobody knows what you mean no matter what you mean, nor how clearly you mean what you mean” (*Four in America* 127–8). Ironically, Stein would spend a large part of her career attempting to ‘clarify’ her work. The irony of this endeavor, however, was not lost on her. “Composition as Explanation”, for instance, does not really explain Stein's composing style but rather shows the decentering potential of what would become one of her signature techniques – the “continuous present” – by describing it through purposefully obscure statements such as “[a] continuous present is a continuous present” (524).

3 To resist readings of Stein that try to erase the wonderfully disquieting ambiguity of her work in favor of a singular and definite interpretation, I will follow in the methodological footsteps of feminist critics such as Harriet Chessman. In *The Public is Invited to Dance*, she takes “an open-ended and speculative responsiveness to [Stein's] writing” that “[resists] traditional critical claims to objectivity and closure, and [allows] ample room for subjectivity” (8).¹ In light of the vastness of Stein's poetic production, I will focus on texts belonging to what

¹ Other feminist scholars such as Barbara Will and Lisa Ruddick take similar methodological approaches in their respective works.

Marianne Dekoven characterizes as Stein's most experimental period (1906–1932) (xiii), particularly *Tender Buttons* (1913) and “Lifting Belly” (1915), since Stein herself references the texts that she produced during this time when discussing how she developed the continuous present.² By examining how Stein uses language in these texts to reconceptualize repetition as insistence (a repetition predicated on difference rather than similarity), I hope to highlight Stein's desire to question established categories and hierarchies, including temporal ones. I further contend that there is something queer about Stein's continuous present and how she uses it to disrupt “modes of signification” that are “linear, orderly, closed, hierarchal, sensible, coherent, referential, and heavily focused on the signified” (Dekoven xiii). While Stein's life and work predate the emergence of ‘queer’ as a strategic political position and identity marker, I also see her quest to challenge temporal and ontological categories³ as vital to current queer discussions about temporality, becoming, and being.

4 Unlike mainstream conceptions of time as a benign, democratic, and linear force, the field of queer studies unapologetically questions time's impartiality by examining its material effects on the lives and bodies of human beings, particularly of those relegated to the margins of society. Time, scholars like Elizabeth Freeman argue, is just another state mechanism used to produce “biopolitical status relations” (“Time Binds” 57) that bind the “naked flesh” through “temporal regulation” (*Time Binds* 3). Freeman refers to this temporal regulation as “chrononormativity” (3), while other queer scholars refer to it as “straight time” (see Muñoz, 2009) or as “heteronormative time” (see Halberstam, 2005). The field of queer temporality, then, studies not only how normative time turns “historically specific regimes of asymmetrical power into seemingly ordinary bodily tempos and routines” (Freeman, *Time Binds* 3) but also offers alternatives to this type of temporality by refusing to organize identities and political action around the normative concepts of heterosexual reproduction, the heterosexual family, and essentialized notions of progress, history, and the future.

5 Although the ultimate goal of many queer temporality scholars is to expose and dismantle the wheels and gears of normative temporality, recent scholarship has revealed two distinct, and often oppositional, approaches to the topic. On the one hand, scholars like José Esteban Muñoz

² See “Composition as Explanation” (1926), “Portraits and Repetition” and “Poetry and Grammar” (*Lectures in America*, 1935).

³ Teresa de Lauretis (2011) views queer texts in a similar fashion. For her, a queer text “not only works against narrativity, the generic pressure of all narrative toward closure and the fulfillment of meaning, but also pointedly disrupts the referentiality of language and the referentiality of images...” (244).

see queerness as a “utopian formation” (26) grounded in the hope of a different future. Muñoz’s position, furthermore, can be characterized as decidedly socially driven in its insistence “on the essential need for an understanding of queerness as collectivity” (11). Scholars like Lee Edelman and Judith Halberstam, on the other hand, focus on what Robert L. Caserio, in the 2005 MLA panel by the same name, calls “the antisocial thesis” (819). According to Halberstam, this thesis involves an acceptance of, rather than resistance to, the historical association of queer subjects “to negativity, to nonsense, to antireproduction, [and] to unintelligibility” (823). Central to the antisocial thesis is a rejection of the figure of the Child as the emblem of the future and of “the absolute value of reproductive futurism” (Edelman 3). Queer negativity, then, not only challenges the social value ascribed to reproduction but also “the very value of the social itself” (6). While Edelman and Halberstam are often portrayed as the main proponents of the antisocial turn in queer studies, it is important to note that they take slightly different approaches to issues of negativity. Edelman, for instance, has often questioned Halberstam’s brand of negativity, calling it “a pose” (“The Antisocial Thesis” 822). Halberstam, on the other hand, has strongly criticized Edelman for basing his approach on “a narrow vision of an archive of negativity” and for downplaying the important role of “material political concerns” (“The Antisocial Thesis” 824).

6 Closely related to the ideas of queer utopias and queer negativity are the notions of being and becoming, often presented as polar opposites. Becoming, in the Deleuzian sense, is crucial to the project of queer studies since, as scholar Tim Dean explains in the “Antisocial Thesis” forum, it proposes “a ceaseless movement of being that is not coordinated by teleology and that never results in anything resembling an identity” (827). Being, on the other hand, is associated with stasis, passivity, and death (Colebrook 2011). In “Queer Aesthetics,” Claire Colebrook argues that this binary, which privileges becoming over being, reinforces, rather than subverts, normalizing discourses related to temporality and identity (25). Like Colebrook, I see this opposition as troublesome for the project of queer studies in general and for the field of queer temporality in particular, and view Stein’s ideas on temporality as an alternative to this binary. I therefore propose an analysis of Stein’s work that focuses on how her unique concept of the continuous present can inform and complicate current queer scholarship on the topic of temporality and move us beyond the false dichotomy of being versus becoming.

7 To fully understand Stein's unique take on repetition, or what she calls in "insistence," we must turn to two of her best-known lectures, "Portraits and Repetition" and "Composition as Explanation". Although seemingly concerned with different topics, insistence in the first case and the continuous present in the latter, both lectures deal with one of Stein's primary obsessions: repetition and difference. In Stein's view, the relationship between these concepts is better explored through the art of portraiture. In "Composition as Explanation", Stein presents the continuous present as characterized by two main aspects: "beginning again and again" and "using everything" (524). She, in turn, links both of these concepts to her foray into writing portraits: using everything (the people and things she encountered in her daily life) forced her to find the difference between these things by beginning again and again (525-26). Portraiture, then, does not simply imply description ("Portraits and Repetition" 288). This is a key distinction since, for Stein, description involves repetition rather than insistence: when we describe things or people, she argues, we are remembering them as they *were* rather than depicting them "when the things themselves are actually existing" (290). Not making this distinction will locate the act of creation in the past, thus preventing the composition from existing in the continuous present. From this perspective, the present time – the time of living and seeing – becomes both the time *of* the composition and the time *in* the composition ("Composition as Explanation" 523, emphasis added). It is the time of the composition since, for Stein, artists must strive to capture "that at which they are looking at" (520) at the moment that they are looking at it. If done properly, the time in the composition should mirror this temporality. As such, Stein's compositions are not characterized by a progression from past to present to future, but rather by a recursiveness that eschews this linear view of temporality. This radical redefinition of what 'natural' temporality entails is, I will argue, one of Stein's most important contributions to "queer engagements in rethinking forms of time [and] life" (McCallum & Tuhkanen 4).

8 Stein suggests, however, that this different temporality is always complicated by what she calls "time-sense" ("Composition as Explanation" 521). Although at first glance the term seems to simply act as a stand in for the concept of 'time', a closer look at the wording that surrounds it reveals the dangers inherent in this type of temporality: according to Stein, in the time-sense of the composition, there is "always a fear a doubt and a judgment and a conviction" (528), a quality of expression that makes the composition "go dead" (529). This "most troublesome" time-sense requires a time that is "distributed and equilibrated" to be embedded within the

composition, thus robbing it of the “confusion” that the continuous present provides (529). Although the vagueness of Stein’s terminology usually leaves it open to multiple interpretations, her word choice in this passage clearly aligns time-sense with regulatory and linear conceptions of temporality. The term time-sense itself speaks of a need for time to make sense, to be intelligible, and conform to the limits of normative temporality.

9 Stein expands on this questioning of time’s sense through her disruption of grammatical and syntactical structures, particularly the sentence, in *Tender Buttons*. As various critics have noted, Stein’s grammar is decidedly agrammatical in its refusal to follow conventional punctuation patterns and adjective-noun correspondences (Randall 119). As Mary Galvin has argued, Stein’s agrammaticality acts as a direct attack on linear temporality since “temporal structure is usually maintained through the linear sequence of grammar” (43). At the level of the sentence, linear temporality is enforced through the logical sequencing of subject, verb, and object, and through the stops and pauses achieved through the logical placement of commas and periods. Stein estranges the reader from this familiar temporality, from the ‘sense’ that is etymologically embedded in the word ‘sentence’,⁴ by relying on fragments that are agrammatically punctuated. For instance, in the “Objects” section of the book, Stein offers a distinctly unfamiliar rendition of a dog:

A little monkey goes like a donkey that means to say that means to say
that more sighs last goes. Leave with it. A little monkey goes like a
donkey. (14)

The fragmented nature and unfamiliar punctuation of this prose poem prevent the reader from reading it in a linear fashion. The lack of punctuation in the first line, in particular, forces the reader to start over and over again in a futile attempt to impose some type of order and meaning on the sentence. To further complicate matters, Stein embeds the notion of “beginning again and again” into the structure of the first line through the repetition of “that means to say,” encouraging the reader to forgo any attempt at a single interpretation and instead engage in multiple re-readings that will, in turn, produce a multiplicity of meanings. Much like the time sense in “Composition as Explanation”, a sentence, when left undisturbed, will act, in Stein’s words, as a “prison”. Stein’s use of the term “prison” seems to make a pun on the meaning of

⁴ According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, the word “sentence” possesses distinctly hierarchical connotations: in the late 13th century, for instance, it was used to refer to a “doctrine” or “authoritative teaching”, while its common usage after the 15th century as “a grammatically complete statement” stems from the notion of “meaning expressed in words”.

‘sentence’ as a legal conviction or, in more colloquial terms, on the idea of ‘doing time’. When juxtaposed to her description of the time sense of the composition as a “conviction” (“Composition as Explanation” 528), this pun further reinforces the link between the prescriptive linearity of the time sense and of the sentence. This linearity, however, can be disturbed. According to Stein, when endowed with a certain violent “vagueness”, a sentence can become a “mission”, a wonderfully productive “stumbling” (*Tender Buttons* 20) that renders singular meanings unnecessary.

10 *Tender Buttons* provides us with a plethora of examples of how agrammaticality can be used to challenge the linear flow of time at the level of the sentence, but Stein’s insistence and the way she uses it to disrupt chrononormativity and, by extension, fixed ontological categories is perhaps best exemplified in her poem “Lifting Belly”. While scholars like Galvin acknowledge that the repetition of the title phrase throughout the poem makes it “constantly shift roles” (45), she fails to address the disruption that this repetition causes in linear temporality and, instead, interprets it as merely an expression of Stein and Toklas’ “lesbian consciousness” (45). From my perspective, Stein’s insistence acts as the frames in a film⁵ by juxtaposing minute variations of the same object (the lifting belly in this case) next to each other to create an image that, although distinctly located in the present, is never static:

There was an instant of lifting belly
Lifting belly is an occasion. An occasion to please me. O
yes. Mention it.
Lifting belly is courteous.
Lifting belly is hilariously gay and favorable.
Oh yes it is.
Indeed it is not a disappointment.
Not to me.
Lifting belly is such an incident. In one’s life.
Lifting belly is such an incident in one’s life. (416)

In this passage, Stein’s use of insistence (“lifting belly is”) creates a tension between the seemingly essential and lasting qualities ascribed to the lifting belly — “courteous”, “hilariously gay and favorable” — and its more finite temporal attributes: the lifting belly is, at the same

⁵ Stein explicitly relates her portraits to the cinema in “Portraits and Repetition”. She, in fact, presents the cinema as the way to avoid the problematic link between resemblance, a vital part of portraiture, and remembering: “Funnily enough the cinema has offered a solution of this thing. By a continuously moving picture of any one there is no memory of any other thing and there is that thing existing, it is in a way if you like one portrait of anything not a number of them” (293-94).

time, “an instant,” “an occasion,” and “an incident”. When closely examined, the slight variations in meaning of these seemingly synonymous terms reveal an image of the lifting belly that is to be appreciated from multiple temporal angles. “An occasion”, for example, can refer to both a particular and special event or, with a minimal play between ‘an’ and ‘on’, to something that happens only from time to time. Similarly, “an incident” denotes a certain temporal specificity, importance, and violence, or, in its variation as ‘incidental’, a chance occurrence. The “new formations of relationship” (Chessman 3) that Stein produces in these lines, then, force the reader to not only question the traditional relationship between the words themselves but also the temporal relationships that we so easily take for granted.

11 Stein seems to be profoundly aware of the destabilizing potential of the insistent image of the lifting belly. Later on in the poem, she states,

Lifting belly is a language. It says island. Island a strata.
Lifting belly is repetition.
Lifting belly means me. (422)

In this passage, Stein explicitly draws our attention to the idea of repetition as language. However, as in most of her poetry, it is a distinctly alien language that forces the reader to question the relationship between signifier and signified. In these lines, for instance, lifting belly is a language that “says island”. The proximity of this sentence to the next, “Island a strata,” encourages the reader to break down both sentences into their component parts. Thus, the first part of the passage could be read as “lifting belly is a language that says is land”, with the second part of this first line forcing the reader to ask, “is land a strata?” As usual, when juxtaposed to each other, these two sentences reveal an interesting tension: Stein seems to suggest that land is both a grounding concept and a mere layer in a much bigger structure (culture, perhaps?). Both of these meanings, in turn, can be ascribed to language, thus exposing how it creates and grounds categories and how it acts as just another institutional power mechanism. In light of the multiplicity of meanings that these lines conjure, Stein’s assertion that “lifting belly means me”, rather than providing an essentialized definition of the self, highlights the futility of such an attempt, a futility that Stein stresses throughout “Lifting Belly” with questions such as “What is a man./What is a woman./What is a bird” (436).⁶

⁶ Chessman explores Stein’s unique “act[s] of naming” (84) and her struggle to “avoid a form of representation binding her subjects to their familiar and conventional descriptions” (88) at length in *The Public is Invited to Dance* (1989).

12 Stein's idea of portraits as insistence is, from my perspective, her most radical in terms of proposing an alternative temporality. The very nature of portraiture, on the one hand, requires the artist to capture an object's essence: its being, so to speak. Stein, in fact, stresses the static quality of being through her constant repetition of the verb "to be" in her poetry. At the core level, the objects in Stein's poems, then, simply are: they exist in the present moment in which the writer is capturing them devoid of any ties to the past or to the future. Stein's reliance on insistence, on the other hand, immediately complicates this seemingly static conception of temporality by constantly changing the essence of these objects. This kaleidoscopic portraiture is perhaps better exemplified in one of Stein's most famous lines: "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" ("Lifting Belly" 439). While the insistence in this line prompts a "beginning again and again" that forces the reader to remain firmly grounded in the present, the meaning of the familiar object, the cliché rose that is the subject of so many poems, is never fixed; instead, it remains in a perpetual state of becoming. Thus, Rose (the person) is a rose or perhaps she has risen. When thinking of the object (the rose), the meaning of the line must immediately change to account for the switch from person to object in the sentence: to say that Rose is risen is not the same as to say that *a* rose has risen. This destabilization of meaning is only further complicated when the reader decides to fully immerse him/herself in the endless insistence that the line requires: when spoken continuously, the individual components of "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" blend into each other until they become unrecognizable. From this perspective, Stein's poetry succeeds not only at creating something new but also something distinctly alien to the reader.

13 What I would describe as Stein's 'being in becoming', then, can be said to align itself with Edelman's and Halberstam's views in that it produces an uneasiness in the reader by defamiliarizing him/her with the idea of a rose, in the case of "Lifting Belly", or with household objects, rooms, and food in *Tender Buttons*. It embraces the unintelligibility and nonsensicalness ascribed to the queer (or the queer text) and, pushes it to the limit:

SHOES.

To be a wall with a damper a stream of pounding way and nearly enough
choice makes a steady midnight. It is pus.

A shallow hole rose on red, a shallow hole in and in this makes ale less. It
shows shine. (*Tender Buttons* 14)

While the previous passage eventually references something that we, as readers, associate with shoes (“shine”), the rest of the poem counteracts any attempt at reaching closure by estranging us from traditional notions of what a shoe is supposed to be. From this perspective, Stein’s poetry constitutes the type of “perverse refusal” that Edelman presents as a defining factor of queerness: queer theory, for Edelman, refuses “every substantiation of identity, which is always oppositionally defined, and by extension, of history as linear narrative (the poor man’s teleology) in which the meaning succeeds in revealing itself—*as itself*—through time” (emphasis in the original 4). In Stein’s poetry, the time of the continuous present never succeeds at revealing meaning, just at generating multiple and often contradictory possibilities.

14 Stein’s use of everything and the stress that she places on the quotidian and on the act of existing, however, are also what set her ideas on temporality apart from those of Edelman and Muñoz. Although Muñoz contends that his aim is not to widen the divide between present and future but rather to envision a future in the present (49), his construction of “queerness as an utopian formation” does entail “a desire” for “a thing that is not yet here, objects and moments that burn with anticipation and promise” (26). Muñoz’s desire for something that is “not yet here” does seem to displace the wonderfully disquieting potential of the everyday that Stein understands so well in favor of a future becoming. For Stein, queerness is not in the horizon (Muñoz 11) but in existing in the present:

As I say, what one repeats is the scene in which one is acting, the days in which one is living, the coming and going which one is doing, anything one is remembering is a repetition, but *existing as a human being*, there is being listening and hearing is never repetition. It is not repetition if it is what which you are actually doing because naturally each time the emphasis is different. (“Portraits and Repetition,” emphasis added 297)

Stein’s idea of “existing as a human being”, a life drive that is firmly attached to objects and people, is also what separates her from the unboundedness and “sheer negativity” of Edelman’s death drive (de Laurentis 250). More importantly, as de Laurentis points out, the life drive does not only rely on attachments and social bonds but also on creativity (250) an intrinsic part of Stein’s work, since she not only engages in aesthetic creation but, in essence, re-creates the objects that she portrays in her poetry (“Poetry and Grammar” 333).

15 The “re” in “re-creation” that Stein herself highlights in her discussion of the term, can be easily linked to the beginning again and again of the continuous present, but it also speaks, once

again, to her aversion to naming (“Portraits and Grammar” 333). This re-creation constitutes the essence of the portraits included in *Tender Buttons*, since the whole volume can be seen as an exercise in “avoiding names in re-creating something” (Stein, “Portraits and Grammar” 333). When taken together, all of the aspects that Stein uses to construct the continuous present—re-creation, using everything, insistence, and beginning again and again—ultimately lead to a destabilization of normative time by denying the reader the possibility of closure, progress, and intelligibility. From this perspective then, the continuous present of Stein’s work does not necessarily negate the future in favor of a static being-in-the-present, nor does it privilege ideas of becoming, but rather evidences a preference for growing meaning sideways.

16 I have borrowed the notion of “growing sideways” from Katherine Bond Stockton’s groundbreaking *The Queer Child* (2009). In the introduction to this volume, Bond Stockton presents the idea of growing sideways as a way to challenge heteronormative ideas about the inherent ‘straightness’ of children and about the ‘verticality’ of growing up. She contends that measuring development by these standards assumes that growth stops when we achieve certain heterosexual milestones such as reproduction and marriage. Growing sideways, on the other hand, “suggests that the width of a person’s experience or ideas, their motives or their motions, may pertain at any age, bringing ‘adults’ and ‘children’ into lateral contact of surprising sorts” (11). The notion of sideways growth, Bond Stockton argues, is better embodied through the figure of “the ghostly gay child”. This figure, she suggests, serves two distinct purposes. On the one hand, through the narrative of coming out, it represents the belated recognition of one’s homosexuality. Since no child is supposed to be sexual, Bond Stockton argues that gay adults are not allowed to embrace their homosexuality until they grow up. Thus, homosexuality is only recognized as a sort of “backward birth” (6). On the other hand, this figure also stands for the child who must not be allowed to exist and therefore can only grow “to the side” of heteronormative society (13). Both dimensions of this “protogay” child,⁷ Bond Stockton contends, allow us to explore a multitude of alternative temporalities, temporalities that conjure metaphors of “moving suspensions” and “shadows of growth” (14). For Bond Stockton, Stein’s poetry, particularly her use of syntax, is a perfect example of one of these “moving suspensions”:

⁷ Stockton borrows this notion from Sedgwick’s 1991 essay “How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay: The War Against Effeminate Boys.”

in her sentences, “meaning is moving and growing . . . even while time almost seems to hang suspended” (26).

17 The “almost” in the previous quote is particularly important, since it is difficult to argue that Stein’s use of insistence freezes time. Even Bond Stockton acknowledges that it might be more accurate to describe the temporality of Stein’s poetry as a struggle between “the advance of time” and “stages of lingering” (25). I would go a step further and argue that the temporality of the continuous present is not only horizontal but also vertical in nature. When Stein uses insistence in her poetry, she produces layers of meaning; in other words, she piles meaning after meaning on the same sentence. This vertical movement, in turn, opens up the possibility for multiple alternative meanings to grow “to the side” of the sentence’s literal meaning. Thus, when we read “Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose,” meanings grow upwards

Rose is a rose
Rose is a rose
a rose is a rose
a rose is a rose

allowing the reader to create new meanings on a horizontal, rather than simply a vertical, axis:

Rose is a rose/Rose is beautiful and young
Rose is a rose/Rose has just woken up or she is blooming like a rose
a rose is a rose/ a rose is just a rose; we must enjoy it for what it is
a rose is a rose/a rose is blooming.

From this perspective, vertical movements of meaning do not necessarily, as Bond Stockton suggests, always breed straightness or linearity; on the contrary, verticality can encourage meaning to grow sideways as well as upwards.

18 In “Queer Texts, Bad Habits,” Teresa de Laurentis offers an insightful analysis of Edelman’s perspective on the antisocial thesis. She concludes that, Edelman’s book, while intelligent and thought-provoking, can still be described as a manifesto in its insistence on presenting queerness “as the figure for an ethical position against ‘reproductive futurism’”(257). The problem with this position, de Laurentis argues, is that it turns Edelman’s unique brand of queerness into just another “political mainstay, where rhetoric is primarily instrumental” rather than into a truly nonteleological project (258-59). Stein’s work, as I have argued, avoids this pitfall by refusing to align itself with any temporal or ontological hierarchy, preferring instead to engage in a cycle of questioning that continuously asks readers to revisit and revise their conceptions of being, becoming, the past, present, and future. Stein’s philosophy on temporality,

while reliant on the continuous present as a decentering tool, does not necessarily advocate for its supremacy, instead insisting on a form of dynamic existing that simply fattens the present, growing it both vertically and horizontally through the multiplicity of meanings generated by the beginning again and again of the composition. From this perspective, Stein's "patient time" (McCallum 244) succeeds at spreading the difference (Stein, *Tender Buttons* 4) that is so crucial to both Stein's work and the much larger project of queer studies.

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“Come Out, Come Out, Wherever You Are”

Queering *American Horror Story*

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Abstract:

Television becomes an increasingly more inclusive space for the representations of marginalized communities, yet many queer characters are sequestered to supporting roles, storylines dealing with queer themes are subordinate within the greater diegeses, and shows emphatically committed to foregrounding queer experiences are predominantly compartmentalized to the peripheries of television on identity-specific or niche cable networks. Thus, queer spectators have become accustomed to constructing secondary or alternative texts within predominant ones in order to derive pleasure from and solidarity with televisual narratives. As queer persons are discriminated against, violated, and coded with fear and contempt in society, FX’s anthology series *American Horror Story* (2011—present) is a unique and challenging text that confronts issues of queer visibility, provides queer performers and creators a vehicle to contribute to cultural conversations, and gives audiences a lens to glean meaning. Each season of *American Horror Story* features different narratives, settings, time periods, and characters. My paper positions each of the four seasons as case studies to interrogate the show’s formal and textual approaches for illuminating queer subjectivities. First, I examine the horror genre and ghost story traditions used in Season One: *Murder House*; these approaches perpetually destabilize the image of the nuclear heteronormative family as queer characters infiltrate the haunted environment. Next, through an analysis of Season Two: *Asylum*, I put the show’s unique anthology form in conversation with the ontology of performance to claim that queer actors are not only afforded diverse queer roles—and vice versa—but are equally unbound from any singular or reductive identity. This approach suggests that the fluidity of performance mirrors that of sexuality and gender. Season Three: *Coven*’s excessive and subversive camp aesthetics are posited in order to understand the show’s appeal for queer audiences. Finally, I read Season Four: *Freak Show*—chronicling freak show performers in South Florida during the 1950s—as an allegory of the current alienation, exploitation, and commodification of “othered” queer individuals. *Freak Show* confronts the social and political pressures for queer people to assimilate or surrender to imminent death—both metaphorical and literal. Thus, I argue that *American Horror Story*, as a horror anthology series, not only provides sustainable viewing pleasures for queer spectators but also a platform for contemporary discourse and televisual activism.

Scared Straight

1 As television becomes an increasingly more inclusive space for marginalized communities, many queer characters are still sequestered to supporting roles, storylines dealing with queer themes are subordinate within the greater diegeses, and shows emphatically committed to foregrounding queer experiences are predominantly compartmentalized to the peripheries of television. Identity-specific or niche cable networks like *Logo*, *PrideVision*, and

— for a time — *Bravo* specifically catered to queer sensibilities, even branding themselves with the tagline, “Gay Television; No Apologies”.¹ Subscribers of gay-themed channels are called to identify with the preset niche categories. These niche networks’ pigeonholed identities along with limited accessibility for audiences reinforce the notion that queer spectators are indeed marginal.

2 Concurrently, in the 1990s and early 2000s, sitcoms and dramas on major networks began featuring gay supporting characters thereby establishing a platform for periodically gay-themed episodes. Even on mainstream television today, heterosexuality is framed in conjunction with normalcy, and queer characters are positioned as foils to leading players. When shows aim to appeal to wide heterosexual audiences, there are usually implicit disclaimers when confronting queer issues, and shows draw attention to their efforts to integrate gay characters or subplots into the narratives as a display of commonality. In order for these shows to remain commercially lucrative, gay and lesbian characterizations and narratives are often negotiated; queer images and storylines can exist only if they lend themselves to commodification. Hence, stereotypes and attractive queer hyperboles permeate into the shows, usually taking the form of flamboyant comrades to the main players. Spectators pining for non-stereotypical queer representations have become accustomed to constructing secondary or alternative texts within predominant ones in the interest of deriving pleasure from and solidarity with televisual narratives.

3 Exploiting the freedoms of cable television, FX’s adult-oriented horror anthology series *American Horror Story* (2011 – present) is divorced from specific gender and sexual binaries and persuasions. Employing melodramatic traditions and paying homage to horror conventions, the show’s general commercial lure is its grotesque transgressive tenets, sensory and emotional provocation, and sadomasochistic nuances. Yet as queer persons are discriminated against, violated, and coded with fear and contempt in society and on television, *American Horror Story* is a unique and challenging text that confronts issues of queer visibility, and gives queer performers and creators a vehicle to contribute to cultural conversations.

4 Each season of *American Horror Story* features different narratives, settings, time periods, and characters. Engaging with preexisting queer theories and discourses, my paper

¹ *Here!* TV uses the tagline “Gay Television. No Apologies” on an advertisement for the TV special, “Dante’s Cove.” See pages 217 to 221 of Anthony Freitas’ “Gay Programming, Gay Public: Public and Private Tension in Lesbian and Gay Cable Channels” in *Cable Vision: Television Beyond Broadcasting*.

positions each of the four seasons as case studies in order to interrogate the show's formal and textual approaches and handling of queer subjectivities. First, I examine the horror genre and ghost story traditions within Season One: *Murder House*. These components perpetually destabilize the image of the nuclear heteronormative family as queer characters infiltrate the haunted environment. Next, through an analysis of Season Two: *Asylum*, I put the show's unique anthology form in conversation with the ontology of performance to claim that queer actors are not only afforded queer roles – and vice versa – but are equally unbound from any singular identity. This approach suggests that the fluidity of performance mirrors that of sexuality and gender. After, Season Three: *Coven*'s excessive and subversive Camp aesthetics are posited in order to understand the show's appeal for queer audiences. Finally, I read Season Four: *Freak Show* – chronicling freak show performers in South Florida during the 1950s – as an allegory of the more recent alienation, exploitation, and televisual commodification of 'othered' queer individuals. *Freak Show*'s secondary text confronts the social and political pressures for queer people to either assimilate or surrender to an imminent death – both metaphorically and literally.

5 It is important to note that although each examination is paired with a specific season of the show for analysis; the themes and theories explored are relevant throughout the entire series and therefore not exclusive to the season in conversation. Additionally, in this paper the term 'queer', while possessing a political or revolutionary spirit, is meant to be inclusive of – yet distinct from – gay, lesbian, bi, and trans perspectives as it acknowledges that those categories are still reductive and prescriptive in their own right. Here, 'queer' is also used to code for the 'otherness' that is intentionally brought forward and, to quote theorist Samuel A. Chambers in regards to queer theory, "call attention to that which is marginal with respect to dominant norms" (Chambers 18). To apply theorist Alexander Doty's concept, 'queerness' critiques gender and sexual binaries in order to attest that there are non-straight truths outside of conventional "hetero paradigms".²

² In the Introduction of *Making Things Perfectly Queer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), Alexander Doty defines "hetero paradigms" as notions connected to heterocentric ideologies (xv-4).

The Ghosts Come Out of the Closet: *Murder House* and Horror

6 In its most simplified meaning, horror examines the tension between the normal and abnormal, the known and the unknown. Applying J. Mitchell Miller's theories on 'otherness' "[t]he other is [...] different or alien to the self or social identities",³ so horror confronts this separation and problematic distinction. As a genre or categorization of media film and television, if terror exists beyond the frame and deliberately permeates into the frame, horror imagines an environment where 'othered' identities are allowed to come out and play. Thus the order of the heteronormative world is disturbed – a world in which "everyone and everything is judged from the perspective of straight" (Chambers 35). Mapping the evolution of horror, these 'other' temperaments consistently take the symbolic form of monsters, ghosts, zombies, and extra-terrestrial aliens. They are embodiments of disruptive, abnormal forces that transcend classifications. Accordingly, horror grants access for ghosts and monsters to invade the traditional and familiar space, and serves as a kind of rebellion against a larger hegemonic institution. The narratives position the unknown entities as intruders and are wrought with dread and discomfort. This arrangement equates the unearthed diegetic paranoia to that of queer panic.

7 *American Horror Story: Murder House* builds upon these horror traditions to showcase the failures of a nuclear heterosexual family as ghosts terrorize them in their new home. After Vivien Harmon discovers her husband Ben having an affair with his young patient, the Harmons, along with their daughter Violet, relocate to Los Angeles to restore their marriage and start anew. They purchase a Victorian-style house on a short sale only to learn that the house has a sordid history of murders committed from within. As they try to maintain sanity and unity as a family, numerous supernatural intruders – both evil and benevolent ghosts – thwart their livelihood. Scholar Patricia White explains that within the realm of horror, "homosexuality, like the haunting itself... work[s] implicitly behind the scenes" (White 62), and is eventually forced into the known space.

8 Horror distinguishes concerns surrounding visibility, and confrontationally brings 'othered' or queer characters to the forefront. Some of the ghosts use their inherent queer positions to threaten the Harmon's hetero-nuclear lifestyle applying non-traditional sexual practices. Some ghosts are unequivocally gay or engage in homosexual acts; as they demonstrate

³ J. Mitchell Miller, "Otherness," *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods* (SAGE Publications, Inc, Sept. 15, 2008) <http://www.sage-ereference.com/view/research/n304.xml>

these practices, they destabilize Ben and Vivien's marriage. Particularly, they prey on Ben Harmon and intensify his emotional and sexual frailty. They subvert his sexual attention in order to call attention to his sexual duplicity. Exemplifying this, Moira, a 60-year-old ghost unable to leave the house, is the Harmon's housekeeper. Though she appears gaunt and nonsexual to those who look upon her, to Ben she materializes as a young temptress. Throughout the season, she poses suggestively in front of Ben and projects an air of palpable sexual energy as she completes household duties. At one point, she antagonistically has sex with another female ghost in order to disrupt and disturb Ben's gaze and damage his relationship with Vivien.

9 Before the Harmons move into the house, a gay couple, Patrick and Chad, occupies the house before another ghost executes them.⁴ Disguised as interior decorators, they return to haunt the Harmons. In one scene, the Harmons congregate in the kitchen to discuss ways to improve the Harmon's Halloween decorations. Patrick intentionally cuts his hand with a pumpkin knife and asks Ben to assist him with a bandage in the upstairs bathroom. As Ben helps Patrick clean and dress the wound, Patrick makes advances on him and grabs his genitals and offers him oral sex – at which point Ben recoils and explains that he is not gay. While Ben never succumbs to Patrick's proposition, the mere suggestion of a homoerotic energy implies that Ben – and his family – are touched by the supernatural⁵ and forced to encounter queerness. This encounter contributes to the fragmentation of the Harmon's heteronormative monogamy and centrality.

10 Although not all ghosts in the show are explicitly queer – as they embody a breadth of gender and sexual projections – symbolically, 'ghosts' do however connote queer or marginal subjectivities. Scholar Samuel A. Chambers attests that ghosts – as cinematic or literary representations — code for the “closeted existence” (41) mirroring the situation of many queer individuals at odds with a community's expectations. The ghosts exist in a liminal space between the spiritual and material worlds and are not welcome to live entirely in either. Chambers continues to explain that within politically and socially conservative communities, queer individuals are also not indiscriminately permitted to express sexuality without restraint and therefore must either surrender their nature to the demands of the culture or find a space to exist elsewhere. Here, presence can only exist in the absence. In *Murder House*, on the other hand, the

⁴ *American Horror Story: Murder House*, Episode 5, Halloween Part One, Dir. David Semel, Aired Nov. 11, 2011.

⁵ In her book *UnInvited*, Patricia White equates “queerness” to being “touched by the supernatural.” See pages 61-63.

ghosts reclaim sexuality and unambiguously actualize their own authenticity. This phenomenon suggests a renegotiation of boundaries and a kind of repossession and transferal of the terror inflicted upon them.

11 In many horror film and television narratives, there is heterosexual closure for the victims of the haunting.⁶ The family unit is thereby restored and heterosexual love between the main characters may endure as the ghosts retreat. Unlike these common horror narratives, at the end of *Murder House*, all three Harmons die within the house and are absorbed into the supernatural realm. It can be inferred that the hypocrisies and pitfalls of their heterosexual practices are punished. The straight characters are no longer permitted to enact their sexuality in the world and are spirited into the closet and become ‘othered’. *Murder House* imagines a situation in which hetero-normalcy is dethroned, and *straights* are forced to live in a hereafter among *queers*. Therefore, their atypical happiness can only be derived from a space in which queerness’ manifestation is legitimized and acknowledged.

Uncommitted: *Asylum*, the Fluidity of Sexuality, and the Ontology of Performance

12 In *American Horror Story: Asylum* (Season Two), Lily Rabe plays Sister Mary Eunice, a prudent, devout postulate who serves as an attendant at Briarcliff Sanitarium for the criminally insane in the 1960s. Early in the season, inconsolable parents bring their unhinged son – who they believe to be possessed by the devil – to Briarcliff to seek counsel from religious officials. After several attempts to treat him with psychotherapy and electroshock therapy, the priest performs an exorcism. During the ritual, the devil transfers from the body of the boy into that of Sister Mary Eunice. Unlike the uncontrollably violent inhabitation of the boy’s body, the devil’s occupancy of Sister Mary Eunice is more inconspicuous and furtively destructive. She is used as a vessel for the devil to enact terror on Briarcliff and its patients. As demonstrated in Rabe’s performance, the character transitions from a virtuous, prude, and compassionate figure into a manipulative, sexually aberrant, and altogether wicked incarnation. In order to acquire supremacy at Briarcliff, the devil must ‘perform’ and appear to be human. This specific diegetic scenario posits the tension between performance and the authentication of the self. In a single

⁶ White uses Robert Wise’s 1961 film *The Haunting* as an example for how heterosexual love is reinstated in the end of the film once the ghosts are spirited away. See pages 78-80.

season, Rabe's character's inhabitation changes, and as a result "she" – the duality of the actor and the role, the spirit and the body – is in flux.

13 *Asylum* hyperbolizes the concept of theatricality and performance in a variety of capacities.⁷ Within the world of the story, the Briarcliff's patients – or more appropriately prisoners – must perform sanity in order to leave the institution and integrate into society. They can either act authentically and risk staying committed to Briarcliff or alternatively 'perform' in conjunction with societal criteria. Similarly, queer individuals who do not conform to sex-role expectations and exhibit the permissible interest in the opposite sex are castigated. Subsequently, societal institutions toil to sequester the behavior divergent of acceptable expressions of heterosexuality, because as scholar Jack Babuscio suggests, "Gayness is seen as [...] a collective denial of the moral and social order of things" (123). Analogous to the practice of passing as sane, passing for straight is indicative of a queer experience and thereby forcing queers to transform into synthetic being.

14 Extending upon this notion, one character – Lana Winters (played by Sarah Paulson, who is openly queer but does not adhere to a specific sexual orientation),⁸ a journalist who attempts cover a story on Briarcliff and its atrocities – is committed to the sanatorium for her homosexuality and having a same-sex partner. Lana, a victim of discrimination, must decide whether she will perform straight or remain a prisoner. As she refuses to perform heterosexual interest and confess sexual reformation, Briarcliff's psychiatrist, Dr. Thredson, determined to cure her homosexual illness, kidnaps and rapes her. After facing abuse and near death, Lana escapes imprisonment only to be wrongfully and ironically placed back in the care of Sister Mary Eunice at Briarcliff. As Lana tries to explain that Dr. Thredson (played by Quinto) raped her, Mary Eunice – or the devil – tells her that she is pregnant with Thredson's child. Mary Eunice informs her that if she acknowledges and embraces the pregnancy, she is effectively cured from her illness, but if she terminates the pregnancy she will remain branded as a lesbian. This quandary is a metaphor for the ultimatums with which queer individuals are confronted. The oppressive heterocentric institution dictates Lana's sexuality.

⁷ In *Cinema as Camp (AKA Camp and the Gay Sensibility)*, Jack Babuscio discusses the theater as a model for life and how "roles" must adhere to heteronormative standards. Thus, gays and lesbian, as 'roles' in society, are unaccepted. See pages 123-124.

⁸ In an interview, Sarah Paulson discusses her experience with *American Horror Story* in relation to her own sexual identity: <http://www.afterellen.com/tv/230031-sarah-paulson-talks-sexuality-and-freak-show>

15 *American Horror Story*'s non-traditional anthology form transcends cinematic and televisual paradigms that ultimately bestow narrative and thematic autonomies. Customarily, television lends itself to long-form storytelling, as demonstrated with serials that sustain for decades. Unlike the film form, which typically works towards a definitive ending, television shows are afforded the opportunity to endure, expand, and experiment. Yet, television still has an ephemeral quality; shows are susceptible to abrupt extinction should networks deem the efforts unprofitable. *American Horror Story* simultaneously speaks to both of these televisual traditions: the expansive and the fleeting. Like other anthologies and serialized shows, each season of *American Horror Story* is predicated on an entirely different story, setting, and characters while retaining consistent themes, moods, and horror and soap opera attributes. Although *American Horror Story* is not the first anthology series and now runs alongside other shows like HBO's *True Detective* (2014 – present) and FX's *Fargo* (2014 – present) which also promise new premises and sets of characters/actors with each new season, *American Horror Story* is distinct in that it appropriates the troupe theatre model; it uses many of the same actors each season but casts them in diverse roles. From season to season, actors who play supporting or guest roles fill main roles, actors who play heroes return as villains, and actors who play straight or non-binary parts play queer characters. By extension, this grants queer actors the opportunity to play given queer characters. Two specific examples are Zachary Quinto and Sarah Paulson: Quinto plays a gay supporting role in *Murder House* but transitions into a heterosexual leading antagonist in *Asylum*; conversely, Paulson plays a supporting character who does not articulate a sexual preference in Season One but plays Lana — a queer leading player — in *Asylum*.⁹

16 On one hand, this model gives actors a range of diverse roles and focuses on dynamic queer characters. It maintains superlative narrative inventiveness and successfully keeps audiences enraptured in the perpetually evolving and expanding *American Horror Story* universe. It also does not restrict actors to certain sex roles or orientations within that universe. Because of this, queer and straight actors are allowed to play characters that reflect their own sexual identities but also can transcend these binaries. The image of the actor is not cemented in the *American Horror Story* role they play on one particular season – queer, straight, or undefined. In many queer paradigms on television when the sexual preference of the character

⁹ In an interview with *New York Magazine*, Actor Zachary Quinto spoke publically about his sexual orientation. "What's Up, Spock?" by Benjamin Wallace, *New York Magazine*, October 17, 2011. <http://nymag.com/movies/features/zachary-quinto-2011-10/>

does not align with the orientation of the actor portraying the character, audiences are asked to recognize the division between the actor and role. Lynne Joyich acutely articulates this nuance of performance:

TV may attempt to employ ‘diegetically real queers’ to assure audiences of the disconnection between gay and straight, identity and mask, yet ‘non-diegetically real queers’ may provoke epistemological crises along these same fault lines. There are countless [shows] in which actors cast in gay roles strive to create unassailable divisions between the person and the part (10-11).

17 Speaking to Joyrich’s point, in serialized shows, actors are often pressured to pronounce the divisions between the role and their personal lives. The actors in *American Horror Story* do not have to emphasize this distinction the same way other TV actors must. Here, the element of performance is constantly oscillating, so the viewers are only asked to acknowledge the truth of the character rather than consciously ascertain the resemblance or dissonance between the actor and the role. As such, the variability and impermanence of role-playing is parallel to the fluidity of sexuality. The binaries between gay and straight do not exist, and *American Horror Story* radically argues, “Sex roles are superfluous” (Babuscio 123).

Long Live the Queens: *Coven* and Camp

18 After a grim and repellent second season, *American Horror Story*’s anthology structure gave the third season the chance to reimagine itself and departed considerably in tone and style from its prior installment. While the series retained much of its gothic horror elements, many critics noted its elevated campiness.¹⁰ For this reason, the season’s reception was critically divided but did prove to capture dedicated audiences; *Coven*’s finale was the most-watched episode of the series and the show’s viewership nearly doubled from the second season.¹¹ Merely a matter of taste, this increased popularity suggests a celebration of an ingrained aestheticism, so it is important to examine one of the season’s most frequently cited attributes, ‘Camp’, and how it works to provide transgressive viewing pleasures for queer audiences and validates the queer existence.

¹⁰ *The Hollywood Reporter*’s critic Allison Keene praised *Coven*’s balance of gothic horror and intentional ‘camp’ aesthetic in an Oct. 7, 2013 review of *American Horror Story: Coven*: <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movie/american-horror-story/review/644348>

¹¹ In an *Entertainment Weekly* article, “‘American Horror Story: Coven’ Final Most-Watched Yet,” James Hibberd examines *Coven*’s increased ratings. *Coven*’s finale totaled about 5.8 million viewers and the season averaged about 4 million viewers. This article was posted on January 17, 2015. <http://www.ew.com/article/2014/01/30/american-horror-story-coven-finale-most-watched-yet>

19 Before discussing *Coven*'s expression of the Camp aesthetic, it is necessary to bring into conversation the spirit of Camp and its intrinsic connection to queer sensibilities. Camp, according to Susan Sontag's seminal article, functions as an aesthetic above all else and celebrates life as artifice. As a result, Camp offers an alternate set of standards without interrogating or defining what is "good or bad", as Sontag distinguishes. There exist only varying personal indulgences derived from the material at hand, though some could read Camp as an inversion of the good and the bad (Sontag 53-54). Later in her piece, she explains that this aestheticism predominantly contributes to why Camp resonates so strongly with the queer communities.¹² Within Camp's domain, that which is considered "bad" is permitted to be "good". For queer audiences, this upturn of discrimination and classification speaks to the experience of being socially ostracized or condemned and proactively subverting culture. Aestheticism, Sontag argues, is the tool queers use to assimilate into society and "neutralize indignation" (Sontag 54).

20 Babuscio extends Sontag's classifications to tease out the connections between Camp and queer sensibilities. If queers' authentic natures have remained relatively undisclosed, then Camp – as a kind of subculture – can be utilized to communicate gay sensibilities and creative energies that are alternative to the conventional. Social oppression complicates human feelings, and Camp is a response to the need to channel the complicated emotions into something productive, triumphant, and bellicose. *Coven* appropriates these ideals to observe a New Orleans school and refuge for young witches to harvest and refine their diverse supernatural powers. Fiona Goode (played by Jessica Lange) heads Miss Robichaux's Academy for women. She is the 'Supreme' of the coven and must identify the most gifted witch to succeed her as the new reigning Supreme of Robichaux's Academy for Exceptional Young Ladies. The young witches, exiled from their former communities and families, possess powers including clairvoyance, voodoo magic, and the ability to raise the dead. While the season traces the inter-tension and drama between witches in the coven and other outlying witch communities, they ultimately learn they must band together to fight the larger institutional powers laboring to exterminate them.

21 Observing Camp traditions, *Coven* highlights visual opulence in the mise-en-scène as a

¹² Sontag specifically uses the term "homosexual" whereas this paper replaces that term with "queer" for consistency.

mode of expression and tactic to avert pain and deal with hostile diegetic and non-diegetic environments. Miss Robichaux's Academy and its inhabitants prioritize style over substance; their lifestyle is saturated in extreme extravagance. The Academy and living quarters are in a Southern mansion in the Garden District of New Orleans – evoking beauty, ostentation, and an undercurrent of Gothicism. There are tall bay windows sizable enough to let light flood into the tope-colored halls, a grand foyer and staircase, and ornate antique furniture. Complementary with the set decoration, the women's hybridize wardrobes resemble the dark essence often associated with witches but also exude a modern sexuality. Typifying this style, in an early sequence, Fiona forces the young witches out of the house for a tour of the French Quarter. Led by Fiona carrying a black parasol, all the women walk in unison along the city sidewalk within the cinematic frame. Their sleek, black dresses in concert with the hyper-styled filmic framing give off an air of seduction, macabre, and impending narrative danger.

22 Myrtle Snow, played by Frances Conroy, personifies visual eccentricity. Head of the Witches Council and former Miss Robichaux's student, she wears flamboyant vintage attire. Donning vibrantly colored frocks, floral shawls, 1950's cat-eye glasses, lace gloves, and fiercely crimped red hair, Myrtle's couture-conscious image pays tribute to the muses from a campy John Waters films. After being wrongfully accused of crime against a witch and burned at the stake, Myrtle is brought back to life only to enact vengeance on the witches who framed her. Ironically, in the end Myrtle sacrificially confesses her crimes against the other witches and brings herself back to burn at the stake. Accompanied by music icon Stevie's Nick's "Silver Springs", Myrtle – dressed in a crimson gown and chic sunglasses – processes with the young witches back to the stake for death by fire. Again, all the witches are dressed black attire holding parasols – harkening back to the earlier sequence of the witches' procession through the French Quarter. After dousing Myrtle in gasoline, she is asked for her last words. Myrtle says, "Only one", before wailing, "Balenciaga!" Balenciaga was a Spanish fashion designer, and *Coven's* costume designer disclosed that creator Ryan Murphy wanted Myrtle to "go out in style". Her final words are thus a tribute to fashion.¹³

23. While Myrtle's second execution illuminates the show's deliberate style and melodrama – and an inside joke for viewers familiar with high fashion – the sequence also marks the show's

¹³ Lindzi Scharf observes Myrtle Snow's connection to fashion, specifically 'Balenciaga', in her article for *Entertainment Weekly*: "Myrtle Snow Wasn't Wearing Balenciaga", Posted January 17, 2015. <http://www.ew.com/article/2014/02/03/american-horror-story-coven-myrtle-snow-not-wearing-balenciaga>

vulgar interlaying of odd and brutal violence in tandem with dark comedy. Throughout the show, the gratuitous violence, more often than not, is laced with biting humor. Fearing the young witch Madison will replace her as the coven's Supreme, Fiona slits her throat in the coven's drawing room. Fiona leaves her bloodied body on the rug, sits on the sofa, lights a cigarette and says, "This coven doesn't need a new supreme. It needs a new rug".¹⁴ Just as Camp appreciates vulgarity, *Coven* finds innumerable opportunities to pair caustic humor with the gruesome content in order to undercut the anger of the repressed. It does not merely protect the self from the selective external world but also combat the oppressive forces. Even though the comedy serves as an anesthetic for hardship, making light of malicious acts, it also challenges the status quo blurring the binary between right and wrong.

24 It is futile to discuss *American Horror Story: Coven*, a women-centered season, without discussing the iconography and textual significance of the show's consistent leading player, Jessica Lange (the show's primary muse), and her cohort of seasoned female performers: Angela Bassett, Kathy Bates, Frances Conroy, Patti Lupine, and Stevie Nicks. These vibrant, discourteous, brazen performers, all distinguished and celebrated in their respective mediums (television, film, music, and theater) facilitate the series' excessiveness and Camp appeal. Sontag theorizes that Camp hails the element of performance and "instant character", which is defined as "state of continual incandescence – a person being one, very intense thing" (61). In other words, this is the celebration of elegantly aging divas while deriving pleasure in witnessing the anxiety to maintain youth. The troupe of elder witches – all very intense and brilliant personas – exudes uninhibited light.

25 *Coven* interrogates the triumphs and pitfalls of immortality and the unquenchable yearning to stay young. Fiona, the coven's longstanding Supreme, acknowledges the inevitable coronation of a new supreme on the horizon, but refuses to abdicate her sovereignty and surrender to old age and chronic illness. Throughout the season, she strategizes – and murders – in order to preserve her ruling position for as long as possible. Much like Fiona, these female actors who prove they have yet to reach their prime, reclaim the televisual space that customarily favors younger performers. Sontag also asserts that the desire for perpetual youth and significance compatible with queer sensibilities. If 'youth' is emblematic of *social relevance*,

¹⁴ This quote comes from the episode, "The Replacements," *American Horror Story: Coven* 3.3, Dir. Alfonso Gomez-Rejon, Aired Oct. 23, 2013, FX Network.

Fiona's crusade – along with Lange the actress and her supporting cast of divas' collective destruction of cultural classifications and repossession of beauty and power – speaks to queer activists' strive to upset traditional institutional practices.

Conflicting Agendas: Alienation, Commodification, and Assimilation in *Freak Show*

26 If *Coven* conceives of a reality in which marginalized people – characterized by witches and other supernatural beings – are able to unite and vivaciously riot against institutional oppression, Season Four: *Freak Show* is a cynical and lamenting social critique of a world averse and incapable of giving disenfranchised people, specifically 'othered' or queer people, the space to live authentically and unreservedly. As a dark fable, *Freak Show* confronts society's strides to alienate diverse populations as well as the exploitation and commodification of the 'exotic' until it threatens traditional cultural practices.

27 *Freak Show* focuses on the fall of one of the only remaining freak shows in South Florida in the 1950s, a home for rejected, abandoned, and abused individuals labeled as deformed and unfit to join society. Posed as a sanctuary from the cruelty of the external world, "Fräulein Elsa's Cabinet of Curiosities" is home to a troupe of performers in need of income, emotional support, and protection from others who regard them 'monsters'. This season reimagines many of the themes from the 1932 horror film *Freaks* and, like the film, the company includes conjoined twins, 'pinheads', a bearded woman, a strong man, and a woman who is under the impression that she is intersexual. Diegetically and non-diegetically, identities that typically lie on the fringes of society are alternatively illuminated and granted permission and a platform to be courageous, flawed, heroic, and dignified. In the same way society assumes human bodies and sexuality falls into rigid binary systems and those that cannot adhere to those classifications are cast out, the protagonists at the freak show give dignity to the 'othered'.

28 *Freak Show* focuses on the approaching dangers and threats of extinction that Elsa's performers face. Simplistically, *Freak Show* argues that the true monsters in society are the people who disregard and separate people who are different. But perhaps more unforgivable than those who exclude and reject the dignity of those who are different are the sins of those who strive to commoditize and exploit the 'exoticism' of the outcast individuals. This devastating conflict is played out in several corresponding narratives. The most unambiguous embodiment of this evil is the perverted and deplorable Dandy Mott and his feeble-minded mother Gloria. After

attending a show, Dandy becomes fascinated with the performers and demands his mother to purchase the conjoined twins, Bette and Dot, so that he may enjoy and eventually marry them. Initially, Dot is excited at the chance to be celebrated by someone, but her sister Bette distrusts his intentions. Throughout the narrative, his obsession and desire to own the Bette and Dot intensifies and quickly becomes wholly destructive. Fueled by his mother's blind adoration, he holds them captive and murders all those who counteract his efforts.

29 Dandy has traits that classify as a first-class citizen and among the majority: he is a white, handsome, wealthy, heterosexual man. Perhaps more deceitfully, characters with covert abnormalities commoditize and assert control over the freak show performers so they may assimilate and conceal their own deformities. Should their oddities ever be disclosed, society would classify them as 'freaks'. Elsa Mars (played by Jessica Lange) is a German expatriate and the manager of the 'Cabinet of Curiosities'. Elsa, with two hidden prosthetic legs, diverts attention away from her abnormalities through exploiting the oddities of her performers. She is in a perpetual state of ambivalence; though she wants to protect and provide a sanctuary for *her* "rescued monsters", she selfishly taps into the community's desire to gaze upon 'othered' individuals as means to bolster her own recognition. She uses the allure of the other performers as a vehicle to showcase her own musical talents. Seduced by the chance to be discovered, she misuses and sells out the company.

30 Exacerbating Elsa's weakness and greed, conman Stanley, played by the openly queer Denis O'Hare, and his young accomplices disguise themselves as Hollywood talent scouts and prey upon Elsa and her performers. Their primary objective, however, is to kidnap and kill some of the performers in order to sell them as exclusive oddities to a museum. The irony, however, is that Stanley also has an abnormality (unusually large genitalia) which he is able to hide more effortlessly than the freak show performers. Beyond that, Stanley is gay but dons a heterosexual façade in order to seduce and control Elsa. Coupling his physical abnormality with his latent sexual nature, Stanley's case speaks to the demise and impairment of repression of identity. While this is not to suggest that one's suppression of identity inevitably leads to the abuse of others, it does illuminate the consequences of repression on a grander scale. Stanley and Elsa are victims of a homogenous society that condemns practices and natures deviating from the norm; while not completely absolved from responsibility, their malevolent actions are – to an extent – the result of ubiquitous discriminatory cultural ideologies.

31 The theme of commodification corresponds with and comments on the relationship between the TV industry and queer actors and representations onscreen. Returning to the point introduced earlier, Ron Becker outlines the rising presence of gay and lesbian characters and roles on primetime network TV during a period he calls “The Gay 90s”, a time of increased gay-themed programming. While visibility of queer character and diegetic scenarios improved after decades that “virtually denied the existence of homosexuality” (Becker 389), the perpetuated images were commercially dictated and disseminated. Queer identities were only welcomed when they could be nicely situated within industrial and economic agenda. Supporting this, quickly executives realized that wealthy, intellectual, liberally minded gays and lesbians were a lucrative market, so conglomerates targeted this specific demographic with corresponding characterization and narratives. Characters resembling this finite image (reflecting the targeted queer audience) proliferated primetime programs and were packaged and sold to audiences who could improve ratings. Consequently, this gave way to stereotypes associated with queer subjectivities and propagated narrow representations. Like the freak show performers, queer lives can only be conditionally acknowledged and praised if there are monetary incentives backing them.

32 *Freak Show* concludes as a ‘Juvenalian’ satire – a cynical and despondent commentary that suggests society’s discrimination is responsible for its own demise. The conditions are such that disadvantaged and rejected ‘others’ who cannot or refuse to assimilate in the mainstream will be obliterated and deferred to a liminal space elsewhere. There can never be a safe place on Earth for them to enact their own authenticity. Only in a hereafter succeeding death do they have permission to self-actualize. In order to pursue an entertainment career in Hollywood, Elsa abandons the show and sells the performers’ contracts to Dandy. In turn, the performers are faced with an ultimatum: stay in the fallen refuge under Dandy’s tyranny or attempt to mask their oddities and assimilate in society. After the company submits to Dandy’s demands, he massacres almost all of the remaining members. Symbolizing the queer experience in the 1950s and today, they must integrate and adopt conventional practices or surrender to death. It is important to acknowledge that this finale does not indoctrinate viewers or endorse the notion that conformity is the sole requisite for salvation. Rather, this season exposes and criticizes the discriminatory demands put upon marginalized citizens as well as society’s destructive nature of exclusion and commodification.

After Shock

33 *American Horror Story*, a comprehensive horror anthology series, “functions in a place beyond heterocentric frames” (Doty xxii-xxiii). The show works to “illustrate and illuminate the process of forming both gay and straight sexual identities in the face of societal heteronormativity” (Chambers 17-18). It examines horror, deconstructs it, and uses it as a lens to understand alternative subjectivities. Indirectly, through various tactics – Camp, social satire, and performance just to identify a few – reclaims and displaces the terror often forced upon queer identities and meritoriously establishes a space for confrontational and critical queer discourse and cultural examination. As a subversive text, the show acknowledges that gay subjectivities are the amalgamation of queer and straight experiences – from triumphs to failures – and provide society with esteemed and constructive world perspectives.¹⁵ It not only provides sustainable viewing pleasure for queer spectators but also a platform for contemporary televisual activism against homophobia – for queer and non-queer participants alike.

34 The show’s malleable formal elements – including the adaptable casting and closed seasonal narratives – as well as its commitments to exploring and disrupting genre tenets gives its thematic content boundless occasions to subvert audiences’ expectations. The show’s narrative liberties afford it the chance to routinely reinvent itself. With its persistent fluxing form, *American Horror Story*’s spectatorship and audience enticement will remain erratic. As discussed, each season’s atmospheric and tonal shifts as well as the casting of the show acting troupe concurrently attract and alienate viewers with the promise of ingenuity. With Season Five: *Hotel*’s advent in the Fall 2015, and with it the fundamental performer Jessica Lange’s departure after four seasons at the center of the narrative and a primary attraction, the show’s potential viewership is uncertain. But, the casting of pop-star Lady Gaga as the lead will undoubtedly amass a different energetic audience. This form lends itself to inclusion, and encourages media forms to find opportunities to appeal to myriad subjectivities. Within *American Horror Story*’s arena for assorted spectators, marginalize experiences – including those of queer individuals – are not only affirmed but can consume and celebrate television with other communities on the fringe.

¹⁵ In his article “The Cinema of Camp”, Babuscio writes, “Those who malign or reject the existence of a gay sensibility will too often overlook the fact that the feelings and creative productions of artists, gay or straight, are the sum total of their experiences” (132-133).

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“For What Crime Was I Driven from Society?”

Material Bodies in Hays’s *The Victim of Prejudice* and Shelley’s *Frankenstein*

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Abstract:

Despite their similar themes of ravaged female bodies and voiceless women, Mary Hays’s *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799) and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) have not been considered together. Taken together, these novels dramatize the double bind that women face as material objects and thinking subjects during the nineteenth century. Applying Julia Kristeva’s psychoanalytic theories of the *chora* and the abject, in addition to Jacques Lacan’s theory of the law of the father, I argue that when Hays’s central character Mary Raymond and Shelley’s creature, whom Shelley uses to provide a voice for the otherwise voiceless female characters, enter the symbolic order, they come to understand the significance of their material bodies and their lack of power. In Kristevan terms, Mary and the creature begin in the maternal *chora*, which they both reject. After entering the realm of the law of the father, Mary, a rape victim, and the creature, an unnatural being, understand the presence of the abject. The typical reaction to the abject is one of horror, as it threatens to break down meaning and the symbolic. While society reacts with horror, viewing Mary and the creature as monstrous, Mary and the creature themselves accept it, but, first, they undergo harrowing circumstances. Acquiring knowledge and language only constricts and fragments Mary’s and the creature’s identities. When Mary and the creature become aware of their bodies, they attempt to reject society’s confinements and transcend its boundaries. While they find transcendence when they escape in their imaginations, a place that transcends the symbolic, they are unable to transcend society’s verbal reactions to their material bodies. Their transcendence is momentary, and they ultimately fail. Despite their failure in patriarchal society, Mary and the creature return the abject to the abyss of death, which they look forward to, wherein they will leave behind the patriarchal language and the Father’s law.

1 In Mary Hays’s *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799) and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), Mary Raymond’s and the creature’s identities are circumscribed when their material bodies prevent them from attaining the agency they desire. After Mary is raped, she learns “that her desire and her body are perverse and unacceptable to respectable society” (Ty, “Imprisoned Female Body” 144). Viewed as “perverse and unacceptable”, Mary recognizes her subordinate role and learns that her body will be subject to men’s gazes at all times. Although Mary actively resists victimization and attempts to find happiness, she remains a victim of a patriarchal society. Similarly, in *Frankenstein*, the creature recognizes society’s injustice when he is rejected and abused for his deformed body. Shelley uses the male creature to provide a voice for the otherwise voiceless female characters in the novel. Although a male, he encounters treatment similar to Mary Raymond and is in several regards marked as female. He faces the same

problems as females in the nineteenth century: he may not interact with society, he lacks the agency to own property and other material possessions, and he faces prejudices based on his material body. Therefore, he may be read as both a male and a female. Within the two texts, neither the victims who rage against their plight (Mary Raymond and the creature) nor the silent victims who remain passive (*Frankenstein's* Elizabeth) find happiness. The novels, taken together, demonstrate a pervasive feature of women's lives at the time and reflect the impossible circumstances that women faced then. Both Mary and the creature are outcasts due to society's unfair labels and prejudices.

2 To better understand their situations, I apply Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic theories of the *chora* and the abject, in addition to Jacques Lacan's theory of the law of the father. Mary and the creature begin in the *chora*: "a prelinguistic, pre-oedipal signifying process centered on the infant's complete immersion and oneness with the body of the mother" (Hoeveler 50-1). Then, repressing the maternal *chora*, Mary and the creature fall into language and enter the symbolic, which Lacan defines as "the realm of the law of the father, in which the 'phallus' (the symbol of the father's power) was the 'privileged signifier' for all discourse" (50). Here, Mary and the creature understand the consequences of their material bodies. Accordingly, Mary and the creature attempt to reject society's confinements and transcend its boundaries; however, their transcendence is momentary, and they ultimately fail. They learn that they never really separated from the "body of the mother": "the mother's body, now called 'the abject,' can never be completely expelled from one's consciousness and instead always exists on the borders of one's identity" (51). Mary and the creature understand the presence of the abject when they are outcast from society. The typical reaction to the abject is one of horror, as it threatens to break down meaning and the symbolic. While society reacts with horror, viewing Mary and the creature as unacceptable, Mary and the creature themselves accept it. In order to complete total transcendence, Mary and the creature return the abject to the abyss of death, which they look forward to, wherein they will leave behind the patriarchal language and the Father's law.

3 At the beginning of *The Victim of Prejudice*, Mary focuses on her intellectual abilities, rather than her physical attributes, until a man introduces desire and sexuality to her. As a young girl, Mary finds happiness in her mental pursuits: "[M]y figure was light and airy, my step firm, my aspect intelligent, and my mind inquisitive" (Hays 5). Mary places significance upon strength – "my firm step" – and her intellect – "my mind inquisitive"; furthermore, she regards her body

as “light and airy”, avoiding sexually charged terms and employing spiritual terms. Mary lives with her guardian, Mr. Raymond, who provides her with a “liberal education” (7) and whose house she calls a “dear and well-known asylum” (14). Mary’s education helps her to understand the possibilities besides marriage and family that exist for her in the world. Accordingly, Mary’s mind and body are not separate entities, but united. However, Mr. Raymond will soon influence her to separate from “reason”: “In *Volatile Bodies*, feminist Elizabeth Grosz points out that in Western philosophy from Plato to Descartes there has been a tradition of separating the mind from the body. This dualism is often gendered and hierarchized so that women are associated with the body, while men are linked to the mind or reason” (Ty, “Imprisoned Female Body” 147-8). As a woman, Mary exists at the bottom of the “hierarchized” separation. Consequently, the paradisiacal nature of her life at her “asylum” is a pre-fall in the Garden of Eden, before God imposes gender distinctions, so to speak, and Mr. Raymond will destroy this paradise.

4 Mr. Raymond assumes he may legitimately reduce Mary to her sex simply because she is a woman. He treats Mary equally; however, this is a false paradise of equality, for Mr. Raymond begins to question and “doubt” Mary’s education when his charge, William Pelham, and Mary display signs of something more than platonic friendship (Hays 25). Mr. Raymond reduces Mary to her physical aspects and thereby cannot appreciate her as an individual. Eleanor Ty explains that “[t]hrough language”, Mr. Raymond introduces Mary to her feelings for William, and he prompts her “to see herself as a sexual being” (“Imprisoned Female Body” 143-4). Mary begins to think of herself in terms of her body, for the conversation “awaken[s] in my heart new desires” (34). She turns her attention away from her mind and toward her “heart” and her body. Here, Mary represses “the completely unified mother and child [the *chora*]” (Hoeveler 51). If Mary follows the same trajectory of Kristeva’s theory, she must repress the *chora* – considered “unacceptable [and] anti-social” – to assume her “clean and proper” place within society: “In *Powers of Horror* [Kristeva] argues that it is only through the delimitation of the ‘clean and proper’ body that the symbolic order, and the acquisition of a sexual and psychical identity within it, becomes possible” (Gross 86). Accordingly, when Mary enters “the symbolic order” and “acquire[s] a sexual identity”, she heeds Mr. Raymond’s advice: “Far be from my heart, then, these weak and womanish regrets” (Hays 40). As a young woman, she admires her strength, which she now considers a “womanish” weakness. She leaves in order to satisfy Mr. Raymond’s fears that her sexual allure will cause trouble in his home. She trusts his wisdom

above her own, acquiescing to his view of her body, falling into the naming conventions that subordinate her based on her sex.

5 Hays emphasizes how men label women, consequently undermining how women define themselves. Mary especially is confronted with her physical body when she meets Sir Peter Osborne, who preys upon her virtue and rapes her, exploiting her body. Upon first meeting Mary, Osborne tries to kiss her, and he objectifies her: “A little beauty! A Hebe! A wood-nymph! I must and will have a kiss; and damn me! You shall be welcome to all the grapes in the greenhouse” (Hays 14). When he uses the sexually suggestive words such as “beauty” and “wood-nymph”, he strips her identity down to her physical appearance. When Osborne identifies Mary with symbolic descriptions, he fixes her to a specific place in the symbolic order. Mary already exists in the symbolic order, but not in the way Osborne suggests. Osborne’s symbolic descriptions of Mary reflect Lacan’s theory that “It is the name, the symbol, that provides unity over time” (Oliver 20). Rather than “provide unity”, the symbols fragment Mary’s identity. Mary feels ashamed after Osborne’s objectification – he refers to Mary with sexually charged symbols: “beauty” and “wood-nymph” – as her cheeks are “flushed by the consciousness of guilt” (Hays 15). The symbolic ascriptions mark a change in Mary, and Lacan would refer to it as Mary entering “the realm of language and symbols, structures and differences, law and order” (McAfee 48). Osborne completes Mary’s prior introduction to language and the symbolic. She further represses what Kristeva calls the maternal, semiotic *chora* and enters the patriarchal ‘law and order’, which causes Mary’s “guilt”. The incident sacrifices part of what she regards as her virtue; however, she will do whatever it takes to remain in control of her virtue, and she will not willingly release that control to Osborne.

6 Despite her heroine’s resistance toward her victimizer, Hays emphasizes that a man like Osborne does not waver in his pursuit. First, he exerts verbal power over her when he labels her; next, he will exert physical control over her. Osborne continues to accost Mary. He wants Mary only for her body, which solidifies her role in society as a subordinate body rather than an independent mind. When she leaves Mr. Raymond’s house, she stays with his friends, the Nevilles; while there, Osborne forces himself into their company. Once Mary leaves the Nevilles’ care and her guardian dies, Osborne seizes his opportunity to hold Mary prisoner at his London house. Trying to escape, she mistakenly takes refuge in his bedroom chamber, and he rapes her: “[T]he hour, the solitude, – my defenseless situation, – my confusion, my terror, – my

previous exhaustion [. . .] his native impetuosity, heightened by recent scenes of riot and festivity, by surprise, by pride, by resistance, – combined to effect my ruin” (Hays 116). Mary’s “confusion” and “terror” prevent her from fighting Osborne. When Osborne rapes Mary, he assumes authority over her:

[R]ape is structured like a language, a language which shapes both the verbal *and* physical interactions of a woman and her would-be assailant [. . .] The language of rape solicits women to position ourselves as endangered, violable, and fearful and invites men to position themselves as legitimately violent and entitled to women’s sexual services. (Marcus qtd. in Ty, “Imprisoned Female Body” 147)

Since “rape is structured like a language”, its language constricts Mary’s identity as much as the symbolic patriarchal language, defining her as “endangered”, rather than allowing Mary to define herself. The verbal scars of rape affect Mary as much as the physical. While she is able to transcend the physical repercussions, she will be unable to transcend the verbal because the symbolic order still traps her.

7 Hays’s heroine rejects the labels that society creates for women, and, through Mary, Hays portrays her redefined notion of virtue. Although Osborne takes away Mary’s virginity, “her *virtue* is intact if her hymen is not” (M. Brooks 21)¹. Mary responds to the rape as follows: “My honor, say you, can never be restored to me? Oh, ‘tis false! ‘tis base as barbarous! Its luster, which you have sought to obscure, will break out, in your despight, from the temporary cloud which envelopes it, with undiminished brightness” (Hays 119). For Mary, her “honor”, her virtue, persists even though Osborne rapes her and takes her virginity. Sustaining her honor’s “luster” transcends any of the repercussions she faces. Rejecting the language of the father, Mary continuously tries to redefine the word “virtue” itself, which signifies her collision with the symbolic order, language, and her attempt to control it. By challenging the notion that a woman who has sex outside of marriage is ruined, Hays strongly suggests that such a notion is false, and Mary “exposes it as the symbol it has always been” (M. Brooks 21). Mary still believes in her innocence, and she claims that her “honor” still exists, challenging Osborne’s subordinate view of her and the symbolic structure of society.

¹ Besides Ty’s work in the 1990s and M. Brooks’ 2012 article, there remains a lack of recent scholarship on Hays, specifically in regards to feminism. Laura Mandell’s “Bad Marriages, Bad Novels: The ‘Philosophical Romance’” (2008) discusses Mary and William’s relationship, but does not mention her rape. While Susan Purdie and Sarah Oliver’s “William Frennd and Mary Hays: Victims of Prejudice” (2010) discusses the rape, they focus more on Osborne and his behavior. Moreover, many scholars prefer to discuss Hays’s first novel *The Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796).

8 Despite Mary's rejection of society's labels, Osborne has already 'ruined' her, an act she cannot undo as far as society is concerned. Society remains steadfast, unaccepting of Mary's new definition of virtue, and it will punish Mary for her rebellion: "[T]he refusal to yield to the Father's law brings about marginalization and isolation under the specific historical and social circumstances in which [Hays] and her heroines lived" (Ty, "Mother and Daughter" 65). Although Mary rejects the "Father's law", she will pay a price. While Mary still believes in her virtue, which she views as "undiminished", Osborne claims that "honor and character, can [. . .] never be restored to you" (Hays 119). Osborne cautions Mary about society, which labels women as "either [the] lovely angel or [the] contaminated whore" (Ty, "Imprisoned Female Body" 139). Mary rejects Osborne's reasoning; therefore, when he tries to apologize for his actions and offers to take care of her financially, she deters him from further ruining her: "I spurn the wealth you offer, the cursed price of innocence and principle, and will seek, by honest labor, the bread of independence" (Hays 119). Even though Osborne takes away her physical virtue, he cannot take away what she regards as her internal virtue; nevertheless, society continues to push the Father's law upon Mary.

9 Hays illustrates that when a woman tries to change the patriarchal language and the Father's law, she is denied, such as when Mary maintains her definition of virtue. Men pay attention to her body – and, as in Mary's case, either abuse or violate it – but disregard her contribution to language. Aware of her sexuality and the importance society places upon it, Mary still attempts to change her fate and the fate of other fallen women. After Osborne rapes her, she does not feel ashamed. Her 'ruined' fate does not define her; rather, she rises above it, surviving: "The fact that Mary continues to live and fight for her dignity and self-sufficiency long after her loss of virginity is an indication of Hays's defiance of the popular belief in the male ability to manipulate the female through controlling her body" (Ty, "Mother and Daughter" 70). Mary maintains her "dignity and self-sufficiency" as indicated by the following assertion: "[V]irtue still maintains her empire in my bosom" (Hays 127). For Mary, her virtuous "empire" triumphs over Osborne's definition of her body; thus, she sustains her "empire", transcending the physical. Although she continuously refutes the physical ruin Osborne subjects her to, her internal virtue saves her from external antagonists for only so long.

10 Mary is beginning to transcend patriarchal restrictions, but the people around her follow and adhere to society's symbolic structures, specifically the definition of "virtue"; thus, because

society believes that she is ‘fallen’ and cannot recover her virtue, they think that she feigns innocence. Her employer thinks she will sleep with him due to rumors that she consensually slept with Osborne, rumors which are implied to have been spread by Osborne himself (Hays 139). Then, after she leaves that job, Osborne prevents her from becoming a traveling companion for a woman, and he taints her reputation in a town where she tends to a farm with Mr. Raymond’s servant, James (145, 162). Mary wants to escape her ‘fallen’ status, but everywhere she ventures, she meets more objectification. Men do not see an individual, but a body, which “is no longer private, but becomes a site for public viewing, for comparison, for abjection and horror [. . .] she becomes simply body and no mind in others’ eyes” (Ty, “Imprisoned Female Body” 149). People respond with “abjection and horror” because the abject, the maternal body, “persists in occupying the boundaries of the subject’s identity” (Mulvey-Roberts 198). In Mary’s case, when she is raped, she comes into contact with one of these “boundaries” – the “unacceptable form of sexual desires” (Gross 87). Here, Kristeva means incest, but I suggest that rape fits the category. According to Kristeva, within abjection, “[m]eaning collapses” (2) and “‘I’ is expelled” (4). Despite these losses, Kristeva writes, “[a]bjection [. . .] is an alchemy that transforms death drive into a start of life, of new significance” (15). The “alchemy” will save Mary from the life Osborne and society subjects her to. Soon, Mary will begin the journey which will culminate in her death.

11 Hays underscores the interminable attack upon a ruined woman, even when she does not willingly choose her status. After overcoming the sexual way men define her, Mary understands that, at all times, her body is sexually violable for not only Osborne, but also other men, and she may escape them only in death. When her circumstances – poverty and eventually debtor’s prison – begin to reflect the consequences of Osborne raping her, her inner strength fails her, signifying that, in reality, she may transcend society’s boundaries momentarily, but not permanently. The people around her stay the same, continuing to follow society’s standards. Therefore, every time Mary transcends society’s boundaries, either Osborne or someone else forces her to face her grim reality, bringing her awareness back to her physical body. At first, she tries to stay positive: “The wrongs I had suffered appeared to me as a dream, the reality of which was wholly inconceivable” (Hays 135). She thinks of her injuries as a “dream” and hopes that they will not prevent her from living her life as she did before the rape. Nevertheless, Mary’s circumstances worsen:

Difficulties almost insuperable, difficulties peculiar to my sex, my age, and my unfortunate situation, opposed themselves to my subsistence: amidst the luxuriant and the opulent, who surrounded me, I put in no claims either for happiness, for gratification, or even for the common comforts of life: yet, surely, *I had a right to exist!* – For what crime was I driven from society? (141)

Mary's "crime", being a rape victim, overwhelms her life. Her situation appears all too real as unfortunate events unfold, and she "sink[s] beneath a torrent" (168). Once she becomes "simply body", she cannot return to the patriarchal definition of "virtue". Try as she might, the gender distinctions implicit in language suffocate her. She preserves her virtue internally; however, to society, she is ruined because all that matters to society is her body. When she realizes this, she falls fatally ill: "The disorder which has gradually wasted my strength and sapped the powers of life gains hourly ground" (174). Even though Mary exposes the patriarchal definition of womanhood, and specifically "virtue", she may not find freedom from society's oppression until she escapes the body that patriarchal language has circumscribed.

12 Hays's rebellious heroine attempts to change society's outlook upon women and their chastity; however, Mary withers under the cruel realities of living as a societal outcast. Her inner virtue fails to save her, and "Hays's plea for female independence can only be a future eventuality" (M. Brooks 22). After Osborne rapes Mary and she struggles for survival, she longs for death. No matter how strong and independent Mary is, she disintegrates under the hardships society presents to a physically ruined woman. Upon her final days, Mary rallies for change: "*I have lived in vain!* Unless the story of my sorrows should kindle in the heart of man, in behalf of my oppressed sex, the sacred claims of humanity and justice" (Hays 174). In recognizing her "oppressed sex", Mary casts off the Father's law. She returns the abject to the abyss of death; in doing so, Mary returns to "a stage preceding binary opposition and distinct categories, before language and naming" (Gross 93). In death, Mary discards society's labels and finds freedom from objectification. Mary fights her fate, but, outside of death, no escape exists for Hays's heroine, whose oppressor – society – crushes her.

13 Nineteen years later, Mary Shelley published *Frankenstein*, which also wrestles with the social injustice women faced in the nineteenth century: Elizabeth Lavenza and Victor Frankenstein's male creature, like Mary Raymond, suffer at the hands of a patriarchy which outcasts them based on their gender and material bodies. Whereas Hays portrays a heroine who embodies both proper womanhood and female rebellion, in Shelley's novel, the heroine is split

into two – the ‘good’, passive woman (Elizabeth) and the angry, independent creature (a man who is in several regards marked as female for the injustices he suffers due to his ‘otherness’, existing on the outside of acceptable society). Elizabeth acts passively and virtuously, adhering to societal expectations and succumbing to the Father’s law when she grows up and lives with Frankenstein’s family. During the nineteenth century, society divided men and women into two spheres: the public sphere for men and the private, domestic sphere for women (Mellor 220). The distinction between spheres “causes [women’s] destruction”, for “women cannot function effectively in the public realm” (221). They cannot participate in its symbolic language, which relegates them to the role of objects. Like Mary Raymond, Elizabeth, Victor Frankenstein’s childhood companion and fiancée, is subject to the symbolic language of patriarchal order, falling into subordination, unable to participate in it on an equal level with Frankenstein.

14 In Elizabeth, Shelley presents the proper woman; however, by staying within her proper, domestic sphere, her role is thankless, and she lives an empty life without agency. Throughout the novel, Elizabeth’s feelings are almost exclusively connected to the domestic and familial, and she lacks a role besides a companion and housewife. After all, as Mellor points out, Frankenstein believes in a “sexist aesthetic that insists that women be small, delicate, modest, passive, and sexually pleasing – but available only to their lawful husbands” (224).² Elizabeth fits this description. When Elizabeth and Frankenstein grow up together, he describes her as meek and mild: “She appeared the most fragile creature in the world [. . .] I loved to tend on her, as I should on a favorite animal” (Shelley 20). She fulfills her “small, delicate” role as an inferior “favorite animal”. Then, when Frankenstein’s mother dies, Elizabeth turns into the perfect, ideal woman, who remains “passive” in regards to her own life, but asserts action in her domestic tasks,

[R]enew[ing] the spirit of cheerfulness in our little society. Since the death of her aunt, her mind had acquired new firmness and vigor. She determined to fulfill her duties with the greatest exactness; and she felt that that most imperious duty, of rendering her uncle and cousins happy, had devolved upon her. (26)

² While scholarship on the feminist and psychoanalytic aspects of *Frankenstein* remains prevalent, recent scholarship focuses mainly on the replacement of women with technology or the parent/child relationship between Frankenstein and the creature. See, for instance, Galia Benziman’s “Challenging the Biological: The Fantasy of Male Birth as a Nineteenth-Century Narrative of Ethical Failure” (2006) and Donna Mitchell’s “Of Monsters and Men: Absent Mothers and Unnatural Children in the Gothic ‘Family Romance’” (2014).

Before she even marries Victor, she performs the “duties” of a wife and mother, overseeing the Frankenstein household and taking care of the Frankenstein family. Moreover, Frankenstein appreciates her appearance, or her “sexually pleasing” looks: “She was now a woman in stature and expression of countenance, which was uncommonly lovely” (53). Mary Raymond’s marginalized status results from her rape and subsequent hardships, whereas Elizabeth’s begins with her limited role in the domestic sphere and later ends with her death. Unlike Mary Raymond, Elizabeth does nothing to fight her marginalized position. With the exception of the occasional letter, Elizabeth is voiceless. When she speaks, she speaks of the household and of her loved ones; thus, she remains the ideal woman, living within the patriarchal language of symbolic order and uncompromised in her passivity.

15 Shelley uses Elizabeth to portray the passive woman, whereas the creature is used as a vehicle to reveal women’s issues, which include the mistreatment he meets due to his outward appearance. Unlike his creator, Frankenstein, the creature is not simply male. Frankenstein, and later others, label and mistreat the creature because of his material body. He encounters social injustices similar to Mary Raymond’s, and “the lifting of a monstrous mask produces a startling unveiling: beneath the contorted visage of Frankenstein’s creature lurks a timorous yet determined female face” (Knoepflmacher 112). Unlike Elizabeth, the “determined” creature seeks vengeance for the cruelties he suffers: “[I]t can find an outlet for hatred not permissible for nineteenth-century daughters” (95). With a “female face”, the creature acts with “hatred” in Elizabeth’s stead. Like Mary in *The Victim of Prejudice*, the creature’s body is mistreated by others, which provokes his hatred. After the creature is abandoned and he survives on his own, he comes into contact with humans, who mistreat him for no other reason than his physical appearance: “The whole village was roused; some fled, some attacked me, until, [I was] grievously bruised by stones and many other kinds of missile weapons” (Shelley 73). During the incident, the creature understands the material realities of his body – it causes people to attack him – and the wrongs of women, who suffer from “masculine cruelty and injustice” (Mellor 222). He learns “cruelty and injustice” more clearly when he acquires language.

16 The creature’s introduction to language limits his identity, and he thereby learns that it privileges men, which he cannot be labeled as. Falling into language and the symbolic, the creature learns that he is an outcast. After the incident with the village, the creature hides in a “hovel”, watching a family, the De Lacey’s, interact in their cottage (Shelley 73). While he

watches the De Lacey's, he learns how to speak and how to read. Despite his new knowledge, his own identity remains an enigma, for he does not resemble his creator, Frankenstein: "And what was I? Of my creation and creator I was absolutely ignorant; but I knew that I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property" (83). When he acquires language, he becomes aware of his 'otherness' – his lack of money, friends, and property. His situation reflects Mary Raymond's after she is raped. Her status as a ruined woman prevents her from finding a job or friends, and Osborne continuously destroys any other prospects for her. Mary's and the creature's lack of possessions and prospects represent that they do not have agency. Furthermore, reading such texts as *Paradise Lost* causes the creature to ask Victor, "Was man indeed, at once so powerful, so virtuous, and magnificent, yet so vicious and base?" (83). It is through reading that he becomes aware of the evil of man. Nevertheless, he still believes in the goodness of others. Like Mary Raymond, he continues to think that he can change the minds of those around him. The creature plans to introduce himself to the blind father, who may accept him without prejudice: "[K]nowledge might make [the De Lacey's] overlook the deformity of my figure" (78). However, he carries out his plan unsuccessfully. The family, except for the father, looks upon him with "horror and consternation", while Felix, the son, accosts him violently, reinforcing how different he is (94). The creature wants to follow the Father's law and "be initiated into society through its entry into the symbolic and ultimately language" (Oliver 22). Every time the creature tries to enter "the symbolic" and "language", though, he is met with derision, reminded of his 'otherness' as a material reality similar to Mary Raymond.

17 Shelley supports the idea that naming separates those in marginalized positions from acceptable society. Instead of helping the creature develop his identity, naming makes him question his existence and view it as a burden. Despite their educations and efforts to enter society, Mary Raymond and the creature are outcasts; after all, they remain connected to the abject: "the monster can be read as a spectre of the maternal body as well as Frankenstein's monstrous child" (Mulvey-Roberts 199). As a "spectre of the maternal body", the creature begins his journey toward returning the abject to the abyss of death, but first he must experience the pitfalls of language. Shortly after he is rejected by the De Lacey's, the creature meets a boy, who he believes "was unprejudiced" (Shelley 100). However, the boy calls him "monster", "ugly wretch", and "ogre" (100). The boy's response quells the creature's attempts to fit in and is similar to Frankenstein's reaction. When the creature first awakens, Frankenstein runs away from

him. Upon meeting him again, Frankenstein names his creature, calling him “Devil”, “vile insect”, “[a]bhorred monster”, “fiend”, and “[w]retched devil”, among other names (67-8). Rather than name him like a father names a son, he uses slurs and pejoratives. The creature understands Frankenstein’s slight: “I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel” (68). The slurs remind the creature that he is ‘other’ rather than the human “Adam”. Lacan’s theory proposes that a name “provides unity over time” (Oliver 20). Since the creature never receives a name besides slurs, he never has a chance at “unity” in regards to his identity. His differences cause others to outcast him – differences not even knowledge changes, for, like a woman, he is “simply body”, the “Devil” that they see. Due to his injustices and being rebuffed so many times, he will ultimately reject the symbolic.

18 Shelley reinforces that, like women in the nineteenth century, marginalized creatures cannot fight to change their status. The creature reaches out to Frankenstein and attempts to change his fate, but his transcendence of society’s injustice lasts momentarily. He tries to become a ‘man’ by exerting power over women, specifically when he asks for a bride. He, like Adam, wants a mate, and he asks Frankenstein for “one as deformed and horrible as myself [who] would not deny herself to me. My companion must be of the same species, and have the same defects” (Shelley 101). When he receives his mate, he will not be the “villain” that his creator deems him, and he promises Frankenstein, “If I have no ties and no affections, hatred and vice must be my portion; the love of another will destroy the cause of my crimes” (103). He will attain a mate who is his equal. His paradisiacal Eve will not label him as an outcast, but accept and love him, and they will live outside the Father’s law, apart from society. He wants to communicate with his counterpart, and in that respect, he wants to retain his linguistic skills; however, he will soon understand the flaws in language and therefore must give up language. Despite the creature’s “activation of the symbolic order”, he bears false hope that he is successful, for “the godlike science of language [will] prove deceptive [. . .] it [will] not provide a way to overcome lack and satisfy desire—as, indeed, language never can” (P. Brooks 211). Frankenstein will destroy the creature’s counterpart, and the creature will not achieve what he wishes to; consequently, “language [will] prove deceptive”, and he will reject the symbolic, returning the abject to its abyss. Asking for a mate, he tries to return to a pre-fallen state, but he fails. He and Victor have already transgressed. The creature has killed innocent human beings,

and Frankenstein has played God. Nevertheless, Frankenstein promises to create the monster's companion.

19 Rather than fulfilling his promise, Frankenstein destroys the female creature – an act which may be read as rape³; accordingly, both Hays and Shelley portray rape as a way for men to silence 'monstrous' women and remind them that they are subordinate creatures. During the creation, Frankenstein second guesses his decision, for he perceives women as the weaker sex: "[A] female monster has more potential for excess, as femininity is conceived to be monstrous anyway" (Liggins 139). Just as society views Mary Raymond's femininity as "monstrous", Frankenstein views the female creature's the same way:

[S]he might become ten thousand times more malignant than her mate, and delight, for its own sake, in murder and wretchedness. [The creature] had sworn to quit the neighborhood of man, and hide himself in deserts; but she had not; and she, who in all probability was to become a thinking and reasoning animal, might refuse to comply with a compact made before her creation. (Shelley 118-9)

Thus, fearing the female creature's possible "malignant" nature and "reasoning" mind, Frankenstein remedies his mistake and destroys the female creature: "I thought with a sensation of madness on my promise of creating another like to him, and, trembling with passion, tore to pieces the thing on which I was engaged" (119). The words "trembling" and "tore" connote sexual violation, especially the word "tear", which compares to tearing a hymen. The action parallels Mary Raymond's rape. She is created like a "thinking and reasoning" creature, but the men in the novel reduce her to body and silence her. Like Mary Raymond, the female creature does not commit any crimes, but Frankenstein prejudices her as soon as the creature labels her "female", leaving her vulnerable to victimization. Frankenstein destroys the female creature before she has the opportunity to speak for herself or develop her own ideas: "Horrified by this image of uninhibited female sexuality, Victor Frankenstein violently reasserts a male control over the female body, penetrating and mutilating the female creature at his feet in an image that suggests a violent rape" (Mellor 224). Rape epitomizes the patriarchal silencing of women, the quintessential example of enforced passivity. The female creature will never threaten men's status as the superior creatures.

³ See, for instance, Judith Halberstam's *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (1995), which argues in a similar direction.

20 Even the women who accept their subordinate positions are punished. Seeking revenge for Frankenstein's broken promise, the creature kills Elizabeth on her wedding night and leaves her body "lifeless and inanimate, thrown across the bed, her head hanging down, and her pale and distorted features half covered by her hair" (Shelley 140-1). Elizabeth, "inanimate" and "distorted", no longer poses a threat, either. While she never opposes her subordinate position as the Frankenstein family's housewife, she could have in the future. Just like Frankenstein silences the female creature, the creature silences Elizabeth and does so violently: "Elizabeth's corpse is 'distorted,' 'bloodless,' 'flung,' across the bed, exhibiting its murderous mark. [Tim] Marshall reads into the description the possibilities of sexual abuse" (Liggins 141). The creature destroys Elizabeth's female body; therefore, the creature destroys her 'monstrous' femininity when he "sexual[ly] abuse[s]" and kills her just as Frankenstein has done with the female creature. In death, the female creature and Elizabeth remain eternally passive. Once the creature kills Elizabeth, he no longer attempts to change the symbolic order.

21 Shelley understands that those who encounter injustice, specifically when it comes to the Father's law and the patriarchal language, may only maintain a sense of self and find escape in death⁴. Just as Mary Raymond fails in her effort to redefine virtue and survive as a societal outcast, the creature, after failing in his pursuits, cannot accept the knowledge of his lonely existence and material realities of his body; thus, as when Frankenstein "sinks [the female creature] in the sea", the creature "return[s] the abject to the abyss where it belongs" and "returns" to a time before knowledge (Mulvey-Roberts 200). After all, he cannot survive anyway. When Frankenstein creates his monster he trespasses upon a sacred place: "[A]t every level, Victor Frankenstein is engaged upon a rape of nature, a violent penetration and usurpation of the female's 'hiding places,' of the womb" (Mellor 226). With a "womb", Nature assumes the female sex and forbids Frankenstein to continue living: "Nature is not the passive, inert, or 'dead' matter that Frankenstein imagines" (226). Therefore, women are not "passive, inert, or 'dead,'" either. Society makes them so. Readers may never know the power women possess, for the creature must die. Frankenstein creates the monster out of unnatural circumstances, so nature restores balance. First, Victor dies, for "Nature's revenge is absolute: he who violates her sacred hiding places is destroyed" (228). Then, his creature follows suit: he announces that "the

⁴ Shelley's ideas reflect those of her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, who wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), wherein Wollstonecraft rallies for women's education and equality.

miserable series of my being is wound to its close!” (Shelley 158). P. Brooks discusses the creature’s word choice: “‘Series’ is here used in the sense of ‘sequence’ or ‘order.’ Conceptually, this phrase is related to the ‘chain’ which figures the Monster’s understanding of human interaction, and its counterparts in language and narration [and he] fail[s] to enter the ‘chain of existence and events’” (215). With its associations to Lacan’s “‘signifying chain’ of language”, the creature’s word choice – the ending “series” – suggests that he will reject the language that he has learned, returning to a pre-linguistic state (202). His life “wound to its close”, the creature wishes to undo his education and forget man’s evil.

22 And he, like Mary Raymond, gives up his pursuit to change his fate. The creature understands his failure and the failure of society:

For whilst I destroyed his hopes, I did not satisfy my own desires. They were forever ardent and craving; still I desired love and fellowship, and I was still spurned. Was there no injustice in this? Am I to be thought the only criminal, when all human kind sinned against me? (Shelley 160)

Like Mary Raymond, attempting to take part in a patriarchal society despite his differences, the creature only finds “injustice”, “destroyed” hopes, and dissatisfaction. Society quells aggression; thus, understanding that he may neither change his body for society’s acceptance nor find a mate, he succumbs to death. By dying, though, the creature returns the abject to its rightful abyss, rejecting the patriarchal language and the symbolic that shun him: “I, the miserable and the abandoned, am an abortion, to be spurned at, and kicked, and trampled on” (160). Losing his paradise, the creature reiterates that the material reality of his body is “an abortion”. Living on earth, he will always meet others who reject him and his appearance. He sees death as an escape: “I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly, and exult in the agony of the torturing flames. The light of that conflagration will fade away; my ashes will be swept into the sea by the winds. My spirit will sleep in peace; or if it thinks, it will not surely think thus” (161). The creature hopes that death will eradicate his knowledge, and, if he still contains knowledge, he will “think” differently. He will not reencounter the experiences on earth. In death, he will find “peace” and happiness. While Victor’s womanless society dies with him, the creature’s beliefs about seeking justice for his and women’s injustice will die with him as well, and patriarchy will remain steadfast.

23 Mary Raymond and the creature are not monsters, but they are victims of monstrous acts. Mary transcends her rapist and her ruined reputation when she redefines virtue, but everywhere

she ventures, she meets another man who reminds her of her status. She succeeds only internally. Externally, society remains the same with its strict requirements regarding women's chastity, labeling women as either 'angels' or 'whores', and Mary awaits her death, returning her now abject body to death's abyss. In Shelley's novel, Frankenstein abandons his creature, who meets resistance and violence whenever he attempts to enter society. He asks for an "Eve" as a companion; however, Frankenstein destroys her and the creature never knows what acceptance or love feels like. The creature fails in his attempt to transcend society's prejudices when he kills Elizabeth; after all, he ultimately belongs in the same role as she does with his outsider status and lack of family, disabling him from taking an active role. The creature, created against nature's plans, will die just as his creator dies. Thus, Shelley's voice for women dissipates, and society remains patriarchal. Whether they challenge society's rules or not, Mary, the creature, and Elizabeth disintegrate beneath them. Trying to live as equals in a man's world, these women may try to challenge patriarchy, but they cannot overcome the hardships they endure in order to do so. Ultimately, their subordinate positions, signified by their bodies, crush them. Mary Raymond's and the creature's earthly lives contain the Father's law and language, which brings only harm and misery. In death, Mary and the creature transcend the society which rejects their material bodies.

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Jenkins, Claire. *Home Movies: The American Family in Contemporary Hollywood*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2015.

By Eleanor Huntington, University of Southern California, USA

1 Throughout *Home Movies: The American Family in Contemporary Hollywood*, Claire Jenkins brings to light the disparity between the changing American familial norms and those presented in popular films. As the title communicates, all of the ideas and theories presented in this book revolve around the family home and the experience of family in contemporary America, be that a black working-class family or an animated superhero one. A scholar of popular media at the University of Leicester in the UK, in her past work, including book chapters on superhero families in *Sky High* and *The Incredibles* and aging women in *Mamma Mia*, Jenkins studied how media presents women and children. In this monograph, she both summarizes circulating opinions on a variety of topics, including the interpretation of black male presidents in disaster films, and contributes original and much-needed examinations, including her study of the father-daughter relationship in American popular films.

2 Divided into six chapters, Jenkins engages in both genre and star studies, combining historical and sociological research and scene analysis to augment her arguments. She in turn focuses on the relationship between fathers and daughter, Meryl Streep as the ultimate Hollywood mother, the action-melodrama's narrative of uniting dysfunctional families, the intersection of race and class in presentations of American families, and finally on Hollywood's alternative families, including those led by single parents through in-vitro fertilization and homosexual couples. By engaging with so many different types of families, Jenkins's academic approach endeavors to be as inclusive as possible. In her fifth chapter, "Race, Class and Hollywood's 'Alternative' Families," she crafts separate passages to deal with both middle-class black fathers and black mothers, while in her final chapter, "Single-parents, Homosexual Unions and Reproductive Technologies", she covers divorce, gay male couples, and lesbian couples. Throughout she refers to her previous arguments and concludes the book with a clear and concise restatement of her overarching thesis: that while Hollywood remains a patriarchal institution and as such is inexorably tied to a traditionally male-dominant familial

structure, recent popular films display a tendency towards liberalizing the family's on-screen representation.

3 Drawing heavily on Stephanie Coontz's research on American families and marriage in postwar America, Jenkins frequently invokes the wide disparity between the imagined American family presented on film and on television, and the realities of the American family (much more ethnically and socio-economically diverse) throughout modern American history. Jenkins connects the mother's position to three maternal character types: the domestic mother, the working mother, and the action mother. In an intriguing chapter, she looks at how all three types are played by arguably the most important American film actress, Meryl Streep. The most crucial element to the overarching argument is that even when the roles are inhabited by someone who, like Streep, is an outspoken feminist, the mother's stories are co-opted by different characters or the mother's actions are only in the service of others, never of herself. In so doing, Jenkins also highlights a recurring problem in Hollywood films: that of the expectation that all women of childbearing age are either mothers or desire to be mothers.

4 Though most families have included mothers who work outside the home, the maternal character that seeks personal and emotional fulfillment from her work continues to be coded as masculine (such as Annette Bening's Nic in *The Kids Are Alright*) or as unfeeling, and thus un-feminine (such as Meryl Streep's Miranda Priestley in *The Devil Wears Prada*). These instances, however, are also presented as examples of how legitimate pressures facing modern working women are being included in, and occasionally sensitively treated, in major Hollywood films. Jenkins' decision to include superhero moms and their families in her argument also reflects the growing concern for working mothers. In both *Sky High* and *The Incredibles*, the fathers' inability to accept the domestic home life endanger the family. On the other hand, the mother, who in the case of Josie Stronghold/Jetstream (Kelly Preston) is also fully engaged as her husband's business partner, provides the emotional and (superhuman) physical support to get her family out of trouble. The mother's position as the family's bedrock is never in doubt, just as there is no doubt that she would feel the same paternal need to seek out more adventure from the world than her own family can provide.

5 This maternal inclusion in Hollywood narratives is also reflected in the contemporary portrayals of ideal fatherhood. While the action films of the pre-1980's focused on the son's need to distance himself and establish himself against the father (such as in *Back to the Future*), the father-daughter films of the 1990's and beyond privilege the father. Instead of the daughter benefiting from a close relationship with a paternal figure, the father becomes a better, more compassionate and more interesting human being because of his interactions with his daughter. For example, in *Father of the Bride*, George Banks' (Steve Martin) reacts absurdly to the news of his beloved daughter's upcoming nuptials, but through the film's narrative develops not only into a more thoughtful and emotionally expressive father, but also into a better husband and friend. Similarly, in films involving a tomboy daughter, this playing out of masculine qualities is framed positively, as a point of pride for the fathers. Jenkins points out, quite correctly, that if the reverse were true, and sons started exhibiting feminine behaviors associated with their mothers, this behavior would not likely be celebrated.

6 By focusing her research on Hollywood films, including many box office hits, Jenkins seeks to address the representations of families that families themselves are most likely to see. She acknowledges the importance of seeing oneself reflected on the screen, and accordingly praises the emerging images of lesbian mothers and black middle class families while acknowledging that there are only so few examples on which to draw. Another area of marked improvement in accurately depicting the lives of American parents is the recognition (and subsequent growth in number of) sexually and romantically active single parents. The sexual love between parents (such as in *Spy Kids* and *Friends With Kids*) makes the individuals better parents, which is a vast departure from the established and traditional understanding of parents (particularly mothers) who become sexless and entirely devoted to their children.

7 By describing the many representational changes coming from Hollywood in the last twenty-five years, the book is also instructive about earlier Hollywood family portraits. It provides insights into infrequently acknowledged subgenres, such as the mom-com (comprising such films as *The Back-Up Plan* and *The Switch*), and into little-studied narrative tropes, such as the family superhero film. Most of the films she references have been produced post-2000, and so *Home Movies* provides a very

contemporary outlook. In her conclusion she also points to areas for future research, including the dearth of materials on adoptive families and on teenaged families.

8 This book will appeal to those wishing to gain a broad understanding of the American family's gender relations as presented in popular Hollywood films. As stated in the introduction, the two aims of the book are establishing the "tropes of the contemporary Hollywood family" and providing case studies through which to analyze Hollywood's familial values (5). The work pairs easily with the growing amount of material that points to the new era of "soft fathering", in which "good fathers" take on increasingly maternal characteristics for the betterment of their children.

List of Contributors

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