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Editorial

by Dr. Laura-Marie Schnitzler

1 This year marks the sixth Early Career Researchers issue of *gender forum*. As in previous years, 2018 has seen a huge demand for this platform for up- and coming researchers and led to the submission of many high quality articles on a remarkable variety of issues. The few articles selected for this issue focus on notions of masculinity and femininity, the queer in-between spaces, and the potential of shaping non-normative identities against the strain of a normative society.

2 In "Making Sense of the "Monsters Next Door": General Strain and the Rampage Violence Narrative", Patrick Osborne discusses the impact of the 1999 Columbine massacre on the literary imagination. Tracing the way the shooters Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold have since been used as stereotypes of the violent narcissistic psychopath and the depressed pariah respectively, Osborne undertakes a reading of Lionel Schiver's *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2003) and Jodi Picoult's *Nineteen Minutes* (2007). Both this reading and the media narratives following the massacre itself focus on the shooters' internalization of the pressure of hegemonic masculinity, and Osborne expertly traces how they lead to the condemnation of the narcissistic psychopath figure while offering a tentative note of compassion towards the ostracised and depressed pariah.

3 Likewise engaging with the notion of outsiders is Henriette-Juliane Seeliger's article "'Raging Bull:' Contesting Masculinity in Joyce Carol Oates' *A Book of American Martyrs* (2017)". Seeliger's insightful analysis focuses on the novel's protagonist, Dawn Dunphy, who has grown up with a negative conceptualisation of female sexuality and whose rape at the hands of a gang of schoolboys left her reeling. Yet, Seeliger proposes that Dawn is more than the victim status easily associated with her traumatic background and instead reads her overture into women's boxing as a way to re-claim her agency and assert both her self-governed and constructed femininity *and* her agency despite the sport's male gaze. Seeliger ultimately proposes that Dawn, who re-christens herself D.D., assumes a powerful form of female masculinity that not so much stands in contrast with notions of femininity, but offers a queer addition thereto.

4 Alex Philp's article is a contribution to an often underrepresented issue in literary analysis, namely the notion of biological sisterhood. In "Looking in the Mirror: Biological Sisterhood, Doubleness, and the Body in Krissy Kneen's *Steeplechase*", Philp applies the notion of the double to sisters and offers a critical reading of how they are both automatically

self and other to one another. Philp's analysis does so in an attempt to do away with stereotypical representations of the sister as either a rival or an unattainable ideal. Undertaking a convincing close reading of Kneen's novel, Philp's article analyses the relationship between estranged sisters Bec and Emily and focuses on the negotiation of the boundaries of the female body in literary fiction.

5 The fourth and final article, "The Power and Subjection of Liminality and Borderlands of Non-Binary Folx" by Nyk Robertson, ambitiously conjoins Victor Turner's concept of the liminal and Gloria Anzaldúa's idea of borderlands to critically discuss the way these spaces offer possibilities for the realisation and lived experience of what Robertson calls multiple subjectivities. Robertson draws on the umbrella term non-binary folx to refer to people outside the normative gender dichotomy and sees the borderlands both as a space of possibility, while at the same time addressing the marginalising difficulties non-binary folx are confronted with when using (or withdrawing) to these spaces.

6 The annual Early Career Researchers' issue of *gender forum* concludes with reviews by Kelly Morgan and Morgan Oddie. Morgan offers an evaluation of Lori Merish's 2017 book *Archives of Labor: Working-Class Women and Literary Culture in the Antebellum United States*, and Oddie contributes a critical review of female-directed horror film anthology *XX* (2017). We thank the contributors for their insightful articles and reviews and are looking forward to the exciting new and interdisciplinary take on gender next year's crop of early career researchers will undoubtedly have in store for us.

Making Sense of the "Monsters Next Door": General Strain and the Rampage Violence Narrative

by Patrick Osborne, Florida State University

Abstract:

Following the Columbine High School Massacre in 1999, two distinct profiles of the rampage shooter emerged within the literary imagination: the type of narcissistic psychopath as which Eric Harris has been characterized, and the figure of the depressed pariah that was associated with Dylan Klebold. Employing a number of socially constructed myths that emerged following Columbine, many fictional accounts of school shootings utilize the media's attempts to understand Eric and Dylan's motives and therefore focus on the shooter's internalization of social strain due to his inability to form social bonds within their schools and communities. Each character struggles to achieve some form of aspirational reference, whether it be popularity or hegemonic masculinity, and is frequently impeded by some form of noxious stimuli (i.e. general strain). The fictional shooters of rampage violence narratives perceive their strained existence as justification for violence; ultimately deeming themselves victims forced to kill by the societies that alienated them through a twisted take on retributive justice. The narratives' differing characterizations of the rampage shooter, evoking the socially constructed myths that developed in the wake of the Columbine Massacre, typically compel utter disgust by employing the characterization of Eric or a hesitantly compassionate understanding towards the shooter in an effort promote tolerance towards those that are ostracized through representations of bullied outcasts like Dylan. Such narrative themes will be evinced through readings of Lionel Schiver's *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2003) and Jodi Picoult's *Nineteen Minutes* (2007).

1 On April 20, 1999, President Bill Clinton somberly declared that he and Hillary were "profoundly shocked and saddened by the tragedy . . . in Littleton where two students opened fire on their classmates before apparently turning the guns on themselves" (Cullen 93). Nearly two decades later, the tragic events that occurred at Columbine High School continue to resonate within the cultural imagination as America struggles to comprehend the massacre and an ever-increasing epidemic of rampage violence that developed in its wake. The *Washington Post* reports that throughout 2015, the United States averaged more than one mass shooting per day; many of which were carried out on the public stage in a horrifying spectacle (Ingraham). In the just first month of 2018, 11 school shootings occurred leaving several dead and many more injured (Blinder and Victor A1). On February 14th, 2018, Nikolas Cruz walked into a school in Parkland Florida killing 17 people with an AR-15 assault rifle: it was one of the worst mass

shootings in American history. Such tragedies have become such a common occurrence in the United States that President Barack Obama declared that shootings in America have "somehow. . . become routine. . .we become numb to this" (Time). Looking for answers, American society simply offers "thoughts and prayers," does nothing to assuage the problem, and repeats the cycle when another tragedy occurs.

2 Due to the apparent increase of such shocking events and their ceaseless media exposure, there has been a dramatic rise in representations of rampage violence within contemporary literature, film, and television over the last decade.[1] Such narratives strive to understand seemingly senseless acts of violence and ultimately construct a profile of rampage shooters by employing various sociological discourses. Directly following the aftermath of Columbine, President Clinton stated that "we don't know yet all the 'hows' or whys' of this tragedy [and that] perhaps we may never fully understand it" (Cullen 93). Over a decade later, Americans still do not have answers and are continually shocked and saddened when similar tragedies occur. Katheryn E. Linder notes that, "when crime occurs among white youth, the innocence and whiteness are both called into question, bringing about what Stanley Cohen has coined a 'moral panic'" (2). To alleviate negative feelings resulting from such anxieties, media outlets attempt to explicate the causation of rampage violence by delineating the shooter's actions as a product of competing external forces: e.g. bullying, America's culture of violence, the availability of guns, and failures in treating mental illness while simultaneously overlooking patriarchal male aggression. All of these competing discourses are explored in fictional representations of rampage violence. For this reason, contemporary literature has the potential to inform various debates concerning the threats of such violence in America.

3 Few scholarly works explicitly blend criminology and literary criticism. Those that do simply aim to illustrate the significance of literary works in the field of criminology and were written by and for criminologists as an impetus for new directions in future scholarship that, seemingly, has not been achieved. This is unfortunate, as Edward Sagarin notes, because to understand the social meanings of crime, "the criminologist locates a representative sample, [while] the novelist creates a representative character" (81). In this sense, fictional characters can help scholars develop a fuller understanding of violent behavior by illustrating criminological

[1] Some examples include: *The Hour I First Believed* (2008), *Give a Boy a Gun* (2000), *Hey Nostradamus!* (2003), *Forgive Me Leonard Peacock* (2013), *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2003), *Nineteen Minutes* (2007), *American Horror Story* (2011), and *Elephant* (2003).

theory in practice. In addition to the lack of criminological approaches in the field of literary studies, few works explore fictional accounts of rampage violence. Linder's *Rampage Violence Narratives: What Fictional Accounts of Schooling Shootings Say about the Future of America's Youth* is the only book-length work to examine this topic. Her work, albeit enlightening and inspiring, is much more about the social construction of the shooter in the popular imagination rather than an examination of the causation of school shootings in America. Her work, for example, examines the differentiation of whiteness and blackness in fictional narratives concerning school shootings and dedicates several chapters to various fictional shooter's socially constructed sexualities through queer readings of the texts. In contrast, the following essay will examine the social roots of mass shootings by employing a criminological approach that examines criminal motivations and the fictional shooter's justifications for violence. The shooters' violent actions are delineated in such novels as a reaction to an American culture that perpetuates shame via social strains and feelings of intense isolation stemming from the dissolution of social bonds.

4 Many rampage shooters, both real and fictional, display a sincere longing to be loved and maintain strong feelings of shame produced by competition and perceived emasculation. The majority of rampage violence narratives derive their inspiration from the tragic events that transpired at Columbine High School. For this reason, two distinct profiles of the rampage shooter have emerged within the literary imagination: the type of narcissistic psychopath as which Eric Harris has been characterized, and the figure of the depressed pariah that was associated with Dylan Klebold. Employing a number of socially constructed myths that emerged following Columbine, many fictional accounts of school shootings utilize the media's attempts to understand Eric and Dylan's motives and therefore focus on the shooter's internalization of social strain due to his inability to form social bonds within their schools and communities. Each character struggles to achieve some form of aspirational reference, whether it be popularity or hegemonic masculinity, and is frequently impeded by some form of noxious stimuli (i.e. general strain). General strain theory has evolved over the years to incorporate three major types of strains that incite violent behavior: 1) the actual or anticipated failure to achieve positively valued aspirations 2) the removal or anticipated removal of positively valued stimuli and 3) the actual or anticipated presentation of negatively valued stimuli (Agnew et al 44). The fictional shooters of rampage violence narratives perceive their strained existence as justification for

violence; ultimately deeming themselves victims forced to kill by the societies that alienated them through a twisted take on retributive justice. The narratives' differing characterizations of the rampage shooter, evoking the socially constructed myths that developed in the wake of the Columbine Massacre, typically compel utter disgust by employing the characterization of Eric or a hesitantly compassionate understanding towards the shooter in an effort promote tolerance towards those that are ostracized through representations of bullied outcasts like Dylan. Such narrative themes will be evinced through readings of Lionel Schiver's *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2003) and Jodi Picoult's *Nineteen Minutes* (2007).

5 Violence for men—predominately, white men—is deemed an appropriate response to feelings of anomie. Michael Kimmel argues

> what transforms the aggrieved into mass murders is also a sense of entitlement, a sense that using violence against others, making others hurt as you hurt, is fully justified. Aggrieved entitlement justifies revenge against those who have wronged you; it is compensation for humiliation. Humiliation is emasculation: humiliate someone you take away his manhood. For many men, humiliation must be avenged, or you cease to be a man. Aggrieved entitlement is a gendered emotion, a fusion of that humiliating loss of manhood and moral obligation and entitlement to get it back. And its gender is masculine. (*Angry* 75)

James Gilligan likewise posits that violence has a symbolic logic for those that commit deadly crimes. After a series of interviews with violent offenders in a maximum-security prison in Massachusetts, he concluded that violence stems from essentially two emotions: shame and love. Violence is often how men express disappointment. Gilligan suggests, "the purpose of violence is to diminish the intensity of shame and replace it as far as possible with its opposite, pride, thus preventing the individual from being overwhelmed by the feeling of shame" (111). Males are more prone to depression, suicidal behavior, and various forms of out-of-control behaviors because of the social construction of masculinity that fosters feelings of inadequacy. Erving Goffman suggests,

> in an important sense there is only one complete unblushing male in America: a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual, Protestant, father, of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight, and height, with a recent record in sports. Any male that fails to qualify in any one of these ways is likely to view himself—during moments at least—as unworthy, incomplete, and inferior. (128)

Accordingly, every man will feel inadequate at some point in his life resulting in a crisis of masculinity. It is from this feeling of inferiority and shame that men attempt to repair, restore, or reclaim their manhood. For many, this is achieved via violence. In addition, men that do not feel loved by others or do not achieve a sense of self-love are more prone to violent behaviors. The violent individual protects himself from a loveless atmosphere by withdrawing from others thus closing themselves off from further pain (Gilligan 51). Accordingly, violence is often a product of an individual desiring love too much but not knowing the proper way to express such desires. This is because men are conditioned to deny feelings of love and that patriarchy only values anger as a truly masculine emotion. Without love, Gilligan claims, the "self feels numb, empty, and dead" (47). Leonard Shengold deems this condition as "Soul Murder": "a dramatic term for circumstances that eventuate in crime—the deliberate attempt to eradicate or compromise the separate identity of another person" (2). Many of the prisoners Gilligan interviewed claimed that their personalities had died and that, though their bodies live on, they ultimately feel dead inside compelling them towards a life of violence.

Evaluating Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold: From Columbine Students to NBK

6 Following the horrific events that took place at Columbine High School in 1999, news pundits quickly began offering their insight into the motivations of the two shooters' heinous actions. As the first mass shooting to be nationally televised, the tragedy incited a media circus constructed from various cultural scripts. As Linder argues, the idea of the school shooter in popular narrative is a product of hyperrealities and Roland Barthes' notion of myth that, in context of the school shooter, is tied directly to hegemonic understandings of youth identity (xxiv). In attempting to better understand the adolescent's catalyst for violence, various interest groups attempt to construct a narrative to explain the horrific actions through previously established discourses that offer up various scapegoats. Joel Best argues that "declaring war is simply one instance of a broader tendency to use militarized language to describe social problems", using a clearly understood metaphor that encourages open conflict with a unanimously chosen enemy (144-145). As a product of a delineative process, social problems typically develop under three conditions: First, an individual or group must declare something or someone as a potential threat to normalcy. Subsequently, the perceived problem must stimulate a general cause for concern among a large population of people, and, finally, those individuals

acknowledging the social problem must labor to eliminate the irritant through a collective moral crusade. In this sense, "social problems do not exist 'objectively' in the same sense that a rock, a frog, or a tree exists; instead, they are *constructed* by the human mind, *called into being* or *constituted* by the definitional process" (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 151, italics in original).

7 The popular interpretation of the school shooter in the United States incorporates numerous myths. First, for example, mental illness is often deemed a cause of the shooter's motivation for killing.[2] Indeed, numerous school shooters experience mental illness and took psychotropic drugs for clinical depression and schizophrenia at the time of their violent outbursts. Yet, as Katherine Newman suggests, "given the number of adolescents who are depressed and suicidal, mental illness cannot be viewed as a straightforward predictor of rampage school shootings" (60). Violent media is also often presented as a cause for the shooter's homicidal actions though causation is difficult to prove. Eric and Dylan were huge fans of the video game, *Doom*, and often commented how it would be fun to act as the game's protagonist in real life. In addition, Littleton Colorado was a predominantly Christian town and the influence of goth culture, satanic media, and the myth of evil were likewise utilized to understand the two boys' actions. Marilyn Manson was offered up as a folk devil that influenced Harris and Klebold to shoot up their school in works such as *She Said Yes: The Martyrdom of Cassie Bernall*, and it was widely believed that the boys were members of the notorious trench coat mafia.[3] Such myths have been adequately disproven. Eric and Dylan, for example, disliked Manson's music, preferring German industrial groups like KMFDM and Rammstein instead.

8 Currently, the most popular myth used to understand youth violence and, to this day, remains consistent in news reports following such tragedies, is peer victimization: "bullying at school is probably the most commonly accepted explanation for school shootings, and for good reason. Shooters do express fury at being excluded, teased, and tormented" (Newman 63). Following Columbine, the bully narrative was highly utilized to understand the boys' actions: "the killers were quickly cast as outcasts and 'fags'" (Cullen 155). As Jessie Klein suggests, this was because, "Eric and Dylan were seen as weak, nerdy, and weird; in short, they were outside the narrow ideal of what people in their school and community believe a boy should be, and

[2] Following Nikolas Cruz's attack on Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, President Trump seized upon the rhetoric of mental illness in a likely attempt to elude a serious conversation on gun control.

[3] Misty Bernall points to Manson's song, "Get Your Gunn," as a favorite of the two boys at Columbine that killed her daughter (52).

therefore treated as less than human" (14). For example, a female student recounted an experience of being slammed against a locker by a jock and called a "fag lover" for simply having a conversation with Dylan (Klein 14). Yet, this long-standing and popular perception of Eric and Dylan as loners has been largely discredited by Dave Cullen's exceptional work of investigative journalism: "'Outcast' was a matter of perception. Kids who slapped on that label on Eric and Dylan meant the boys rejected the preppy model, but so did hundreds of other kids at the school. Eric and Dylan had very active social calendars, and far more friends than the average adolescent" (147).

9 Rather than feeling like losers, the two boys deemed themselves gods on a quest for fame and notoriety. In their journals, they wrote of desiring to become the Nietzschean Übermensch, and perceived others as lesser individuals that needed to be eradicated. For Eric, this manifested in extreme misanthropy. In his journals, he declares a desire to "KILL MANKIND" and that "I hate the fucking world . . . *people are STUPID, I'm not respected, everyone has their own god damn opinions on every god damn thing* . . . I feel like God . . . I'm higher than almost anyone in the fucking world in terms of universal intelligence" (qtd in Cullen 258; 234, italics in original). Such rantings are clearly the product on a young man feeling aggrieved from not being heard and feeling shame for not being extolled by others as the superior human he perceived himself as. Looking at Eric's insecurity about his spelling, Peter Langman suggests that

> although Eric tried to maintain an image of himself as a superior being, inside he felt insecure and vulnerable. It is hard to sustain the illusion of superiority when you cannot even spell the words you want to use. But Eric found a solution—he rejected the whole concept of spelling: "spelling is stupid . . . I say spell it how it sounds. What is the solution when there is a threat to your identity? Eliminate the threat. (27)

It is also evident that he had insecurities concerning masculinity. If the world makes you unsure your identity, the perceived solution for the two boys was to burn the world down. Both Eric and Dylan were consistently referred to as "fags" by students higher up on the school's social hierarchy of popularity. Eric maintained a small frame with a sunken chest, therefore making him smaller than the jock elite. In response to such insecurities, Eric adopted the ideology of superiority proposed by the Nazi party that provided him a model of hypermasculinity: a macho, militaristic ideal of manhood ingrained in a culture of violence. While others perceived him as different, he was, as Rachel Kalish and Michael Kimmel suggests, actually, an "over-conformist

to a particular normative construction of masculinity, a construction that defines violence as a legitimate response to perceived humiliation" (Suicide 461).

10 Cullen rightfully deems Eric as a psychopath in his best-selling true crime book, *Columbine* (236). Eric's heroes were the aggrieved vigilantes that evoked violence as a form of retributive justice on an American society that failed to honor their desires. Rather than being a shooting, the Columbine Massacre was intended to be a bombing. Eric was fascinated by the Oklahoma City bombing and perceived Timothy McVeigh as a heroic figure. In 1995, McVeigh committed on of the most horrific acts of domestic terrorism in the United States prior to 9/11. Angered by the government's siege of Wako and Ruby Ridge, McVeigh bombed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, killing 168 people as revenge on a government that oppressed white nationalists. Eric was fascinated by such carnage and desired to up the body count in copy-cat fashion, and for over a year studied McVeigh's tactics. For Eric, McVeigh was an ideal of masculinity that took action into his own hands and eliminated anyone that had perceivably had done him wrong. Because of his crimes, McVeigh achieved celebrity status months before his execution and was highlighted by MSNBC' *Headliners and Legends*: as series usually devoted to Hollywood stars thus cementing his fame (Kellner, *Guns* 104). Eric also wanted such infamy. For him, the attack on Columbine was "clearly a 'self-enhancing' antisocial act, and during it, Eric got to experience himself as invincible. His antisocial concern with status was interwoven with his paranoid preoccupation with status" (Langman 37-38): killing equated power and a demonstration of the hegemonic masculinity he had previously been denied at Columbine.

11 Dylan, on the other hand, was a young man desperately trying to connect with society. Evaluating his demeanor, Langman suggests Dylan appears to suffer from social anxiety disorder and maintained an avoidant personality fearing rejection from others (51). While Eric's journals are filled with rantings of hate and misanthropy, the most common word used throughout Dylan's journals is "Love" (Solomon xv): He claims he had fallen for "fake love" and that his unrequited love for a girl (who has yet to be named) "didn't give a good fuck about him" (qtd in Cullen 186). Cullen argues, Dylan had no happiness, no ambitions, no friends, and "no LOVE": he desperately desired "to find love" while "still fret[ing] about 'this toilet earth,' but his focus shifted dramatically toward love. Love. It had been prominent from the first page of the journal, but now, a year in, it grew overwhelmingly" (186; 216). Depressed and isolated (despite having many friends), Dylan found himself unable to form the necessary attachments he believed would

give him the love he so desperately needed. Travis Hirschi posits that, "positive feelings toward controlling institutions and persons at the same time neutralize their moral force. Such neutralization, is in control theory, a major link between lack of attachment and delinquency" (127). Lack of positive attachments to conventional peers and social institutions heightens the probability of delinquency. Because Dylan felt alienated by his school environment and perceived his inability to from attachments at Columbine, he maintained low self-esteem: Accordingly, Dylan had deficiency of self-love and "when self-love is sufficiently diminished, one feels shame" (Gilligan 47). As aforementioned, such feelings of shame can lead to restorative violence, "as those who receive less support should be less able to cope with their strains in a legal manner" (Agnew, *Pressured* 98). For Dylan, his strains and the inability to form social bonds developed into suicidal ideation. However, his desire for self-harm would later be alleviated through his friendship with Eric.

12 Langman perceives Dylan as an enigma. Dylan was a shy, peace loving individual, that transformed into one of the most violent mass murderers in United States history. He perceives Dylan as a "pseudopsycopath" that when in the presence of Eric acted tough, engaged in criminal behavior, adopted Nazi symbolism (even though he was Jewish), and ultimately planned mass murder. Yet, in his journals, Dylan is a confused and lonely boy with a strong desire to find social attachments and love (Langman 68). Dylan perceived himself a god, much like Eric, and believed all humans to be brainless zombies. However, unlike Eric, he saw zombies as toys to be played with rather than something needed to be eradicated (Cullen 182). Like Eric, Dylan desired to achieve a sense of hegemonic masculinity that he had failed to obtain and, for this reason, constructed and identity with the outlaw. In a paper written for an English class, Dylan wrote about "the Man" who challenged school bullies and preppies to fights and killed them using guns, knives, and a metal truncheon: "'The man' can be viewed as Dylan Klebold's ego ideal: two inches taller than, he, muscular, smart, self-assured, resolute, in control, and coldly murderous. 'The man' was, quite literally, an avenging angel" (Larkin 142). With the aid of Eric, Dylan learned to perform the role of the man and adopted violent masculinity as a way of restoring feelings of shame. The two boys desperately needed each other. Eric taught Dylan the violent mannerisms of being "the man": Eric gave Dylan's life purpose and an attachment he so desperately craved (freedom from alienation), while Dylan provided Eric an accomplice and validation for his hate and violent misanthropy. As Andrew Solomon claims, "Eric was a failed

Hitler; Dylan was a failed Holden Caulfield" (xv). Together the narcissistic psychopath and the depressed pariah initiated one the most violent school shootings in American history, and compelled many authors to write novels in an attempt to understand why such tragedies occur.

"Good Wombs Have Borne Bad Sons": Evoking Eric Harris in Lionel Shriver's *We Need to Talk About Kevin*

13 Lionel Shriver's *We Need to Talk About Kevin* delineates a mother's struggle to come to terms with her son's violent actions; a few years before the novel takes place her son, Kevin, horrifically murdered eleven people at his school with a crossbow. Written in an epistolary format, the novel consists solely of Eva's letters (written as a form of therapy) that sketch Kevin's early childhood and retrospectively search for an answer as to why he killed his classmates. While no clear motive is explicitly stated in the novel, the narrative highlights three likely reasons for the rampage attack: the social construction of a deviant hypermasculinity via violence, the celebrity status of mass murders, and Eva's ambivalence towards motherhood. Written after the tragedy at Columbine, Shiver portrays Kevin as a narcissistic psychopath and employs the myths that surround the media's understanding of Eric Harris. Kevin mutilates animals, pours bleach into his sister's eyes, and maintains a strong sense of schadenfreude while maintaining little empathy for others. He demonstrates no remorse for his violent actions and believes the massacre has made him a public icon: he hopes to be played by Brad Pitt in the film version of the tragedy, and perceives his heinous actions as a source of entertainment for the American population. In perceiving himself as a celerity, Kevin hides behind a mask of violence and postures himself a traditional school shooter: a "tough guise" that demands respect and infamy via aggression.[4] James Messerschmitt argues that "for many men, crime may serve as a suitable *resource* for 'doing gender'—for separating themselves from the feminine. . . [as] particular types of crime can provide an alternative resource for accomplishing gender and, therefore, affirming a particular type of masculinity" (*Masculinities* 84, italics in original). Kevin perceives his horrific actions as an avenue for successfully doing gender, as his deviant actions correct his previous subordinated social situation as an outcast (Messerschmidt, *Nine Lives* 13). Accordingly, "basking in the celebrity status he obtained through his rampage at Gladstone High

[4] See Jason Katz's *The Macho Paradox: Why Some Men Hurt Women and How All Men Can Help*.

School, Kevin skews the massacre as evidence of his abrupt ascent to the top of a masculine hierarchy" (Phipps 110).

14 Mikhael Bakhtin argues in *Rabelias and His World* that the folk carnival allows for a momentary suspension of class hierarchies in which the peasantry could elide their social boundaries via a temporarily permitted spectacle of misbehavior and iconoclasm. During a period of carnival, the conventional world is turned upside down and the lower classes gain a feeling of catharsis by parodying and aping the dominant social order. A major source for this inversion and misrule lies in the grotesque: custom, body, and self-presentation take on a fantastical design and people and their actions become characterized by vivid distortions of the body and transgressions against the social order (7; 21). The school shooting represents such a carnivalesque moment as time comes to a still and social hierarchies are briefly inversed: the individual that once perceived him/herself as inferior becomes omnipotent granting either life or death to those previously maintaining a higher social status. Newman claims school shooters "no longer would . . . try to accommodate themselves by scraping and bowing before the lords of adolescent society; instead they would show who was really in charge and stake their claim to a notorious reputation. The performance was a public one . . . that no one would doubt who was responsible" (152). As such, Kevin views his massacre as a public spectacle that elevates his social status. Gregory Phipps notes, "Kevin tries to extend the carnivalesque moment for as long as possible, but, as Eva herself reminds him, the media inevitably will forget about him at some point in the future" thus making his massacre meaningless (112).

15 Emile Durkheim writes in his seminal work, *Rules of Sociological Method*, that crime serves several functions, and, because criminality is inevitable in all populations, it ultimately benefits rather than harms society: "Crime is, then, necessary; it is bound up with the fundamental conditions of all social life, and by that very fact it is useful, because these conditions of which it is a part are themselves indispensable to the normal evolution of morality and law" (70). In this sense, the presence of crime allows society to define various social facts: it enforces conformity to the social structure as the population constructs punishment to deter criminality and ultimately incites social change. Furthermore, because crime disturbs the collective conscious of a given society it encourages a unified response to deviance that strengthens normative behavior and fosters social solidarity to restore the carnivalesque moment to normalcy (Hawdon, Ryan, and Agnich 682). However, in doing so it must present the criminal

as the ominous other. Today's media outlets irresponsibly turn mass murders into household names and sensationalize violence via pornoviolence.[5] Douglas Kellner argues that such spectacles reflect "acts of societal violence that embody a crisis of masculinity and male rage, an out-of-control gun culture, and media that project normative images of violent masculinities and make celebrities out of murders" (*Guys and Guns* 14). Would-be killers latch on to such violent images of masculinity and perceive murder as an acceptable approach to doing gender.

16 Like Eric and Dylan, Kevin desires to demonstrate his masculinity and gain notoriety through mass murder. Linder's reading of *We Need to Talk About Kevin* examines Kevin's queer mannerisms: he wears clothes that are too small, he maintains traces of effeminacy, he masturbates openly in front of his mother, and has an ambiguous relationship with a male friend (38). However, these examples also depict his performance of hegemonic masculinity. While Kevin is small in stature, his "shrunken mode of dress has the opposite effect of making him look bigger—more adult, bursting . . . Kevin's crotch cuts revealingly into his testicles, and the painted-on T-shirts make his nipples protrude" (170-171). His acts of masturbation are clearly a demonstration of virility and patriarchal power over his mother, and his relationship with his friend, while not clearly homoerotic, can be viewed as a Dom/Sub relationship in which Kevin maintains all the power. While Eva clearly sees these behaviors as disturbing, her husband, Franklin, views such deviant behaviors as natural, upholding a culture of entitlement, silence, and protection— i.e. "boys will be boys". Kimmel suggests, "guys implicitly support criminals in their midst who take that silence as tacit approval. And not only does that silence support them, it also protects them" (*Guyland* 63). Franklin and Eva's parenting styles conflict, positioning the mother and father in a good cop/bad cop binary opposition; forcing Eva to constantly perform the role of disciplinarian. Franklin beams with pride at Kevin's "archetypal teenage toughness . . . a candy-coated savagery for [his] consumption" (295). When Franklin asks Kevin if boys at his school ever settle their differences in a good-old-fashioned fist fight, he responds that "choice of weapons . . . is half the fight": "Fistfight's a low percentage. A doughboy's got way better odds with a 30 millimeter. Smart call" (259). Franklin sees this as humorous, however, Eva perceives that "this teenage angst of his, it wasn't *cute*" and believes a boy to be a very dangerous animal (295; 62).

[5] See Tom Wolfe's *Mauve Gloves & Madmen, Clutter & Vine*.

17 Indeed, Kevin is a very dangerous animal and believes violent actions will grant him the upmost masculine power. Discussing his actions with Eva during a visiting session in prison, Kevin beams when Eva asks if the other boys mess with him: "Are you kidding me? The fucking worship me, *Mumsey*. There's not a juve in this joint that hasn't taken out fifty dickheads in his peer group before breakfast—in his head. I'm the only one with the stones to do it in real life" (41). Violence, in this sense, provides Kevin an impression of a positive self-worth that has ultimately been denied to him by the social structure. Because alternative modes of self-expression have been closed off, many marginalized adolescents attempt to regain a sense of their lost dignity by appropriating respect through aggression. Elijah Anderson notes that criminal activity garners respect by others through the perpetrator's demonstration of manifesting nerve (91). Richard T. Evans suggests, "it is [Kevin's] desire for the public's recognition of the wickedness and daring of his crime . . . [that provide] his certainty that the murders of his father, his little sister, a teacher, and some classmates guarantee him unquestionable manhood and masculine power" (14). Kevin has indubitably over-conformed to a patriarchal mode of masculinity that denies men proper means of expressing emotion and only extols aggression as a favorable trait. Kellner argues, "although the motivations for the shootings may vary, they have in common crises in masculinities in which young men use guns and violence to create ultramasculine identities in producing a media spectacle that generates fame and celebrity for the shooters" ("Media" 157). Kevin has bought into a violent ideal of hegemonic masculinity that is tied to American nationalism, and, since American culture breeds violence, Kevin's crimes offer excitement and interest on which he thrives (Jeremiah 177-178). As Eva claims, school shootings in America and her own son's horrific actions as a response to toxic masculinity are as "American as Smith and Wesson" (61).

"They Started It": Evoking Dylan Klebold in Jodi Picoult's *Nineteen Minutes*

18 While Shriver's representation of the school shooter has no redeeming qualities, Jodi Picoult's *Nineteen Minutes* characterizes Peter Houghton as a sympathetic individual compelled to kill due to peer-victimization: Peter is a likable character that desires love and social inclusion, however, since he is perceived as different is ostracized by his fellow students and is tormented daily. Much like Dylan, Peter desires love: he yearns for a relationship with his childhood friend, Josie, however his longing is ultimately exploited by the popular students at his school. The

jocks mock his expression of feelings toward Josie, spreading a love letter he wrote, and consequently embarrass him in front of the entire school. Picoult claims in interviews that she chose to take up to topic of bullying after recalling her own high school experiences and those of her children: One day "I was reaching into my locker and a kid walked by, called me a freak, and slammed the locker shut on my hand, breaking three fingers. Years later, as a mom, I saw all three of my kids face bullying—and it begged the question: In a post-Columbine world, why haven't we figured this out yet" (Q&A 25). While the conception of bullying transformed from an omnipresent rite of passage to a serious social problem following the horrific tragedy at Columbine, the specter of bullying still lingers in America's schools. Newman argues "bullying is a nationwide problem. According to the National Association of School Psychologists, about 160,000 children miss school every day for fear of being bullying" (64). Jessie Klein likewise argues that American society is designed around a bully economy. To be successful in our society an individual must by competitive, aggressive, and powerful: characteristics linked by the values of masculinity and capitalism (156). Those that fail to measure up are easy targets for ridicule and bullying which have damaging psychological effects: "The impact of bullying can affect the physical, mental, and academic well being of an individual, resulting in high levels of anxiety, low self-esteem, and more frequent thoughts of suicidal ideation" (Beebe and Robey 34). Feelings of depression may also turn outward making the bullied individual a threat to others. Klein suggests, "of the 166 school shooting perpetrators whose identities are known, 147 were male. Most of those who committed massacres . . . struggled for recognition and status among their peers. The majority of them languished at the bottom of the social hierarchy" and were bullied for not meeting the masculine ideal (17). Kimmel found that 88% of students in Midwestern towns reported having observed bullying in their high schools and 77% report having been a victim; two out of three students state they have been bullied based on appearance, gender, and sexual orientation (*Guyland* 80). Another similar study conducted by Friedericke Sommer, Vincenz Leuschner, and Herbert Scheithauer states 67% of school shooters had been marginalized and 63% had been bullied; nearly every one of the perpetrators they analyzed had been accused of being gay and not measuring up to the hegemonic notion of masculinity (4).

19 Picoult opens Nineteen Minutes with Alex speaking to her daughter, Josie, about her homework: in chemistry she learns that "Catalysts . . . [are] substances that speed up a reaction, but stay unchanged by it" (6-7). Later in the school day, she discusses some hearsay with her

friend Courtney: "Courtney's eyes lit up; gossip was as good a catalyst as any chemical" (17). The image of the catalyst is, of course, conspicuous as the novel aims to explore the impetus for Peter's massacre. The pressures to conform to a toxic notion of hegemonic masculinity serves as a noxious stimulus for Peter as other students perceive him as not being able to live up to the standard. As a result, they deem him a "fag" as a result, mock his unrequited romantic interest to Josie, and conclusively pull down his pants in the school cafeteria. It is clear in the novel that Peter does not have any homosexual tendencies as he maintains an unrequited love for his childhood friend, Josie, who has blossomed in high school and has been integrated into the popular clique at Sterling High School. However, being deemed a "fag" has little to do with homosexuality. As C.J. Pascoe explains,

> 'Fag' is not necessarily a static identity attached to a particular (homosexual) boy. Fag talk and fag imitations serve as a discourse with which boys discipline themselves and each other through joking relationships. Any boy can temporarily become a fag in a given social space or interaction. This does not mean that those boys who identify as or are perceived to be homosexual are not subject to intense harassment. But becoming a fag has as much to do with failing at the masculine tasks of competence, heterosexual prowess and strength or an anyway revealing weakness or femininity, as it does with a sexual identity. This fluidity of the fag identity is what makes the specter of the fag such a powerful disciplinary mechanism. It is fluid enough that boys police most of their behaviors out of fear of having the fag identity permanently adhere and definitive enough so that boys recognize a fag behavior and strive to avoid it. (330)

Kimmel argues that guys watch how other men perform gender waiting for someone to slip up in an effort to assert their dominance—because masculinity is a constant contest and is largely a homosocial experience performed a judged by other men. He argues such contests, as a result, construct three cultures of masculinity: that of entitlement, silence, and protection (*Guyland* 59). First, men feel entitled to power defined by their masculine status. When this is challenged or thwarted, an individual must heroically defend their right to manhood through violence. Secondly, this violence is not discussed via a culture of silence. Bullying, for example, is not challenged, as "boys will be boys": peer-victimization is ultimately viewed as an omnipresent rite of passage and other boys do not challenge the norm in fear of being alienated. While Josie dislikes seeing her old friend Peter being bullied, she does nothing to alleviate the situation in fear of being ostracized from the popular clique. Lastly, such silence grants protection: the

violent nature of men becomes engrained in the very fabric of society and, in the case of bullying, no one questions the possible negative outcomes.

20 Being deemed a "fag" causes Peter general strain. Agnew claims that one of the strains most likely to induce a criminal response, especially among youth, is abusive peer relationships: "peer abuse includes insults, ridicule, gossip, threats, attempts to coerce, and physical assaults" (72). He further suggests adolescents are more likely to cope with strain via criminal channels as they have yet to develop problem-solving skills (*Pressured* 117), and that males are more likely to experience rage as a response to their anomic condition as anger is a legitimate affirmation of their masculinity (136). This is very much the case with Peter. Following his shooting spree at Sterling High School, Peter drops his gun when approached by the police. When being questioned in his holding cell he whispers: "They started it" (55). Violence, for Peter, is a justified retributive act for years of torment. Picoult delineates Peter's early experiences in elementary school, suggesting he is "sensitive, and he's sweet. But that means he's far less likely to be running around with the other boys playing police chase than he is to be coloring in the corner with Josie" (72). As a result, his teacher tells Peter's mother that he must adopt a more aggressive approach to masculinity if he is not to be bullied (72). However, Peter is unreceptive to the normative behaviors that define masculine success in American society. Picoult thus presents the aspirational references of hypermasculinity and homogeneity as socializing agents that force Peter into accepting certain beliefs, aspirations, and norms that conflict with his individual desires. As a result, the demands of Peter's peers and Sterling High School become alienating social constructs that force Peter into a socially strained existence as he consistently fails to conform to the social norms provided by his superiors, and, in turn, loathes the idea of adhering to "fake" notions of idealized popularity he deems "bullshit" (160).

21 In Peter's defense, his lawyers suggest that he has experienced something similar to battered women syndrome, serving as a catalyst for his rampage, and has developed PTSD as a result of constant harassment. This interesting, yet still inexcusable, defense does indeed have merit. Thormod Idsoe, Atie Dyregrov and Ella Cosmovici Idsoe found that "the level of PTSD symptoms among the bullied children was quite high. Slightly more than one third of the students who reported being bullied had scores within the clinical range for PTSD symptoms" (907). Clinical psychologists Charlie Donaldson and Randy Flood likewise perceive the omnipresent demand of hegemonic masculinity for men as a potential catalyst for PSTD

symptoms. They suggest current patriarchal norms concerning hegemonic masculinity construct a cultural malaise for men that fosters strains due the fears of gender role strain—i.e. mascupathy. Although many men attempt to portray themselves as confident and powerful, their fears and anxieties leave them constantly frightened and fragile beneath the façade of their tough exterior. This "generalized vigilance is a deep and abiding form of stress, and can be termed Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome" (Chapter 5, para. 25). Such stressors can lead to violent outbursts, as is the case with Peter in *Nineteen Minutes*. Socialized to adhere to hegemonic conceptions of masculine success and not having the means or the desires to do so, Peter ultimately snaps due to the demands of normative society and kills as a means of escaping from the aspirational reference. In this sense, Picoult presents Peter's rampage in Mertonian terms: Individuals that struggle to achieve societal goals or are affected by noxious stimuli cope via antisocial channels—in this case, the murder of ten classmates. While he is indeed a monster for his rampage, he is also a sympathetic character exposing his need for love: unable to foster the necessary bonds conducive to hindering criminal behavior, Peter explodes as a result of his extreme alienation from idealized notions of manhood.

"I Want to Find Love": Mental Illness and the American Male

22 Following the tragic events that occurred at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School on Valentine's day 2018 (a day meant to represent love and friendship), President Trump invoked the rhetoric of mental illness in an attempt to understand Nikolas Cruz's homicidal actions. While the discourse of mental health was, of course, a means to elide a more serious discussion of stricter gun control in America, the social problem of mental health in the United States is indeed warranted: the current cultural climate fosters feelings of social strain while simultaneously dismantles social bonds therefore perpetuating feelings of depression and isolation. While most American's desire a structure of belonging, western culture extols individualism and grants limited avenues to convectional means of success perpetuating higher rates of social strain. Bruce E. Levine argues that, for this reason, "Americans have increasingly lost autonomy and community, liberty and fraternity, and sovereignty and support and have acquired something I call *institutionalization*" (*Surviving* 30, italics in original). Institutionalization, such as patriarchal norms, construct notions of hegemonic masculinity and creates a definitive pressure for men to succeed at various gender role expectations. Any failure

in doing so increases perceptions of shame, and, as aforementioned, feelings of inadequacy concerning gender role strain can often lead to violent outbursts. Accordingly, bell hooks claims, "patriarchy is the single most life-threatening social disease assaulting the male body and spirit in our nation" (*The Will* 17). Many American men are hurting, and, because they have no outlet for expressing their pain other than violence, the nation cannot heal until the social structure decreases feelings of social strain and increases social bonding. In the state of the union following the Parkland massacre, Trump suggested "we must also work together to create a culture in our country that embraces the dignity of life, that creates deep and meaningful human connections, and that turns classmates and colleagues into friends and neighbors" ("Statement by President Trump"). Indeed, such social bonding would likely decrease violence in America as criminological theory implicates. However, "our culture does not value human relationships at all. It is that our extreme industrial society values other things more than human connectedness. Rather than spending energy on family, intimacy, and friendship, Americans pour energy into efficiency, productivity, and consumption" (Levine, *Surviving* 157). America's culture of competition and patriarchy promotes insanity (hooks, *The Will* 30), and, until we address a society that perpetuates feelings of shame and devalues love, the United States will continue producing the "monsters next door."[6]

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[6] On May 3, 1999, *Time* Magazine featured an article concerning the Columbine Massacre and featured pictures of Eric and Dylan on the cover of the issue. The issue was called "The Monsters Next Door: What Made Them Do It?" I employ the phrase "Monsters Next Door" in reference to the issue.

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"Raging Bull:" Contesting Masculinity in Joyce Carol Oates' *A Book of American Martyrs* (2017)

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Abstract:

Dawn Dunphy in Joyce Carol Oates' 2017 novel *A Book of American Martyrs* is used to women's bodies being controlled and defined by men: she has grown up with an image of female sexuality as impure and contemptible, and as a teenager she has been raped by a gang of schoolboys. However, Dawn is not simply a victim, but from her early teenage years struggles to regain control over her life and body. In fact, her rape provides a cathartic moment for her: she rejects stigmatization and takes violent revenge on her rapists. Driven by the wish to fight men, her hammer-wielding vengeance leads Dawn to go into women's boxing – where, however, she immediately finds herself the object of male assessment again, as female boxers have to play certain, sexualized roles for the eyes of the predominantly male audience.

Female masculinity, my essay will argue, provides the means for Dawn to reject male claims of control over the female body: through her performance as a boxer, Dawn challenges notions of femininity and masculinity and lays claim to an almost gender-neutral identity. She chooses a new, gender-neutral name, D.D., and in an echo of her rape revenge she picks the boxing name "Hammer of Jesus." What is more, D.D. refuses external ascriptions and to don the sexualizing attire other female boxers wear. Instead, through representation of her body by means of clothes, tattoos, and hairstyle she uses the body itself as a marker of power, to "transform mechanisms of masculinity and produce new constellations of embodiment, power, and desire" (Halberstam 276). The disgusted and negative reactions of the men around her show how successful her attempt at defying notions of gender indeed is. Thus, female masculinity becomes the means for D.D. to reassert control over her own body by rejecting the objectifying male gaze. She challenges masculine power by messing up what masculinity means and who has a claim to it: "The boxing ring, obviously, has become the arena for the most public contests over the meaning of masculinity and its relation to male embodiment" (Halberstam 272).

"The boxing ring . . . provides a nice metaphor for the power of dominant masculinities and their relations to subordinate masculinities. Although the battered white male boxer takes massive amounts of abuse in the ring, he also manages to emerge triumphant every time. . . . This is not unlike the structure of white male masculinity, which seems impervious to criticism or attack and maintains hegemonic sway despite all challenges to its power."

Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* 275

1 If the boxing ring provides a metaphor for the power of white male masculinity, it can also be the space where dominant hegemonic masculinity is challenged and contested. The male boxer's body and American identity and power became so intrinsically connected in the nineteenth century that both marginalized masculinities as well as women had to be excluded from boxing in order to maintain this identificatory symbol of white male power (Bederman

8). Joyce Carol Oates' 2017 novel *A Book of American Martyrs* provides an illustrative example of how a woman can challenge the notion of masculinity in the boxing ring. Her novel traces the lives of two women: Naomi Vorhees, daughter of an abortion doctor, and Dawn Dunphy, daughter of the man who assassinates him. Dawn, who has grown up in a restricted, Christian-fundamentalist community, later manages to break free from the limitations and regulations imposed on her by her environment, and for the young woman who struggles with her gender, boxing becomes an essential means to assert her "female masculinity" and regain control over her life. The term was coined by Judith Halberstam in her pioneering study *Female Masculinity* (1998), in which she showed that, far from being the privilege of men alone, masculinity can also be found in women. Her partly historiographic, partly literary study covers a wide range of examples, from the variety of genders that already existed long before the twentieth century, to the example of the tomboy, the drag king, or the butch. By having a butch boxer challenge male domination in the world of female boxing, Oates' novel makes "[t]he boxing ring . . . the arena for the most public contests over the meaning of masculinity and its relation to male embodiment" (Halberstam 272), thus exhibiting a "genderless attitude" also shown in some of her previous writings (Cologne-Brookes 234). This paper explores the ways in which the boxing ring as metaphor for male power is shaken by a woman consciously displaying her female masculinity. It will first look at Dawn Dunphy's past and the experience that prompts her decision to go into boxing. It will then continue to assess the literal 'roles' female boxers act out in the novel, and then analyze in what ways Dawn challenges the male gaze in the boxing ring and develops a liberating masculine identity.[1]

"Something about her body:" Challenging binary gender divisions

2 Dawn Dunphy is used to women's bodies being controlled and defined by men. She has grown up in the small town of Muskegee Falls, Ohio, where her parents attend the conservative and strictly pro-life St. Paul's Missionary Church of Jesus. Gender roles are divided traditionally: her father works as a carpenter while her mother stays at home with the children, doing only volunteer work. The man of the house is considered head of the family, and women do not get to say or decide much. Sexuality and all things physical are disapproved of, and especially female sexuality is considered taboo. Although this has happened before she was born, her father attacked and almost raped a woman when he was in

[1] Due to the limited scope of this paper, other interesting aspects that influence Dawn's boxing experience, such as the role of religion, her suppressed (bi-)sexuality, or the her father's fate, cannot be regarded in detail here but may prove insightful topics for further research.

his twenties, and the novel makes clear that his hatred for and fear of female sexuality pervades and conditions his entire family. Dawn has no one to provide some form of sex education to her, and thus cannot develop a healthy relationship to her body. Generally, the community expects girls to behave much more modestly than boys, and while her brother, growing up confidently in the image of him being head of the family in his father's absence, freely speaks his mind, she cannot as she has to be a good Christian girl. No one ever asks Dawn what she wants, nor does anyone believe in her: when she first hints that she might like (and possibly even be good at) women's boxing, she is immediately put down (Oates 342).

3 As a result, Dawn has developed a complicated relationship to her body. What seems to bother her most is the decidedly feminine aspects of it: her breasts, her vagina, and she is "frightened and disgusted" by menstruation (Oates 396). From the moment she reaches puberty, Dawn's body equally repels the people around her, both those disposed towards her and those who dislike her:

> there was something about her that made them angry, jeering–something to do with her body that was a female body yet carried like a man's, with rolling gait, a way of bringing her feet down hard on her heels, pushing herself forward as her arms swung free. Her eyebrows grew heavy above her deep-set eyes. Her forehead was low, and often furrowed. Her shoulders and upper arms were strong. She wore clothing that might've been a man's clothing, dark, or khaki-hued, without color – corduroy trousers, flannel shirt, dark cotton T-shirt beneath, polyester jacket and frayed running shoes. (Oates 392)

Her gym teacher in high-school allows Dawn onto the team not because she is good at basketball, but because she is intimidating to opposing players, and although she seems to be a good team player, the other girls get her removed from the team (Oates 391). Similarly, the person who is interviewed at the end of the chapter "Mud Time," possibly a former teacher of hers, asserts that "you could see in her face she's be trouble" – despite the fact that she hadn't caused any trouble at the time, and despite the fact that her siblings were good students (Oates 399). Even after she has become a successful boxer, her trainer and her manager still look at her as a homely, clumsy girl, if they acknowledge the fact that she *is* a girl at all (Oates 553, 609).

4 To the other children her age, themselves caught in the difficult teenage years and trying to define and shape their own gender identities, Dawn's looks render her gender so ambiguous that it poses a threat:

> In effect, gender is made to comply with a model of truth and falsity which not only contradicts its own performative fluidity, but serves a social policy of gender regulation and control. Performing one's gender wrong initiates a set of punishments

> both obvious and indirect, and performing it well provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all. (Butler, "Performative Acts" 528)

Thus, while the girls on her basketball team only get her thrown out in order to avoid having their own vulnerable and unstable identities questioned, some of the boys rape Dawn, using her body in an attempt to force a straight, heterosexual, feminine sexuality onto her. Rape can be understood as what Catherine MacKinnon has termed a gender- rather than a sex-crime: certain crimes, like rape, are linked up with notions of masculinity and femininity, they are embedded in a gendered social context that is structured by a hierarchy of power (MacKinnon). Rape is a "gendering" crime, as it essentializes gender through the inherently gendered act of male penetration, enforcing the paradigmatic norm of male power that posits the male as aggressive, powerful, and hard and the woman as passive and vulnerable. As Sanyal observes in the context of male-to-male prison rapes, rape is a means for perpetrators to make their victims "social" women (128). The fact that the boys never address Dawn by her name, but only as "cunt" and "dyke" before they torture her underlines this: she is not an individual with a name, but representative of something that must not be, she has dared to cross the boundaries between man and woman and needs to be punished for it. Drawing painful attention to her physical 'cunt' through rape is supposed to turn her into a 'real woman' and to assert their male power over her, while simultaneously showing how unsettled they are by Dawn's absent femininity: "Something about her body maddened them" (Oates 394). By asserting their male dominance and control of the female body, these boys hope to re-establish by force hierarchies of power threatened by Dawn's ambiguous place in the gender order. What is more, Oates emphasises the ordinariness of the boys: she is at pains to make clear to the reader that their assault on Dawn is not the deed of sick minds aiming at torturing just someone who happens to cross their path, but of *ordinary* boys in whom such horrible ideas and the need to assert themselves over women resides. Oates thereby underlines what Sanyal has called for in her 2016 study *Vergewaltigung* (*Rape*): an understanding of rape not as an identity rooted in the sick psyche of malicious sociopaths, but as a crime; a crime that can potentially be committed by anyone (Dworkin 45-6, Sanyal 153-4). What they do to Dawn is the result of their own "vacuousness" and "emptiness," not of cruelty (Oates 392).

5 Dawn's first response to the rape is not unusual for rape victims and exemplary of her general lack of a sense of agency: she blames herself and hopes that no-one witnessed her "shame" (Oates 396). However, this does not last long. It does not take her more than a few hours to decide that she will not be shamed, but take revenge on her assailants. Calculating

and with consideration, she lies in wait for them, a claw hammer she has found in her aunt's garage hidden in her pocket. Her attack is more than just revenge, though: it is an attempt to reverse what has happened. Her hammer-wielding vengeance is the first time Dawn experiences a sense of power and agency that leaves her "excited, exhilarated:" having smashed her assailants to the ground with the hammer, she can use the power of her hands, thereby turning her violated body into a deadly weapon and reverse what has happened by "blacken[ing] the hurtful eyes that had seen the lower part of her body naked" (Oates 398). Dawn does not allow the experience of being raped to dictate her life choices and reduce her to the position of helpless victim. In fact, her rape provides a cathartic moment for her: she rejects stigmatization and takes violent revenge on her rapists. The sense of power she experiences in doing so will eventually lead her to go into women's boxing.

Boxing as gendered performance: Gazing at the fighting female body

6 In professional women's boxing, however, it is a sexy physical appearance rather than boxing skills that sells tickets. Women are supposed to bring revenue, and as both audiences and trainers and managers are mostly male, it is the men who decide what the women should look like. The sight of two women fighting is intrinsically connected with sex, as their urge to fight can be presumed to somewhat equal their sexual drive. Thus, fighting women gain approval only if, to the eyes of the male, heterosexual observer, they are sexually desirable. "To be sexy, in this ordinary sense, is to satisfy a set of standards for appearance and behavior that are the outgrowth of a specific, societally shaped heterosexual male gaze" (Lintott & Irvin 468). The term "male gaze" was coined in 1975 by the feminist film critic Laura Mulvey to describe how films visually treat women as objects and "coded the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order," implying a male viewer and offering women up to what she terms their "male gaze" (Mulvey 835): "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure, which is styled accordingly" (Mulvey 837). The male gaze is even interpreted by some as a metaphor for the penis: "the male eye penetrates the outside world, and especially the erotic female body," which can be understood as visual rape (Reeser 110).

7 A central effort in the world of women's boxing is on keeping women and masculinity apart from each other: female boxers are not fully taken seriously as 'boxers' but regarded only as 'women' in the (male) world of boxing. Trainer Ernie is surprised at any woman entering the gym, assuming that entering such an utterly male environment, a "place almost

entirely male," "and everyone in sight male," full of male voices and images of male boxers, must in itself be a challenge for any woman (Oates 557). As a "male" environment like the boxing studio threatens their femininity, the other women at the gym willingly cater to the male gaze and exaggerate their femininity, showing up at the studio in tight clothes, wearing make-up, and concerned more with their effect on the men present than with actually working out:

> Fleshy bodies, not muscled. Sexy-fleshy-female bodies displaying themselves at the machines, pummelling the heavy bag with sixteen-ounce boxing gloves until within a scant minute or two they were breathing through their mouths, panting. Red mouths, mascara, makeup beginning to run with sweat. A man's nostrils picked up their special smell – perfumy sweat. Their fingernails were glossy, perfect. Nothing mattered more than the perfection of their fingernails. (Oates 554)

While they are carefully shaped and styled, these women boxers' bodies are not actual boxing bodies, though. Dawn (who has started calling herself D.D. by this time) is surprised to find that Lorina Starr's hits are weak and forceless, and Jamala Prentis, "all dazzle, display," is "slack-armed and dazed with fatigue" after only one round (Oates 584, 602). These women, it seems, are infinitely scared of being seen as masculine: "Even women who are involved in the most masculine of activities, such as boxing or weight lifting, attempt to turn the gaze away from their own potential masculinity" (Halberstam 270). Thus, they are not interested in boxing or real fitness, but in shaping and toning their bodies so that they will comply with female beauty standards, thereby voluntarily affirming the male gaze: "Their care was for how they looked, in the eyes of men" (Oates 553).

8 What is more, the professional women boxers all act out sexualised, feminized and often also racialised acts, performing roles for the eyes of the – predominantly male – audience. Dawn's first opponent is Lorina "The Cougar" Starr, a woman slightly older than thirty and rumoured to be of Chickasaw Indian extraction (although this might equally well just be the role assigned to her, as her friend Mickey suggests even to Dawn that she might claim "Indian blood" [Oates 591]). Only the amount of make-up she is wearing and her "sexy boxing attire" turn Lorina in the "sexy-glamorous young woman" as which Dawn sees her. Lorina's body has been shaped to match her role:

> Her features were Caucasian except for very dark eyes and very black straight hair which had been cut short and streaked with platinum-blond highlights. Her skin was coarsely made up with red-tinged beige powder. She wore sexy boxing attire–a sequin-spangled red sports bra, Spandex-tight blue trunks that fitted her shapely buttocks tightly. Above her left breast was a tattoo of a red boxing glove and on her right shoulder, a snarling cougar with a curving tail. (Oates 582)

The other women she fights are alternatively Canadian, adorned in white and red clothes decorated with maple leafs and looking like "a tall graceful bird," "savage and beautiful" or play the role of "wildcat" (Oates 559, 594-5, 600). The boxing ring thus becomes a symbol of male control in which women are put on display for the male gaze: "In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. Women displayed as sexual object is the leit-motiff of erotic spectacle" (Mulvey 837). Watching these women, Dawn comes to realise that a female boxer will always be assessed in terms of her sexual appeal: "that is how a boxer knows *she* is doing well. *She* is not just scoring points – *she* is arousing the crowd" (Oates 586, my emphases).

"Hammer of Jesus:" Shattering Gender Expectations

9 Having entered the world of women's boxing, Dawn equally finds herself the object of male assessment. The "Hammer of Jesus," which will be Dawn's boxing name, is Halberstam's "raging bull (dyke)": Ernie often compares Dawn to cattle, her "body [being] solid as a young heifer's," her "thighs were large as shanks of beef," and she is "weighed like a steer" (Oates 553-4, 563; Halberstam 267). A body like Dawn's can be sexually appealing only under extreme circumstances and only if it is overwhelmed by the power of traditional femininity. Her "homely and stolid" body can only be considered attractive as a fetish object to "a certain set of boxing fans who'd get off seeing a female of this type . . . pummelled, knocked down, humiliated and bloodied by one of the rising stars in female boxing–that'd be some kind of sexual charge" (Oates 555). Just like the other female boxers at the gym, Dawn is expected to conform to the standard of sexiness desired of female boxers, and when they find she does not, her trainer and her manager try to push her into a more feminine role. They set up Ernie's former protégée Mickey Burd to turn Dawn into less of a "female orangutan," and pay careful attention to what she is wearing in the ring (Oates 583). It becomes clear that an androgynous sexual identity like Dawn's is only acceptable insofar as it has to be presented as irony, as a joke to the audience: Mickey suggests, for example, that the role of "butch, but in a fun way" may be the one for Dawn (Oates 591).

10 Dawn's situation is further complicated by the fact that she is a *white* female boxer. The world of women's boxing is structured both by racism and sexism. As Dawn observes early on, the boxing world is now dominated by blacks and Hispanics: "And she saw too how over the decades from the early 1900s boxing had largely shifted from white-skinned to dark-skinned, Hispanic. She wondered if it was too late for her. The best women boxers were

black, Hispanic, Native American" (566). As the male gaze is structured intersectionally, different, even harsher beauty standards apply to her: bell hooks observed as early as 1992 that femininity, "far from being race-neutral, is always already raced as white," and as Kathy Deliovsky has shown in her 2008 study on normative white femininity, not much has changed since then: "[a]ssigning value to women's bodies, based on cultural and racial standards of beauty, is an expression of white masculine power relations" that creates a hierarchy of racialised beauty ideals in which white femininity stands at the top and non-white, subordinate and marginalised femininities are "relegated to the bottom of the gender hierarchy" (hooks, Deliovsky 57-8; Collins 193). Thus, as the black and Hispanic women at the gym are already excluded from the attainment of "true" femininity in the eyes of the men by virtue of their skin colour, violations of the ideal can be much more easily forgiven. Being the only white woman at the gym, with her female masculinity Dawn quite obviously oversteps the boundaries of the gender order that values white, hegemonic femininity highest.

11 Although being unable to articulate this, Dawn strongly perceives of how the boxing ring is crucial to sustaining male power. Having realised that her escape into women's boxing has not actually brought her peace from the stigmatization of her body, Dawn begins to challenge the male gaze by asserting her own masculinity and refusing to be put on display in the same way as the other female boxers. Following her wish to become a different person, Dawn begins to craft a new, gender-neutral identity for herself. Starting with her name, she distances herself from the feminine name "Dawn" and replaces it with the gender neutral abbreviation "D.D." (Oates 558, 589, 591): "The female boxer was not herself but 'D.D. Dunphy' in black T-shirt, black trunks. Tight-laced black shoes. Muscled shoulders and arms, muscled thighs, legs. . . . Her hair trimmed short and neatly shaved at the nape of her neck" (Oates 560). She also picks the boxing name "Hammer of Jesus" (Oates 563) in memory of the hammer she wielded against the boys who raped her.

12 Feeling the need to bring her inner and outer self in alignment, D.D. simultaneously begins to also shape her body and to eliminate all markers of femininity. Part of it comes naturally: as D.D. continues to work out and build muscle, her body grows harder. In a way, D.D. is steeling herself both for boxing and against fear, becoming more masculine in the process: "Her muscles were hardening, her body was an astonishment to her, a promise" (Oates 567). She consciously avoids fighting "like a girl," meaning the superficial style the other female boxers put on in order not to appear too masculine, and determined to win, she wins fans and followers. In addition to that, she also begins to neutralize her female body with its physical realities as best she can. D.D. ties her breasts closely to her body, which is more

than just a medical precaution, and welcomes the opportunity to get rid of the monthly reminder of her femaleness, her menstruation, by skipping her period (Oates 567, 574). Outwardly, she returns to wearing black, loosely fitting clothes again and gets tattoos that are expressive of her mentality: "The Hammer wore silky black trunks, black T-shirt. Black shoes. On the hammer's biceps, vivid tattoos: a cross festooned with white lilies, and a cross festooned with white roses. On her back just beneath her neck the words JESUS IS LORD" (Oates 595). The rose and lily, both flowers associated with the Virgin Mary underline her belief in chastity and sexual abstinence, and the words "Jesus is Lord" in capital letters emphasise that she believes in God's approval (Cucciniello 64). Getting these tattoos and wearing her perceived inner self on her skin, for everyone to see is a major breakthrough for D.D. Throughout her life, she has been avoiding mirrors, and when she entered the tattoo parlour and accidentally caught a brief glance of her face in the mirror, "she felt a pang of loathing" at looking so "coarse and plain." When she leaves after hours of inking, however, rather than the "rush of shame" and guilt she expected to feel, D.D. can now not only look at herself but feels exhilarated (Oates 593-4, 610).

13 As a result, unlike the other female boxers at the gym, D.D. Dunphy does not put on a show for the eyes of the audience, but she actually wears her masculine identity, visible for everyone to see. She has physically become someone else: her body allows her to comfortably inhabit her female masculinity and be a successful boxer while defying the male gaze that seeks to objectify women in the ring. The act of looking means control, and D.D. refuses to be controlled by men and have her body evaluated on their terms. In the ring, this means "'like a viper'" she now "'rivet[s' her] opponent with [her] gaze" (Oates 583). As the reactions of the audience show, simultaneously admiring her strength and being disgusted by her body, D.D.'s attempt at defying ancient mechanisms of control is successful. Her new identity of "D.D." is a way for her to evade the derisive comments about her body made by men and their attempts at defining what it should look like. In the ring she becomes what Donna Haraway once termed the "cyborg:" "a robot-soldier," an asexual "*killing machine*" (Oates 583-4, emphasis in original). Her masculine body is admired by the men who look at her, but it also scares them – and D.D. enjoys having turned their gaze into fear: "The way this man was looking at her. . . . 'She's a killer. Christ, she scares me!' But it was a delicious sort of scare. The hammer felt it like a cat shivering as it is being stroked" (Oates 596).

14 While D.D. grows ever more comfortably, reactions of boxing audiences to her body are similar to the reaction the boys at her school experienced: In combination with her fighting skills D.D.'s male looks turn her, in the eyes of the male audience, into a man herself.

A good fighting technique, strength and stamina are so intrinsically connected with the idea of masculinity, that a woman who shows all these and does not look feminine becomes a man in the eyes of the audience: "Because you become a man, battering the other. That is what 'man' is – battering the other into submission" (Oates 595). However, as masculinity is so bound up with power and the notion of winning, this changes the moment D.D. is defeated by Jamala Prentis. What makes D.D. lose her strength in the fight against Jamala "The Princess" Prentis is not her opponent's superior talent but the fact that Jamala is so aggressively (and attractively) feminine: "Sleekly-beautiful Princess Jamala with gold-flashing dagger tattoos, shaved head, skin-tight Spandex." "D.D. felt her soul swerve seeing such beauty . . . and so she was hit as she'd never (before) been hit" (Oates 600, 602). Jamala exerts such a force of (possibly sexual) attraction on D.D., that she cannot bring herself to smash her face. For the first time, D.D. calls for Jesus in a fight, but is still defeated. While she could be considered a man until now, representing the ideal of powerful, strong, aggressive masculinity, her defeat has now turned her into a "social" woman again (Sanyal 128) – a masculine woman. And "[t]he *boxing world*, as it was called, did not like *female boxers*" (Oates 602, emphases in original). As a male-dominated world, the boxing world prescribes women who want access to it what they are supposed to look like, and it is not unfeminine. Loosing is associated with femininity, and just like that, the men who admired her before the fight now look with "disgust" and "contemp[t]" at the 'female boxer' (Oates 602), thus exposing the fragile structure of the binary gender system. As Butler states, "that culture so readily punishes or marginalizes those who fail to perform the illusion of gender essentialism should be sign enough that on some level there is social knowledge that the truth or falsity of gender is only socially compelled and in no sense ontologically necessitated" (Butler, "Performative Acts" 528).

Conclusion: "Raging Bull" breaking free

15 Through the character of D.D. Dunphy, Joyce Carol Oates contests the power of the male gaze. Her character's development provides an illustrative and inspirational literary metaphor for the potential to challenge white hegemonic masculinity. She vividly shows how a supposedly male environment that asserts its maleness primarily through the objectification of women can be challenged and uprooted by a woman laying claim to masculinity. From the earliest years of her life, Dawn has experienced men who tried to exert control over women's bodies. However, she refuses to be victimized, controlled and defined by men, and from her early teenage years struggles to regain control over her life and body. Her rape provides a

cathartic moment for her: rather than being the "soul rape," a fate worse than death, that reduces her forever to the passive and traumatized role of victim, it awakes in Dawn a wish for revenge (Sanyal 93). Realizing that her female masculinity may indeed be a source of power rather than a weakness, D.D. gradually begins to embrace it. Just as she used her own body to avenge what the boys did to her, she also learns how to use her body to challenge the male gaze in the boxing world, shaping a new, gender-neutral "cyborg" identity for herself. By embracing her female masculinity, D.D. simultaneously inspires adoration and disgust in the men who watch her, thus successfully employing her body "to transform mechanisms of masculinity and produce new constellations of embodiment, power, and desire" (Halberstam 276). In *A Book of American Martyrs,* the boxing ring thus becomes the visual expression for the power of white male masculinity, and through the character of D.D. Dunphy the novel shows how by embracing female masculinity particularly in such male-dominated environments, dominant hegemonic masculinity can be challenged and contested, ultimately exposing the fragility of the construct called masculinity.

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Looking in the Mirror:
Biological Sisterhood, Doubleness, and the Body in Krissy Kneen's *Steeplechase*

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Abstract:
Biological sisters share genetics and are born (often) in the same womb, therefore encouraging a sense of similitude. When a sister looks at her sister, then, she sees not 'Other' but simply 'mine', or, as Toni McNaron suggests, a sister is "someone who is both ourselves and very much not ourselves—a special kind of double" (7). Through close textual analysis, this paper examines how the doubleness of biological sisterhood encourages the understanding of a sister's body as simultaneously 'self' and 'other' within *Steeplechase* (2011) by Krissy Kneen. *Steeplechase* explores the relationship between estranged, middle-aged sisters Bec and Emily as they reunite at the opening of Emily's art exhibition in Beijing. The relationship between Bec and Emily demonstrates that by understanding a sister's body as simultaneously 'self' and 'other', sisters in literary fiction are able to challenge and disrupt the established boundaries of the body. This paper explores the unique perspective that biological sisterhood offers to reading the female body in literary fiction. This paper also argues that interrogating the corporeal bond between sisters can contribute to dismantling the predominant literary representations of biological sisters as rivals or as an idealizing metaphor, and can reveal deeper complexities of fictional biological sisterhood.

1 Sisterhood has long been a strong, recurrent theme in women's literature. Such pervasion indicates the importance of the bond for women. Within literary criticism, however, there is scarce attention given to the relationship between biological sisters and the body, despite the fact that sisterhood exists in a unique corporeality. Biological sisters share genetics and are born (often) in the same womb, therefore encouraging a sense of similitude. Unlike with the gender difference of brother and sister bonds, and the unavoidable hierarchy of vertical familial bonds such as those between mother and daughter, the adjacency of sororal bonds encourage sisters to see each other, as suggested by Toni McNaron, as "someone who is both ourselves and very much not ourselves—a special kind of double" (7). This paper examines how the doubleness of biological sisterhood encourages the understanding of a sister's body as simultaneously 'self' and 'other' within close textual analysis of one text of Australian literary fiction—*Steeplechase* (2011) by Krissy Kneen. *Steeplechase* explores the problematic but intensely loving relationship between two Australian sisters, Bec and Emily. After engaging in an intimate, often sexual, relationship as adolescents due to their shared psychosis born from Emily's schizophrenia, the sisters grew estranged after Emily was incarcerated in an institution. They reunite in their middle-age, however, when Emily invites Bec to the opening of her art exhibition in Beijing. The doubleness of Bec and Emily

facilitates their understanding of the body of their sister as simultaneously 'self' and 'other': an understanding which encourages complexity as well as solidarity within their bond. Alongside examining these nuances, this paper will also explore how by understanding a sister as both 'self' and other', the sisters in *Steeplechase* are able to challenge and disrupt established body boundaries. Much work has been done by literary scholars of biological sisterhood to dismantle the opposing representations of sisters as rivals and of sisters as an idealizing metaphor; their work has revealed the complexity and nuances of biological sisterhood within fiction. This paper seeks to situate itself among this important scholarship, and contributes by shifting the emphasis to the question of biological sisterhood and the body.

2 There is limited scholarship about biological sisterhood and the body as represented in literary fiction. Indeed, there is relatively limited scholarship about fictive biological sisters in general. The scholars that *do* examine sisters suggest various reasons for this. In her influential text *The Sister Bond: A Feminist View of a Timeless Connection*, Toni McNaron, for example, suggests that it is the exclusively female nature of the relationship (a threat to patriarchy) which has discouraged critical attention to sisters (5). Helga G. Braunbeck echoes this when she argues that sisters are passed over in favour vertical bonds and the bond between brothers because, quite simply, "sister interactions take place outside of the male experience" (159). Similarly, Amy Levin suggests that the silence around sisters may be because the relationship does not adhere to the patriarchal script that the primary role of women is maternal; the sister relationship therefore, which is often built on mutual caregiving and friendship, is considered excessive and without value (20). Another reason might be due to the popularity of the feminist 'sisterhood' within Western public discourse in the latter half of the twentieth century. Sisterhood was a unifying, empowering notion within feminist movements, and Levin, like Downing (4), argues that critics avoid discussing biological sisters because of "the frequent friction among biological sisters that is so much at odds with ideals of sisterhood" (16).

3 Despite this deterrence, there has still been a few key scholars[1] who discuss biological sisterhood in fiction. Within their scholarship, one common interest is on interrogating the representation of biological sisters as rivals. While Roesch suggests that sisters are "shown as rivals who follow the dichotomies of the female and male gender patterns" (134) from the nineteenth century, Levin's scholarship argues that many older, establishing sister stories also endorse rivalry between sisters, such as between the stepsisters in *Cinderella*, or between kind, honest Cordelia and her ambitious sisters in *King Lear* (22). In turning to the Bible, we

[1] Some of whom are mentioned above, and I would like to add Eva Rueschmann and Bridgette Dawn Copeland in particular to this cohort.

find Genesis a world "where brotherhood is seen almost entirely in *human* terms, and where sisterhood is almost entirely ignored" (Downing 107). The one sister relationship that does appear is, unsurprisingly, also shrouded by rivalry: Leah and Rachel, both wives of Jacob, compete to have Jacob's children although eventually only Leah is able to carry a child. Their rivalry, notably, is primarily *corporeal.* Leah and Rachel compete in the physical capacity of their bodies, and their physical capacity to serve the desires of Jacob. Their rivalry—like between the sisters in *Cinderella* and *King Lear*—is for the love of a man, or, as Rueschmann suggests in her doctoral dissertation, "for the property or position of power that the male represents" (2). The rivalry between sisters in fiction is almost always over a male (Bernikow 76), and as such sister rivalry is often (at least somewhat) corporeal in nature as their competition for a male delimits their rivalry to aspects that a male desires. Arguably, as a large part of a male's attraction to a female in these establishing texts is determined on the female's ability to both sexually satisfy and provide children for the male (or, in the case of a father, his daughter's ability to be 'marketable' as a 'good' potential wife), corporeality is often a large part of sister rivalry. The potential for corporeal-related rivalry without the prize of a male is rarely seen in representations of biological sister relationships in fiction. This is representative, perhaps in part, of a history of social valuing that ignores female bonds unless they are in relation to men.

4 Given the understanding of sisters as rivals, sisters are often represented as a dichotomy in order to generate plot (Levin 19). Alongside canonical texts such as *Little Women* (1869) by Louisa May Alcott and the novels of Jane Austen, there are many texts of Australian literary fiction which also follow the established trend of representing sisters as competing opposites. Examples include the mischievous Judy and naive Meg in Ethel Turner's *Seven Little Australians* (1894), the adventurous Caro and the milder Grace in Shirley Hazzard's *The Transit of Venus* (1980), the sisters described only as 'the artist' and 'the cartographer' in Lara Fergus' *My Sister Chaos* (2010), and irresponsible April and serious Esther in Georgia Blain's *Between a Wolf and a Dog* (2016). While the oppositional nature of these sisters introduces tension and conflict into the texts, I argue, alongside Rueschmann (12) and the psychological and sociological studies of biological sisters discussed forthcoming, that is it not the difference between sisters that induces the most tension: rather, it is the similarity. That is, it is the unresolvable tension between a woman desiring to mirror her sister while simultaneously desiring to assert her difference.

5 This tension partly emerges from experiences unique to the upbringing of biological sisters. In *Sisters: Love and Rivalry Inside the Family and Beyond*, Elizabeth Fishel describes

the "shared, private and, in some cases, primitive language between sisters which expresses their interwoven scripts, the stories of their growing up" (214). Sisters are also often a woman's "first role models, allies, and friends" (Millman x), and can thus be influential to a woman's life both in actual, physical presence, and in internalized experiences from memories of earlier years together (Jones 5). Additionally, the potential for the relationship to last longer than almost any other facilitates a "continuing shared experience" (ibid.). Sarah E. Killoren and Andrea L. Roach, in their sociological study of sisters as confidants, argue that this shared experience may encourage sisters to occupy a mentorship role in matters of body experiences, dating, and sexuality (237-238), where knowledge is communicated through the secret physicality shared between biological sisters since birth. Born (often, except in the case of some half-siblings and surrogate pregnancies) in the same womb, sisters share a unique body experience. Unlike with a brother, where a sister would be unavoidably 'other' due to pervading gender dichotomies, and unlike with a parent, where the vertical hierarchy between parent and child is difficult to dismantle, a sister sees a version of herself when she looks at her sister. That is, she sees someone of the same gender who is biologically almost exactly like her, and nothing like her: "a special kind of double" (McNaron 7). Such an experience is, of course, especially resonant for twins or for sisters that are close in age. In addition, sharing the same pregnant body may encourage sisters to understand that they have been, in some sense, birthed *beside* each other. This genetic adjacency, the *horizontal* bond rather than the *vertical*, is where the sororal bond is different to other strong female bonds—particularly the bond between mother and daughter. Downing suggests that unlike the "overwhelming, somehow sacred difference that separates mother and infant child" (11), the difference between sisters is, generally, more relative and subtle (11). Though there is some hierarchy in birth order, age difference, or parental favouritism, there is a symmetry between sisters that is largely unachievable in mother/daughter bonds. McNaron argues that this symmetry, this *doubleness*, is the reason why many biological sisters harbour the "desire to be one, juxtaposed against the necessity to be two" (7).

6 The doubleness of biological sisterhood is thoroughly explored within Krissy Kneen's *Steeplechase*. Kneen's novel explores the relationship between two estranged Australian sisters, Bec and Emily, as they arrange to meet for the opening of Emily's art exhibition in Beijing. Though close growing up, the protagonist Bec recalls their shared psychosis during adolescence that resulted in their engagement in physically intimate and sexual activity together. These events caused Emily to be incarcerated in an institution for schizophrenia which prompted the estrangement between the sisters, though it revealed late in the narrative

that Bec attempted to visit Emily in the institution but she was prohibited by the institution staff and their grandmother.

7 Throughout the novel, Bec and Emily are consistently represented as 'doubles'. The novel begins with Bec, while she is recovering from an operation in hospital, receiving a phone call from her older sister Emily. Upon answering the phone call, Bec hears her "own voice" (Kneen 8) echoed back to her, and the concept of Bec viewing Emily as a second self, or an extension of self, is established. Emily asks Bec to accompany her to the opening of her art exhibition in Beijing and, though hesitant, Bec agrees. Bec immediately recognizes herself reflected in the body of her sister upon her arrival in Beijing, despite their years of estrangement:

> I am shocked to see her this way, blown out and hidden under her own flesh…This moment is also a mirror and I am reflected: I am this size, this weight. I am this same embodiment of jet lagged exhaustion. In her eyes I find my own loneliness and insecurities. (Kneen 139)

8 Bec understands that the body of her sister is her own. The sisters, then, might be seen as *sharing* a body. Emily has a strong desire to cement the shared nature of their bodies, as seen in her insistence on physical similarity. This desire reflects the aforementioned tension intrinsic to biological sisterhood: the necessity to be two bodies, but the yearning to be one (McNaron 7). Emily, for example, suggests that they wear the same coloured dress to her exhibition opening "to prove that [they] are sisters" (Kneen 139). She also recites knowledge about Bec's physical appearance— knowledge that Bec believes would be "impossible that she would know" (148)—such as that Bec had an asymmetrical haircut for months. She also knows, perhaps instinctually, that Bec does not like sweet cocktails despite Bec remembering that there was "never a drop of alcohol" throughout their childhood (157). Likewise, Bec knows her sister without *actually* knowing her. While eating lunch at a restaurant with Emily's friends, no one seems to know that Emily "is taking the piss" (156) but Bec, and earlier, when she realizes that "[her] vague half-smile is the same expression as [her] sister's" (154). Their shared childhood, and shared biology, facilitates an intrinsic connection where both women know their sister's body almost more than they know their own. For Bec and Emily, the body of their sister *is* their own body, despite not having a relationship with each other as adults.

9 Their understanding of each other as 'self', against the physical reality of being 'other', renders the body boundaries of the sisters unstable. The established boundaries between self and other, internal and external, are blurred between Bec and Emily. As such, the parts or functions of a sister's body that would traditionally be considered 'out of bounds'—and

therefore rendering the female body inferior than the contained, pure (male) body (Grosz 14)—in Western patriarchal ideology are no longer actually 'out of body bounds' in the presence of a sister. Rather, they remain within the boundary of the self. When Bec arrives in Beijing and sees her "blown out" older sister (Kneen 139), the "round swell of her hips, the thick set of her shoulders" (146), she does not judge her sister's body. The larger figure of her sister, which 'trespasses' the Western patriarchal boundaries of an ideal "small, slender, and taking up little space" female body, is not abject and deserving of "stigmatisation" (Anleu 367) to Bec in the same way that it might be to the eyes of an outsider or an 'other'. To Bec, Emily's larger figure is also her own—the internal is not trespassing into the external, just shifting inside the special, sister delimitations of the self. This suggests that in the eyes of a sister, where the boundaries between self and other are already blurred, a female's body is able to transgress (and disrupt) established body boundaries that are restrictive (and damaging) for women.

10 Such blurred body boundaries between the sisters also, however, facilitate alternative complexities. For example, Bec visits her studio in Brisbane before traveling to Beijing. Both sisters are painters, though they differ in success: Emily is "a national treasure" (Kneen 97) and Bec feels as though her exhibitions are essentially "shouting into the wind" (Kneen 31). Bec, heavily intoxicated, unlocks a safe in her studio. She takes out several canvases that she has painted to replicate Emily's celebrated painting style. Bec believes that she knows how to paint indistinguishably from her sister as "[she] has spent hours watching [Emily] do it, hours doing it [herself]" (99). She signs her paintings with Emily's signature, which is "perfect", an exact replica of her sister's (ibid.). Bec feels when she first began her "Emily Reich period" that it was "impossible for [her] to see where Bec ended and Emily began" (100). Bec imagines, perhaps fantasizes, that she "becomes Emily" (ibid.). Here, Bec not only desires to share the body of her sister, but desires to reject her own body and exist in Emily's body *as Emily*. This desire is perhaps due to the rivalry that sisters are taught since birth, as aforementioned. Bec, unable to reconcile that she is not as successful as her older sister, might desire to become Emily. However, if this desire is due to rivalry, it is different to the sororal rivalry traditionally represented as it is not entirely for the love, wealth, or property of a man (unlike the rivalry between sisters in the aforementioned establishing sister texts of Rachel and Leah in Genesis, *King Lear*, and *Cinderella*). While Bec is jealous of the admiration her lover, John, has for Emily's paintings, Bec has been privately 'painting as Emily' long before she met John. Arguably, then, Bec's desire could simply be an intense manifestation of the desire that McNaron argues is inherent in biological sister relationships; the desire to be one

(7). Bec's desire to exist as Emily when painting speaks to a more complex, darker implication of the blurred body boundaries between biological sisters. Here, biological sisterhood is clearly not always an idealizing metaphor: the uncertainty of 'self' and 'other', particularly in regards to corporeality, accommodates the transgression of boundaries in ways that threaten an individual sense of self.

11 The complexity of the blurred body boundaries between Bec and Emily is most acute, however, in Bec's memory of the childhood events that ignited their estrangement. Throughout their childhood and adolescence, Emily had shown schizophrenic traits that were similar to those of their mother. Emily harboured a delusion that a man named Raphael visited their isolated property during the night and that she had developed a friendship with him. After Emily grows increasingly distant from Bec, her younger sister longs to reclaim Emily's attention and is distraught to be excluded from experiencing Emily's secrets—"I want to share him with her. Raphael has stolen my sister from me and I want so much to join them in their game" (Kneen 95). Bec eventually convinces herself that she can also hear Raphael "breathing between the flat tones" of the telephone receiver (2011, 83). Emily and Bec develop a shared psychosis, or, as Bec describes it, "a shared madness, a folie á deux" (194), and Bec begins to wish that Raphael would visit her like he visits Emily. On the first night that Raphael visits Bec, Raphael takes her on horseback to a nearby public school and kisses her (128). It is revealed late in the narrative that Emily is Raphael, and that both Emily and Bec were under the delusion that Emily's change in clothes, physicality, and voice when she 'became' Raphael was a seperate person. Here, the transgression of body boundaries shifts from metaphorical to actual physical intimacy. As an adult, Bec "wonder[s] about [her] nights with Raphael which must have been nights with Emily. What terrible things [they] did. How cleverly [they] hid this from [themselves]" (202), and she remembers their continuous physical, often sexual, intimacy. Here, the sense of an individual corporeality is so unstable that the established (and 'acceptable') body boundaries between Bec and Emily are incredibly disrupted. By viewing the bodies of each other as simultaneously 'self' and 'other', the sisters within Kneen's text demonstrate the potential for biological sister bonds to transgress and shift the established boundaries of the body in ways that are incredibly psychologically and physiologically complicated. Here, the often ignored, 'taboo' shades and nuances of the relationship between biological sisters and corporeality are revealed.

12 The relationship between biological sisterhood and the body as represented in literary fiction is undeniably complex. Though sisters as rivals and sisters as an idealizing metaphor have dominated literary representations of the bond, sisters Bec and Emily within Kneen's

Steeplechase disrupt such traditions. The 'doubleness' of biological sisterhood encourages Bec and Emily to understand the body of each other as simultaneously 'self' and 'other': an understanding that facilitates solidarity and empowerment *as well as* conflict and complexity. Bec and Emily demonstrate that in the eyes of a sister, where the boundaries between 'self' and 'other' are already blurred, a female's body can transgress established body boundaries that are restrictive for women. Such blurred body boundaries between Bec and Emily, however, also have the potential to accomodate the transgression of body boundaries in ways that threaten an individual sense of self and reveal the nuances of sororal physical intimacy that are often taboo. Through close textual analysis of biological sisters as represented in *Steeplechase*, this paper has explored the potential for fictional biological sisterhood to challenge and disrupt (in numerous, alternative ways) the established boundaries of the female body. In doing so, this paper has contributed to the important work started by literary scholars of interrogating and dismantling the dominant literary representations of biological sisters as rivals and biological sisters as an idealizing metaphor in literature. By shifting emphasis to the *body*, and to the corporeal bond of biological sisters, this paper explores some of the complexities of biological sister relationships that have yet to be extensively examined in literary scholarship.

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The Power and Subjection of Liminality and Borderlands of Non-Binary Folx

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Abstract:

This essay explores Victor Turner's liminal spaces and Gloria Anzaldúa's borderlands and how these spaces contain components of power that include the potentiality of liminal space, the access to knowledge and knowing, freedom from social constructs, and multiple subjectivities. By existing in an unintelligible state, folx who hold non-binary gender identities function within liminal spaces. Components found in liminal spaces and borderlands allow non-binary folx to possess a power that is not accessible to those confined within the structured gender binary. For this essay, I will utilize the term non-binary to refer to people who place themselves, or are forcibly placed, outside of the gender binary. I am using non-binary folx because I view this as an umbrella term that includes all of the above-mentioned labels, as non-binary implies functioning outside of the gender binary. Moreover, folx incorporates the x that is being widely used to bring in more identities to conversations, such as womxn, latinx, and alumx to name a few. While investigating the power that exists within liminal spaces and borderlands, the struggles that non-binary folx face are also explored. A search for home, an inability to enter into defined spaces, and lack of access to systems are some of the complexities that exist within these liminal spaces. These borderlands are sites of potential invisibility, misrecognition, and unintelligibility that restrict access to institutions as well as rights that are structured by the gender binary system. It is imperative that an investigation of these properties of liminal states and borderlands be done to create access to these institutions without negating the lived experiences of non-binary folx by forcing their classification within the gender binary.

1 Father/Mother. Light/Dark. White/Black. Western languages are built on a foundation of differences and comparisons. Concepts are understood by how they relate to or differ from other concepts already understood. A table is understood to be related to other furniture but differ from a chair in that one holds food while the other holds people. This comparison of difference creates a dichotomy of either one or the other. Rigid borders create a binary that places identities into an either/or positionality. The polarity that is created by the dichotomy establishes distinct borders around both sides of the binary.

2 By looking at the concepts of liminal space and borderlands, this essay will investigate the space that falls between the distinct borders of female and male gender identities. The concept of borderlands as a space for power has been applied to numerous groups of people who inhabit these fringes. Gloria Anzaldúa introduced her conception of identity in her 1987 book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza.* Prior to Anzaldúa's borderlands, the concept of liminality existed as a space outside of definable social structures. The theory of a liminal state

came from Victor Turner's investigation of the rituals of the Nbembu tribe. Turner defines this space as "ambiguous, neither here nor there, betwixt and between all fixed points of classification" (*Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* 232). Although Turner presented this space as a place of transition, I argue that non-binary folx stay within a liminal space due to their unclassifiable identities. Although Anzaldúa and Turner look at these spaces differently, I argue that these two theories are in conversation with one another.

3 Turner's investigation of the Nbembu tribe is a case study of how members of the tribe move from one defined space to another through their rite of passage. The space one inhabits between the two structured identities was a phase he called the liminal phase. This phase, however, was not seen as a permanent phase.

4 In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa investigates the space that is undefinited differently than Turner. For Anzaldúa, her investigation was more of a personal one. In her semi-autobiographical book, she discusses spaces between defined identities through her own personal experiences and identities. She looks at physical borders, such as the Mexican-American border, and her identity as a Chicana. Yet, she also discusses symbolic borders, such as men and women, and heterosexual and homosexual, and her identity as a lesbian who often finds herself functioning in traditionally female and male roles both.

5 Both Turner and Anzaldúa explore these places as transitory spaces. Turner presents this movement from the liminal phase to the structured phase as inevitable and necessary to enter back in to society. Anzaldúa, on the other hand, argues that even those who live within the borderlands must abide by certain expected rules to gain access, but does allows for the existence of folx who remain in the borderlands.

6 Another way in which Anzaldúa demonstrates her passage between borders is through the structure of her book. The first half of the book is written in essays describing Anzaldúa's lived experiences as a Chicana lesbian activist to challenge the concepts of bordered spaces. The second half of the book are poems written by Anzaldúa that allow the reader to relate to her experiences from a different access point. The book is written using English, as well as six variations of Spanish. Anzaldúa does this as another illustration, specifically to non-bilingual readers, of how access matters and being able to move within both languages affects this access.

7 This essay will investigate the ways in which non-binary folx exist within these liminal spaces and borderlands. I will also look at the components of power created through being positioned within these spaces. Liminal spaces and borderlands contain components of power that include the potentiality of liminal space, the access to knowledge and knowing, freedom from social constructs, and multiple subjectivities. These components allow non-binary folx to possess a power that is not accessible to those confined with the structured gender binary.

8 Although these spaces permit access to specific types of power, they are also sites of potential invisibility, misrecognition, and unintelligibility that restrict access to institutions as well as rights that are structured by the gender binary system. It is imperative that an investigation of these properties of liminal states and borderlands be done to create access to these institutions without negating the lived experiences of non-binary folx by forcing their classification within the gender binary.

Defining Terminology

9 People who hold identities outside of the male/female gender binary use several labels. Some of these labels include gender variant, gender non-binary, genderqueer, gender diverse, intersex, transgender, and non-binary folx. Additionally, there are certain distinctions made between these labels. However, for the purpose of this essay, I will utilize the term non-binary to refer to people who place themselves, or are forcibly placed, outside of the gender binary. I am using non-binary folx because I view this as an umbrella term that includes all of the above-mentioned labels, as non-binary implies functioning outside of the gender binary. Moreover, folx incorporates the x that is being widely used to bring in more identities to conversations, such as womxn, latinx, and alumx to name a few. In keeping with the intention of allowing non-binary folx an identity outside of the binary, I will also be utilizing the singular “they” and “them” when referencing a person outside of this binary if gender pronouns are not known for an individual. Though there are also many alternative pronouns to the ones representing the binary, such as “ze”, “hir” and “xe”, “they” has become widely used for much of the community, and has been added to the Oxford Dictionary, which I believe makes “they” more universally understood.

10 Throughout this essay, I will be using two concepts to define the spaces in which non-binary folx negotiate. Both spaces will be shown to be sites of power and freedom, while, conversely, creating an invisibility and lack of power. By being placed or placing oneself in a

position that is not directly defined by the mainstream discourse, non-binary folx initiate an interrogation of the rigid gender dichotomy.

11 The first concept explored to investigate the space non-binary folx are positioned within will be the term liminality. In 1967, Victor Turner established the idea of liminality through his study of the Nbembu rite of passage ritual in his book *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Turner breaks down the rite of passage ceremony into three distinct phases.

> The first phase of separation comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions (a 'state'); during the intervening liminal period, the state of the ritual subject (the 'passenger') is ambiguous; he passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state; in the third phase the passage is consummated. The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations of a clearly defined and 'structural' type, and is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards. (*The Forest of Symbols* 94)

For Turner, these stages were documented through a transition. Liminality, for him, was not a place one remained, but rather a place one passed through on their way back into social structure. The liminal stage created a space where the subject was able to redefine themselves within circumstances that have "few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state" (*The Forest of Symbols* 94). This stage, though, was a means to an end. The end was reached when the subject was able to place themselves back into the constructs of society. As cited above, this state, by virtue of its stability, has rights and obligations.

12 However, I will argue that this liminal space, outside of the constructs of society, allows for a space from which to deconstruct the notions society holds stable. Michael Joseph posits, "Someone whose personhood is liminal lives beyond the pale of society, or structure. For such persons, liminality is neither ritual nor transitional, but an open-ended way of life qualified by sets of cultural demands, ethical systems, and processes that are irreconcilable… outsiderhood and marginality defy reincorporation" (140). Thus, because of their inability to be defined, these bodies call into question the definitions of gender that are widely accepted. As Yang states in 2000, during her investigation on liminal spaces within social movements, "a liminal situation is characterized by freedom, egalitarianism, communion, and creativity. Freedom results from a rejection of those rules and norms that have structured social action prior to the liminal situation"

(383). This freedom is why I have chosen liminal spaces as the first of two spaces from which to work when investigating the potential non-binary folx have for social restructuring.

13 Although liminality helps to illustrate the space that non-binary folx occupy, there has been a significant amount of work since Turner's study around this undefined space that helps contextualize liminality more clearly. To extend the argument of liminal space, I look at Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of borderlands, which she outlines in her book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. According to Anzaldúa, "A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants" (3). As is evident in Anzaldúa's definition of borderlands, people who are positioned outside of a distinct boundary inhabit these spaces. In the case of non-binary folx, these bounded spaces are those of male and female. Individuals outside of male and female are forbidden to enter those defined spaces.

14 Turner and Anzaldúa's work creates an access point for which to understand the lived experiences of non-binary folx. However, neither theory truly parses apart the power and limitations that are found within these undefined spaces. Turner saw liminality as a temporary state and did not investigate the power that one could hold remaining in a liminal state. He investigated more the need to enter a structured state in order to gain access. Anzaldúa, analogously, looked at the ways in which borderlands confined the inhabitants. Though Anzaldúa took it further, arguing that the system and borders themselves were what confined the border dwellers. Turner did not critique the system the Nbembu tribe functioned within, while Anzaldúa did actively critique the systems of gender, nations, sexuality, and more.

15 By utilizing Turner and Anzaldúa, I will parse apart the ideas of liminal space and borderlands and how undefined identities can negatively affect the lived experiences of non-binary folx, but that there is also an empowerment that exists when one dwells outside of structured identities. This essay will look at how access to systems that depend on defined identities is the site of difficulty when living outside of the binary.

16 Non-binary folx exist in a place that borders the female space and the male space but does not cross into either position completely. Different variations of gender and gender presentation will be situated closer to one border or the other or may lie precisely in between the two. These variations create this space of borderlands where the subject is never completely

defined. “Anzaldúa’s book Borderlands describes a fragmented and multiple subject that strategically deploys the relationship and even the contradictions among its various parts to deconstruct Western narratives of identity based on opposition and hierarchy” (Walker 70). This relationship to various identities can be both empowering and fractional. Throughout this essay, I will investigate the sites of empowerment as well as the consequences of fracturing one’s full authentic self if that self does not fit within defined spaces. I also consider the invisibility that can be created within these borderlands and how this inability to be seen has particularly detrimental effects on the lives of non-binary folx.

Investigating Anzaldúa’s Borderlands

17 Anzaldúa’s concept of borderlands has been used by philosophers in art, identity politics, as well as queer and race theory to investigate numerous sites of divergence since her 1987 book. In “Bodies in the Borderlands: Gloria Anzaldúa and David Wojnarowicz’s Mobility Machines,” Todd Ramlow utilizes the concept of borderlands to look at both queer identity and differently abled bodies within the queer community, specifically using the works of artist David Wojnarowicz. Ramlow “consider[s] how these liminal spaces/states might produce a new consciousness that undermines the normative structure and coherence of both sides of the binary” (169). As Ramlow suggests, by existing in a liminal space, a consciousness that is not bounded by conventional binaries can emerge. This consciousness allows the person within the liminal space to see past the binaries and negotiate within the borderlands. Ramlow argues, “Anzaldúa’s tentative assertion of the ‘canceling’ effect of a dually constituted/excluded borderlands subject, or being ‘zero, nothing, no one,’ is rejected throughout the rest of her text, and this dual consciousness precedes her assertion of a more radical multiple subjectivity born out of the borderlands” (176). Anzaldúa argues that it is not a nothingness, but a multiplicity, that is created. This ‘multiple subjectivity’ is what gives the inhabitants the power to look beyond conventional norms, while at the same time encouraging those within the bound spaces to question these norms. Mutability and multiple subjectivities are what give these individuals within liminal spaces the power to critique the lands of distinct genders of which these border dwellers fringe.

18 The power that is given to border dwellers is not an absolute power. There are many struggles that coincide with existing within the borderlands. However, the power that exists

within these areas is a power that is limited to the border dwellers themselves. “Both Anzaldúa and Wojnarowicz create images of life in the borderlands and envision modes of being outside of Self/Other dichotomies. These images have real resistant power, power that is produced along with the exercise of dominant bio-power that would subjugate individuals and groups” (Ramlow 173). The borderlands position the inhabitants in a space of freedom that allows for the questioning of power that does not exist within bordered identities.

19 Within the freedom that exists inside the borderlands, these liminal spaces create an ambiguity that is the source of power while simultaneously being the source of a fracturing of identity.

> *La mestiza* constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to different thinking characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes. The new mestizo copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity… Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (Anzaldúa 101)

The border dweller is forced into a continual renegotiation with the borders that surround them. This can lead to a sense of not belonging or not having a home. For instance, a more masculine presenting person may feel the need to dress more androgynously or even feminine when it is necessary to be read as a certain gender, such as going through airport security.

Searching for Home

20 Being positioned in a permanent state of being allows a person to find stability within their identities and existence. Identities that are positioned in the borderlands do not have the stable sense of home due to the liminality of these spaces. These spaces do not allow for permanence as the border dwellers are continually negotiating and repositioning themselves. In “Gendered Borderlands”, Denise Sergura and Patricia Zavella write about this loss of home within the context of moving between geographic spaces.

> Subjective transnationalism also reflects the experience of feeling “at home” in more than one geographic location, where identity construction is deterritorialized as part of shifting race-ethnic boundaries or gendered transitions in a globalizing world. Conversely, subjective transnationalism includes feelings that one is neither from "here" nor from “there”, not at home anywhere. (540)

The lack of home referenced by Segura can go beyond geographical location and be applied to locations of gender as well. Many physical spaces are gendered, such as restrooms, dorm rooms, and dressing rooms. Gender itself, though, is also a space. Someone's gender identity takes up space in a room, takes up space in relationships with others, and surrounds someone's identity in relation to others in their life. As non-binary folx enter into different situations with people who have different understandings of the gender binary and those who exist outside of it, they are continually navigating their identities and how they present these identities. Because of this continuous navigating, a permanent space, or home, cannot be realized.

21 The transient nature of living within the borderlands does not allow for one to be situated in permanence. Conversely, those positioned concretely within the borders of male or female are situated in a permanence that they do not have to contemplate. These homes of female and male are already built for them to live within. However, within this continual negotiation, there is an access to knowledge that lies outside of bound spaces. Anzaldúa describes the negotiation between moving in and out of the borderlands and within the borderlands themselves as she gains knowledge. As she navigates within these borderlands, she is able to access "knowing" in different ways that help her to keep moving and keep her from becoming stagnant.

> Every increment of consciousness, every step forward is a *travesia*, a crossing. I am again an alien in new territory. And again, and again. But if I escape conscious awareness, escape "knowing" I won't be moving. Knowledge makes me more aware, it makes me more conscious. "Knowing" is painful because after "it" happens I can't stay in the same place and be comfortable. I am no longer the same person I was before. (Anzaldúa 48)

As Anzaldúa continues to move into new spaces and new consciousness, she is able to increase the amount of "knowing" she is doing. This is another location of power within borderlands where access to knowledge is gained through an access to movement between borders not accessible to those contained within the borders. So, although this liminal space places its inhabitants in a state of "homelessness," it also gives these inhabitants power that is distinctly their own.

22 It is important to note that this search for home can disenfranchise others whose identities are liminal. By placing oneself within a defined recognizable identity, the visibility of undefined identities becomes less prominent. As Jack Halberstam describes in *Female Masculinity*, "But for the queer subject, or what Gloria Anzaldúa calls the border dweller, home is what the person

living in the margins cannot want… the journey home for the transsexual may come at the expense of a recognition that others are permanently dislocated" (171). By finding stability within a recognized identity, transsexuals who clearly define themselves within the binary of male/female further push non-binary folx into the margins. The act of finding a home can, then, displace others into an increased state of homelessness, which could be described as a gentrification of gender. As gender presentations and identities are made more palpable for mainstream consumption, those who cannot exist within palpable presentations are forced further into the margins.

Investigating Spaces for Non-Binary Folx

23 When non-binary folx move throughout their lives, they often present identities that exist beyond the boundaries of recognized gender identities. By blurring these recognized gender identities, these "passengers" fall outside of easily interpellated categories. Turner describes the "passenger," a person inhabiting the liminal space, as someone who is, "at once no longer classified and not yet classified" (*The Forest of Symbols* 96). This not yet classified space allows an examination of the classifications themselves. However, it also renders the existence of the person that is unclassifiable questionable. As Judith Butler describes, "The fall from established gender boundaries initiates a sense of radical dislocation which can assume a metaphysical significance. If human existence is always gendered existence, then to stray outside established gender is in some sense to put one's very existence into question" (508). Therefore, while the categories of male and female come under investigation, the person outside of these categories also comes under investigation. The existence of non-binary folx places them within a liminal space that is not yet classified and, at the same time, is "an instant of pure potentiality" (Turner, *The Forest of Symbols* 41). This pure potentiality is the fundamental characteristic that gives these passengers power.

24 Because they are not incased in socially constructed norms of their gender, since their gender exists outside of socially recognized genders, they have the potential to create an identity that is outside of social constructs. This power lies within the potentiality of the liminal space, the access to knowledge in the borderlands, freedom from social constructs, and the multiple subjectivities that exist in the borderlands of the gender dichotomy.

Finding Potential within Non-Binary Folx's Boundaries

25 Knowledge and knowing have been discussed earlier as sites of power. I have investigated Anzaldúa description of the effect of always moving and having access to the knowing. Now, I would like to look at how this access to knowledge comes at a cost. The act of seeing and being seen is examined by many theories including Althusser's interpellation, Butler's "I", and Foucault's Panopticism. Anzaldúa discusses the power dynamic in "seeing and being seen. Subject and object, I and she. The glance can freeze us in place; it can 'possess' us. It can erect a barrier against the world. But in a glance also lies awareness, knowledge" (Anzaldúa 42). Although the gazer has the power to erect a barrier between what they understand and the gazed upon, this gaze still creates a knowledge for both the gazer and the gazed upon. By existing in a liminal space outside of what is known, the act of existing itself becomes an act of knowing and disseminating knowledge.

26 Within this liminal space, the inhabitants are also afforded freedoms that are not accessible when one is bounded within a defined identity. The barriers are positioned around one's unknown existence, but not within it. Since these inhibiters identities are not permeated with socially constructed norms that mark these identities as real, they can restructure and negotiate their identities within society. "By separating ritual subjects from existing social structures, the liminal stage of the ritual process endows subjects with the freedom and power to transcend structural constraints and to refashion themselves and society" (Yang 397). This negotiation of self is not one available outside of the liminal space because only the liminal space contains the potentiality to construct one's identity. As discussed prior, Turner's subject is only transitioning when they exist as passenger. Once the subject moves into the ritual subject, they are then repositioned within the structures of society.

27 Non-binary folx, because their existences position them outside of the structures of society, are able to call into question all that is understood as real about gender.

> Transgender thus reveals as fraudulent the accepted version of the relations between sex and gender in which sex is thought to be the natural cause of gender. The transgendered subject's role is that of a debunker, unveiling this representation of sex to be just that, a representation or simulation, not the natural cause or ground of gender at all, but its projection. (Prosser 483)

Without their position within the liminal space, their role as debunkers would not be possible. Thus, non-binary folx find power within this liminal space. The power within liminal spaces is

that of the ability to deconstruct accepted social norms as well as to critique the dichotomy of the male/female gender system.

28 As discussed throughout this essay, this power comes with limitations and at a cost to those within these spaces. To have access to the power of liminality, one must stay within the liminal space and not transition into Turner's third state of consummation. This liminal space sometimes renders the subject unintelligible or even invisible. However, positioning oneself outside of the liminal space, by passing over the threshold, crossing the border, and stabilizing their identity, the subject not only loses the power of liminality, but also loses pieces of themselves that initially placed their identity within a liminal space.

Interrogating Impediments in the Borderlands

29 Subjects who exist in the liminal space are threats to the ideas of hegemony and intelligibility. Institutions and other societal systems often requires a person to place themself into a defined gender to gain access to the resources of these institutions. These systems do not allow for an uncategorized subject. Because of their status of not yet classified, non-binary folx become a problem that society attempts to bind within a space that it can understand and classify. "Liminality is inherently emancipating. The sense of egalitarianism and communion it creates tends to level out existing social structures…. (however) the freedom of liminality, when carried to an extreme, 'may be speedily followed by despotism, overbureacratization, or other modes of structural rigidification' (Turner 1969: 129)" (Yang 384). This need to classify subjects not only places their positions in liminal spaces at risk, but also puts the bodies of these subjects themselves at risk. These bodies are forced to renegotiate their gender presentations, their desire/ability to pass, as well as their gender definitions in order to traverse the society in which they live. They are constantly shifting identities as they negotiate spaces of which they move in and out.

30 The alternative to continual renegotiation is crossing the border into a classified gender. This can be detrimental for many reasons. First, it is often a conscious effort to fit within performed gender roles despite incongruence with the subject's gender identity. Second, it suggests to mainstream society that this is the true lived experience for anyone who's presentation differs from their sex assigned at birth. It has the potential to make others invisible who exist within the liminal space. Even if one does wish to be a border-crosser, Jameson Green

argues, mainstream society will never allow for a seamless transition from liminal space to the state of consummation. “Seeking acceptance within the system of ‘normal’ and denying our transsexual status is an acquiescence to the prevailing binary gender paradigm that will never let us fit in and will never accept us as equal members of society. Our transsexual status will always be used to threaten and shame us” (503). This idea that society has the power to shame a community that is attempting to become part of the mainstream is also problematic when looking at those border dwellers that wish to cross the threshold. If one’s identity does fit closer to the accepted border of man or woman, they are still forced to police their gender identities in order to be seen as legitimate occupiers of this space.

31 Although there are those whose identities fit closer to the gender norms of male or female, by existing in the borderlands as part of their transition, or coming of age journey, they will, as Green suggests, never be entirely integrated into the new bordered identity into which they move. Even those who desire to be intelligible and defined may not meet the criteria to be fully incorporated into the gender binary system. “Interestingly, persons who share liminal states in communitas are sometimes there for altogether different reasons. There are those who choose a permanent state of liminality, and others who are liminal by circumstance, condition, or social definition. The liminal persona comes to be in two ways, the voluntary and involuntary” (Carson 10). Even identities that do fit within the gender binary system, if they are not genders that match the sex assigned at birth, many systems still do not allow the same access as they do to cisgender individuals. Thus, the lack of agency in crossing into the mainstream is another reason why it is imperative to create access to institutions without requiring absolute intelligibility.

32 As discussed prior, the liminal space also does not possess a position of wholeness. In fact, often, when society cannot classify an identity, they either cannot consciously conceive of such an identity or simply deny its existence.

> Within this schema of a regulatory ideal of naturalized sex and gender, an individual who actively seeks to remain liminal becomes, to a certain degree, invisible… although they are perceived, it is not clear how they are (or, perhaps, should be) perceived – we do not have an easy way of seeing them that does not violate their sense of non-identification with existing gender and sexual norms. (McQueen 7)

As Butler discussed, a person existing outside of the binary gender system may have their very existence questioned because there is no classification that can make their lived experiences intelligible. To be unintelligible is to be invisible.

33 There are multiple theorists whose concepts of identity aid in exploring subjectivities of non-binary folx. First, Althusser's theory of interpellation will be considered. Althusser's theory suggests that if there is no language for which the hailer to call out to the one being hailed, the hailed cannot be called. If one is not something that can be hailed, due to lack of language available, then one lacks subjectivity. Butler also uses Althusser to look at her concept of the 'I' and about being visible. As she describes it, "One 'exists' not only by virtue of being recognized, but, in a prior sense, by being recognizable" (*Excitable Speech* 5). This ability to be recognized is what gives identity to those being hailed and a shared understanding between the one doing the hailing and the one being hailed. Without this understanding, a person is unable to share their identities. The concept of invisibility goes hand in hand with the theory of interpellation. Without being able to be interpellated, one remains invisible in the way that they are not given a subjectivity that fits their own identities.

34 Not only does this unintelligibility place the body in a state of invisibility, but also places barriers between them and institutions that require a person to define themselves within the system of the gender binary. Institutions such as marriage, medical access, education, and state and federal identification documents require participation in the system of the gender binary. These institutions help to perpetuate hegemony within the gender system. All of these impediments can cause non-binary folx to define themselves using the current gender system, at least in some aspects of their lives. This, in turn, takes away some of the power that they gain access to within the liminal space, and assists in making these lived experiences invisible while also placing them in direct opposition to the larger society and institutions. "The dual aspect of liminality as both a desired enduring site of being and a finite process of becoming neatly captures the bind which many trans-individuals appear to be caught in with regards to social and political recognition" (McQueen 7). Without change to the gender system, these borderlands will remain marginalized and the people within them will have less access to necessary institutions. However, if the gender system simply includes more classifications of gender, individuals residing within liminal spaces can potentially be moved into a space that is classified and therefore lose the power that comes from existing within this liminal space.

35 That is the challenge faced when dismantling the gender system and gaining access to institutions and rights without losing access to the liminal space. How can one gain access to systems that only grant admission to those who are clearly defined without moving in to a space

of distinct definability? Should the onus fall on those who hold these unclassified identities to become classifiable or the systems that do not allow for access of authentic humans?

36 Victor Turner's liminal space and Gloria Anzaldúa's borderlands give theoretical context to the space in which non-binary folx find themselves negotiating. These spaces are a site for empowerment through potentiality, knowing, freedom, and multiple subjectivities. However, within these borderlands, a potential for invisibility, misrecognition, and lack of access all exist. The navigation between the liminal state of gender nonconformity and a presentation that is intelligible when necessary is critical to the lived experiences of non-binary folx. Through the work of acknowledging the power and vulnerability of liminal spaces and borderlands, it is the hope that this essay initiates a conversation that creates awareness and understanding about these lived experiences while allowing these experiences to exist without classification. Only in the space of liminality can these identities be true to themselves and continue to possess the power afforded to them by existing within these borderlands.

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Lori Merish, ***Archives of Labor: Working-Class Women and Literary Culture in the Antebellum United States*** **(Duke UP, 2017)**

By Kelly Morgan, Drew University, USA

1 Lori Merish, in *Archives of Labor*, examines the robust literary culture of working-class women in the antebellum United States and succeeds in uncovering the complexities of the female experience that defined the various occupations in which women participated. Merish examines popular fiction, factory pamphlets, and dime novels in order to unpack the public perception of the female worker and in doing so, ascribes agency to working-class women employed as mill girls, seamstresses, missionary workers, and domestic servants. Merish also refracts the working class occupations through the lens of race by exploring the shifting public perception regarding the domestic servant as conveyed through popular contemporary novels. Historiographical trends tend to highlight gender roles and social expectations by evaluating the means in which working-class women push the boundaries of a traditionally patriarchal society in order to be economically or socially independent. Consequently, scholarship often collapses a variety of occupations into one seamless 'working class' experience. Merish's work, on the other hand, addresses the complex composition of the working class and conveys the plurality of female occupations by analyzing them in separate chapters with distinct literary tracts. She succeeds in weaving together literary and historical analysis and produces a thorough and engaging text on antebellum working-class women.

2 Examining nineteenth-century working-class culture poses significant obstacles for meaningful analysis, primarily due to the ephemerality of the source material. In spite of the proliferation of literary texts catered to the working-class, there was little motivation to preserve these texts, often deemed of little value. Merish, however, overcomes this obstacle by finding and examining long-ignored textual archives and by approaching ephemerality as an analytical tool, rather than a burden for critical scholarship. Merish weaves together the narratives of each female occupation with both their respective literary genre and with their other female counterparts in similar occupations. In the first two chapters, Merish explores diverse literary genres that focus specifically on the factory girl. The *Voice of Industry,* a periodical that catered to the working-class population, often reprinted women's speeches on labor reform in response to the degradation of working-class factory experience. In addition to *Voice of Industry,* Merish

critically analyzes the *Lowell Offering* and the *Factory Girl's Album,* both periodicals that provided an outlet for women's opinions on class struggle and their experiences as women in a factory setting. By analyzing periodicals published for consumption by working-class women, especially in the case of *Lowell Offering,* Merish uncovers a burgeoning literary culture among female factory workers specifically, and their professed solidarity with their fellow laborers against the degradation of the working-class population by elite factory owners.

3 From periodicals to dime novels, Merish then explores the trope of the factory girl in popular fiction. The gendered construction of the fallen woman speaks to a wider understanding of the factory girl in working-class society, as a vulnerable woman lacking agency and eventually seduced by an elite factory owner and rogue. Highlighting the dependence of factory women on the factory-owners, Merish extends this analysis to include the dependence of the entire working class on elite industry owners. Class dependence, a frequent topic in the working-class periodicals, ties in seamlessly with Merish's analysis of popular fiction and the extension of class concerns framed and refracted through the lens of gender.

4 Merish shifts from factory girl to seamstress through the trope of the fallen and seduced woman, but highlights the difference in social status between these two occupations. While the role of the two occupations are similar, as in they both deal with the manufacture of textiles, the image of the solitary seamstress evokes significantly more sympathy and sentimentality than their factory girl counterpart. Merish attributes this to the economic dependence of the solitary seamstress within the home compared to the factory girls' attempts at independence by leaving the home, and ultimately their domestic responsibilities. Merish juxtaposes the dependent class of seamstresses depicted in fiction with the militant seamstresses who, much like their factory-girl counterparts, developed a collective voice to speak on behalf of their downtrodden seamstress sisters. By comparing these divergent literary genres, Merish complicates the role of female laborers both within their respective class structures and as advocates both for their fellow women and for the working-class as a whole. Merish, through this venture, uncovers and unpacks how female laborers saw themselves in conjunction with how their male counterparts considered their labor and social roles within the broader working class.

5 The last chapters tackle the complexities of race, class, and empire by exploring the literary culture of female missionary workers in California and through fiction depicting domestic servants. In particular, Merish's analysis of Harriet Wilson's 1859 novel *Our Nig*

highlights what Merish refers to as the "'blackening' of domestic service for antebellum constructions of class" and interrogates the concept of the domestic sphere once it is refracted by race and gender (154). By incorporating an interracial girl, Frado, as the domestic servant, her responsibilities gradually increase, thereby entailing more of a slave-master relationship, rather than an extension of domestic duties performed by white women. The means by which Frado addresses this status and pushes against the mistress's expectations are, according to Merish, the contested space for working-class women and their assimilation to, or avoidance of, social expectations in the antebellum era.

6 Merish's final chapter explores the testimonies of Mexicanas who worked in missions, often alongside Native American women, in the California territory. While the content and argument are similar to the rest of the book, the shift to a different historical moment complicated by varied definitions of race and identity presents the reader with challenges in interpreting and understanding Merish's claims. More historical context regarding the status of Native Americans before and after United States annexation, in addition to the complicated position of Mexicanas during this time, would complement and enhance Merish's argument. This book achieves a substantial feat by seamlessly incorporating the comparison of slave narratives, popular fiction, the white female working-class, and the role of the domestic servant, and the additional layer of Californios, while similar in content and argument, reads as an anomaly and not as part of the same literary culture formed and analyzed by the rest of the book. While logically the arguments are similar, the context and content, a full continent apart, can arguably be part of a different historical and literary moment, rather than an extension of the culture that Merish is analyzing in the rest of *Archives of Labor*.

7 Merish's book is an accomplishment both in literary interpretation and historical analysis, identifying complicated nuances in social and cultural ideologies and addressing them in an informative manner. The obstacle faced when exploring working-class popular culture—by default an ephemeral and elusive subject matter—is swiftly overcome by Merish's incorporation of a variety of texts, both fiction and nonfiction, and engagement with an assortment of periodicals, dime novels, and sentimental books. This book is an essential read for anyone interested in working-class women's history, literary culture, and the intersection of race and class in the antebellum period.

Jovanka Vuckovic, Annie Clark, Roxanne Benjamin, and Karen Kusama. *XX.* Magnet Releasing and XYZ Films Productions, 2017.

By Morgan Oddie, Queen's University, Kingston, Canada

1 Given the low number of women contributors to horror, a genre anthology of "four deadly tales from four female filmmakers" (Magnet Releasing) is a disappointingly unique concept. This is what *XX* (2017) promises, with four dramatically different horror shorts. However as an anthology, the film lacks consistency in style and tone, as the only commonality is the gender of the filmmakers.

2 Based on a short story by Jack Ketchum, "The Box" is the first of the collection. Directed by Jovanka Vuckovic, Gemini-award winning visual effects artist and former Editor-in-Chief of *Rue Morgue Magazine*, "The Box" manages a sophisticated level of atmospheric dread given the short run time. On the way home to the suburbs, a young son peeks into a stranger's red gift box on the train. He then stops eating without explanation, and the food refusal soon spreads to his sister. Relationships between the rest of the family and the mother (played by Natalie Brown) rapidly deteriorate, as she desperately struggles to connect with her family, their newfound affliction, and the box, before everyone's self-starved demise. Her husband reacts to the situation with anger and blames her for continued composure and measures of self-care. In the most unsettling scene of the collection, the mother is literally consumed by her family on their suburban dinner table, a gory and macabre dreamscape through which she softly smiles. Her family members starve to death in hospital one after another, and she never receives an explanation of the contents of the box beyond "nothing". The viewer also does not learn the origin of the mystery. Identifying with the maternal confusion, dread, and disconnection is exactly what makes this piece disconcerting.

3 The second installation, "The Birthday Party", is the directorial debut by Annie Clarke (aka St. Vincent). On the morning of her daughter's birthday party, an anxious housewife (Melanie Lynskey) finds her deceased husband alone in his study. Her sadness over his presumed suicide is truncated by the planned events of the day and her inability to fully grieve. She conceals the death from both her malign housekeeper and nosy neighbour, annoyingly contrived women characters. A series of irrational, trauma-driven

decisions ends with her hiding the body in a plush panda costume and setting it up as a prop at the party. The short ends with the accidental discovery of the body by partygoers and a filmic postscript that comments on the daughter's future therapy and difficulties with intimacy. Channelling *Weekend at Bernie's* (1989) black comedic absurdity, "The Birthday Party" explores themes of humiliation, loss, and fears around childrearing. The cattiness of the characters also highlights how subtle and entrenched patriarchal expectations encourage women to be awful to each other. Less traditionally horror than the other shorts, the plot's irreverence does not make it out of place in the collection, and the mid-century aesthetics and St. Vincent's ambient pop soundtrack give it a unique take on the genre.

4 After contributions to *V/H/S* (2012), *V/H/S/2* (2013) and *Southbound* (2015), Roxanne Benjamin's filmography is largely composed of horror shorts. "Don't Fall" is a classic fabled creature feature, where four characters on a camping trip trespass on cursed land and one becomes a flesh eating monster as a result. After an accidental skin puncture while hiking, the gullible and easily scared character (played by Gretchen Wool) quickly transforms and brutally murders all of her friends. Of the four pieces, this is the most straightforward horror, with ample gore and jump-scares. It intentionally draws on the tropes of horror, right from the over-the-top title sequence, but subverts the final girl narrative. Building folklore from the ground up is difficult in a short and it results in something that feels like a campfire store with problematic and vague references to 'maybe Native American' roots.

5 The last segment by Karen Kusama, "Her Only Living Son", is a strong finale, envisioned as an alternative trajectory for *Rosemary's Baby* (1968). In the original, Dr. Hill returns Rosemary to her husband as an exercise of his medical (and patriarchal) authority, assuming she is insane. In this reimagination, the Dr. Hill character believes her and helps her escape the coven of Satanists. The segment explores the fraught relationship between single mother (Christina Kirk) and son, who is coming of age, influenced by considerable sins of his father. There is palpable tension between the mother's love and fear of her son, highlighted in a scene in the principal's office, where the son is let off for brutally attacking a girl. The viewer cannot help but draw parallels to many university sexual assault cases, where the perpetrator and his bright future are the

central considerations for the disciplining powers. The piece ends in a beautifully tragic moment where mother and son die together in an act of agency separate from paternal Satanic forces.

6 The transitional animation by Sofia Carrillo (*La Casa Triste*) unites the anthology in wraparound segments with deconstructed and monstrous dollhouses, playing with truly creepy decaying representations of femininity. Though three out of the four shorts address motherhood (and its perversities) in some manner, there is little thematic cohesiveness in the way that constructs a typical anthology. Like many reviewers who applauded the compilation of a female-directed genre anthology, Peter Howell refers to *XX* as "signed, sealed and delivered as a form of empowerment" (Howell). There is definite novelty in an all-female directed collection, given the genre dominance of men. However, citing empowerment at any incarnation of female filmmakers undermines attempts at normalizing their presence in the genre (Miller). Overall, the film is worth watching for the quality of each vignette and centrality of women protagonists; but each should be consumed separately without expecting continuity throughout the anthology.

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