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Opening Wounds and Possibilities: A Critical Examination of Violence and Monstrosity in Horror TV

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Opening Wounds and Possibilities:

A Critical Examination of Violence and Monstrosity in Horror TV

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Communication
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

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Abstract

  This dissertation examines contemporary horror TV, dissecting the ways it works both to subvert *and* uphold contemporary social standards about race, gender, class, and ability. This work attends to the moments in horror TV where graphic displays of violence and monstrous characters open up possibilities for innovative and progressive representation of historically marginalized people, as well as those instances that foreclose such potential. Horror TV shows blur the definitions of monster and human, suggesting that humans can be monstrous and that monsters can have humanity. Horror TV is a platform through which we see the coming together of a traditional logic about what is and what is supposed to be with a radical suggestion that, perhaps, things could be another way. This dissertation closely examines two seasons of *American Horror Story – Coven* and *Freakshow –* along with *Hannibal* and *Penny Dreadful*, as symptomatic texts of a dynamic sociopolitical moment in the United States where progressive and conservative worldviews sometimes violently clash.

  This dissertation examines the role of performance in horror TV, literal and figurative theater spaces that frame action in ways that disrupt hetero-patriarchal epistemologies. Order and chaos, reason and emotion, the natural and the supernatural often "crash" together in violent ways on the stages of horror TV, sometimes inviting something alternative to emerge. These often-violent performances serve as microcosms for the larger set of narratives and images we see in horror TV.

This dissertation examines the figure of the dandy, who emerges in all the horror TV shows included in this work. The dandy is a contradictory character, at once queering social conventions of white masculinity, while also recuperating a traditional and dominant social position through violence. The dandy's violent behavior is a kind of consumption: the taking of bodies and lives to satisfy their boredom. The horror TV dandy may be villainous, but is also the embodiment of the contemporary, good, white citizen who puts consuming above all else. This dissertation also attends to the ways that horror TV is, perhaps unsurprisingly, the product of a white imagination. Horror TV masks the ways that it forwards a white worldview by portraying stories about racial difference and racism, while narratively confining the material implications of racism to the past. Some horror TV shows further center whiteness by suggesting that "horror" (the weird, the macabre, and the terrifying) comes from a distant and exotic place – specifically the Dark Continent of Africa or the Exotic East of Japan and India.

Contemporary horror TV, however, presents some of the most innovative portrayals of (mostly white) women in lead roles through the figure of the antihero. The women antiheroes of horror TV act via their relationship to cultural and political oppression, often in the form of violence. As a result of the traumas they have experienced, the women of horror TV embody *both* heroic and villainous qualities. The antihero women speak to contemporary cultural attitudes about women's changing position in the United States, and that we only see white leading antihero women on horror TV points to the fact that women of color are not afforded the same multifaceted representation.

Introduction: What can horror TV tell us?

I have been a fan of horror for as long as I can remember. My father was my primary caregiver and I was a voracious reader from a young age. Perhaps as a way of bonding and an effort to satiate my requests for new material, my father introduced Stephen King novels to me when I was ten years old. I have never looked back. I watch every horror film I can (including the classics), watch as much horror TV as possible, and still keep up with the latest Stephen King (he's still going). As I began to study critical theory in college and graduate school, I could not help but question the sexist, racist, homophobic, and able-ist tropes that abound in much horror. Yet, I revel in horror media's presentations of shock, the grotesque, and the macabre. Like many academic fans of the genre (McCarty, 1984; Halberstam, 1993; Pinedo, 1997; Means-Coleman, 2011; Calafell, 2015), I am drawn to the idea that mediated violence can inspire new ways of thinking about gender, race, sexuality, ability, humans, and monsters. For some, horror is enjoyable because it presents images, narratives, and sounds that interrupt dominant discourses about bodies. Horror, by presenting bodies that are literally torn apart, invites us to (re)consider the ways that they were (theoretically and politically) constructed in the first place.

This dissertation attends to horror television shows (horror TV), dissecting the ways it works both to subvert *and* uphold contemporary social standards about race, gender, class, and ability. In delineating the kind of horror I examine, I draw from Isabel Pinedo (1997) who asserts that, broadly, horror disrupts norms, disturbs culturally-understood boundaries, upsets rationality,

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and evokes fear: this dissertation interrogates the various ways horror TV can function as critical social commentary. Specifically, this work attends to presentations of graphic violence and configurations of monstrosity on horror TV. Horror TV shows routinely blur the definitions of monster and human, suggesting humans can be monstrous and monsters can have humanity. Rust (2018) notes mediated violence is never singular in meaning, rather functions to engage the many discourses surrounding it. This work follows a critical cultural studies approach to media by situating horror TV's presentations of violence and monstrosity within larger cultural, economic, and political systems that have traditionally centered white, masculine, able-bodied and heterosexual perspectives (Kellner, 2011). I attend to the moments in horror TV where graphic displays of violence and monstrous characters open up possibilities for innovative and progressive representation of historically marginalized people, as well as those instances that foreclose such potential. This work considers the pleasures of being grossed out with an investigative eye on the politics of that which grosses us out. As Middleton (2010) stresses about ultra-violent horror films, there are ideological stakes at play with media that present characters harming or murdering others. The spectacle of violence and monstrosity so prominent on contemporary horror TV points to shifting cultural anxieties and desires about gender, race, sexuality, and disability. Horror TV is a platform through which we see the coming together of a traditional logic about what is and what is supposed to be with a radical suggestion that, perhaps, things could be another way. Indeed, what better way to ask that question than through gore, dismemberment, and monsters?

Monstrosity and violence intersect in several ways. Western cultures usually consider violence as deviant or abnormal, while also framing those who are violent as monstrous (Calafell, 2015). People can be deemed monstrous as a result of committing an act or acts of

violence, or by being the victim of violence (for example, if they are maimed or scarred). Further, people can be the victims of violence as a result of a perception that they are monstrous. I use Cohen's (1995) description of "monster" to indicate an "incoherent body," or as Calafell (2015) regards it, a form rendered unintelligible by dominant ways of knowing, specifically in terms of identity categories: monsters disrupt conventions; they fit uneasily into normative categories. A white, able-ist, hetero-patriarchal system determines certain bodies are always-already monstrous: those that are *not* masculine, white, straight, and able-bodied. These bodies have historically and disproportionately been the victims of violence. They have historically and disproportionately been rendered monstrous and thus deserving of violence.

There are several ways the horror genre on film and TV can present violence to the audience, but I find we are invited to watch violence in contemporary horror TV primarily in two ways: as it is happening and after it has happened. In either way, the camera does not cut away or obscure the bodies and body parts as they are being, and after they are, dissected, violated, and killed. These two presentations of violence are the primary source of horror in horror TV. Other kinds of horror include jump-out scares (quiet moments followed by an abrupt change of image or sound), psychological tension, and off-screen, or implied, violence. Some successful horror films have little to no on-screen violence or death (examples include *The Haunting (*1963), *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), *Paranormal Activity* (2007)).

The two kinds of violence appear "real," as though these acts could conceivably happen to bodies. I use real to refer to production techniques that *show* violence happening to bodies or that show mutilated, dismembered, and dead bodies after an act of violence. Computer generated technology enables the presentation of violence that appears more real than many other technologies, such as prosthetics, squibs, and makeup *alone*. Horror TV still uses these

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techniques, but often combines them with computer generated imaging (CGI) (Abbott, 2018). As a result, "real" here refers to contemporary horror TV's violence as appearing believable, whether the violence is done until human or monster bodies. This examination of horror TV will consider the different kinds of graphic violence that interact with violent monsters and monstrous-victims of violence. Horror TV includes jump-out scares, suspense, and implied violence, but *primarily* presents explicit, gory violence as the source of horror.

The first kind of violence I identify as prevalent in horror TV is an intense and fast-paced violence, where a character, or several characters, are killed or maimed on screen. This kind of violence resembles "splatter" horror movies, which aims to mortify audiences with scenes of explicit gore. In these scenes, we watch the act of torture, dismemberment, and murder. This is a frenzied and unambiguously-violent kind of horror and we are invited to witness the violence in its entirety. The focus is on *both* the frenzied pace and the explicitness of the violence. *The Walking Dead*, for example, provides zombie-action sequences where our heroes must fight off a rotting corpse whose mouth is inches from a human neck. The opening scenes of *American Horror Story: Coven* present a racist madwoman torturing a slave by tying him up and fitting a bull head on the upper half of his torso. Both of these scenes feature fast-paced camera work with frequent cutting, loud music, and different point-of-view shots. The rapid editing of these scenes feels violent to the eyes and ears, adding to the horror of a zombie bite or a Minotaur-making. The pace and explicitness of the violence in these scenes together invites a feeling of uneasiness. The immediate ferocity of the filming, for me, invokes discomfort.

Secondly, horror TV presents a slower, more atmospheric style of violence. These are scenes where the camera lingers on victims' bodies *after* they have been killed or maimed. This is a deliberate, more art-full, and uncanny horror. These are moments where viewers are

immersed in disturbing diegetic environments. The camera slows down on massacred bodies, animal parts, or violent sex. At times, the viewer takes in a room or a space for thirty or more uninterrupted seconds. These scenes are haunting; they invite us to feel uneasy, on edge. Here, the horror TV shows engage the audience in a different kind of horrific performance. *Hannibal* provides perhaps the most salient example of horror TV that employs atmospheric violence. In one scene, the detective-protagonist enters a crime scene: a hotel room where the victims are naked and the skin from their backs has been flayed and suspended, resembling angel wings. The camera stays in one spot for much of the scene, lingering on the victims' backsides, and the now-exposed muscle, spinal column, and sinew. Here again, the pace and the explicitness of the gore is my focus: the unobstructed presentation of violence directs our attention to a monstrous configuration of the body.

The violence of horror TV is itself a kind of discourse that invites interrogation into conventional constructions of a "monster" and who is "monstrous." Horror TV resists neat categorization of who is a monster and what monstrosity may represent. The two ways we are invited to watch violence on horror TV asks us to see that any*body* can represent radical and alternative physical constructions, intellectual perspectives, and ways of knowing. The violence of horror TV points us towards a chaotic conceptualization of monster, one that is not easily defined by looks, gender, race, sexuality, or ability. There is not a singular and unidirectional relationship between them (as in, monsters do violence to humans). Rather, horror TV, by presenting graphic violence in more than one way and by presenting monstrosity in many forms, tells a more complicated story about characters who hurt others. This project extends the study of monsters towards a critical examination of the presentation of violence in today's horror TV. Halberstam (1995) asserts that mediated monsters are a technology. He, and later Cohen (1996)

and Calafell (2015), note how monsters are polyvalent and complex technologies that co cultural work, both to reinforce and resist dominant ideologies. Pinedo (1997) argues the horror film has entered the post-modern, such that there is little clear delineation between good and evil, masculine and feminine, inside and outside, monster and human. Horror TV similarly blurs boundaries. Generally, horror TV presents an array of conventional monsters (vampires, werewolves, witches, and ghosts, for example) and monstrous humans (serial killers, axe-wielding maniacs, and abusers, for instance). The two kinds of violence prevalent in today's horror TV, the splatter and the atmospheric, involve all shapes and forms of the monster. Together, presentations of violence and the monster resist neat categorizations but instead speak to multi-faceted workings of power and resistance in the contemporary United States.

This dissertation examines the prominent and consistent presentation of graphic violence and monstrosity together in horror TV, and the ways that different characters are rendered monstrous as either the perpetrators or the victims of violence. I specifically interrogate these monstrous constructions for what they reveal about gender, race, sexuality, and ability. Questions that guide this investigation are: Which monsters animate which kind of violence? When are monsters perpetrators of violence, and when are they victims? What kinds of people and monsters commit violence, and who are the victims? These broad research questions lead to questions more narrowed to my focuses on gender, race, sexuality, and ability. How are monsters gendered? How are monsters racialized? Are there gendered differences in the violence committed? Is the violence racialized? How does queerness and monstrosity intersect? Finally, what overt parallels are made between physical monstrosity and physical disability in horror TV? What covert stories are being told about monstrosity and ability?

Genre and Medium

This work sits at the intersection of TV studies and horror studies. Horror TV shows are included in studies about zombies, vampires, or werewolves, but those projects typically also encompass popular movies and literature (Levina & Bui's 2013 reader *Monster Culture*, for example). 2013 also brought Lorna Jowett and Stacey Abbott's *TV Horror: Investigating the Dark Side of the Small Screen*, which touched on many important issues regarding violence, TV, domesticity, and culture. Jowett & Abbot's (2013) book is a primarily U.K.-based perspective, examining horror TV functions on the BBC channels. Further, like many individual articles and chapters on horror TV, *TV Horror* focused on shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Being Human,* and *The X-Files*, shows that typically did not present graphic violence. The recent *Horror TV in the age of Consumption* (Jackson & Belau, 2018) reader devotes its pages to contemporary horror TV that includes explicit and grotesque violence, including *American Horror Story, The Walking Dead*, and *True Blood.* While on the rise, there is still a dearth of scholarship on horror TV specifically.

The earlier examples of "horror" TV (*Buffy*, for instance) hailed from the 1990s and broadcast on networks that were, at least in the United States, governed by the moral, thus political, code of the FCC. The second list of shows, analyzed in the *Consumption* book, aired or currently air on networks not overseen by the FCC. This shift is significant. According to media critics and journalists, around the year 2000, TV expanded from broadcast and basic cable to premium cable and digital platforms, ushering in the era of "prestige TV[1]" (Cowan, 2013;

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[1] Scholars, journalists, and pop cultural critics use a variety of terms to describe the post-2000s era of TV, including the Golden Age of TV, quality TV, post-network TV, and prestige TV. I will use prestige TV throughout the dissertation.

Martin, 2013). Here, TV storytelling began mirroring the multifaceted and complex narrative structures used in cinema. For example, these characteristics are present in popular and critically acclaimed TV shows such as *True Detective* (*HBO*), *Louie* (*Comedy Central*), *The Walking Dead* (*AMC*), *Bates Motel* (*A&E*), and *Mr. Robot* (*USA*). Horror TV, in particular, presents a myriad of complex stories, images, sounds, and characters. Dow (1996) argues TV can point scholars towards cultural commentary about social, political, and economic anxieties and desires.TV is a unique format, however, allowing for several hours' worth of show-time. Serialization allows for character and narrative development unlike in film: there is simply more time allotted for stories about politics, culture, and people.

An effect of the turn towards cinematic of prestige TV is that violence, gore, dismemberment, and macabre material typically reserved for R-rated film increasingly has a place on TV. Because "TV" is no longer limited to broadcast, horror shows can push traditional boundaries of taste and violence. Today's TV technology expands well beyond the reach of the Federal Communications Commission [FCC] and these channels are allowed to broadcast content as graphic as the writers can imagine (I expound on the FCC and TV censorship a bit below). Literary and media critics situate the horror genre as originating with eighteenth century gothic literature, although certainly many give credit to mythical and folk stories about monsters, demons, and violence (Tudor, 1989; Hutchings, 2004). Classic cinema translated some of these novels onto the screen as early as 1910, and by the 1950s gothic and scary stories jumped to the TV (examples include *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* and *The Twilight Zone)*. Horror has been a part of TV since the medium's infancy. Contemporary horror TV, however, departs in some important ways from these predecessors.

Method

This dissertation analyzes four current horror TV shows that, at the time of this writing, have aired within the last five years: *American Horror Story* [*AHS*]*: Coven* (*F/X*, 2013)*, AHS: Freakshow* (*F/X,* 2014)*, Penny Dreadful* (*Showtime,* 2014 – 2016)*,* and *Hannibal* (*NBC,* 2013 – 2016). These are shows aired on broadcast, cable, and premium cable TV. I choose not to examine horror TV that originates on digital-only platforms (such as *Netflix* or *Hulu*) because here are fewer of them[2], and it is difficult to obtain audience ratings (Ahmed, 2017). Although from disparate networks, the selected shows are symptomatic of the general aesthetic of contemporary horror TV. The four shows are slow in narrative pace, tell complex stories in a variety of ways (flashbacks, flash forwards, unreliable narrators, for example), present gory and grotesque violence, and engage with the theme of monstrosity. They all use the two kinds of violence outlined above: fast-paced frenzied violence and slower, graphic atmospheric violence. They all fit into the cinematic-trend in TV, because they are sophisticated in their rich narratives and character development. These four are not the only shows with these characteristics, but *Hannibal*, *Penny Dreadful*, and both *AHS* seasons are the most critically acclaimed contemporary horror TV shows (see, for instance, *Entertainment Weekly*, *The Village Voice, Slate, Rolling Stone*, and even *The New York Times*). These four horror TV shows are popular *and* illustrative of the kinds of stories and images of violence and monstrosity found in the broader horror TV landscape.

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[2] As of this writing, Netflix has only three seasons if *Hemlock Grove* and two seasons of *Stranger Things* as original, English-language horror TV shows. All other horror TV shows had previously aired on TV in their respective countries (including the U.S., Germany (*Dark*, for example) and the U.K. *Black Mirror*, for example)).

Below I briefly introduce the premise of each show I attend to and only the pertinent

characters to my analysis. I will first use a character's first and last name, and then, throughout

the dissertation, I will primarily use first names only (I will highlight the two exceptions to this

with footnotes).

Coven

AHS is a horror anthology series that premiered on the *F/X* network in 2011. Each season

"stands alone" and is not directly related to one another[3]. All *AHS* seasons share the same

creators and show runners (Ryan Murphy and Brad Fulchuk) and generally share similar

aesthetics, themes, and even cast members. Any season of *AHS* could contribute to the analysis

of violence and monstrosity in this dissertation, but I have chosen two. *Coven* (season three) and

Freakshow (season four) are *AHS*'s highest rated seasons and most critically acclaimed. Further,

Freakshow represents an informal truncation of the *American Horror Story* anthology, as regular

star Jessica Lange's last series (she had starred in each of the show's first four seasons). Seasons

five through seven (the latest to air), while still providing graphic and grotesque violence, seem

to change after Lange's departure: *Hotel, Roanoke*, and *Cult* begin to use avant-garde aesthetic

and storytelling techniques, such as twist endings, show-within-a-show structures (all strategies

not used in seasons one through four).

Coven is about a group of witches who live in an old mansion, disguised as a finishing

school for teenage girls, in the heart of New Orleans. Each cohort of witches is led by a

Supreme, an all-powerful witch. Fiona Goode is the Coven's current Supreme; she is a

narcissistic and mean older (mid-fifties) white woman, desperately longing for youth and beauty.

The coven of witches is in an adversarial situation with another group of black witches in New

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[3] One of *AHS*'s creators, Ryan Murphy, has said in interviews that each story belongs to the same "universe" and later seasons reference older ones. Still, each season begins and ends with original characters and narratives.

Orleans who have practiced voodoo since the colonization of the United States. The leader of the black witches is Marie Leveau, an immortal priestess who sold her soul to a voodoo spirit almost two hundred years ago. In the 1830s, Marie was one of Madame Delphine LaLaurie's many slaves. Madame LaLaurie is a white New Orleans socialite who (in)famously mistreated and tortured her slaves.

Close to six million people watched the premiere episode of *Coven*, and it averaged three and a half million viewers per episode. *Coven* was *F/X's* second most-viewed original drama in 2013. *Coven* is not only commercially popular, but also the most critically acclaimed season to date: it earned eight primetime Emmy nominations, with Kathy Bates taking home the award for Outstanding Supporting Actress, and Jessica Lange winning the award for Outstanding Lead Actress.

Freakshow

Freakshow takes place in Jupiter, Florida in the 1950s and follows a circus of deformed and disabled performers, referred to in the series as "freaks." The disabilities portrayed on the show range from existing conditions (for example, microcephaly, dwarfism, or excessive body hair) to supernatural ones (a three-breasted intersex person, and a lobster-clawed man, for example). The ringleader is Elsa Mars, a white middle age woman who had an accident – she lost the bottom of her legs while shooting a German snuff film—that turned her into a "freak." The main antagonist in *Freakshow* is a deranged young white man, Dandy, with an overbearing mother. Dandy is very wealthy, very bored, and obsessed with freaks.

Freakshow is the most-watched season of *AHS* to date, and was *F/X*'s most watched series in 2014. The first episode alone attracted over six million viewers. *Freakshow* is also the AHS season with the most Primetime Emmy award nominations with twenty. Like *Coven*, the

iteration of *AHS* that immediately precedes it, *Freakshow*, has generally favorable reviews, and a seventy percent score on Rotten Tomatoes. Also like *Coven*, *Freakshow* starred Jessica Lange, Kathy Bates, and Angela Bassett. Michael Chiklis, Patti Labelle, and Neil Patrick Harris also joined the cast for *Freakshow*.

     Hannibal

     Hannibal shares its name with a 2001 Ridley Scott film about the fictional cannibal psychiatrist Hannibal Lecter, most famous from the 1990 Jonathan Demme film, *The Silence of the Lambs*. That film, and the TV show, is based on characters from the Thomas Harris novels "Red Dragon" (1981), "Silence of the Lambs" (1988), and "Hannibal" (1999). The first season of the TV show *Hannibal* introduces Hannibal Lecter, a middle-age white brilliant psychiatrist called in to supervise a young FBI profiler, Will Graham. Will is a thirty-ish year old white man, investigating a particularly gruesome serial killer case where victims are mutilated in various ways and their bodies re-assembled onto other objects (deer antlers, or beehives, for instance) or into other objects (a human totem pole, or angels, for instance). Hannibal is also a serial killer. He incorporates his victims into gourmet cuisine. *Hannibal*'s three seasons tease the viewer with whether or not Will will discover Hannibal's true identity, and later, if Will himself will become a serial killer.

     Hannibal was developed by Bryan Fuller, a TV writer and producer who created and contributed to shows like *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *Pushing Daisies,* and *Heroes*. *Hannibal* received much critical acclaim, and a small, yet devoted fan-base who dub themselves "fan-ibals." *Hannibal* starred critically-acclaimed actors such as Hugh Dancy, Laurence Fishburne, Gillian Anderson, and Eddie Izzard. After three seasons, however, *NBC* cancelled *Hannibal* because of relatively low ratings for a broadcast network. *Hannibal*'s home at *NBC* is

an important characteristic, however, given its particularly grotesque and explicit presentation of violence. *NBC* is a broadcast cable network, meaning it does not require a cable box to view; rather you can plug a TV into a cable outlet and watch (joining *ABC, CBS*, and *Fox* as the most powerful[4] cable channels in the United States).

I will briefly discuss the difference between broadcast cable (sometimes also called "terrestrial" or "basic" cable) and digital cable (any kind of TV that requires a cable box and a subscription) as they relate to the standards set forth by the FCC. The shift in how we watch TV has impacted what we can watch on TV, opening the door for increased TV violence (as well as nudity and swear words). The federal government created the FCC in 1934 as an independent agency with the authority to grant broadcast licenses and oversee the material that went out over the airwaves. Although the FCC is explicitly prohibited from censoring TV and radio content based on political or ideological reasoning (thus keeping in line with the First Amendment), the FCC does regulate material they consider inappropriate, or "indecent," particularly when consumed by children. Digital, satellite, and internet cable channels are not held to FCC standards but have historically self-censored in line with FCC regulations to appease advertisers and attract mass audiences (Premium, or pay-cable channels like *HBO* have never adhered to these standards). Part of the turn towards prestige TV in the 2000s saw that self-censorship erode: Digital cable channels increasingly included "hard" swear words (including "shit," "fuck," and "cunt"), nudity, and graphic violence into shows such as *Breaking Bad, South Park, The People vs. OJ Simpson* and *Feud: Bette and Joan*. In turn, basic cable channels, particularly in the ten o'clock time slot, began including some of these elements. The FCC still restricts *NBC* and other basic cable networks from airing full nudity and most "hard" swear words (nothing

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[4] A discussion of the technology of broadcast, or terrestrial cable, vs digital cable is out of the purview of this project. However, the "Big Four" are the largest cable channels that do not require a digital subscription.

worse than "shit" for example). A longer history of the politics of the FCC and basic cable content is out of purview of this project overall, but a discussion of *Hannibal* requires acknowledgement of its placement in the basic cable turn to prestige TV through a sophisticated, cinematic filming quality and inclusion of semi-nude and severely injured bodies.

     Penny Dreadful

     Penny Dreadful debuted in 2014 on *Showtime* and ran for three seasons. The title and the concept for the show are based on lurid and sensational stories from nineteenth Century British novellas. *Penny Dreadful* takes place in 1890s London. The characters and storylines draw heavily from literary characters, including Dr. Frankenstein, Frankenstein's monster, Dorian Gray, Count Dracula, Mina Harker, and Dr. Jekyll. Vanessa Ives is *Penny Dreadful*'s main protagonist. She is a white woman in her thirties who possesses psychic abilities. She lives and works closely with Sir Malcolm Murray, a white man in his 60s. Both Vanessa and Ian are original characters, but their work and personal lives intertwine with the above-mentioned literary figures. The series opens with Vanessa and Malcolm searching for Malcolm's daughter (and Vanessa's childhood friend), who has been taken by vampires. Vanessa enlists the help of an American actor, Ethan, she found touring England as part of a Wild West exhibition show. Malcolm, Vanessa, and Ethan then turn to Dr. Victor Frankenstein to help them solve the mystery of the "undead" true to his literary origins, is obsessed with re-animating dead bodies to solve the mysteries of life and death.

     Before its debut on *Showtime*, *Penny Dreadful*'s first episode was shown at the South by Southwest film festival in Austin, Texas to fan and critical acclaim. About one million people watched the series premiere on *Showtime* and on its mobile app, and the series averages eight hundred thousand viewers per week (Patten, 2016). Although *Penny Dreadful* was not as

watched as some of *Showtime*'s most popular shows, notably *Homeland* (averages just over one million viewers per week) or *Shameless* (averaging one and a half million viewers per week), *Penny Dreadful* performed as well as *Ray Donovan*, *Nurse Jackie*, and *Billions* (Patten, 2016). The last season of *Penny Dreadful* received a 90% Rotten Tomatoes score, surpassing the site's mark for "universal acclaim."

Feminist Critical Cultural Inquiry

My analysis of horror TV is rooted in critical cultural studies. Critical cultural studies makes visible the relations between power and culture (Hall, 2011), central to my focus. Cultural theorists attend to the politics embedded in social relations, the economy, and culture (Barker, 2012). Power operates through these sites discursively and materially: Critical cultural theory examines the communication practices that undergird a culture, that are felt on the ground. How we talk about something matters (Hall, 1989), and mediated messages that reach wide audiences repetitively provide especially salient sites for critical examination. Horror TV is an increasingly popular form of media that presents uniquely graphic violence and monstrosity. This dissertation considers how violence against certain bodies and presentations of monstrous bodies on TV work to *both* uphold traditional paradigms of power *and* present examples, images, narratives, and characters who resist them.

This analysis of horror TV assumes that power is not necessarily top-down and all-consuming, but rather attends to the ways that there is room for cultural resistance (Foucault, 1976). Hall (1989) notes that popular culture is an important site for examining the ways power weaves in and around a political system. Hall is extending the concept of hegemony, wherein we tend to act according to "common sense" cultural norms constructed by those in power. Cultural products, TV included, tend to tell stories from the point of view of those in charge. As Hall

(1989) points out, however, pop culture also reflects shifting power relations between the state and its citizens. Horror TV is caught up in a web of representations that both serve state and economic interests and pushes back on these. This project considers how horror TV is *both* caught up in gendered, racialized, and able-ist norms and where particular performances of violence and monstrosity can subvert them.

The addition of the slow, atmospheric kind of violence in horror TV *and* the presentation of several different monsters (as opposed to just the psycho-killer) warrant an extension of an analysis of gender in horror. This dissertation examines the intersection of violence and monstrosity in horror TV with a particular focus on gender, race, sexuality, and ability. This project takes up the work of feminist and anti-racist scholars to examine the ways that whiteness and masculinity operate in the horror TV that is the focus of my project. Butler (1990) asserts that we are culturally and politically compelled to perform "man" or "woman" routinely, to the point where gendered markers begin to feel "real" and natural. Postmodern feminist theory attends to the ways gendered categories are unstable and to how bodies differently can detach gender from conventional norms (Butler, 1993). This dissertation adds to the scholarship on gender and the horror genre by interrogating the ways that women characters on horror TV participate in violent acts. For *Coven, Freakshow*, and *Penny Dreadful* in particular, I closely attend to the women characters who survive the season-long violence by overcoming or subduing the monstrous threats. My research builds on the work of Carol Clover, who noted that many of the slasher films of the 1970s and 1980s portrayed a woman who survived the horrific ordeal: The Final Girl. Given that the audience for these films was, at the time, largely young and male, Clover argues the Final Girl's feminine body allows for *all* viewers, but importantly for masculine ones, to identify with the screaming, hysterical victim. The Final Girl stands in as a

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relatable character for men who go to the theater to experience the pleasure of being scared. Although the Final Girl remains a popular trope for women in horror film, this dissertation joins the scholars that have built on Clover's work. Robin Means-Coleman (2011) develops the concept of the Enduring Woman, the resilient and brave black woman who survives until the end of the horror movie. Isabel Cristina Pinedo (1997) women audience members of horror film critiques Clover's assumption that horror movies are made primarily for masculine audiences. Pinedo explores the pleasures of violence and the macabre that may attract feminine audience.

This dissertation will examine the ways violence and monstrosity speak to racialized constructions of power and marginalization. Horror TV is overwhelmingly a white enterprise: *Coven* has six white women and two black women in leading roles, *Freakshow* has five white women and one black leading women, *Hannibal* features two leading men with two white women and one black man in supporting roles, and *Penny Dreadful* has one white woman and five white men as its leads, with one black man in a supporting role. None of these shows have leads or co-leads of LatinX, Asian, American Indian, or Middle Eastern heritage. Beyond character's race, however, a cultural studies and critical race approach to this work asks what stories are being told about whiteness in these shows? Critical race theory attends to the ways people of color have been discursively and materially oppressed, silenced, and disenfranchised in the West. This dissertation investigates the ways whiteness is at the center of the stories, characters, and dialogue of horror TV. The United States' particular history of enslaving black people stems from what hooks (1984b) calls imperialist-capitalist-white-hetero-patriarchy, a condition alive today (Delgado, 1995; Springer, 2008). hooks' critique puts forth the importance of an intersectional approach to critical media studies: analyses of power must consider various social locations (Crenshaw, 1991; Hill Collins, 2004). Tropes about people of color abound in

the horror genre (the black guy always dies first, for instance). Horror film has a complex history with race and racism (Means-Coleman, 2011), from 1912's *The Birth of a Nation* (not a horror movie but portrays the "horrors" of emancipated slaves) to 2017's *Get Out* (a commentary on racism in the United States). Contemporary horror TV, too, seems to want to attend to issues of racism (*Coven* explicitly, and *Freakshow* and *Hannibal* implicitly). This dissertation examines the ways whiteness is centered throughout horror TV despite the inclusion of stories about racial difference and oppression.

Chapters

In what follows, I trace the presentations of violence and monstrosity through four horror TV shows, attending in particular to the stories told about race, gender, sexuality, and ability. Chapter One "Where the hideous can be beautiful: The spectacle of violence and monstrosity on the stages of horror TV" investigates the literal and figurative stages that appear throughout horror TV. That is, several horror TV shows take place in performance spaces such as a circus (*Freakshow*), a Grand Guignol-type theater (*Penny Dreadful*), the opera (*Hannibal*), and an evening news interview set (*Coven*). These theatrical spaces invite us to attend to the ways that horror TV also enables performance in alternative spaces. On figurative stages, those spaces where gruesome acts of violence are staged in the style of an art-installation, horror TV constructs a meta-commentary about the spectacle of the staged performance. Both the literal and the figurative stages in horror TV frame action so as to open up possibilities for innovative and progressive epistemological paradigms. Order and chaos, reason and emotion, the natural and the supernatural often "crash" together in violent ways on the stages of horror TV, sometime inviting something alternative to emerge.

Chapter Two, "A nightmare dressed like a daydream: The violent, queer, white masculinity of horror TV's dandy," examines the figure of the dandy in contemporary horror TV. A study of *Penny Dreadful's* Dorian Gray, *Freakshow'*s Dandy Mott, and *Hannibal's* Hannibal Lecter as exemplars of the horror TV dandy reveals a multifaceted and monstrous presentation of white, upper class masculinity. The horror TV dandy is feminized through his consumption of material goods, flamboyant aesthetics, and leisurely lifestyle. As well, he is queer (the dandies of horror TV are pan-, bi- or a-sexual,). However, the dandy also consumes in the form of violence, often brutal and macabre, and also often in service of (re)gaining power and control. In this way, the dandy recuperates a traditional form of masculinity. Using critical whiteness theory, queer theory, and scholarship on violence and the horror genre, this chapter interrogates the dandy as a figure who both resists cultural standards of white masculinity and reinforces a violent, patriarchal social order.

Chapter Three, "There's nothing I hate more than a racist:" The racial landscape of horror TV," establishes that, unsurprisingly, horror TV operates through a white imagination, featuring casts of primarily white characters. However, racial difference implicitly permeates the horror TV landscape. Some horror TV ignores racial difference and racism, taking a decidedly post-race position (notably *Hannibal*), while others present storylines about race and racism (*Coven* and *Freakshow*) but they function to temporally sever racism's horrific implications, casting aside racism's continued presence. Further, these shows fetishize people of color and, more broadly, the idea of racial Otherness through presentations of the exotic East or the "Dark Continent" of Africa. Simultaneously, horror TV shows work to ignore contemporary instantiations of racism through color-blind assumptions that racism is a thing of the past. It is not altogether surprising

that horror TV is a white-centered space, so my analysis attends to the ways the genre ignores or decries overt racism while continuously relying on it to tell its stories.

Finally, Chapter Four, "Fallen women: Prestige horror TV and embodied trauma of women antiheroes" argues that horror TV presents some of the most innovative and complex portrayals of white women in prestige TV. Contemporary horror TV emerges out of a unique matrix of post-prestige TV, the conventions of the horror genre, and the third wave of (largely white) feminist politics. Many horror TV shows feature women in lead roles, and several of these main women characters resemble the archetypal anti-hero. *Penny Dreadful*'s Vanessa, *Coven*'s Fiona, and *Freakshow*'s Elsa are exemplars of leading women characters who defy neat categorization of good or bad, hero or villain. These characters then resist easy gendered configurations, as these women toggle between caring for others and attending to their own interests. The antihero women of horror TV differ from the men of the first generation of prestige TV (Tony Soprano, Walter White, Don Draper, for example) because their morally ambivalent behavior is directly a result of gendered expectations, limitations, and even violations that play out on and through the character's bodies. The antihero women are monstrous in their Both/And position of victim of cultural and traumatic limitations and violence but also are the heroes of their story.

I conclude the dissertation by considering a call from a recent article in a literary magazine for media critics to dive as deeply into shows with, about, and for women as they do for shows with, about, and for men. Fans and critics alike tend to more quickly dismiss "women's shows," particularly if they are weird, experimental, or merely imperfect. For me, horror is all of these things *and* it is a genre that seems ahead of others when it comes to dynamic and complex roles for women. Horror TV deserves our attention *because* of my findings that

horror opens up certain spaces for creative portrayals of gender, race, sexuality, and ability, while also foreclosing on others. Horror TV literally subverts the construction of the human body, of rationality, and so then, of knowledge itself. It is not a perfect space, but certainly has potential.

Chapter One:
Where the hideous can be beautiful: The spectacle of violence and monstrosity on the stages of horror TV

"You don't get punished for the parts you play in life."
Ethel to Elsa in the season finale of *Freakshow*.

Penny Dreadful, a "monster-mash up" of a Gothic horror drama (Abbott, 2018) introduces Dr. Frankenstein's monster by the end of episode one, "Night Work." Dr. Frankenstein re-animating a human corpse in *Penny Dreadful* generally follows the cinematic forms that have come before it (including James Whale's classic (1931) version, Kenneth Branaugh's (1994) remake, and even Mel Brooks' (1974) comedic take). These films, of course, present a director's vision of Mary Shelley's description. A manic Dr. Frankenstein exposes a corpse to a lightning strike and the corpse comes "alive." Due to the calamity that led to the man's death, the newly-animated dead body appears misshapen and stitched together. He looks monstrous: hence, the name "Frankenstein's monster." *Penny Dreadful* presents a monster without heavy makeup (as opposed to the customary Boris Karloff-look: a hulking body with an enlarged forehead and bolts sticking out of his neck). Rather, *Penny Dreadful*'s monster is of average height, with extremely pale, white skin, and red-tinted irises. As with his on-screen predecessors, *Penny Dreadful*'s monster appears more ugly than scary. Also following the previous iterations of *Frankenstein*, *Penny Dreadful*'s monster-making scene is loud in every way: there is deafening thunder, the cranking of mechanical parts, and Frankenstein's movements are frantic. We witness the spectacular birth of a grotesque creature.

After the highly stylized monster-birth scene in "Night Work," the show departs from Shelley's text to weave Frankenstein and his monster into the larger narrative of Victorian ghosts and demons. In episode two, "Séance," we learn that the monster whose birth we watched in episode one was Dr. Frankenstein's *second* monstrous creation. As Dr. Frankenstein is getting to know monster #2, monster #1 enters the laboratory and brutally murders Frankenstein's monster #2: Monster #1 literally rips monster #2 in half with his hands, each part sliding to the floor in a pool of blood and guts. The camera zooms in on Dr. Frankenstein's blood-splattered face, he is devastated. Episode three, aptly-named "Resurrection," provides the narrative context for monster #1's rage: Frankenstein abandoned his "first born" out of fear, leaving the confused, terrified, and monstrous-appearing creature to survive on his own. Monster #1 is taken in by the owner of a theater in downtown London. The theater owner tries to comfort the monster: "There is a place where the malformed can find grace, where the hideous can be beautiful, where strangeness is not shunned but celebrated...The theater!" The owner gives monster #1 the name Caliban after the deformed villain in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Caliban begins his work as a prop-master and stage hand for the macabre and gruesome plays at the theater.

Caliban remains a lead character in *Penny Dreadful* for three seasons, but I open with the (re)animation of Dr. Frankenstein's monster #2 because it demonstrates a frightening yet mostly-familiar performance that points to the tensions between traditional post-Enlightenment rationality and alternative kinds of logic, including the supernatural, the other-worldly, or the metaphysical. Dr. Frankenstein's scientific goals of knowledge and mastery over life itself give way to an incoherent body – a monstrous creation that defies what we *think we know* about life and death. Yet, as I elaborate on Caliban finding a home and a job as a theater technician, *Penny Dreadful*, particularly in season one, presents action taking place on a literal performance space:

the stage. Indeed, horror TV is a rich site for inquiry into the possibilities generated by literal and figurative performance spaces that frame presentations of violence and monstrosity.

The scientific method, discovery of facts, and establishing historical narratives are all (often taken-for-granted) systems grounded in whiteness, masculinity, and able-bodied-ness. Post-Enlightenment knowledge systems typically oppose the spiritual, supernatural, dark, mythical, metaphorical, or even unusual, epistemologies historically and culturally associated with femininity, the global South, blackness, and people who are disabled. The dichotomous associations are, of course, not nearly as cleanly connected as the stories the media often tell about race, gender, ethnicity, religion, and ability. Horror TV, already a genre with the ability to queer boundaries, presents narratives and images through the lens of the kinds of performance stages, or theaters, which are also typically associated with upsetting traditional forms of art. The theater itself in horror TV is monstrous, codifying certain perspectives on race, gender, and bodies, while also opening up possibilities for creative and multi-layered conversations about them.

This chapter begins by articulating the two most prominent performance spaces in the horror TV shows I analyze - Grand Guignol theater and the Freakshow- and how the action on these stages brings forth, or "center stage," traditionally marginalized perspectives, bodies, and experiences. I then expand the concept of the literal stage to explore the figurative performance spaces presented in horror TV, notably through the art-full tableaus of "beautiful" violence that we see in *Hannibal*. I use the extended example of the throat-slice to show that violent acts in horror TV are radical performances of the rational *and* the irrational, bringing the inside out, and opening space for alternative epistemologies.

Grand Guignols & Freakshows: Staging violence

     Penny Dreadful and *Freakshow* are two horror TV shows that explicitly use the theater to demonstrate the dynamic between the natural and the supernatural, and between what is beautiful and what is monstrous. We also see theaters and stages in *Bates Motel*, *American Horror Story: Hotel*, and *American Horror Story: Roanoke*. My other two artifacts also portray stages and theaters, although their narratives do not rely as strongly on literal performance spaces as do *Penny Dreadful* and *Freakshow* (a young actress in *Coven* uses her magic to make set lights fall on a director, and *Hannibal*'s characters investigate a victim who has been turned into a human-cello on a stage). The theaters portrayed in *Penny Dreadful* and *Freakshow* depart from all of the above-mentioned kinds of stages, however, in that they are theater spaces specifically constructed to present taboo, violent, marginal, weird, and even offensive material. Freak shows and horror-theater function as unique purveyors of art, elevating the spectacle of the body that rejects dominant form and function; thrusting mutilation, malformation, or the grotesque center stage.

     Caliban's narrative in season one of *Penny Dreadful* revolves around themes of performance, staging, scripts, violence, and, in particular, the shock of Grand Guignol theater. Grand Guignol refers to a small Parisian theater opened in 1897 that "... put on gruesome, faux-blood-splattered shows. The Grand Guignol featured staged killings, mutilations and scenes of torture so realistic that audience members often fled the theater in terror—when they weren't transfixed by the grisly scenarios enacted mere feet from their seats" (Cosgrove, 2014, para. 3). Grand Guignol theater achieved its spectacular effects through techniques later popularized in horror cinema: props, makeup, pulleys, pumps, squibs, and buckets of fake blood. The Grand Guignol theater differed from other theaters at the time in Paris because the plays presented not

only featured gore and violence, but the narratives often contained taboo themes and topics (Peirron, 2006). Shows at the Grand Guignol presented stories about prostitutes, communicable diseases, suicide, and sexual pleasure (Hand, & Wilson, 2002). The horrific shows at the Grand Guignol were interspersed with comedies to allow audiences a "cool down" in between the onslaught of graphic violence, as there were documented incidents of patrons fainting during performances (Hand, & Wilson, 2002). The Grand Guignol was housed in a former chapel at the end of a small alley in Paris, adding to a dark and foreboding atmosphere, yet the church-conversion seems a fitting trajectory given some religions penchant for the supernatural. Gargoyles, angels, and demons loomed over patrons in the lobby, and confessional booths were converted to box seats. This hauntingly beautiful space is recreated in *Penny Dreadful* when several main characters attend a play.

There was only one theater named the Grand Guignol, which was in Paris, so *Penny Dreadful* takes liberty by explicitly naming its London-based theater Grand Guignol. But when in "Séance," the camera lingers on the brightly lit sign marking the theater's name, we understand *Penny Dreadful*'s investment in a particular kind of theater and performance. Throughout *Penny Dreadful*'s first season, a Grand Guignol-type theater features prominently as a setting: Frankenstein's monster #1 works backstage with the special effects and technical equipment. Additionally, a nest of vampires uses the rafters of the theater to sleep during the day. The title of the eighth, and final, episode of *Penny Dreadful*'s first season is "Grand Guignol."

It is helpful to look at Grand Guignol's predecessors, notably Japanese Kabuki Theater. Kabuki is a highly-stylized form of Japanese theater, combining narrative, dance, and music, dating back to the 17th century. Performances involved heavy makeup, elaborate costumes, and avant-garde story telling techniques (indeed, kabuki roughly translates to "avant-garde" or

"bizarre" (Bouchetoux, 2014)). Hundreds of years before Grand Guignol theater, kabuki told stories about betrayal, forbidden love, and suicide through graphic depictions of violence by using artificial blood, makeup, props, and elaborate staging (Galuzzo, 2016). All episodes in season two of *Hannibal* are named for the various elements of a traditional Japanese multi-course haute-cuisine meal, suggesting not only that *Hannibal* is an elaborate "meal" to be appreciated and consumed, but that it is a kabuki-like performance of art. For instance, season two, episode one is called "Kaiseki" which refers to the multi-course meal itself *and* the specific skills and techniques required to prepare the food (Furiya, 2000). Although certainly not the first type of live theater to present non-traditional and violent material, the explicit reference to Grand Guignol in *Penny Dreadful* invites our attention towards provocative art that brings together the beautiful and the grotesque.

The same year that *Penny Dreadful* introduced Caliban to the Grand Guignol theater, 2014, *Freakshow* brought to us stories and violent images in relationship to performance, fame, scripts, the stage, and shock taking place in a circus tent. Freak shows, too, have 19th century origins that enticed audiences through the display of the taboo, the grotesque, and the shocking. More problematically, however, freak shows used disabled performers as the main attraction. Freak shows operated throughout the United States independently or as part of a larger fair from roughly 1840 until the 1940s (Bogdan, 1988). Although *Freakshow* presents a community of performers who advocate for their interests, real freak shows were operated by wealthy and exploitative show runners like P.T. Barnum (Chemers, 2014). Still, historical accounts of freak show performers note that the circus was one of the only legitimate venues where entertainers with disabilities could work (Bogdan, 1988). The freak show, along with the larger implications of the term "freak," connote the unusual, the abnormal, or the bizarre. According to Chemers

(2014), freak refers to anything that defies to expectations. When referring to people, it is almost exclusively used pejoratively, and indicates someone with non-normative interests, behaviors, or looks. Counter- and pop-culture moments have worked to (re)claim the term freak (as in letting your "freak flag" fly, or Rick James' "Super Freak" disco song), but overwhelmingly, people with disabilities and their representative organizations reject the term as offensive and defamatory.

Freakshow's penultimate episode, "Show Stoppers," brings together the settings of the freak show tent with Grand Guignol-style graphic gore, while also making messy (literally) the distinctions between the rational and the irrational. Elsa has sold her *Cabinet of Curiosities* freak show in order to pursue a career as a TV actress. The new ringmaster, Chester, calls a rehearsal in the main performance tent. From the stage, Chester wheels in a large horizontal box and declares he will be attempting a new magic trick in his act: he is going to saw the conjoined twins in half. Bette and Dot balk at being Chester's subjects, and declare they are leaving the rehearsal. Chester yells after them, "Where are you going?! I haven't dismissed anyone yet!" Although an enthusiastic and pleasant man a few episodes ago, Chester demonstrates a demand for control and authority over his performers. Maggie volunteers: "I'll do it, I know how the trick works...All I gotta do is smile and show a little leg, right?" We know this trick too: the box is the standard saw-a-woman-in-half magic box where a woman's head and feet appear exposed, but the volunteer contorts her body so her real feet are tucked up with her body and it only *appears* as though she has been sawed in half. We also know that the volunteers are traditionally beautiful young women who dance around and distract the audience with "a little leg" before getting into the contraption. Maggie, played by Emma Roberts, is an attractive young white woman who initially came to the freak show as part of a scheme to kill any disabled performer

and sell her or him to a museum of oddities. Maggie represents the rational order of both scientific inquiry *and* of kill-or-be-killed capitalism as she seeks to literally sell out vulnerable people. Further, we "know" this trick because women who look like Maggie are often located in the "center" of U.S. politics, economics, and culture.

Chester, played by Neil Patrick Harris, is a character whose perspective and interests outwardly align with dominant social standards: a young, white, attractive man who married young and joined the Army. However, Chester's narrative emphasizes that in following the cultural narrative for white men in the 1940s and 50s, he abandoned his dream of being a circus performer. The 1952 Florida setting of *Freakshow* allows us to see a dichotomous problematic about desire, passion, and self-actualization for Chester. There is only one "respectable" or rational choice. The horror of *Freakshow* brings the spectacle of violence to weave throughout Chester's plot. We find out through flashback that Chester brutally murdered his wife Lucy when he came home from serving in the Army and caught her having sex with her best (girl)friend. The flashback shows Chester repeatedly bludgeoning Lucy and her partner to death as bright blood spurts across the room and onto Chester's body. The scene is washed in sepia, a reminder that this is a past-event, yet the blood is tinged so red as to feel fresh. *Coven* similarly uses this technique when showing us how horrifically diabolical Madame LaLaurie is in the 1830s: her flashback scenes are muted in sepia, yet as she paints her face in slave's blood, all we see is bright red. But LaLaurie's bloodlust resumes as she is dug up in 2013, the fresh, bright red blood foreshadowing that the spectacle of injury and violence will carry through to our characters' presents.

Back on the stage, the camera circles rapidly and closes in on Chester and Maggie, creating a dizzying and claustrophobic sensation. Chester opens the box and tells Maggie, "Get

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in, Lucy." As the camera circles around to where Maggie *should be*, the woman is instead

Chester's former wife, Lucy. He is hallucinating; he is losing control. The clear distinctions he

has drawn in the past between circus performer and Army husband are collapsing. Interspersed

between images of Lucy and Maggie are extreme close ups of a feminine ventriloquist dummy.

From Chester's perspective, the dummy has come to life and goads him into enacting (further)

revenge on his cheating wife. The scene increases in tension as Chester imagines the woman in

the box rapidly switching from Maggie to Lucy. When we see Maggie, she is frightened by

Chester's abrupt movements as he sets up the trick, but when we see Lucy, she is taunting him

about his "pathetic" magic act. We no longer know what is going to happen: The chaos on stage,

constructed by the earlier flashback foreshadowing Chester's instability, the camerawork, and

the increasing taunting of the Lucy and Dummy characters, invite the viewer to feel disoriented.

Chester is losing it, and the "it" is the neat truncation of his respected, and respectable, white,

middle-class, heterosexual life.

Chester's characterization, brought to light on the stage, explores his relationship to

society via spectacular violence. The apprehension in this scene, of course, is that Chester is

going to actually saw Maggie in half. So far, the buildup has brought forth the underlying tension

that Chester has been made monstrous by conforming to the rules of gendered, raced, and classed

expectations. By negotiating this dynamic on stage, and through the threat and the presentation

of physical violence, *Freakshow* tells us that Chester's real horror was the performance of ideal

citizen, at the expense of any other form of expression. Debord's (1967) postmodern critique of a

"society of spectacle" Engages some helpful ideas about the "spectacle" and the "spectacular."

For Debord, late capitalism has filled everyday life with artificial relationships mediated by

commodities. He famously begins: "In societies dominated by modern conditions of production,

life is presented as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation" (p.1). For Debord, along with Baudrillard and Gramsci, the events, images, sounds, and experiences that enthrall us are not mere diversions from a lifetime of hard work. Rather, our primary relationships are now with things, images, and events, with *the illusion* that we are still strongly connected as a community of citizens and as self-actualized human beings. Debord warns that the spectacle society, emerging right as *Freakshow*'s Chester breaks down on stage, enables and encourages horror via the isolation of individual citizens. Spectacles, in the postmodern world, organize reality, and that reality, according to postmodern Marxist critics, is always serving capitalism and the state: the dominant, rational order.

The second half of Chester and Maggie's scene brings full spectacle to the *Freakshow* stage, and along with it, graphic, gory, and macabre violence. The lights go down and come back up, revealing that Chester is now in full stage makeup wearing a red, sequined tuxedo. We hear clapping and the sound of a symbol crashing as Chester works up the "audience" for his trick. But there is no audience other than the other performers who are attending the rehearsal: Chester is lost in his own world. The camera cuts increase in speed along with the rhythm of the drum, and images of Lucy/Maggie in the box are joined by the addition of the dummy – she, too, taunts him as a "nothing." Chester appears more and more agitated, angry, and delusional as he lowers the saw down through the magic box. "I'll show you. I'll show everyone," Chester says as he begins sawing through the box. The camera lingers on Maggie's face as she lets out a blood-curdling scream. We watch as the bloody saw weaves back and forth through the box containing Maggie's body. We hear a combination of Maggie's screams and a squishing sound. Bright red blood leaks from the box to the floor and the other performers rush onto the stage. The lights dim and when they come back up, the performance is over. Chester is in his rehearsal clothes with no

makeup as he holds the bloody saw up in the air incredulously. For his final act, Chester

separates the two halves of the magic box, and Maggie's insides pour out in a gloppy mess.

Maggie's dismemberment in *Freakshow* occurs at the moment when Chester finally and

completely loses touch with what is physically in front of him, what he sees. His world was split

apart as he returns home from a violent and chaotic war, to find his wife straying from her script.

Chester's white masculine authority dissolved, so then he goes on to split Maggie, and her overt

performance of femininity, apart. Chester's performance was about (re)establishing a normative

order that he believed had wrongfully upended. But by physically sawing Maggie in half, he is

also restoring touch – that is, actual contact – with something (in this case, a saw to a body). If

Debord's lament about the postmodern spectacle society is about us losing touch with what is

real, rather we are entertained by the illusion of happiness that things bring us, than Chester's on

stage action brings the illusion and the reality together, even when he is tearing her apart.

As I consider any resistive potential to horror theater and the spectacle of the wounded

body, performance theory offers is helpful. Halberstam's (1993) notion of "imagined violence"

can potentially be productive for considering *other* ways of knowing. Conquergood (1995) notes:

"Performance privileges threshold crossing, shape shifting, and boundary violating figures...who

value the carnivalesque over the canonical, the transformative over the normative, the mobile

over the monumental" (139). Conquergood invokes Mikael Bahktin's (1984) notion of carnival,

where norms and conventional rules are turned "upside down" and the silly, irrational, and

inconsequential are embraced by those who typically adhere to the rules of culture and society.

For Bakhtin, carnival was itself a speech-genre, and the carnivalesque creates an alternative

social space, one that eschewed the traditions of society. The most prominent feature of carnival,

one that especially allows for the subversion of norms and rules, is through the use of the

grotesque. Bahktin uses the concept of "grotesque realism" to blur the boundaries between art and theory and the material world, the body in particular: The body and other earthly objects are embraced enthusiastically. Performance studies is uniquely situated to attend to the corporality of the bizarre, the macabre, and the grotesque because it is through the body that we make sense of the world. Conquergood (2002) reminds us that while texts and words are certainly an important component of communication, but that the ways bodies move, live, and die say just as much as about the rules of the cultural games we play.

Theater and performance help us make sense of the margin and of the center – just as blurry as the politics of monstrosity. Grand Guignol and Freak shows, like splatter and exploitation films, operate on the periphery of traditional performing arts. The horror TV shows I look at provide narratives about museums of oddities and curiosities (*Freakshow*), cockfighting (*Penny Dreadful*), and séances (*Penny Dreadful*). Other horror TV shows feature fashion shows (*AHS: Hotel*) and reality TV (*AHS: Roanoke*), other performative stages that have been derided as low, inherently exploitative, or as not contributing to the progress of culture. When considering the various literal and figurative performance platforms in horror TV, I am inspired by the tension between margin and center, as in center stage versus side stage. bell hooks' (1984b) now-famous book on black feminist theory, argues that liberatory politics *must* include the perspectives of people who have historically been cast out of dominant discourses. This includes women of color, working class and poor people, people with disabilities, and those in the LGBTQ community. Importantly, traditionally marginalized voices still speak, yet powerful systems listen in fluctuating quantities depending on the political, economic, and cultural circumstances. The stages of horror TV seem to be a space where marginalized experiences, sometimes in the form of monstrous beings, in other instances, people who look like us, move to

the center. The spaces of horror TV enable the coming together of traditional conceptions of beauty and value with queered and irrational ways of knowing through the idea of performance art. These performance acts and spaces are as monstrous as the characters who function on and within them; they tear down neat distinctions between discipline and distraction. They bring together rules and order with shock, grotesque, and spectacle. In doing so, the performative stage opens up space for relationships between, rather than strict antagonisms of, the masculine and feminine, whiteness and blackness, as well as ability and disability.

The theater and the stage act as physical and figurative platforms on which horror TV negotiates the representations of a dominant and rational order versus what is presented as destabilizing and irrational modes of being. The framework of performance in horror TV allows us to unravel the tightly wound conversations between traditional, dominant ways of knowing, and supernatural, typically-Othered, even monstrous, ones. These forces are pitted against one another in arenas set up within the diegetic world of horror TV. As discussed in the Introductory chapter, patriarchal philosophy tends to present ideas as dichotomous, as either/or. Post-Enlightenment logic directs attention towards explanations and ways of knowing that rely on predictably, tangibility, and legibility. Rather than constructing a strict binary, the stages of horror TV bring together presentations of the performing arts with so-called scientific rationality in ways that show where they overlap. My opening example speaks to the coming together of science and the supernatural, with monstrously-ambiguous results. If science is supposed to be in the service of gaining knowledge, through objective and rational means, Dr. Frankenstein's sympathetic and artistic monster invites us to question what we assume to be knowledge.

All the world's a stage: Figurative performance spaces

Carol Clover (1992) reminds us that horror often takes place in liminal spaces, those that lie just *outside* of traditional settings and locations. The stages and theaters presented in horror TV at first belie the idea that horror happens in the margins; theaters attract the masses and everyone pays attention to "center" stage. However, horror TV directs our attention towards traditionally marginalized material in ways that are less obvious than stages and theaters. These include alternative performance spaces, such as a TV interview (for instance, *Coven*'s Cordelia sits for a *60 Minutes*-like interview in the coven house), wax museums (*Penny Dreadful*'s Caliban takes a job at one after he's fired from the Grand Guignol), or a lectern in a classroom (We first meet *Hannibal's* Will giving a lecture to students at Quantico). However, this section most closely attends to spaces in horror TV that resemble performance art installations. Art installation refers to any mixed media project, often occupying a large space (or environment) (Bishop, 2005). Further, art installations are typically designed to be engaged with corporeally – whether through touch, sound, or walking through the space (Bishop, 2005). Art installations transform experience and knowledge within that space. Art environments "install" the viewer into an artificial system with an appeal to subjective perception. We are transformed as a result of experiencing the material and the space. Horror TV transforms the notion of the performance space beyond the literal theater and into places - such as a forest, a New Orleans mansion, or a Victorian asylum - and invite us to watch, feel, and question traditional ways of knowing as a result.

In these spaces, horror TV constructs a meta-commentary about the spectacle of the staged performance. The figurative stages I identify in horror TV are still conspicuous spaces where discernable performances happen. For example, the witches of *Coven* perform magic. The

premise of *Coven* posits that, rather than be confined to a sleight of hand by a magician on a stage, magicians, in the form of witches, are all around us. Further, *Coven* is about a competition among the young witches vying for the spot as the next Supreme witch; competition, too, usually takes place on a stage or "platform" of some kind. States (1996) notes that if, "...one is free to call similarities as one sees them [leading to] increasing instability in one's working definition....one has lost the common denominator that binds them together in what we might call performance" (p.2). This is not to say that performance theory is not useful in deconstructing assumptions about everyday tasks, actions, and rituals (Turner, 1986), rather I attend here to the spaces where horror TV is framing action as deliberative performance, even when this is not obviously the case. For instance, there is theatricality to the *Coven* witches' performances of magic even where they are not literally taking place on a stage. In a similar vein, the serial killers of *Hannibal*, including Hannibal himself, are incredibly theatrical in their style of violence (for instance, staging the corpse of a judge into a statue of justice, or turning victims into angels by flaying the skin on their backs and posing them in a praying position).

In other instances, the mise-en-scene of a show establishes a stage out of everyday places or objects. In episode 2 "Amuse-Bouche," Will and Jack investigate the hunting cabin of the serial killer named Hobbs. The camera follows Will to the second floor, revealing hundreds of sets of elk antlers in the loft. The camera then sits in the corner of the loft for five seconds, looking across at the antlers that cover the floor, walls, and even ceiling, leaving the center of the room empty. The environment we are invited to gaze at carefully resembles a stage framed by the spikes of the antlers. The antlers are clean, almost sterile looking. But they jut out throughout the room, posing a threat to anyone walking through. The camera moves to show Will, followed by Jack, entering the "stage." Referring to Jack's criminology institute, Will remarks that the

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antlers "...could be a permanent installation in the Evil Minds Museum." The men continue to talk about Hobbs' crimes with the antlers reaching out for them in the background, framing the men's scientific inquiry as a performance. Indeed, *Hannibal* is all about the precarity of evidence, knowledge, and rationality. Several scenes in *Hannibal* take place in a laboratory or interrogation room. But where crime investigations take place in installation-like spaces, we are invited to question the premise of standardized, mechanized, and overall, masculinized ways of knowing.

These are also spaces that gesture specifically towards body horror, inviting the audience to "know" something about the body (including what happened to it) by looking at it. Explicit representations of violence, and violence done to bodies, provides a kind of mastery over what we see (Rust, 2017). Horror TV directs our attention towards the injured or dead body, but unique to this genre, we gather information about the scene and the body in its incoherence (that is, its mutilation). We attend to the performance of the wounded body. Performances function as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity, through iterated....or 'twice-behaved behavior'" (Taylor, 2003, p. 22). Ontologies and epistemologies, that is, what we know and the ways that we know, are transmitted through bodily performances within communities. Conquergood (2002) points our attention to the importance of bodies and embodied knowledges: we gain understanding about culture, politics, and economics when we attend to the communication through the whole body.

Hannibal most explicitly makes the case that horror can be beautiful, immersive, and uncannily troubling. Several pop-culture critics make note of the ways *Hannibal* connects the spectacle of violence to art and performance. Headlines include: "The 10 Most Grotesquely Beautiful Images on "Hannibal" So Far" (Serafine, 2014), and "It's Beautiful" – *Hannibal*'s

Seduction through Visual Pleasure" (Worrow, 2015). *Hannibal* presents horror as macabre and provocative art. As Abbott (2018) points out, the remarkable presentation of wounded bodies on *Hannibal* "...redefines horror in television as an aesthetic avant-garde of macabre spectacle and gothic beauty. They are experimental, disturbing, and seductive, inviting the audience to wallow not in the excess of gore, but in the sumptuous stylistic excess of horror" (p. 132).One of the most beautifully, grotesque murders on *Hannibal* drives home the performative importance of installations as spaces and objects, encouraging consideration of alternative forms of being and knowing. Hannibal kills series regular and crime scene tech, Beverly Katz, in season two's "Mukōzuke." Put best by media critic mark Rozeman (2014): "The FBI walks in to discover the body meticulously sliced into vertical pieces and stuck inside several glass compartments like some kind of twisted *Bodies* Exhibition or art installment." Indeed, Beverly's body is doing *both*: performing science *and* art. We can see her insides through the glass plates, yet when the camera pans to the side, her whole body comes together so Beverly is recognizable as Beverly again. Her deconstruction is a haunting spectacle of insides and outsides.

Overall, there is less resistive potential in Beverly's mutilation, compared with Maggie's, for instance, because all we knew about Beverly up until this point in *Hannibal* is that she was a brilliant scientist, skilled marksman, and loyal C.I.A. agent. Further, as an Asian American, Beverly's strengths were stereotypical as well, given that her job and role on the show relied on her proficiency for science and technology. I will discuss the disposability of characters of color further in Chapter 4, but Beverly's art-full death falls in line with how the horror genre historically treats women, and in particular, women of color as objects who are inconsequential to the overall plot (Clover, 1992; Means-Colemen, 2013). *Hannibal*'s treatment of women, and women of color, is not surprising given it is a show that centers two white men. Beverly's body

lies on display in pieces, fitting into a long tradition, both mediated and in real life, of powerful men chopping up women.

Like *Hannibal, Penny Dreadful*'s camerawork often slows down in scenes that resemble a still-life painting, or an art installation. Unlike *Hannibal*, these scenes are often not outright tableaus of gruesome murders or dismembered bodies. *Penny Dreadful*, as a Gothic melodrama, builds a sense of atmospheric dread and unease into its installation-like scenes. They are at once beautiful and terrifying. The opening scene of episode four of *Penny Dreadful* is a wide shot of Dorian Gray's parlor. As the episode opens, we immediately recognize this environment because previous episodes had set up the haunting space in Gray's home, wherein visitors to his home, and thus the viewer too, take in the rows and rows of portraits on the wall. We cannot escape the gaze of all of those eyes. In this scene, the camera slowly pans around the room of naked bodies, writhing slowly around and with one another. We watch them curiously, as do those eerie eyes on the wall. Opera music blares from a phonograph. No one body or action heralds our attention; we merely take in the atmosphere. After about 30 seconds, the camera reveals the Gray is participating in both the orgy and in the voyeurism. He lounges on a couch with no clothes on, a man and a woman to either side of him. Although he is being caressed by both of them, his wandering eyes capture our attention. Gray, too, is taking in the erotic atmosphere. This scene is markedly different than the quick cuts and hurried violence of *Penny Dreadful'*s Grand Guignol scenes. There is an implicit sense of foreboding as we are immersed in Gray's parlor, for Gray doesn't appear happy to be surrounded by all of these beautiful men and women. For all of Gray's superficial perfection, there is something wrong here. The scene finally cuts away to what we assume to be the next morning, when Gray takes in the same parlor, although it is empty now.

Hannibal's hazardous elk loft, and Dorian Gray's depressingly-beautiful parlor, more closely resemble an artistic atmosphere than a staged play or skit. Where, the spectacle of horror is being elevated as an art installation. The elevation of violence and the grotesque towards art seems to fit in to the larger trend of cinema-like prestige TV. Thus, horror TV more closely resembles art-house horror film than low-budget slasher flicks, even when it contains slasher-like scenes. Horror TV's multi-layered presentations of frenzied, graphic acts of violence, slow exhibitions of performance-art gore, alongside well-written scripts, effective acting, and believable special effects elevate the genre on TV as a whole.

The art of the theatrical throat slice

Maggie's terrifying encounter with an almost-cartoonish-ly large hand saw in *Freakshow*, and the display of Beverly's grotesque dismemberment, are two examples of a Grand Guignol-style spectacle of violence. That is, whether set on actual stages or immersed within installation-style settings, violent acts on horror TV rely on explicit, sometimes grand, visual displays. Speaking to the performative aspects of spectacles, Projansky (2014) notes that spectacles are "visual objects on display" (p. 5) while Kellner (2015) describes them as "dazzling and seductive" (p. 1) forms of entertainment. Dictionary.com, too, prioritizes events that can be seen: "Anything presented to the sight or view, especially something of a striking or impressive kind." Although in agreeance with the idea that spectacles are often thought of as visual phenomena, performance studies may extend the idea of spectacle to include any *sensed* event or articulation that is striking or jarring (Remshalt, 2004). Sounds, smells, or proxemics can add to a spectacular experience. The "splatter" sub-genre of horror film is a direct descendent of the spectacle of Grand Guignol theater (McCarty, 1984), and horror TV, too, carries its traditions in both form

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and content. Generally, today's horror TV is spectacular in its adherence to graphic portrayals of violence. Moreover, we *see* and *hear* the violence. Horror can be psychological and paranoid: the fear of what we *cannot* see. Indeed, *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and the *Paranormal Activity* series (2007 – 2015) are famous for the ghosts we never see. But horror TV has largely eschewed off-screen apparitions[5] and instead has invested in the spectacle of blood, body parts, and often-obviously monstrous villains. I turn to the trope of the throat slash here, as it is ubiquitous across the horror TV landscape. That is, horror TV consistently uses knife slashing across the throat to wound and kill characters, opening up the body and releasing, in a dramatic fashion, what is supposed to be "inside." The throat slash is an intimate and performative act that reveals the messiness of moving from margin to center.

Not a contemporary phenomenon in film, theater, and TV, throat slashing appears in classic literature (for example *The Lord of the Rings* (1954)), and before that, the penny dreadfuls of the nineteenth century. More recent filmic examples include *Gone Girl* (in both the bestselling book and its film adaption[6]), and *Eastern Promises*. Perhaps the most famous throat-slasher is Sweeney Todd, the fictional barber who exacts revenge by slitting patrons' throats while in his barber chair. Sweeney Todd first appears in an 1846 penny dreadful, staged as a theatrical production in a Grand Guignol-style theater only one year later. Broadway playwright and lyricist Stephen Sondheim famously adapts the story of Sweeney Todd into a Tony award winning musical in 1979. Tim Burton, the renowned director of Gothic horror films such as *Edward ScissorHands* and *Beetlejuice*, adapted *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* into a Golden Globe winning move in 2007. We watch Johnny Depp as Todd drag his

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[5] There is a popular sub-genre of reality TV that follows investigations into the paranormal. Such "ghost-hunters" look for supernatural activity in homes, old and abandoned buildings, cemeteries, etc. Although there is a level of suspense built-into this reality TV format, I do not consider these shows for this study.
[6] The throat-slashing victim in *Gone Girl* is played by Neil Patrick Harris, *Freakshow*'s Chester.

shiny straight razor over several victims' throats, until the climax of the musical horror film where a young boy slashes Todd's throat and kills him. In 2014, *Penny Dreadful* indulges our continued fascination with Sweeney Todd, explicitly referencing the play in "Resurrection." Todd's inclusion in *Penny Dreadful* is a nod to the play's beginnings in a penny dreadful, a nod to the spectacle of graphic violence, and in particular, an indication that the characters of the show may not achieve their end goals. That is, in *Sweeney Todd* , the real monster is the corrupt state system that protects officials who kidnap and rape women. Sweeney Todd gets temporary satisfaction from becoming the monster and brutally slitting the throats of those who participate in the system, but he also dies a monster. *Penny Dreadful*'s Vanessa dies a monster, literally: By the series finale, Dracula has turned Vanessa into a vampire and Ethan kills her. Like Sweeney, Vanessa was always already on the periphery of the system, marginalized by her connection to the supernatural world. *Penny Dreadful*'s nod to Sweeney Todd and the throat slice ask us to consider monstrous insides, and the implications of letting them out.

Mediated portrayals of throat-slashing do not necessarily take place on a stage, or within a stage-like arena, but they tend to be carefully stylized and sensational ways to kill someone in a Grand Guignol tradition. Throat slashing places two people in close proximity to one another. Throat-slashing in horror TV then highlights monstrous relationships when the slasher is standing behind the victim and dragging a knife or razor across her or his throat in a highly visible and violent act that allows for blood to squirt out horizontally and pour down vertically. This is an intimate act. The opening scenes of *AHS: Hotel* most explicitly convey the relational aspect of a throat-slit, as the vampire Countess uses a metallic, stiletto finger nail to cut the throats of a couple she is having sex with and then drinks their blood. Intimacy is not necessarily romantic, for we see throat slashing as a method between characters who are close in other ways.

Coven's Fiona admits to slashing the throat of her former Supreme, a mother figure, in order to usurp her power. Fiona later cuts the throat of her would-be-usurper Madison, a daughter figure, in order to eliminate the threat. Madison's blood squirts so ferociously, that Fiona's only remark about murdering the young witch is that the coven is going to "need a new rug." In *Freakshow* Dandy slashes the throat of his long-time maid in the opulent dining room when she berates his selfish entitlement.

Hannibal, in its quest to provide bizarre and disturbing horror, puts a twist on a throat-slashing death by graphically portraying the injuries of a victim who has had his neck slit through to the back of this throat, and then his tongue is pulled through so that it is protruding out of the neck wound. Beyond the unfortunately racist named "Columbian Necktie" murder, *Hannibal* presents a throat-slashing in *both* the pilot episode and the series finale. I will revisit the finale in Chapter 3, but the throat-slash in "Apertif" is a violent performance that haunts Will Graham throughout the entire first season. The act itself happens quickly: we see serial killer Hobbs take his wife hostage by holding her body in front of his own. Before Will is able to shoot, Hobbs scores his wife's throat: blood sprays everywhere, including on Will's glasses. For the whole season, *Hannibal* shows Will flashing back so that we, too, must revisit the knife wound and the geyser of bright red blood. The repeated flashbacks indicate that, like the violence that takes place on literal stages, the throat slash is a highly stylized, even dramatic, act that brings together literal and metaphorical configurations of the stage in horror TV. The *act* of the throat slash is a performance

Conclusion

Moving from the stage of the Grand Guignol theater in *Penny Dreadful* to the serial killer Hobbs in *Hannibal,* we are able to draw a line through horror TV with the throat-slash. To the Countess' bedroom, the *Coven*'s living room, Dandy's dining room, or *Hannibal*'s crime scenes, we can see how the literal stage that carries so much spectacle is translated onto other spaces in horror TV through the act of the throat slash. These locations feel mundane compared to the lights and elevation of a performance stage, but horror TV creates alternative performance spaces through atmosphere and adornment. On these figurative stages, there is the addition of a slower, more atmospheric horrific spectacle alongside instances of frenzied, blood-spraying performances of violence. As the camera slows down to showcase victims of gruesome injuries and murder, these scenes present a different mode of performing art than does Grand Guignol theater or the circus. Yet they come together to forward the various ways that marginal and dominant modes of knowing and being intersect.

Horror TV is a unique genre to complete this work. Situated within the prestige TV era, horror TV is often structured carefully and artistically. The pace is slow, there are several plots, and tensions rarely resolve neatly. Thus, today's horror TV provides a unique mix of high- and low-brow art. The low – the outrageous, gory, and violent images and actions- appear to us as a Grand Guignol-style of theater. The high – the artistic presentation of bodies, animals, plants, and technology – come to us as art installations. Theater and performance helps us make sense of the politics of the margin and of the center – just as blurry as the politics of monstrosity

Although the Grand Guignol in Paris has shuttered, and freak shows have gone extinct (indeed circuses with animal performers are heading towards demise), their traditions live on in horror TV. Scholars assert that Grand Guignol-style theater waned in popularity by the 1960s as

a result of the real world horrors of two world wars, as well as the ubiquity of horror cinema (Peirron, 2006; Thomas, 2011). In 1962, *Time Magazine* wrote the theater a formal, and appropriate, send-off: "The last clotted eyeball has plopped onto the stage. The last entrail has been pulled like an earthworm from a conscious victim. The Grand Guignol is closed forever" (Cosgrove, 2013, para. 6).*Freakshow*, set in the 1950s, explicitly grapples with the end of the freak show era, brought about by access to TVs in American homes and a bourgeoning disability-rights movement (Chemers, 2014). But the technologies that worked to foreclose the live theater of gore and difference would also be the ones to take up the demand for shocking and grotesque material. In this way, splatter and exploitation film of the 1960s and 1970s, and then, I argue, contemporary horror TV, does the work that Grand Guignol theater and freak shows used to do. Moreover, horror TV situates its graphic violence and grotesque presentations of monstrosity literally back on to stages.

By bringing oddities and the macabre out of the shadows, Grand Guignol theater, and more problematically the freak show, were stages where power and resistance played out and where traditionally marginalized bodies and performances were given the spotlight. The violence that (sometimes) takes place in these arenas commands our attention and points to the chaos and disorder of everyday, lived experiences. Even those instances where a character attempts to (re)establish traditional kinds of order, horror TV is pointing towards the precarious nature of that order. In this, hegemonic systems and sets of knowledges are just as messy and monstrous as those that have been historically cast to the margins.

Chapter 2

A nightmare dressed like a daydream: The horror TV dandy as monstrous consumer and

ideal citizen

Season two of *Hannibal*, having concluded the Hobbs storyline, introduces a new serial

killer who abducts, kills, and places his many victims into a large spiral-formation. The bodies

are glued together and take up the entire floor of an industrial silo. One day, Dr. Hannibal Lecter

follows the perpetrator, climbs a ladder to the silo's roof, and peers down at the killer's piece of

"art:" A distressingly beautiful circular pattern of bodies, arranged by skin color: lightness giving

way to darkness, giving way to lightness again as your eye travels across the tableaux. The

camera switches up to Hannibal, who, upon spotting the "artist," shouts "I admire your work!"

As he did with Hobbs, Hannibal begins copycat killing victims and leaving *most of* the bodies for

the "artist" to use in his installation. When the FBI eventually finds the silo of bodies, they note

that one body is missing a leg, an anomaly in the field of corpses. As Jack Crawford, Beverly

Katz, and another technician work in the crime lab to make sense of this particular victim and

catch the perpetrator, *Hannibal* inter-splices scenes of Hannibal unwrapping a human leg from

butcher paper, using a reciprocating saw to butcher it into portions, and then carefully preparing

the leg in the style of OssoBucco (slow roasted veal leg). Classical music plays enthusiastically

while Hannibal sautés and then braises the meat with wine and vegetables. Simultaneously, Jack

gives a monologue to his colleagues about the killer experiencing an existential crisis about faith

and humanity. After his speech, we stop seeing or hearing from Jack at all, the focus is all on

Hannibal as he takes his Le Creuset pot out of the oven, opens and samples a new bottle of wine, and finally sits down to a sumptuous dinner for one.

Hannibal, in the sanctuary of his kitchen, partaking in his favorite activity, is *not* the one having an existential crisis. This scene is one of many in *Hannibal* that portrays the cannibal psychiatrist wholly at ease butchering, preparing, and consuming human bodies. This chapter examines consumption in horror TV, as performed by a specific kind of character who appears across several shows: the dandy[7]. The horror TV dandy contains multifaceted, sometimes contradictory, meanings. The dandy figure in contemporary horror TV is coded as *both* feminine and masculine, and in each categorization is presented as uniquely monstrous. On the one hand, the feminized dandy provides a queer and potentially innovative resistance to dominant modes of white, upper class, heterosexual masculinity. However, in his near-obsessive pursuit of orderly perfection, often via extraordinary violence, the dandy seems to recuperate conventional versions of power and control, particularly over women. Above all, the horror TV dandy represents the epitome of the good, white neoliberal citizen who recuperates a traditional, patriarchal social and economic order through consumption. The outrageous and horrific violence performed by the dandy in the name of consumerism obscures his true danger: he is the ideal citizen.

Along with Hannibal, this chapter will focus on *Freakshow*'s Dandy Mott, and *Penny Dreadful*'s Dorian Gray. Other contemporary horror TV shows with a dandy character include Roman from *Hemlock Grove*, Dandy Mott's ancestor, Edward Mott, from *American Horror Story: Roanoke*, and Quentin from *Coven*. Because Quentin plays a relatively small role on *Coven*, he will be used as an example in this analysis, but takes a backseat to the aforementioned three dandies. TV shows in other genres have dandies as well. For instance, Barney from *How I*

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[7] Throughout this analysis, Dandy Mott's name will always be capitalized to differentiate him from the term "dandy."

Met Your Mother, Loras from *Game of Thrones*, and the main character of the anime *Space Dandy*. Finally, Norman Bates, of *Bates Motel*, is a young dandy in a psychological thriller TV show. Although I do look at *Bates Motel*, and thus Norman, in this analysis, his ominous Gothic mansion foreshadows the importance of the Gothic tradition to the figure of the dandy. That is, one of Norman's defining features is an expressionist home fraught with tension about Norman's role in his family and in society. Like Norman, the dandies of horror TV reconcile this tension via violence against those who threaten their sense of order. The dandy in horror TV is a queer configuration of resistance of and deference to dominant gendered, racialized, and classed structures.

This chapter will first delineate the way I use "consume" and "consumption" in this analysis, comparing and contrasting the dandy to the metrosexual, and considers the various ways that the dandy figure in horror TV performs queer, but dutiful neoliberal subject. I then turn to the horror TV dandy's role as villain: he is presented as monstrous in his queerness and his penchant for senseless violence. I explore the dandy as "all surface, no soul" and conclude that the dandy figure does invite our attention as a fascinating and alluring character, fracturing conventional prescriptions for white masculinity. Yet I conclude with the terrifying realization that the horror TV shows I examine invite us to enjoy and even identify with the dandy, who is in fact, the ideal neoliberal, consuming, citizen.

The all-consuming dandy

The term "dandy" dates as far back as 1790, and gains popularity in the 19th century to describe an upwardly ascending European man who pays much attention to how he dresses (Coad, 2008). Kaye (2009), using Baudelaire (1981), describes the dandy as "...a slightly

effeminate aesthete, who is 'rich,' 'idle,' and 'blasé'; a man whose existence is defined by 'luxury,' 'elegance,' and the perpetual pursuit of happiness" (p. 111). The horror TV dandy, in keeping with the cultural and historical conceptions of the character, consumes most obviously in the form of buying and acquiring things and experiences. It will be important here to consider the ways that the dandy may be compared to the metrosexual man. Critical cultural scholars (Kaye, 2009; Ramert, 2009) have argued that the metrosexual is the modern incarnation of the dandy. A metrosexual man attends to his personal appearance through shopping, beauty regimens, and diet and exercise. Popularized in the early 2000s, metrosexual became a buzzword for describing a white, straight man who displayed typically effeminate personal hygiene practices and routines (Sender, 2006). As Kaye (2009) points out, such a definition lends itself to thinking about what it means to *become* a metrosexual: money. Like the 19th century's dandy, the 21st century metrosexual is intertwined in a complex web of consumerism, aesthetics, and sexuality (Sender, 2006; Kaye, 2009). The dandies of horror TV are wealthy men and, importantly, the focus is on how all of these men *consume* rather than work (or produce). Dandy and Dorian do not work at all. Hannibal, of course, is a respected and brilliant psychiatrist. Towards the beginning of the series, we see him meeting with (presumable paying) patients. Yet as early as episode two in *Hannibal*, his time at the office wanes. Even *Coven*'s Quentin, who alludes to a book-writing career, can only focus on the "stress" (read: party hopping) of traveling across the globe as he celebrates his success. These men all fit into an important characterization of the metrosexual: a man who straddles femininity and masculinity through the aesthetics of his clothing, accessories, and home environment, and thus his relationship to consumption and procuring things. The horror TV dandy occupies a space where the dandy-figure meets the metrosexual; this is a particularly gendered, classed, and raced space. A common critique of the metrosexual seems to

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rest on a superficial, or even devious, motivation for attention to looks and health: solely to get women (Kaye, 2009; Adams, 2013). If the metrosexual is a neoliberal construction of refinement through shopping, the dandy represents a philosophical subversion of traditional and often puritanical rules about gender and sexuality. This is a figure who can claim any number of gendered presentations and sexual partners, so long as he participates in the project of contributing to the economy. However, it still seems to remain that the dandy's whiteness allows for historical and contemporary flexibility with gender and sexuality.

The metrosexual is largely the product of a neoliberal project urging a wider swath of good citizens to shop, decorate, go out to eat and otherwise pump money into the economy as he crafts his own personal "brand" (Sender, 2006). Wilde describes Dorian as "...wonderfully handsome, with his finely-curved scarlet lips, his frank blue eyes, his crisp gold hair" (quoted in Halberstam, 1995, p. 64), and *Penny Dreadful*'s casting delivers an equally attractive and well-kept young man. He is always clean shaven. Dorian's hair is parted severely in the middle, so as to frame his flawless porcelain skin. *Freakshow*'s Dandy, too, wears his hair parted in the middle, although in keeping with his harsher personality and penchant for violence, his hair is slicked down with a thick layer of pomade. Dandy wears suits, vests, and sometimes bowties in a variety of bright colors and loud patterns. Hannibal, the oldest and most professionally accomplished of the three, is always impeccably dressed in suits with ultra-wide ties and a pocket square. These are men who prioritize even the details of their clothing. In his three *Coven* scenes, Quentin wears a three piece suit and a fedora with a purple feather to match his pocket square. Kaye (2009) reminds us that the flamboyant man, whether dandy or metrosexual, ought not to be reduced to a singular and apolitical aesthete, defined *only* by fashion, wealth, or lavish lifestyles. That is, these personas or behaviors are not merely escapes from the drudgery of

everyday life and work, but Kaye argues, the dandy and the metrosexual consume as a way into upper-class culture and social circles. That is, the aesthetics of Dandy, Dorian Gray, and Hannibal draw us in not only because they are pleasing to the eye, but because they demonstrate mastery within the economic and sociopolitical realms from which they hail. Above I explored the ways the dandy represented a queer masculinity, in that horror TV's dandies, aligning with their Victorian counterparts, exhibit queer sexualities. The metrosexual however, is decidedly heterosexual. Sender (2006) finds that the metrosexual project is about introducing the white straight masculine consumer to a broader array of lifestyle and beauty products designed to make him a better boyfriend or husband, at once shoring up his sexuality and integrating more bodies into an ever-expanding market-based culture. Yet, within their queer masculinity, horror TV's dandies are doing *both*: they are (re)asserting masculine ideals through consumerism while eschewing a strict adherence to heterosexuality. In 2018, a queer-affirmative masculinity then seems the ultimate neoliberal victory that works to include more bodies within its system of citizenry-through-consumption.

The horror TV dandy's fashion sometimes transcends the setting of his particular program, suggesting the monstrous dandy, and his relationship to neoliberal ideals of rugged individualism and consumerism, is a fixture within our economy. Hannibal's costuming functions to not only illustrate his dandyism, but also to obscure time and place within the *Hannibal*'s universe. The material of Hannibal's suits and the patterns on his ties, and certainly the width of the ties as well, are uncanny: They are not in style in the United States in the 2010s, and no other character in *Hannibal* wears colorful and loud suits. Yet they do not appear overly gaudy or anachronistic, particularly as Hannibal sits in his opulently decorated office. *Coven*'s Quentin wears a cape over his flamboyant suit, not at all in style in 2013.In one scene, Quentin

stands with his hands on his hips so that his cape flares out dramatically. And Dorian Gray's

unbuttoned shirt similarly functions to suggest the dandy's wardrobe defies place and time.

Hannibal's fashion is a marker of his eccentricity and queerness in the very ordered sphere of

law enforcement and behavioral science. These characters seem to demonstrate a mastery of

time, as well as wealth and lifestyle. Additionally, their distinct looks align with neoliberal ideals

of self-branding. Ramert (2009) argues that the two diverge insofar as contemporary dandies,

like their predecessors, are "personality performers" (p. 447). That is, following in Oscar Wilde's

footsteps, figures such as Truman Capote, David Bowie, and Andy Warhol have integrated the

aesthetic and lifestyle. Horror TV dandies stand out among their characters: they are memorable

for their dress, refined behavior, and luxurious homes. Indeed, some of these dandies are actual

brands, to be sold and consumed based on name-recognition alone. For example, Hannibal, the

central character of a successful collection of novels, films, and a TV show, is a mythic name by

2017. Through blurring temporal situated-ness, horror TV's dandies project a timeless and

universal appeal when indeed, their presence is serves as a reminder of the reign of a queer-

affirming, white, affluent man on top.

Another way to consider consumption in horror TV is through the taking up of space,

something our horror TV dandies excel at. We meet Dandy in the first episode of *Freakshow*,

when his mother buys every ticket for a performance at Elsa's show. As Ethel, the bearded

woman serving as the freak show's barker (or M.C.), announces the night's performers, the

camera pans around to show the audience, or rather, where the audience is supposed to be.

Instead, the tent is full of empty chairs except for Dandy and his mother taking up two seats in

the middle. As the performance begins, the camera instead stays on Dandy, closing all the way

up until his face fills the screen. He lifts a pair of theater binoculars to his eyes and shouts,

"Freaks!" This scene introduces Dandy as a man extreme in his expectations: the excessive rows of empty seats demonstrate that the entertainers will perform for *only* Dandy and his mother, while Dandy is simply too excited to see the performers with disabilities. Here, Dandy is defined by his consumption that comes by his command over the space. Hannibal Lecter, too, illustrates such mastery over self and space immediately. In "Apertif," we learn Hannibal is an orphan and was educated at elite boarding schools in Europe. He is extremely intelligent, well read, and even well published in psychological journals. Hannibal's office is enormous: the walls are lined with books, including a second-story loft. Space not reserved for books is covered with paintings and art. Hannibal conveys his commitment to a particular kind of intellectualism (psychology and philosophy) by spreading it all about his office space. Hannibal's office furniture is ultra-modern and very low to the ground, so that his legs appear unnaturally lengthy as he listens to his patient's problems. Hannibal's office is an ode to his taste, intelligence, craft, but also his physical presence, shoring up his power in comparison to other characters who enter it.

Finally, horror TV presents the myriad ways that consumption is also symbolic or murder, or "consuming" one's life. Hannibal is perhaps the most literal consumer on horror TV: he kills, dismembers, prepares, and eats other humans. Hannibal, an intensely multi-layered and enigmatic character, resists neat categorizations of hero or villain, masculine or feminine, and human or monster. *Hannibal* is unapologetically about men, but one that asks more questions about masculinity than provides prescriptions for. *Hannibal*, a show that revels in the complex morality of antiheroes and the drive towards primal, violent pleasures, presents Hannibal as a dandy character not reflexive about his serial killing. Contemporary and historical male antiheroes typically serve as allegories about wounded masculinity: "frustrated geniuses and pained authors wracked by existential crises, threatened by the petty demands of raced and

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gendered Others" (Johnson, 2017, p. 23). *Hannibal* presents literal wounds, transforming human bodies into something else, and invites the audience to see beauty in the body's possibilities. But in doing so, we are invited to identify with Hannibal, a problematic position. In the previous chapter I outline some of the resistive potential that artful and provocative violence can bring, but here we see that when *Hannibal* privileges the perspective of the all-consuming white male lead character, it also endorses, at least, partially, his worldview. Hannibal is captivating to watch, viscously murdering and skillfully butchering, yet dangerous in the ease with which he slips back into mainstream society. Hannibal's enactment of violence and consumption point to the ways that *Hannibal*, although featuring primarily white men, transcends a monolithic anxiety about white masculinity's slipping foothold on economic and political power in the United States. That is, Hannibal does not kill to right perceived wrongs, or make up for a seemingly-flawed social justice system; he is not a vigilante. Nor does he kill to compensate for a personal loss or lack. As *Hannibal* develops through three seasons, the serial killer villains ultimately function to contrast Hannibal's philosophy about murder: he is simply a superior human being and consumerism at the top of the food chain means he can take lives.

The Gothic, monstrous dandy

The emergence of the dandy in upper-class European circles coincides with the popularity of the Gothic novel (Halberstam, 1995; Haggerty, 2006). Haggerty (2006) points out that Gothic fiction ascends at moments when gender and sexuality are being codified in European society. Using Foucault, Haggerty argues that where the rules about masculinity, femininity, and heterosexuality are articulated through law, public health campaigns, and the church, there is a counter movement wherein some people enact and embrace "unauthorized

genders and sexualities" (p. 2). The figure of the dandy transgresses normative presentations of masculinity through his flamboyant fashion and life of leisure.

The figure of Dorian Gray represents an excessive display of sexuality, decoration, and beauty often found in the Gothic novel. *Penny Dreadful*'s version of Dorian Gray is a white man who appears no more than 30 years old. He lives in a heavily adorned Victorian mansion in London. Unlike Hannibal or Dandy, and keeping with Wilde's story, we do not know the source of Gray's wealth; he is the ultimate man of leisure. Gray's wardrobe is as lavish as his estate: he wears suits with expensive-looking patterns and embellishments. Jack Halberstam (1995), referring to Dorian Gray's portrayal in Oscar Wilde's original text, stresses Dorian's fashion and good looks are his defining features as a dandy. That is, he is striking to look at both in terms of his physical body and his adornments (clothing, accessories, and jewelry). Accordingly, he lives in well-decorated places, and socializes in visually striking settings. The dandy is coded as feminine in his exterior excess. That is, he subverts traditional, and contemporary white masculine styles of dress and hygiene. "With his flamboyant dress, controlled personality, and life purpose in seeking pleasure, the dandy actually serves as a sort of foil for his time, pointing out hypocrisies and the social climate by testing boundaries" (Ramert, 2009, p. 448). The decorations are pointing us towards characters whose investments in material goods and extravagant experiences are all-important. *Coven*'s Quentin Fleming, despite his relatively small amount of screen time, is an example of the self-indulgent and femininely monstrous dandy. He serves on a council of esteemed witches who oversee covens around the United States, and besides being the only warlock portrayed in *Coven*, he is feminized in many ways. He is a small man (much shorter than all the women in his introductory scene). As Fiona greets the council, she exclaims, "Quentin, you vicious old queen" and kisses him on the cheek. The character's

homage to Truman Capote is shored up as he facetiously declares, in a high pitched voice with a Southern accent, ""Oh, my life is pure torment. One book signing after another. Travel, travel, travel. It's, like, get me off the bestseller list already." Quentin is above all excessive: his dress (as noted above, he dons a flashy cape), his sassy retorts, and his jet-setting lifestyle.

Here I consider the various forms of monstrosity embodied in the horror TV dandy. According to Halberstam (1995), the dandy is a Gothic monster. Monsters reflect cultural anxieties about race, class, gender, and sexuality (Calafell, 2015; Levina & Bui, 2013; Means-Coleman, 2011). Monsters - whether vampires, zombies, or ghosts - are presented as out-of-control, ravenous, and irrational, and are thus often codified as feminine and as not-white (Levina & Bui, 2013; Means-Coleman, 2011). They are mindless, soulless, and not-human. Using monstrosity as a concept, as a tool, through which to negotiate these kinds of mediated representations helps us make sense of how humans, too, can represent monstrosity in their Otherness; by being women, queer, from outside the United States, poor, or by being a person of color (Calafell, 2012; Levina & Bui, 2013). This is not always a bad thing: historically marginalized groups of people sometimes find empowerment in representations of the monster (Means-Coleman, 2011; Calafell, 2012). This figure resists dominant assumptions in ways that may connect to the experiences of women, people of color, people with disabilities, and those in the LGBTQ community, for example. On the one hand, the horror TV dandy is culturally monstrous in his deviant performance of masculinity as presented in contemporary TV shows. That is, the period pieces *Freakshow* and *Penny Dreadful* still fit into a conversation about white masculinity today. The Victorian dandy, the 1950s dandy, and the present-day dandy resist many traditional presentations of masculinity, albeit in contextually situated ways. And yet, the horror TV dandy performs many other acts that are often associated with white masculinity, most

notably in his demand for power, control, and possessions. Further, these characters specifically (Dandy, Hannibal, Dorian, and even Quentin) are captivating on screen: they command our attention through flashy wardrobes, outrageous requests, and acts of macabre violence. In a genre, and medium, rife with antiheros, horror TV's dandies reside most closely and clearly on the side of the villain. The dandy is particularly dangerous not for what we can see (that is, his obvious bad deeds) but for what his showy accessories and flamboyant personality hide: he *is* the order. Read together, and as contemporary iterations of a classic Victorian literary figure, the dandy is not simply a queer white man who flaunts social norms, but in many ways he fits into them.

Episode nine of *Freakshow* is called "Tupperware Party Massacre." Dandy Mott rings the doorbell of a suburban home, where eight white, upper-middle class women have gathered for a Tupperware party. In a previous episode, we learn that Jimmy, one of Elsa's performers whose finger are fused into claw-like appendages, sometimes attends these parties to sexually satisfy the housewives. Because of personal problems on this day, Jimmy abruptly left the suburban home. The women Jimmy has come back to bother them when they hear the doorbell ring again. The homeowner, upon seeing Dandy's handsome face, tells the other women not to worry, and she opens the door. Dandy exclaims, "Well isn't that dress just a magical color! What is that!? Periwinkle?" The woman swoons as Dandy explains that his car broke down and he would like to call for help from her home. The homeowner throws the door wide open and warmly invites Dandy in as violins begin to screech in the background. Something bad is about to happen. When we next catch up with the housewives, they are all floating in the swimming pool, now bright red from all the women's blood. The camera stays on the image of the red water in the large swimming pool, eight bodies bobbing with their legs and arms spread around them. The lanai

screen is covered in bloody smears and handprints. The camera finally switches to an underwater shot and we see that the homeowner's eyeballs were gouged out.

An important function of the dandy's appearance in horror TV is related to their white masculinity: they do not *look* monstrous. Halberstam (1995) suggests that the Gothic novel works through a Gothic economy, producing monstrosity as "...never unitary but always an aggregate of race, class, and gender" (p. 88). Horror TV functions similarly, providing monstrous figures who are safe in their queerness, but also in their whiteness and wealth. Dandy's ability to easily enter the 1950s suburban home full of women speaks to his aura of comfort for the women. This is at least partially due to his queer masculinity. The dandies' attention to dress, decoration, and the finer things in life render him feminine, seemingly aligning him with women's interests, safety, and politics. As Dandy comments on the woman's periwinkle dress, he comes across as gay: someone who ought not to sexually violate the housewives. And he does not: instead he brutally mutilates and kills them.

Regardless of dress, however, the woman would not have let Dandy in the house if he was black. The horror TV dandy figure is white, as much a function of his Victorian roots as is it to allowing him into white women's orbits in horror TV. That he is even able to flaunt his queerness in public is a sign of the dandy's white, upper-class, privilege, both in the 19th century and today. In his study on black Muslim men in the United States, Khabeer (2016) uses the term "dandy" primarily in relationship to how young black men have historically and contemporaneously *dressed* well. That is, for the black dandy, dressing in expensive and even flamboyant clothing is a nod to a former, more conservative politics about respectability and faith. Dandyism shores up heterosexuality for many young black men in the United States while also distinguishing them from the "ghetto fabulous" aesthetic that is sold by corporate (white)

interests to working class and working poor communities (Khabeer, 2016). Where dandyism is connected to queerness for white men, they only become safer-appearing for white centered political and economic system. The effeminate man was and still is a Western cultural threat via his rejection of traditional masculine and heterosexual ideals. Backlash for the dandy and the metrosexual man follow the pattern of any counter-cultural movement. Oscar Wilde was imprisoned for two years for gross indecency, having officially been outed as a gay man. Despite a more LGBTQ-accepting culture in the twenty first century United States, there has been what Coad (2008) refers to as "metrophobia" from both men and women who argue for the restoration of traditional, and dichotomized, gender roles. But the Victorian dandy and his contemporary offspring offer a reminder that such roles have been historically distorted. Indeed, some critics (Adams, 2013) have deemed the dandy the "original gentlemen," arguing that the attentive, sensitive, and sophisticated man represented by the dandy is the kind of traditional masculinity that should be revered, a thread Khabeer (2016) picks up on from working with black dandies.

Later in "Tupperware Party Massacre," Dandy empties Tupperware containers of blood into his own bathtub. He tells his childhood friend Regina (the daughter of his family's maid, a young black woman, played by Gabourey Sidibe) that he discovered the "power of bathing in blood" after killing his own mother and soaking in hers. Dandy confesses these deeds while wearing a pink silk bathrobe, declaring: "I can't tell you how it felt, the control over their lives!" These back to back scenes featuring Dandy comprise some of the most violent and disturbing scenes in horror TV. His manipulative charm, attitude of grandeur, quest for control, and sense of entitlement (here, for other people's lives) are also illustrative of Dandy's larger character arc in *Freakshow* and, finally, they are in line with the larger role of the monstrous and consumptive dandy throughout contemporary horror TV.

I contend that the horror TV dandy asks us to consider how monstrosity works. The dandy is classically beautiful on the surface, but something monstrous lies beneath. Or rather, there is *nothing* inside of him, and this emptiness is monstrous. In "Sorbet," Hannibal's psychiatrist remarks that he is "...wearing a very well-tailored person suit," pointing out that as impeccably dressed as he is, Hannibal comes across as having no soul. Halberstam (1995) describes the Gothic villain, as "all body and no soul" (p. 1): his power to charm and entertain is primarily visual. We see this when we first meet *Penny Dreadful*'s Dorian Gray in episode two ("Séance") of *Penny Dreadful*, where Dorian makes an instant connection with Vanessa at a party. The camera is close up on Vanessa's face as she takes in the large ballroom filled with people in tuxedos and ball gowns. A figure that was previously blurry in the background moves closer until he is in focus. Dorian wears his shirt unbuttoned almost to the center of his chest, with a bright red cummerbund. Even at a medium close up, we see that he is wearing rings on his fingers and carries a pocket watch. We know that Vanessa is immediately enchanted with Dorian because she begins to smile even before he introduces himself. In a soft voice he tells Vanessa his name, and then asks what she is skeptical about. Vanessa is caught off guard when Dorian (correctly) guesses she is taken aback by the mis-matched colonial décor of the mansion. He notes: "About the room...Rather aggressive in the chinoiserie and geographically capricious to say the least. In this one room, there's Japanese, Siamese, Egyptian, Balinese, and something I take to be last season's Panto of Aladdin." Dorian impresses Vanessa with his incredible knowledge of styles from around the globe, suggesting that he is "full" of information, as well as taste and refinement. However, because Dorian is based on a popular literary figure, we also know that this man literally has no soul: His "interiority" remains within the painting that keeps him young and beautiful. But here I will challenge Halberstam's assertion that the Gothic

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monster, in particular the villainous dandy, has no soul: Hannibal, Dorian, and Dandy, too, possess intrinsic qualities. They display drive, desire and anxieties, and these interiorities are primarily bound up in acquisition and consumption.

Hannibal's ultimate consumable, the person he spends the most time pursuing and ultimate destroying, is Will Graham. When Will gives in to his desire during season three and acts as accomplice to Hannibal's murders, thus aiding in Hannibal's monstrous consumption, *Hannibal* reinforces the imperative that smart, rich, handsome, white men are the ultimate winners. During their first meeting, Hannibal expresses an interest in Will that goes beyond the role of mentor. The psychiatrist observes: "I imagine what you see and learn touches everything else in your mind. Your values and decency are present yet shocked at your associations, appalled at your dreams." Will is appalled, for sure, at Hannibal's intrusion into his psyche. Will coldly retorts, "Please don't psychoanalyze me. You won't like me when I'm psychoanalyzed," suggesting that he is as angry as the Incredible Hulk that Hannibal Lecter would dare to analyze him. This early scene establishes that *Hannibal* will not be a typical police procedural where the experts spend the bulk of their time analyzing the killers, rapists, and terrorists (for instance, shows like *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, *Criminal Minds*, and *Homeland*). Despite being a about law enforcement officials, *Hannibal* will dive deep into the complex ethos of its serial-killer main character, asking the audience to identify with someone who kills just because he can.

Hannibal is an antihero who sits dangerously close to the villain side of the spectrum. Beginning with his appearance in the 1990 film *Silence of the Lambs*, Hannibal is often considered an essential fictional villain. However, Hannibal's role in *Silence of the Lambs*, 2002's *Red Dragon*, and NBC's *Hannibal*, portray the cannibal psychiatrist in a more ambiguous

way. After all, Hannibal helps Clarice Starling capture "Buffalo Bill," and he continues to serve in an advisory role to Will Graham in *Red Dragon* and *Hannibal*. Will begins the series as an antihero only in his imagination. That is, in the pilot for *Hannibal*, Will has never killed anyone and works as a consultant to the FBI to catch the "bad guys." Like Dexter, however, Will harbors a secret desire to kill others, a proclivity Hannibal quickly figures out and exploits. Season 1 makes perfectly clear that although Will can imagine himself killing, butchering, and mutilating, he is horrified at this possibility. In scenes where he is by himself, Will performs mundane tasks, or rescues animals. His genius, however, is perverted: it requires him to intellectually embody the killer so that the FBI can quickly catch her or him. The week-to-week killers in *Hannibal* present as obviously monstrous, but so does Will, if he "becomes" the monster, even for a moment and even to catch the perpetrator. Hannibal follows in line with the tradition laid out in the first decade of prestige TV, presenting leading men who invite both sympathy and condemnation as they struggle to retain power and status in a changing political and cultural arena. But *Hannibal* departs rapidly from his prestige TV predecessors in that first Hannibal, and then Will, dare to explore the possibility that "normal" people may be drawn towards non-normative desires.

The dandy as a Gothic figure is complicated in his sexuality and so too are the dandies of horror TV. Dandy is not gay, although he is queer: in the fifth episode of *Freakshow*, "Pink Cupcakes," Dandy begins having sex with a male prostitute, but viscously kills and dismembers him before they finish the act. Halberstam (1995) argues that the dandy "...obviously...represents the homosexual male" (p.63). Halberstam goes on to complicate this reading though, noting that Dorian Gray's first selfish transgression is to callously break the heart of the woman he loves. Yet Dorian's love for Sybil, Halberstam finds, stems from her profession as an actress, someone

who dons various costumes and characters, including sometimes dressing up as a man. *Penny Dreadful*'s Dorian is similarly queer. He has sexual relationships with Vanessa and another woman character, Lily, and also with Ethan Chandler. Dorian also has a brief romantic relationship with Angelique, a transgender woman escort with male genitalia. We know about her body parts because we see them: the camera lingers, from Dorians's perspective, on the spectacle of her genitals, highlighting the queerness of *both* of them. Hannibal Lecter has one heterosexual relationship in *Hannibal*, when he sleeps with fellow analyst Alana Bloom. The affair is brief and does not impact the show's narrative. Rather, Hannibal and Will's relationship teems with sexual tension[8] and culminates with the two men embracing each other and diving off a steep cliff to their deaths together.

The bored dandy

A symptom of horror TV's dandies excessive privilege is that they are bored, further driving the imperative to consume. Dorian Gray complains about being bored of life in the season two episode "Ebb Tide." But Dandy frequently throughout *Freakshow*, reports that he is bored. Historically, boredom may be interpreted as a feminine, an upper-class, or even a white ailment, the problem of someone who does not have to work for a living. But horror TV twists the portrayal of boredom, such that dandies assert masculine dominance in response. Dandy is the only son of a wealthy heiress in central Florida. His mother ultimately reveals to Dandy that in order to protect the family money, like so many royal families in Europe, the Motts interbred for generations. Mother Mott laments that although the money has been preserved, a dark legacy

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[8] Numerous "Fannibal" Reddit pages, YouTube content creators, and bloggers have "shipped" (putting fictional characters into a relationship) Hannibal and Will. See for example the "Are they Gay?" YouTube series https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6w-Uk5NFQYQ.

of mental illness has also been passed down. Although *Freakshow* provides a rational explanation for why Dandy is not normal, the show does not excuse his cruelty and anger towards anyone who denies him what he wants. Rather than mentally ill, Dandy is presented as selfish, demanding, and entitled. In episode two, "Massacres and Matinees," Dandy and his mother[9] are eating dinner. The camera first closes up on a crystal jar with a metallic nipple as a lid. The nipple-lid has the word Dandy engraved on it: it is his drinking "bottle." We then see that Dandy and his mother sit at opposite ends of a large dining table. The dining room is adorned with ornate wallpaper and heavy curtains. A crystal chandelier looms above them. Dandy, as he is throughout the series, is dressed up in fine clothes and his hair is parted straight through the middle of his head, heavily slicked down with pomade to either side. There are two curls of hair that rest on his forehead, framing his face like devil horns. Dandy flicks his fork and taps his feet: he is bored. His lips are tightly pursed as his mother rings a bell so that the maid will bring in dinner. He declares that the escargot dinner is "boring" and fills up his crystal baby bottle with cognac from the bar. Mother attempts dinner conversation by inquiring about Dandy settling down and having children. While drinking liquor from his baby bottle, Dandy declares babies to be "boring!" Dandy is a devilish-man-child, who later goes on to savagely kill the maid and his mother: those keeping him in such boring circumstances. As he declares to Regina (the maid's daughter), he finally feels power when he holds someone's life in his hands. He is only satiated by consuming the lives of people.

I return to the idea that the dandy is monstrous in his emptiness. He is a beautiful creature, but one who is soulless. He enacts violence against a system that tells him he is

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[9]Dandy's mother is played by Francis Conroy, who plays Myrtle Snow in *Coven*. Myrtle is on the witch council with Quentin, *Coven*'s dandy character.

supposed to already have it all but simultaneously that he should want more. Consumerism largely defines the dandies of horror TV. They are bored when they are not the center of attention, consuming others' time. They voraciously acquire fine clothing, furniture, food, and spirits. But I find that the dandies' violence is also a kind of consumption: the use and abuse of other's bodies and lives for personal gain, even if that gain is merely the removal of an obstacle. Hannibal provides a literal version of violence-as-consumption by carefully butchering, preparing, and eating his victims. That is, the dandy's wealth and social status allow him a seemingly free-pass to wield power over anyone in his way. He does whatever he wants, flouting societal and legal rules, and moreover, suggesting that he is above such rules. Although above I noted the ways that the horror TV dandy is feminized through his consumption of material goods and a lavish lifestyle, he is also abhorrently violent, consuming human life. Thus the horror TV dandy seems to be eschewing those cultural and political rules which do not serve his desire for fine things, while re-establishing a particular kind of order, often through violence, that allows him to stay on top. Horror TV's dandy works to (re)assert a traditional, patriarchal form of masculinity not despite of his excess and flamboyance, but rather those characteristics contribute to the dandy as powerful consumer. There appears to be an intrinsic emptiness to the dandy: as presented in horror TV, he is preoccupied with superficial pursuits. Nothing inside of him is good or entertaining enough. The dandies of horror TV all engage in self-indulgent and self-serving behaviors. They are all perpetually bored. They are certainly not the only characters to use and abuse others for personal gain and entertainment, but they are among the most captivating visually and rhetorically as they manipulate, and even – especially- as they kill their way to what they want. That the figure of the dandy is a main character on several horror TV shows, commanding attention through explicit and macabre acts of violence, points towards the

dandy's real danger: that we are invited to root for him as he kills his way to the top. For all his subversive characterizations, the dandy is a rich, white, man who gets the things and people he wants by being the ultimate good citizen-consumer.

The horror TV dandy revels in excess. As noted above, the Gothic is about excess, and although excessive adornment is coded as a feminine attribute, in the horror TV dandy we can also see the ways that their excess is related to selfishly and dangerously (re)ordering their worlds. These men of horror TV are dandies, and not merely metrosexuals, as their excess is tied to not only consumerism, but passion and desire for things, experiences, and people. Halberstam (1995) notes that the dandy "...represents too much and too little, excess and paucity; the dandy represents the parasitical aristocrat and the upwardly mobile bourgeois" (p.62-63). Horror TV's dandies are monstrous as they injure, kill, and consume their way to top. Reading these characters through a Gothic dandy is lens, rather than as iterations of the metrosexual man, is useful because we can make sense of their multilayered monstrosity. Gothic fiction is a style and narrative structure that produces fear and desire within the reader (Halberstam, 1995), and horror TV very much follows within these footsteps. In both literature and televised horror, fear and desire occur through an excess of meaning: The Gothic genre has "rhetorical extravagance that produces, quite simply, too much" (Halberstam, 1995, p.5). Thus these monsters of horror TV open themselves to the viewer to readings where they are at once feminine and masculine, monsters and humans. On the one hand, it is encouraging to see queer characters so heavily represented on TV. For horror fans, all the better that the genre has embraced its unique ability to present masculinity in a variety of forms. Stemming from the decidedly feminine-coded characteristic of boredom, the horror TV dandy's quest for control animates significant and brutal violence, often against women, people of color, queer people, and disabled people.

Conclusion

Horror TV's dandy is presented as both feminine and masculine, and both characterizations perform important cultural work. With the villainous dandy we see the slippery relationship between surface and content, between beauty and ugliness. The dandy is most overtly feminized through his queer sexuality and behavior, whether bisexual, pansexual, or asexual. As well, he is feminized by the aesthetics of his clothing, accessories, and home environment, and thus his relationship to consumption and procuring things. But housed with a Gothic tradition, Dandy, Hannibal, and Dorian Gray are social climbers obsessed with ordering their lives and desires in particular ways. Metrosexuality is a helpful perspective to consider alongside the figure of the dandy, for the contemporary iterations of these characters situate them as good, neoliberal citizens who spend their time, money, and efforts on building and maintaining a brand.

The dandy is bored because he has every material thing he wants, yet he yearns for more. Feminized dandy is monstrous in his emptiness. He is a beautiful creature, but one who is soulless. He enacts violence against a system that tells him he is supposed to already have it all but simultaneously that he should want more. Thus, horror TV's dandy ultimately recuperates his place in the white, hetero-patriarchal order in his wealth and his preoccupation for control. This side of dandy speaks to other, very timely themes of image control and power within one's industry. . The masculinized, yet queer, dandy symbolizes masculine anxieties about control, namely, the loss of control. The dandy's fanatical quest for control animates violence against a system that would wrest it away from him, one that is only escalating in 2018. The masculine side of the dandy overtakes the feminine side: he *will* have it all, and resorts to gendered and sexual violence to get it.

Halberstam (1995) warns that: "What we should resist at all costs...is the impulse to make the monster stabilize otherness...monsters are always in motion and they resist the interpretative strategies that attempt to put them in their place." (pp. 84-85). Referring directly to Dorian Gray and Mr. Hyde, Halberstam agrees that we can read homophobic, racist, sexist, and classist discourses through the dandy's monstrous figure. But they are just that: figures, with fluid and slippery centers. The dandies featured in horror TV demonstrate that even when they are centered narratively, the shows do not necessarily revolve around them. *Hannibal* is just as much Will Graham's show. Neither man is wholly villain nor hero, and both men possess masculine and feminine characteristics. *Hannibal* is about the psychological and philosophical dance that Will and Hannibal do, pointing towards (post)modern anxieties that may, or may not, justify a turn towards the monstrous. And yet, the show is called *Hannibal*, and Hannibal leads the dance. In an interview with *Esquire* magazine, *Hannibal* creator Bryan Fuller noted, "Lecter is really a bit of a dandy and someone who loves the finer things in life - someone who would have a bespoke wardrobe. I thought of Hannibal Lecter as this man who appreciates the beauty in life..." (Porteous, 2013). Fuller emphasizes highbrow tastes, yet Hannibal is, of course, a cunning and dangerous serial killer. *Hannibal* brings these worlds together explicitly, notably by presenting grotesque violence in artful, even refined, ways. Moreover, that *Esquire*, a popular men's lifestyle magazine, is interviewing Fuller about a fictional character speaks to the connection between a pop cultural figure who literally consumes bodies while in perfect three-piece suits, and configurations of modern (white) masculinity. There is something scary here, beyond Hannibal's human leg OssoBucco; we are being invited to share interests with him, perhaps even identify with him.

Dandies, at least as they are (re)imagined today by fashion writers and photographers, and cultural critics (Sender, 2006; Adams, 2013) contain within them the possibility for resisting prudish discourses about sex, drugs, violence, and identity. This seems to be an important jumping off point for horror TV's fascination with the dandy. Yet simultaneously, the dandy is villainous in horror TV. He commits atrocious violence, and sometimes is the victim of it as well. The dandy in horror TV reads as subversive or feminine through his rabid consumerism of material goods, but then flips this coding through his violent consumption of people. The horror TV dandy recuperates masculinity and power in this villainous role as he injures and kills those around him. He is excessively violent and this violence is a kind of consumption. These characters, regardless of the time period from which they hail, align as well with the Gothic tradition of deviant dandy as they do with the good neoliberal (post)modern man.

Chapter 3

"There's nothing I hate more than a racist:" The racial landscape of horror TV

The pilot episode of *Coven,* "Bitchcraft," opens with a flashback of Madame LaLaurie[10] throwing a lavish dinner party in 1834 New Orleans, introducing her daughters to potential suitors. The camera zooms in on the youngest daughter eyeing a black house slave. We see only her face, explicitly directing our attention to the young white woman's interest in the slave. The camera cuts to an extreme close-up of LaLaurie, now in her bedroom after the party. She is painting her face with blood as she explains to her husband that it will make her skin "tight as a drum." As she laments that the blood is not fresh enough, her husband tells her that the youngest daughter was caught with the slave. Then, with a blood-streaked face, we see LaLaurie brutally beat the girl: "You might as well spread your legs for the family dog!" LaLaurie then turns her vitriol on the slave. He pleads with LaLaurie that the daughter was the one who came on to him. LaLaurie screams "Keep that mongrel quiet" as her husband beats the slave with a club; he falls to the floor whimpering. The scene cuts to LaLaurie's attic of horrors, where several black men are held in cages, each with various injuries and disfigurements. The camera rotates quickly around the torture chamber in an almost dizzying circle. It stops to show LaLaurie entering: "Bonjour my pets!" she exclaims gleefully. The camera rotates quickly again and stops on a cage containing a black man with a mutilated face. He is shown in close up through the bars of the

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[10] Unlike other characters throughout this analysis, I will refer to LaLaurie by her last name. Perhaps because of her upper class position, or her figure as a real life person, *Coven*'s characters almost exclusively use LaLaurie's last name, rather than Delphine.

cage, and his lips have been sewn together. He tries to scream and his muffled cries infuriate LaLaurie: "Oh shut up or I'll rip your lips open and stuff more shit in there." The camera continues to rapidly swing from cage to cage, slowing down to show us the various mutilations of the men. At the end of the attic is the slave caught with LaLaurie's daughter: he is tied up as if on a crucifix. LaLaurie mutters, "you wanna act like a beast, then we're going to treat you like one" and the slave sobs. LaLaurie calls for the "pickaninny with the head" and a small black boy appears holding a severed bull head (it appears almost as big as the boy). LaLaurie commands the boy to place the bull head on the slave's head, creating her very own Minotaur. We hear the slave whimpering and crying from within the bull head, but we see the head moving back and forth on the human body: the animation gives the image unity. The slave is now part man and part animal.

This chapter examines the way horror TV negotiates racial difference in the narrative of the shows. The shows examined here, and all currently airing horror TV series, have predominantly white casts. Horror TV is still very much the purview of a white imagination. Yet, as the above scene indicates, some of the horror emerges from the interactions of white characters with, and their violence towards characters of color. Whiteness organizes the politics of representation in horror TV. Horror TV does present characters of color who are smart, capable, and fleshed out in the narrative. I will examine, in particular, the representation of the "strong black woman" in horror TV. But these shows also fetishize people of color and, more broadly, the *idea* of racial Otherness through presentations of the exotic East or the "Dark Continent" of Africa. Simultaneously, horror TV shows work to ignore contemporary instantiations of racism through color-blind assumptions that racism is a thing of the past. My

analysis attends to the ways the genre ignores or decries overt racism while continuously relying on it to tell its stories.

This chapter begins by outlining horror TV's tendency to relegate instances of racial discrimination and violence as events and attitudes of the past; something that does not happen anymore. Further, for *Coven* and *Freakshow*, I trace the ways that explicit calls for equality in the narratives (about both disability and racial difference) end up meaning same-ness. This chapter then examines the ways that horror TV (re)centers whiteness by juxtaposing action and settings with the horrors that lie in "Dark Continent" of Africa, or the "exotic East" of India and Japan. Finally, I consider the multiple representations of black women in horror TV, as they are strong, capable, and smart, while also portrayed as sexually deviant, animalistic, and irrationally angry.

Post-racial horror TV

Horror TV presents complicated and sometimes contradictory discourses about racial difference, most notably as difference manifests through racialization of characters and within the story. Some horror TV narratively presents and condemns an explicit kind of racist violence against people of color, notably *Coven*. *Freakshow*, too, is about difference, although overtly the difference of disability. However, *Freakshow* presents several indications that we can read issues surrounding racism and racial difference into the story of people with disabilities who are constructed as "freaks." For instance, the first two episodes of *Freakshow* have scenes that take place in a diner. Jimmy, a performer with fused fingers, encourages his friends, the other performers, to blend in with other patrons. The camera shows the diner customers staring at the performers, and Jimmy complains to Eve, the Tall Woman: "I tell you, sometimes I can't take it.

The way they look at us. The way they treat us. It ain't right." Later one of the intellectually

disabled performers raises her voice, and the manager demands the group leave. This scene

parallels racially-segregated diners across the United States, but in particular in the South, until

the 1960s (Semuals, 2017). So while Jimmy and his friends are ridiculed and evicted based on

their disabilities within the narrative, *Freakshow* too warrants attention to themes of difference,

discrimination, and violence concerning race. When including *Freakshow* alongside *Coven* in a

consideration of how difference (explicitly or implicitly racialized) organizes horror TV, the

period setting of the shows invites a reading of themes of race and racism of the past that now

impact the present. I consider the ways that horror TV operates through a post-racial logic,

discouraging readings that emphasize racial difference, and thus systemic marginalization and

violence. One way that horror TV does this is by temporally severing narratives about racism and

centering white characters and accomplishments.

Horror TV is situated in a time in U.S. political culture where racism is assumed to have

little impact on contemporary life (Ono, 2013). Post-racial politics rely on colorblind-ness, as in:

"I don't see any color, I just see people" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Contemporary post-racial

discourse in the US dictates that race be transcended as a category of difference and that race

does impact individuals on a structural level. Bonilla-Silva (2006) calls this colorblind racism:

rhetoric and discourse that eliminates race as a descriptor with the goal of equality through

sameness. Central to colorblindness is the removal of "any taint or suggestion of white

supremacy or white guilt while legitimating the existing social, political and economic

arrangements which privilege whites" (Gallagher, 2003, p.22). Post-racial discourse in the

United States undergirds the problematic assumption that race does not matter. *Freakshow* most

explicitly conveys this message by repeatedly asserting that freaks – frequently referred to by

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Elsa as monsters – are *not* different from able-bodied people. If we can, as I suggest above, read "freaks" as a metaphor for other kinds of difference, including racial, than *Freakshow* implies that equality means *sameness*. Importantly, *Freakshow* is all about difference, but couches the theme of difference as an eternal struggle to be recognized as *the same* as everyone else. In this way, *Freakshow* fits with the post-racial imperative to ignore the institutions that stratify society along particular lines (race, gender, ability, sexuality, for instance) and instead stand up to individual "bad apples" who are intolerant, unenlightened, or even evil. I return to the scenes in *Freakshow* that take place in the diner. Jimmy, a young white man who can "pass" as able-bodied when he wears gloves, speaks for the group of performers who sit at the counter. All of the performers are white. Although some of them admit to Jimmy that they are uncomfortable because of the diner patrons staring at them, Jimmy implores his friends to behave a certain way (polite, quiet, order from the menu), for they belong at the diner just as anyone else. Jimmy remarks throughout the series that freaks are not different, and certainly no worse than other people, at one point shouting to a group of Greasers that are harassing the performers: "DON'T CALL US FREAKS!"

I turn to *Hannibal* as a show without diegetic attention towards racialized difference: there are no race wars or monologues about people disabilities. Rather, *Hannibal* seems to openly invest in colorblind and post-racial politics. Beyond its resistance to storylines and dialogue about race and racism, *Hannibal* casts a black man (Laurence Fishburne) as FBI Agent-in-Charge Jack Crawford. This is a role played by a white man in the first film about Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham (1986's *Manhunter*), and played again by a white man in *Silence of the Lambs* (1990). Colorblind casting borrows from the impetus to "not see color" and cast roles in TV, film, and theater based on attributes other than race. *Hannibal* (re)casting Jack as black

speaks to a commitment to colorblind politics that simultaneously allows for the representation

of a man of color in the formerly all-white *Hannibal* universe, while also then ignoring the

particular experiences and perspectives that Jack's race may bring to his character. A longer

dissection of the politics of colorblind casting is outside the scope of this work, but *Hannibal*

eschews overt references to the various particulars of racialized identities. A broadcast network

show (*NBC*), perhaps it is unsurprising that *Hannibal* espouses some of the most carefully

conservative politics about race and racism: let's just not talk about it. Yet, as I will discuss

below, *Hannibal* also participates in racist invocations of the "exotic East."

 Coven overtly positions Fiona as the good white woman who speaks for justice and

equality. It bolsters an explicit anti-racist agenda whereby the old-school racist is taught a lesson

about equality and contemporary culture in the United States. By attending to how whiteness is

functioning in this interaction, we see that only blackness as an identity category is marked and

commented on; white people's racial identification is ignored and thus their racist deeds and

words are as well. *Coven*'s investment in post-racial politics is woven into the antagonism

between LaLaurie, the evil racist from the past, and Fiona Goode, the modern white

"enlightened" anti-racist. Portrayals of racial injustice in *Coven* exclusively revolve around

events in the past, driving home the idea that the United States is a "post" (or *past*) racial society.

Explicit racial violence is rhetorically contained in LaLaurie's character, which severs past

instances of racism and injustice from today's (Flores, Moon, & Nakayama, 2006). The very first

scene in "Bitchcraft" establishes LaLaurie's ferocious racism. LaLaurie is presented as a

madwoman in these opening scenes. Popular press writers remarked that this scene was among

the most grotesque they had ever watched on TV. Kate Bolonik (2013) writes in her recap for

Medium.com: "It makes me physically ill to even recount this, to summon these images again; it

was traumatizing enough for this typically unflinching viewer to see it the first time." In "Bitchcraft," Fiona unearths LaLaurie and introduces her to New Orleans in 2013. A scene in the third episode, "The Replacements," opens with LaLaurie visibly upset (crying tears and whimpering) as she watches President Obama on TV give a speech: "No... why oh Lord Almighty God have you forsaken this once proud country?" Fiona walks in, and says "I voted for him. Twice. We've also had black secretaries of states, Supreme Court justices, and even the poet laureate." LaLaurie hisses "lliiiieeessss." Fiona lectures: "You've got a lot to learn" and then makes LaLaurie the housemaid as punishment for her racist views. When LaLaurie refuses to serve lunch to Queenie, who is black, Fiona retorts "There's nothing I hate more than a racist."

LaLaurie, as a villain, stands out in *Coven* because she is an overt and over the top racist. She hails from the past and brings with her a racist philosophy presented as retrograde and reprehensible. LaLaurie's defining characteristic is her segregationist politics and explicit violence against people of color. She is wildly wicked, violent, and narcissistic. She is never presented as relatable, thus her white supremacist politics are more easily transferred to another time. LaLaurie functions to temporally sever racism in *Coven*, obscuring the notion that people of color still confront racist ideas and behaviors. Regarding post-racial politics, Flores, Moon, & Nakayama (2006) note that "history is rewritten into concrete and disparate moments in which such horrors as slavery...occurred, but they are moments of the past, not the present" (p.187). An important way that this works in visual media is through period setting (Ono, 2013), and *Coven, Freakshow*, and *Penny Dreadful* all work to aesthetically transport the audience to another time and place. The very first shots of *Coven* use an editing device meant to mimic an old and grainy filming technique. Shadows flicker across LaLaurie's face as she introduces her daughters, mirroring the effect of a projector. The scene is shaded in a dark sepia wash; colors are muted

and soft. These shots more closely resemble the filmic effects of silent cinema than *Coven*'s

typically sharp high-definition. The editing of this scene takes the viewer to another time with

the effect that LaLaurie's gruesome racist acts become segregated to the past. Promotional stills

for *Freakshow* used a similar washed-out and grainy effect, designed to look as though they were

created in the 1950s.

Throughout *Coven*, LaLaurie represents a bygone and overt kind of racism and,

superficially, Fiona represents contemporary "enlightened" anti-racism. However, in presenting

racism in the form of obvious violence or discrimination that no longer exists, whiteness is

overlooked as a structurally dominant racial identity. Fiona embodies *Coven*'s commitment to

post-racial politics through the condemnation of explicitly racist rhetoric, while at the same time

upholding the (racist) idea that whiteness is an invisible racial category. Here I take up Projansky

and Ono's (1999) idea that whiteness is not a fixed identity position but rather a strategic

deployment of privilege and invisibility. That is, whiteness is not important for what it is, but

rather, for what it does. What we understand to be whiteness is the effect of discursive and

communicative practices and like any other identity marker, it needs to be interrogated and

unpacked by critical scholars (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995; Moon & Flores, 2000). This work is

particularly important because, unlike other identity markers, whiteness uniquely "...provides

symbolic and material benefits, including the attainment of power through its lack of defined

boundaries and invisibility" (Dubrofsky & Ryalls, 2014, p. 397). Nakayama & Krizek (1995)

point out how Western communication is steeped in white supremacy through white invisibility,

where white practices and ways of knowing are assumed to be normal or universal. Critical

media scholars specifically attend to the ways that popular media takes whiteness for granted,

(re)centering it while (re)inscribing representations of people of color as Other (Dubrofsky &

Ryalls, 2014; Ono, 2013; Projansky & Ono, 1999). *Coven* and *Freakshow* lays out the horrors of overt racism and discrimination but presents it as a phenomenon that is contained in the past; something that does not happen anymore. Although the narrative of *Coven* explicitly decries racism, the show displaces it temporally, deflecting the ways that whiteness functions as a past and present cultural coordinator.

Fiona's lecture to LaLaurie is indicative of *Coven*'s post-racial ideology in that sameness means same-as-whiteness. White power is allowed to go unchecked or unacknowledged when anti-racist speech is undermined by the narcissistic and unsympathetic Fiona. *Coven* fails to implicate whiteness in creating the conditions under which someone like LaLaurie is able to terrorize black bodies in the past, and then again when Fiona mentions a few black achievements in order to rile up her opponent. *Freakshow* has a slightly more complicated narrative regarding sameness: Jimmy explicitly acknowledges that there are able-bodied people who use the disabled to "remind them that they're normal" (Edward Mordrake, Part 1). Yet he spends almost the entire season telling others that he is jealous of the able-bodied (including Dandy and Maggie). Even Jimmy's mother Ethel, the bearded woman, laments that Jimmy isn't "normal" as she notes that as a child, Jimmy was always a soldier for Halloween – the ultimate conformist costume. Although these examples refer to disability, the discourse seems to parallel discourses about blackness in the 1950s South. Whiteness and able-bodied-ness respectively set up the landscape of *Coven* and *Freakshow*, inviting a discussion about past violence and erasure, but not about present issues. However, Fiona's lecture, and Jimmy's attempts at integrating his disabled friends into Jupiter, Florida society, forwards the notion that racism is not white people's problem, and ableism is not able-bodied people's issue to address. Presentations of racial difference and oppression are present in a variety of ways throughout horror TV, yet by directing

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our attention towards a spectacle of gruesome, racist violence in the past the shows package racism through post-racial and colorblind rhetoric. Further, the horror of Coven often comes at the expense of black characters and black bodies. Whiteness structures the narrative, imagery, and dialogue such that the audience is not invited to consider the ways the racism operates in the contemporary United States. Though some of the shows, notably *Coven* and *Freakshow,* purport to forward a message of equality and justice for those who are different, horror TV ultimately (re)arranges whiteness at the center of its universe.

The Exotic East and the Dark Continent

Here I examine the myriad ways that the horror TV shows I examine rely on exoticized and stereotypical configurations of Africa and the East (India and Japan).A theme of darkness, mystery, strangeness, and danger weave through presentations and dialogue invoking spaces outside of the United States and the United Kingdom. These spaces in horror TV present Africa and the East as aesthetic or imperialist goals, re-inscribing a white and masculine centered world. In her performance as carnival barker, *Freakshow*'s Ethel conveys the ways that horror TV frames spaces of the Global-East as exciting, threatening, weird, and dark:

> Ladies and gentlemen, everything you've heard is true...Wonders, curiosities! A plethora of the strange, the weird, the bizarre, the unusual! From jungles untamed to forests enchanted. From the Dark Continent to the spice-laden lands of India. Astounding mistakes of nature are gathered here for your amusement and edification. What you're about to see will astound your very senses and harrow yes, harrow your souls. And tonight, for the first time anywhere, the Spectacular Siamese Sisters! But amidst the terrifying and the tragic a voice and beauty. Ladies and gentlemen, direct from the cabarets of prewar Berlin, the enchantress who holds sway over all of nature's mistakes: Elsa Mars!

Ethel not only paints a picture of Africa, India, and even Thailand (formerly Siam) that is scary yet enticing, she also presents Elsa as our (white) savior, who will safely guide us through the dark terrain of the freak show. *Penny Dreadful* more conspicuously contains an African guide, Sir Malcolm, Vanessa's father figure. Malcolm is a white British imperialist who, in his own words, "has spent most of my life in Africa." *Penny Dreadful* takes place during the height of the era of the British Empire. Around 1900, Great Britain controlled over four hundred million people across the globe, or almost a quarter of the world's population (Maddison, 2001). Throughout his tenure on *Penny Dreadful*, Malcolm brags about "his" mountain that he flagged, he uses a lion hunt experience to help him make sense of his vampire hunting, and finally, his butler is an African that he "befriended" during one of his many excursions. Malcolm's office space in his London mansion is covered wall to wall with maps of Africa, and as Vanessa becomes possessed by an Egyptian spirit, she taunts him for allowing his only son to die of disease while on an excursion to the "Dark Continent." For wealthy white Brits like Sir Malcolm, the African continent is a place to be studied, claimed, conquered, and dragged back to "civilization." Egypt, in particular, plays a role in the mythology of the supernatural threats to Victorian London . During the necropsy of the vampire that Vanessa, Ian, and Ethan bring to him, Dr. Frankenstein finds hieroglyphics under the creature's exoskeleton-like skin. Immediately, Egypt is connected with the gross and dangerous monsters haunting London's underground. Ian and Vanessa visit an Egyptologist (a fat, old white man) to decipher the hieroglyphics. The Egyptologist's face goes white as he looks up from the symbols, and he tells Vanessa and Ian that they are from Egypt's Book of the Dead. So far, nothing good comes from Egypt.

Penny Dreadful's placement of Africa and blackness as outside from and Other than white, Victorian England fit into Projansky and Ono's (1999) assertion that media products, as capitalist commodities, work to continually (re)frame developing world citizens and people of color as Other. Further, people of color must be rendered an inferior Other so the West remains financially dominant within their territories (Projansky& Ono, 1999). Our products, including entertainment media, find a ways to reinscribe whiteness at the center. The authors locate the "...subtle discursive adjustments made to favor white privilege" even in films that purport to resist said privilege. Even, especially, films that cast actors of color, are critically acclaimed, and present themselves as anti-Hollywood, "reconstitute a space for white dominance without calling explicit attention to this act" (Projanksy & Ono, 1999, p 152). Some contemporary horror, like *Penny Dreadful*, participates in a visual logic where racial difference is nowhere yet everywhere. This is most prominent in the many scenes that take place in Sir Malcom's study, where the walls are covered in maps of Africa, and his desk is littered with cartographic paperwork and tools.

Other shows, like *Coven,* provide many women of color as characters, and even explicitly evoke the politics of racial difference and racism. As Projansky and Ono point out though, even media sites that ask us to be impressed with a diverse cast, such as *Coven*, are all about whiteness. In contemporary film, whiteness is made visible only where it is decentered and disavowed (Projansky & Ono, 1999). This is not to say that whiteness is a universal central, but emerge so as it is juxtaposed with blackness. Regardless of the makeup of the characters, or the prominent role of Africa in the narrative, we are continually invited to watch the film or show unfold through the perspective of the white characters (Ono, 2013).Even when films are about

racial difference and racism, they still (re)center whiteness, even if subtly. We watch the drama "From a vantage point resonant with contemporary logics of whiteness" (Ono, 2013, p.301).

Afrofuturism is a critical theoretical perspective, like phenomenology, that emphasizes bodily experience (Anderson & Jones, 2016; Mignolo, 2015). Afrofuturist Sylvia Wynter (1995) locates a paradigmatic shift regarding embodied ways of knowing within the Enlightenment period. As Cartesian thought takes over Europe ("I think, therefore I am"), not only does a mind/body split become an important, and lasting, perspective, but European-ness (thus whiteness) is associated with the "mind." That is, whiteness, and masculinity too, are assumed to be naturally rational, logical, progressive, and superior. Blackness was "colonized" into the body (Wynter, 1995) such that, blackness became associated with feeling, carnality, and the material of bodily experience (Anderson & Jones, 2016). Finally, these distinctions are, of course, not merely bifurcated, but also ranked: Modernity ushered in the assumption that the mind–that intellect is primarily linked to thought – is a better way of knowing than the body – where intellect is linked to the senses (Mignolo, 2015; Anderson & Jones, 2016).

As noted above, *Hannibal* never explicitly draws attention to issues of racial identify, difference, or discrimination yet it is the horror TV show perhaps draws most heavily from non-Western epistemologies. A glance at the list of episode names for season two clues us in that *Hannibal* draws inspiration from, at least partially, Japanese cooking methods (a nod to Hannibal's dedication to killing, butchering, and preparing sumptuous meals of his victims) and also Kabuki theater (considering the highly stylized and artistic presentations of dead bodies). But an Afrofuturist read of *Hannibal* reveals that the show critiques a modern, philosophical duality of the mind and body. Part of the horror of *Hannibal* comes from the show replaying on repeated brutally violent scenes, almost always from Will's point of view. This is his genius:

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through his mind, Will can place his body within the environments of the crime scenes he is investigating *or* has experienced firsthand. Will, as a forensic expert, has a mind full of information and procedure for solving crimes. However, Will also has the gift of "second sight," where, in his mind, he can place his body back at a crime scene. *Hannibal* shows us this by placing Will's body in the center of a crime scene, say a living room, and then speeding up and slowing down the camera pace. The speed of the shots is disorienting, moving backwards in time, and then forwards again, as we see blood splatter *entering* a body, and then a bullet *leaving* that body, only for time to "stop" and we watch the scene again in a sequence that makes logical sense to the viewer (a bullet enters the body, followed by blood splatter exiting).The opening blood bath at the Hobb's residence, in which Will stands feet away from Jacob Hobb's slashing his wife's' throat, plays five times in flashback throughout the first two episodes of *Hannibal*.

Hannibal Lecter is presented as *all* mind and *no* feeling/empathy. Such a characterization further aligns Hannibal with his fellow horror dandies, Dorian Gray and Dandy Mott. The dandies of horror TV discussed in Chapter 3 are white men of privilege who make sense of the world through a particular logic that awards them a prize at the end. This is not to say that their exteriors are not important. As I have argued, their exteriority is a decoration: they are all surface and no soul. Hannibal, Dandy, and Dorian are men who are classically intelligent, in Hannibal's case, a genius, yet have almost *no* emotional intelligence. Their queer, white, masculinity takes on attributes traditionally reserved for femininity, while they forego the attunement of feeling and relating also connected with femininity. Yet, following Wynter's (1995) argument about dominant, Cartesian thought, horror TV overtly connects mastery of the mind to whiteness. Hannibal Lecter aesthetically epitomizes modernity through his office décor - the style is clean, minimalist, ultra-low chairs, and we learn in "Apertif," his shelves are lined with academic texts

(as opposed to Gothic romance or Greek literature, for instance). As a genius psychiatrist cannibal, Hannibal Lecter is a monster that dominates and consumes cerebrally.

Critical black theory, Afrofuturism specifically (Anderson & Jones, 2016), posits that black characters provide a surrogate through which to experience the body. Blackness acts as affective labor, where white spectators can revel in the sensuality, aggression, pleasure, and pain felt throughout the body, yet walk away from its lasting effects. In *Freakshow*'s "Massacres and Matinees," Elsa shuts down the suggestion that she could make more money by putting on a matinee show in addition to their nightly performance. She argues that a Freakshow requires the darkness, "People don't come to see freaks in the heat of day. They come in the evening. When the darkness moves in and speaks of mystery. The unknown. When logic loosens its vice grip and the imagination comes out to play. The night allows the stars to shine and we come alive. The daytime is for kiddie shows and clowns." Elsa seems to be connecting mysticism, suspense, and even terror with darkness. Elsa is a European, white entrepreneurial woman making her living from "darkness" and the imagination it (supposedly) invokes. Her position is complicated by her German-ness: the atrocities of the Third Reich were animated and propelled, in part by, slavish adherence to modern industrial and organizational technology. It is unsurprising, then, that a victim of Nazi Germany, like Elsa, would gravitate towards an alternative mode of knowing, or more accurately, of feeling. However, we can't dismiss Elsa's complicity in using what she wants of "darkness" and then abandoning the Freakshow (and its performers) as she embarks on her solo career under the bright lights of Hollywood. We can read Elsa alongside *Penny Dreadful*'s Sir Malcolm, who travels frequently to Africa to boost his own ego, and lay claim to mountains and rivers. These white characters use what they want from "darkness" and those associated with it, leaving the rest behind.

Ethel's onstage monologue about the darkness and intrigue of Africa and India includes, and indeed conflates, several countries, cultures, and people. *Coven*'s Marie chides Fiona in "Boyparts" about white stereotypes of Africa: "Well maybe you haven't heard the news about civilization started in Africa. We're more than just pins and dolls and seeing the future in chicken parts. You've been reading too many tourist guides." Yet these generalizations about particular places and people still drive the politics of *Coven* and the other horror show in my analysis. I find it useful here to use Means-Coleman's (2011) conceptualization of "black horror" and "blacks[11] in horror" to examine the inclusion of characters of color and story arcs about people of color and non-Western locations. I too, risk conflating people of African descent and people from Africa, with those from India or Japan, here by extending Means-Coleman's Afrocentric framework. But, her model helps us see that these shows use graphic depictions of horror, often presented as beautifully grotesque horror, to obscure the (re)centering of whiteness, even in shows that purport to champion equality and progress.

In *Horror Noire*, Means-Coleman (2011) distinguishes between horror films that prominently feature black characters and are about *blackness* – "black horror" – from those that contain black characters but are otherwise about white people and experiences- black people in horror or "blacks in horror." Means-Coleman uses two Wes Craven directed films as examples of each: *The People Under the Stairs* (1991) has a young black protagonist while almost all other characters are white, but *A Vampire in Brooklyn* features a predominately black cast, and also showcases black history, art, and humor. Means-Coleman considers production elements when differentiating between "blacks in horror" and "black horror": black horror, such as *A Vampire in Brooklyn,* typically has black writers, producers, and directors (although *Brooklyn* had a white

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director in Craven, it was co-written by Charlie Murphy and Eddy Murphy). For Means-

Coleman, it is imperative that critical cultural scholars attend to *both* blacks in horror and black

horror texts: "Together, [both kinds of] films offer up an extraordinary opportunity for an

examination into how race, racial identities, and race relationships are constructed and depicted.

Perhaps most interesting for both types of films is when and how they variously position blacks

as the thing that horrifies, or the victim of that which is horrified" (p. 9). In this way, we see that

we cannot understand racism without understanding how whiteness functions politically,

culturally, and economically in horror TV.

Controlling images and the enduring woman

An important way characters of color, and in particular women of color in horror TV are

made monstrous is through dehumanizing violence; that which dismember them or turns them

into objects. A blatant example in horror TV is *Coven*'s LaLaurie repeatedly referring to her

slaves as animals: pets, mongrel, dog, and beast. The house slave accused of flirting with

LaLaurie's white daughter is literally turned into an animal, much to LaLaurie's delight. Black

men as animals with uncontrollable sexual urges are a long-standing stereotype that works to

dehumanize bodies of color as uncivilized or brutish. Much of the horror in horror TV relies on

controlling images (Hill Collins, 1991) of people of color. Controlling images are stereotypes

about marginalized groups of people created and perpetuated by the mainstream media (Hill

Collins, 1991). These images are not always as obvious as the above example, however,

especially given horror TV's investment in beautiful horror. But characters of color, primarily

women, seem disproportionally to be the subject of artful installations of the macabre. Chapter

One discusses *Hannibal*'s crime scene tech Beverly, an Asian woman who is killed, sliced into

vertical pieces that are set into glass panes. The camera moves around the panels containing

Beverly's body, inviting us to look as though we were patrons in a museum. As noted in Chapter

One, we see *everything*: her insides and her outsides are on display. She is now an object for our

inquiry into the body. *Freakshow* more overtly presents a museum setting, as several characters

try to infiltrate Elsa's circus to kill and sell a performer with disabilities to a museum of oddities.

Only one performer is ultimately captured, killed, sold, and displayed in a jar: Ma Petite, the

two-foot tall Indian woman. Like with Beverly, the camera lingers on Ma Petite's body, only she

is floating in a jar of brown-tinged formaldehyde, as though she were a science experiment.

These two examples of women of color killed and treated as objects extends Hill Collin's work

on black women in media to consider how in white centered shows, the deaths of people of color

fit with a tradition of dehumanizing violence.

Just as the concept of *monster* is constructed within a particular historical and cultural

context, and does political work for said time and place, *human*, too, is an assemblage of

meanings and motivations. Black people in the United States were non-humans for a

considerable amount of time, as slaves, and then legally shifted to 2/3 of a human immediately

after emancipation. There is a complex relationship for many black critical scholars and the

concept of human. It is unsurprising, even understandable, why critical scholars of color embrace

the hybridity, the incoherence, and the strangeness that monstrosity brings (Anderson & Johnson,

2016; Womack, 2013). The monster is the ultimate not-human. Womack (2013) notes: "As a

non-human, your life is not valued. You are an 'alien,' 'foreign,' exotic,' 'savage,' – a wild one

to be conquered or a nuisance to be destroyed. Your bodies are not your own, fit for probing and

research. You have no history of value. You are incapable of creating culture in general, but

when you do it is from an impulse or emotion, never intellect" (p.385). The non-human is not in

control of their own body as a result of a cultural and political order that renders certain bodies "normal" and human or "deviant" and non-human. Historically, designating that some people were not-human was an important tool for colonialists and slave-traders. If "human rights are inalienable" (Womack, 2013, p. 385) than they are not (supposed) to be taken away. In order to systemically enslave, violate, and oppress people, over a length of time, they must be categorized as not-human. Certain bodies must be made the Other – the monster.

Horror TV continues a legacy of mediated constructions of monstrosity for women of color, especially for black women characters. *Coven*, in particular, presents images of black women as monstrous: wild, animalistic, sexually aggressive and deviant, and angry. In "Boy Parts," we meet Marie in the present day: she lives in a run-down house in New Orleans's ninth ward, where she owns a beauty salon. Fiona enters the salon as young black hairdressers are dancing to loud hip hop music. The camera stops on Fiona's face: she is out of place in the salon. The music suddenly turns off and we hear the sounds of a beaded curtain moving. Marie enters with two large, black, male body guards. She wears a tight, leopard print body suit with a red leather jacket. She has large gold hoop earrings and a metal chain for a belt. Her braids reach down to her waist. Marie swaggers across the salon with a smirk on her face. Marie dismisses the hairdressers, saying menacingly "I'll take care of this one myself". As she sidles up to the chair Fiona is sitting on, Marie places her hand confidently on her hip. The screen goes black and the next scene moves to a different subplot. We are left wondering about Fiona's fate in Marie's salon. The walk through the salon, the dismissal of the hairdressers, and the camera cut after "I'll take care of this one myself" frames Marie as a threat. In 1834, Marie was angry because LaLaurie maimed her lover; in the 2013 salon scene, we do not know why she is still angry. Marie's presentation suggests the stereotypical aggressive and angry black woman. This

characterization is a particularly problematic trope for black women because it upholds the notion that they are "unreasonable, unpredictable, and likely unhinged" (Springer, 2008, p. 78). Further, we can connect Marie's presentation in terms of the exotic Other, who invites attention *because* of her racialized difference. Marie is an immortal voodoo priestess and presents in stark contrast to her white antagonist Fiona. Marie, who appears to be in her 40s, is beautiful and presented as sexually desirable. Portrayed by Angela Bassett, Marie has her hair in long braids, always dons red lipstick, and wears form fitting, often animal print clothing. She is exoticized from her first lines in *Coven*, which are in Creole. For the rest of the show she speaks English, however, with a Caribbean accent; no other character speaks with an accent. One astute internet reviewer[12] noticed a detail in one episode that emphasizes that Marie is less cultured than Fiona: "Fiona orders a dirty martini while Marie orders a Sprite. That speaks for itself" (Stillwell, 2014). Marie's order indicates she is not as refined or high class, as Fiona, the white witch.

Marie's kind of bitch stands in stark contrast to Fiona's version of bitch, one that is rooted in narcissism and vanity, but ultimately (re)centers Fiona as an innocent victim. Indeed, Fiona's white bitchy-ness is rendered invisible in the salon where she is wearing, as usual, all black. Her blonde hair, also as it is throughout the show, is medium length and straight; there doesn't appear to be any products or much work put in it. Her make-up is polished but subtle. She never speaks a word to Marie. Marie, with her braids, animal print dress, metallic accessories, and bright red lipstick, commands attention. Marie's bitchy-ness is connected to her wildness and thus her blackness. Marie's bitch is embedded in her clothing, hair, and accent, as well as in the words she utters to those around her. Marie's characterization relies on stereotypes of a particularly threatening and exotic kind of black woman, while Fiona's bitchy-ness is

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[12] Although online commentary is beyond my project, this media journalist's observation points out the blatant, and racist, gender and class differences in a quick joke.

subdued. These representations problematically present racist tropes that perpetuate the dehumanization of black bodies and experiences and normalize white femininity. As noted above, much horror TV works to rhetorically contain discrimination against people who are different by presenting violence against people of color or disabled people as something that happened a long time ago. Hall (2002) points out that the media presents an array of racialized discourses, and yet, too often an unquestioned set of assumptions about people of color inform the kinds of images and dialogue that make it to the screen. Hall and bell hooks (1994a) note that these assumptions are steeped in power relations that uphold a white patriarchal ideology through the discursive, as well as material, control of black bodies.

Marie, however, is also presented as strong and capable in her war with the white witches and LaLaurie. She, and indeed many of the black women portrayed in *American Horror Story*, embody characteristics of what Means-Coleman (2011) calls the Enduring Woman. In Clover's 1992 *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, she coins the phrase "Final Girl" to identify the young white woman who so often survived in the slasher horror films of the 1970s and 1980s. This woman grows up to become the "kick ass" girl in 1990s girl-power themed mediated texts. Ono (2000), in his assessment of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* implores that we must attend to race in the so-called "power feminist" moment, for white heroines are afforded the ability to be aggressive and even violent, at the expense of those who are different. We see this "girl power" movement extended into the 2000s and 2010s across TV genres, but in horror TV in particular (the next chapter will elaborate on the leading women of horror TV). Importantly, these women are primarily white women, who occupy *both* an empowered social position through race, and a marginalized identity through gender. Like Buffy, the woman protagonist of horror TV is encouraged to use aggression, be strategic, and even violent as she defeats monsters: we're

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invited to root for her. Strong women on TV are so ubiquitous that there is now a considerable amount of backlash against the overused term "kick-ass" or strong woman trope[13]. Still, horror TV generally presents several empowered and capable heroines: Maggie and Michonne from *The Walking Dead*, Mary from *Salem*, Annie from *Being Human*, and Sookie from *True Blood*, for instance. Of the horror TV texts I analyze in this project, *Hannibal* stands out as a curious outlier in the genre: although there are smart, dynamic women on the show (Alana and Bedelia, most notably), they orbit around Hannibal and Will, never taking center stage in the narrative. Every season of *American Horror Story* features a woman main-character. Finally, although an ensemble show, *Penny Dreadful* centers Vanessa and her demonic possession: the men characters are compelled to action as a result of Vanessa's actions. The white women literally anchor the horror TV shows.

I use the concept of the Enduring Woman (Means-Coleman, 2011) to consider the role of the strong black woman characters who appear usually in the periphery of horror TV shows, notably *Coven* and *Freakshow*. This character complicates the sexual and aggressive portrayals of black women historically found in media. Yet, couched within a larger field of characters and dialogue that dismisses the unique violence done to black women, the Enduring Women of horror TV often end up inconsequential to the overall plot. Means-Coleman, in her book on black horror (*Horror Noir,* 2011) extends Clover's (1992) observation that, absent a male savior, the (white) women in the slasher genre are able to develop effective fighting skills. The Final Girl is resourceful, careful, and tenacious as she defeats the monster. Means-Coleman, attending to black women in horror films of the 1970s and 1980s, finds these women present as a variation

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[13] This New Statesmen article is just one that is sick of the hackneyed phrase:
http://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2013/08/i-hate-strong-female-characters

of the Final Girl: they are Enduring Women. The Enduring Woman, a black woman who

survives the horror film, is equally tenacious, smart, and strong as the Final Girl, but unlike the

white and asexual Final Girl, the Enduring Woman is often sexualized, "...with seduction serving

as a principal part of their cache of armaments" (p. 132). The rise of the Enduring Woman in

black horror of the 1970s, unsurprisingly, coincides with the Blaxploitation film, where strong,

capable, hyper-feminine, and unapologetically black women like Pam Grier defended themselves

and the men around them. Reading Enduring Women in horror and Blaxploitation's femme

fatales together illuminates a key difference between the Enduring Woman and the Final Girl.

The Final Girl fought off a singular monster within a film – once she subdues Jason, Freddy, or

the alien, she (and by extension, the audience) can rest easy. This is an individualized villain, a

monolithic psychopath, explained in the narrative as a societal anomaly. The Enduring Woman,

however, explicitly battles racism, sexism, and classism embedded in film's story (Means-

Coleman, 2011). That is, both Blaxploitation heroines and black horror Enduring Women faced

systemic villains – ones that can be overcome within the narrative of a film but always with the

understanding that they can never "rest easy," rather tomorrow will be another fight.

We see examples of the Enduring Woman in other contemporary horror TV shows,

including Marion Crane in *A&E*'s *Bates Motel* (played by hip hop superstar Rihanna), Zayday

Williams in *Fox*'s *Scream Queen*'s, and Kali (better known as 008) in *Netflix*'s *Stranger Things*.

The women in these examples stand out because they demonstrate the Enduring Woman's ability

and drive to fight monsters physically stronger and larger than themselves. I refer not

(necessarily) to size here, but rather to systemic monsters: 008 seeks revenge against the men

who tormented her in the name of science, and Zayday fights against a university system that

protects the interests of fraternities and sororities over their victims. Both of these women stand

up against a white, patriarchal system that uses and abuses women of color (008 as a weapon, and Zayday as a "diversity" admission so the university does not lose funding). Marion Crane, at first glance, appears to be merely blowing off her (white, married) boyfriend when she leaves Norman's hotel with the 400,000 dollars (updated from *Psycho*'s $40,000). That Marion is black *and* survives her shower at the Bates Motel is a meta-victory for this character. She not only endures a narrative that killed her 50 years ago, but she is also driving away from the supposed-charms of a white man who promised her the world, asked her to compromise her financial security, merely to satisfy himself. Marion, Zayday, and 008, are Enduring Women who are fighting white patriarchy. The above Enduring Women are successful in their quests to defeat systemic violence and marginalization (until the last episodes of their show, that is), and the Enduring Women of horror TV, too, tend to survive until the "end." Yet the Enduring Women in my texts do *not* seem able to fight against the systemic injustices that weigh upon them. An important difference between the Blaxploitation sexuality of the 1970s Enduring Woman and, in particular, the black women of *American Horror Story*, is that the contemporary women's sexuality is presented as perverse and *too* dangerous.

Representations of black women in horror TV as wild, angry women are also connected to the way their sexuality is presented as dangerous and even macabre. In *Coven*, the black women are portrayed as feminine, and certainly sexual, but unlike their white counterparts, femininity and sexuality become attached to their wild animal-ness. One of the season's most talked about scenes depicts Queenie's confrontation with LaLaurie's resurrected Minotaur. Marie deploys the monster to attack LaLaurie at the coven, but in an attempt to intervene, Queenie steps in. Her motivation is never made clear: LaLaurie treats Queenie terribly up until this point. Her motivation for stepping in as hero becomes more confusing when her encounter

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with the beast turns sexual. The anxiety of the scene begins with the anticipation that Queenie could be killed by the Minotaur, but then comes from the horrific connection of Queenie's sexuality and monstrosity. Queenie begins compassionately: "they called me a beast too," and then coos: "don't you want to love me?" The formal elements in the next shots invoke anxiety: the background is very dark and it is difficult to discern the action. The camera cuts are rapid and come from various high and low angles. The frenetic camera slows to show that Queenie begins masturbating as the Minotaur embraces her from behind. The camera slows down to follow Queenie's hand going up her dress. The monster then turns on Queenie and mauls her. Marie, too, is only connected romantically to the Minotaur (her lover from the 1930s).*Coven* frames its "strong" black woman as titillating and monstrous sexual beings.

Desiree from *Freakshow* most closely, of my artifacts, resembles the Enduring Woman: unlike *Coven*'s Marie, Desiree survives the entire series, and even helps enact merciless revenge on Dandy Mott. But Desiree represents non-normative sexuality – she is an intersex woman, who presents as feminine, with three (highly visible) breasts. In her words: "Three titties, proper girl parts and a ding-a-ling. I'm a full blown hermaphrodite. Put that on your banner." Hill Collins (2004) argues that one of the functions of the out of control bitch stereotype for black women is that it is, "...designed to defeminize and demonize" (p.123). Where for Means-Coleman, the Enduring Woman was able to charm and distract, so then defeat, with her sexuality, in some ways, the black women's sexuality of *Coven* and *Freakshow* is presented as bizarre, threatening, and ultimately, not attractive. But Desiree resists neat categorization of perverse sexuality because she has sex with men and desires to become a mother (she cries tears of joy when a local doctor tells her that she can get pregnant). Her advertisement about her body indicates that she is ok, even proud of her body, yet she longs for many of the same experiences as other women

(intimacy and children). Desiree even gets a happy ending: she marries a black business man who had previously inquired about buying the freak show.

Conclusion

  Coven is the season of *AHS* and of a horror TV show with the largest cast of characters of color. It also overwhelmingly presents black bodies as the victims of unspeakable violence. The opening moments to the show, outlined at the beginning of this chapter, prepares the viewer for the atrocious violence against people of color that is to come. Episode nine, "Head," further illustrates *Coven's* investment in racist politics when a white male witch hunter barges into Marie's beauty salon and, using automatic guns, massacres almost all of the black women working there (only Queenie survives). There is no annihilation of a group of white characters on *Coven*. Much of the horror in Coven depends on graphic violence against black people as a storytelling device. White characters, too, are the victims of violence, but they are killed or maimed individually, and we get to know their back-story. The horrific dismemberment of all the black men, the slaves, in Coven serves no other narrative purpose than to construct LaLaurie's character as an outdated racist. White characters and motivations drive the story here, and blackness is the collateral damage. The opening scene of *Coven*'s first episode is significant because it sets the tone and expectation for the kinds of things that are to come, including horrific and macabre violence. Through the gruesome spectacle of racialized violence, all attention is on the black bodies. The maintenance of a white political order organizes this violence, yet whiteness is completely unremarked upon. Scholars have attended to the horror genre as a site for potential subversion of racist and sexist norms and tropes (Clover, 1992; Means Coleman, 2011; Pinedo, 1997). Means-Coleman (2011) notes that horror, "...is one of the most intrepid

entertainment forms in its scrutiny of our humanity and our social world" (p. 13) in that horror, by definition, contains the potential to disrupt the political and social order. But horror also has the ability to reinforce racial stereotypes and use characters of color as disposable victims (Means-Coleman, 2011). One of the most powerful ways that racism endures in the popular imagination is through mediated violence: bodies of color as violent and violence against bodies of color (hooks, 1994a; Hill Collins, 2004). Horror TV sensationalizes the subjugation of the racialized Other.

The combination of post-racial politics, exoticized spaces of the Global East, and controlling images of black bodies in horror TV leads to a pop cultural landscape where characters of color are disproportionately injured, tortured, and killed. That is, the "horror" in horror TV comes too often at the expense of characters of color. Ono (2000) makes the astute, yet troubling claim that when characters are coded as people of color, and in particular when those characters are cast as villains and monsters, we end up rooting for the (white) hero to eradicate them: "the ultimate form of marginalization" (p. 180).Taken together, centering whiteness and white characters, while using tropes of exotic foreignness, leads to an imbalance of violence against characters of color in horror TV overall. When horror TV shows continually delegate characters of color as monstrous – less than human- they become disposable fodder for entertainment. In an earlier chapter, I noted the creative possibilities opened up through the theatrical stages of horror TV, which invite traditionally-marginalized bodies, experiences, and knowledges into the center. An examination of racial politics in horror TV, however, tempers my enthusiasm where bodies of color still seem relegated to the wings.

Chapter Four

Wounded women: The embodied trauma of prestige horror TV's women antiheroes

In the main tent at *Fraulein Elsa's Cabinet of Curiosities*, the performers are cleaning up after a meal, and Elsa watches a grainy, black and white film that is being projected onto a sheet hanging from center stage. A disheveled young woman storms in the tent. Her hair is a mess, and her robe is torn open to reveal her undergarments. She storms towards Elsa, yelling that she needs to leave this place and get back to "my life, my family, my church, my people!" We recognize her as Penny, the candy striper who made a gossipy and crude remark about the conjoined twins from an earlier scene in the hospital. Elsa teases the young woman about smoking too much opium: "it makes you woozy!" As the camera switches between the two women, highlighting the candy stripers unkempt appearance and emotional expressions, compared to Elsa's perfectly coifed hair, expensive robe, and stoic face. Elsa's expression changes to a smile as Penny declares she had been held at the freak show against her will. Elsa switches reels on her film projector and plays a recording of Penny smoking opium out of a water pipe and engaging in an orgy with several of the performers. The film is grainy, blurry, and zooms in and out on various body parts and people. There is a pulsating soundtrack playing at the same time that we hear the flicker of the projector. The film evokes a dark, disturbing pornographic film, perhaps even a snuff film. *Freakshow*'s signature violins begin to play as Elsa suggests, in a cold tone of voice, that perhaps Penny enjoyed her time last night. The film still

playing in the background, Penny begins to nod and mutter, "I liked it.....I liked it." In the grainy

film, we get a close up of her smiling at the camera, winking, and then blowing a kiss.

This scene, in the pilot episode of *Freakshow*, "Monsters among Us," is a disturbing mix

of ambiguity about implied violence, pleasure, and pain. We never find out the exact

circumstances of how the candy striper ended up at the freak show. Did Elsa kidnap her?

Convince her? Or did she show up willingly only to regret her decision? Further, was she

sexually assaulted? According to Elsa, "I see a young woman taking control of her sexuality for

the first time in her life," indicating that cultural and religious rules had bound Penny's ability to

express herself sexually. The discomfort we are invited to feel in this scene foreshadows Elsa's

overarching character arc: an antihero. This is Elsa's third scene in the episode, and the first two

present a benevolent and starry-eyed woman who takes in people who are traditionally shunned

by society. She is also a woman who loves glamour, Hollywood, and attention. In the third act of

the pilot episode, however, we realize that Elsa can also be cruel, vindictive, and forceful. She's

both good *and* bad. This scene also points to Christian and southern regulations traditionally

placed upon young white women, systemic and cultural forces that often compel people, and

women in particular, to take on the Both/And of the antihero. The candy striper explicitly

invokes those forces as she claims a societal position as a good, white, Christian woman who is

out of place in the Freakshow, in a drug den, and in a sex party. Elsa confronts Penny's

positionality by questioning the young woman about enjoying the party. Through Elsa, Penny

comes to realize that, perhaps, she acted in a way, in 1952, was amoral for a white woman but

that she desired this behavior. Elsa becomes our antihero-guide throughout *Freakshow*, wading

with us into, dark, complicated, and sometimes traumatic experiences that have historically

beleaguered women.

This chapter focuses on women antiheroes who occupy a prominent location on horror TV. I attend closely to *Coven*'s Fiona Goode, *Freakshow*'s Elsa Mars, and *Penny Dreadful*'s Vanessa Ives to make connections between trauma, gender, race, violence, and monstrosity. For many women antiheroes of horror TV, trauma takes the form of cultural violence and disenfranchisement that play out on and through their bodies. More to the point, women often experience the cultural trauma of men and patriarchal systems through their bodies. The moral ambiguity of the antihero women emerges from trauma caused by white, hetero-patriarchal regulations and the embodied violations that these experiences bring. Horror TV constructs rich back-stories for the women antiheroes that reveal tragic and gender-based acts of violence. The women's contemporaneous presentations of often-monstrous morality then play out on and through their bodies in ways that diverge from the mediated men antiheroes who preceded them on TV. Women antiheros provide possible emancipatory mediated figures, although they are still overwhelmingly white, (upper) middle class, heterosexual, and conform to Western standards of beauty.

I begin the chapter by explicating the importance of the (masculine) antihero character to the development of prestige TV. After I note how women's roles in these early-prestige TV shows tended to be comedic or in secondary roles, this chapter connects complex, antihero women to the horror genre of TV, where leading women resist conventional gendered norms and expectations in service of more multifaceted and morally-ambiguous characterization. I next trace the ways that traditional gendered conventions act on the women antiheroes bodies as traumatic acts of violence, animating the women as both/and selfish, selfless, caring, dismissive, human, and monstrous. I conclude by proposing that the woman antihero is not always or

necessarily a progressive step for women characters, but that her figure does open up possibilities for dynamic representations for women on TV.

The antihero on TV

An antihero is a protagonist who embodies traits of both a conventional hero and villain (Vaage, 2016). Classic literary archetypal qualities of the antihero tend to include selfishness, a proclivity for violence, amoral and self-destructive behavior (Vaage, 2016). A protagonist usually means a leading role in a book, play, film, or TV show, and connotes that this character is also good or a hero. After all, the protagonist is working against an antagonist, the bad character. The antihero defies neat distinctions of good or bad, hero or villain, and often uses an ends-justify-the-means kind of rhetoric. That is, an antihero typically breaks the law, defies a promise, and acts recklessly or immorally towards a justifiable goal.

The antihero figure emerges with a vengeance in contemporary prestige TV, a phenomenon related to genre, gender, and medium (Martin, 2013; Vaage, 2016). Rooting for the hero to defeat the villain can be entertaining for a while, but the antihero's multiplicitous morality has the potential to be compelling across several seasons of a TV show. As discussed in the Introduction Chapter, prestige TV, sometimes called "quality TV" or the Golden Age of TV, is the trend beginning about the year 2000 that brought cinematic qualities, budgets, and talent to TV (Vaage, 2016). From its inception, prestige TV also contained the antihero lead character (Martin, 2013; Vaage, 2016). Notable examples include Tony Soprano of *The Sopranos*, Vic Mackey of *The Shield*, and Jimmy McNulty of *The Wire*. Following in their (muddy) footsteps are Walter White of *Breaking Bad*, Rick Grimes of *The Walking Dead*, and Don Draper of *Mad Men*.

This chapter attends to the women of horror TV who also embody the moral complexity typical of an antihero. The antiheroism of the leading women of the horror TV I analyze is born from trauma. That is, a traumatic event or threat justifies their bad behavior in the narrative through a series of reversals that may obscure the ways that bad behavior is simply, and still, bad behavior. Trauma is a reversal of normal life expectations and experiences: a rupture in our sense of safety and comfort (Leys, 2000). It is a breach in what is supposed to be good and healthy for us to thrive. Yet trauma can also induce a reversal of our moral compass or behavior in ways that are, or seem to be, productive for us to survive post-trauma. King (2010) and Johnson (2017) link the contemporary antihero narrative to wounds and trauma – both individual and systematic – an element also intrinsic to the horror genre (Tudor, 1991; Means-Coleman, 2013). The antihero women differ from their masculine counterparts as the narratives of horror TV make explicit connections between gender-based conscriptions and violence, and a complex moral compass.

The antihero in prestige TV complicates dichotomies of morality, gender, and space, the horror genre seems an ideal outlet for the antiheroes of prestige TV to do their work. Prestige TV enables stories that subvert, or at least highlight, the complexities of traditional political and social structures (Thompson, 1997; Vaage, 2016). Elements intrinsic to the horror genre – anxiety, paranoia, and the supernatural, for instance—often rely on the reversal of conventional situations and behaviors, also characteristics of the antihero. There is a pleasure in watching *other*, especially fictional, people be bad or at least morally ambiguous. The antihero provides both attraction and revulsion in their overall ethos. Further, many horror TV characters are defined primarily by their violent tendencies – Norman Bates, Rick Grimes, and Hannibal Lecter, for instance. The first prestige horror TV antihero was Dexter Morgan from *Dexter*

(*Showtime*, 2006-2013). Dexter is a crime-scene technician in Miami, FL who specializes in blood splatter analysis. Whereas other prestige TV portrayed violence as part of its narrative (*The Sopranos* stands out as an example), *Dexter* was, in many ways, *about* blood and violence. Further, Dexter moonlights as a vigilante murderer. The viewer is invited to sympathize with Dexter because he is making up for where the state failed to prosecute criminals. He uses his professional talents to kill bad guys who have been ignored or acquitted through the criminal justice system. Dexter stands out in the field of TV antiheroes because his narrative revolves around his quest to kill bad people. *Dexter* regularly showed our antiheroes' kills in a spectacle of gory violence, always culminating in Dexter keeping a slide of the victim's blood as a trophy. Importantly, Dexter is not presented as completely innocent: he harbors a hunger for murder. His adoptive father guides young Dexter to channel his "Dark Passenger" (the show's term for Dexter's bloodlust) through "constructive" killing sprees of bad people. Thus, Dexter is a deeply flawed yet sympathetic lead character, who Jackson (2018) argues emerges as a widely popular TV character partially as a result of the opening provided by the horror prestige TV.

As with the troubled men who came before him, Dexter's white masculinity contributes to his presence as a premiere antihero. *Dexter*, as a prestige TV show, has many themes – psycho-pathology and fatherhood, for instance – but at the center is a man's individual battle with an ineffective criminal justice system. Dexter's "death wish"-like quest for vengeance places Dexter closer to the hero side of the scale than villain, in part because he looks like the archetypal hero. Byers (2010) describes Dexter as a "...sociopathic vigilante [who] is simply a white, Anglo-Protestant male pumped up to cartoon (hence superheroic) proportions," (p. 146). The singular, white man fighting against The System is a long-standing trope in all genres of

film[14]. In prestige TV, we see many of the same themes of these films, with recent scholarship attending to the dynamics of white men eschewing legal and social norms as a result of a threat to their white masculinity (Byers, 2010; King, 2010; Johnson, 2017). These threats are embedded, obscured even, in narratives that seem universal – terrorism, un- and under-employment, and street crime – but play out in very gendered and racialized ways. Johnson (2017) examines perhaps prestige TV's most prominent antihero, *Breaking Bad*'s Walter White, finding that his character stands in for contemporary white masculine anxieties about changing gender norms regarding work, family, and money. As well, Johnson reads together the coincidence of *Breaking Bad* and the election of the first black President of the United States, such that Walter White makes and sells drugs in response to perceived threats to his rightful place as head of household *and* head of the social order. Dexter, too, "breaks bad" in response to perceived failures of a system created for and by white men to maintain that very order.

Women antiheroes of prestige TV

Above I listed just *a few* of the critically-acclaimed and fan-favorite antihero lead characters of prestige TV – all white men. There is a gendered and racialized thread running through any conversation about complex characters and prestige TV, itself a phenomenon that resists traditional assumptions about its medium. The popularity of the antihero on TV performs a gendered function for TV, bringing flawed, gritty, and often-violent men into domestic spaces. "These were characters whom, conventional wisdom had once insisted, Americans would never allow into their living rooms: unhappy, morally compromised, complicated, deeply human" (Martin, 2013, p.4). In *Difficult Men* (2013), Martin continues by noting that viewers at home

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[14] The vigilante film arguably culminates in the above-mentioned *Death Wish* series of action/vengeance films of the 1970s starring Charles Bronson, and re-booted in 2017 with a Bruce Willis.

became "seduced" by these characters and their bad behavior, bringing in the language of sex and romance to theorize the power that the antiheroes of early prestige TV carried into our homes. As antiheroes, the leading men of these TV shows already straddled the categories of good and bad, while also making messy some traditional characterizations of TV. However, while gendered distinctions blur via the antihero on TV, his racial positionality remains. Martin (2013), a journalist, gives away deep seated assumptions about whiteness when he describes the antihero as flawed but "deeply human," with the ability to draw us in despite their complex moral compass: all affordances extended primarily to white men in the United States.

Although towards the beginning of the prestige TV era, as noted above, men antiheroes dominated, this is not to say that there existed no morally-complex women characters. Before Walter White broke bad, *Weeds*' white housewife Nancy Botwin sold marijuana out of her suburban home in 2005. There is, however, a significant difference in tone between the two shows: *Weeds* was a half hour dark comedy and *Breaking Bad* was an hour long, neo-western crime drama (Martin, 2013). Indeed, the most notable show about women in the first decade of prestige TV was *Sex in the City*, another half hour dramedy. The formats and tone of *Weeds* and *Sex in the City* nodded towards "light" material, suggesting a superficiality about women making a living, finding and breaking up with romantic partners, and maintaining friendships. 2009's *Nurse Jackie*, featuring Edie Falco as an inner-city emergency room nurse with an opiate addiction, brought a sharper edge to a woman-fronted prestige TV show, as Jackie navigated raced, classed, and gendered issues within the health care system. Yet, *Nurse Jackie* also ran for only a half hour, and frequently used comedy to ameliorate the heaviness of the subject matter. According to journalist Brett Martin's 2013 retrospective analysis of the (in)famous men of 2000s TV, no man-centered prestige TV show ran for a half hour, and none are comedy-dramas

[dramadies]. Where women did make a mark in leading roles at the onset of prestige TV, their platforms were consistently shorter and lighter.

An additional, but important, trajectory for the women of prestige TV's first decade was in secondary roles. Rather than sidekicks or assistants however, some of the most compelling women of TV were the wives of the leading (often antihero) men. If antihero men largely functioned as stand-ins for white, masculine anxieties in the twenty first century in the United States, then their wives filled a similarly stabilizing role (Vaage, 2012). That is, many of the men of prestige TV struggle with the dual mandates of white masculinity as an independent man *and* as a married father. Thus, the wives of TV's antiheroes were both filling their duties as wives and mothers, but also as the figure that blocks her husband's freedom, de facto emasculating him. Further, these characters were far from Mrs. Cleaver or Laura Petrie – they were women who sometimes worked outside of the home, who struggled to maintain "control" of their household, and who participated in their husband's various nefarious deeds. Carmela Soprano (*The Sopranos*), Betty Draper (*Mad Men*), Gemma Teller, (*Sons of Anarchy*) and Skyler White (*Breaking Bad*), for instance, in many ways also embodied antihero characteristics. They were fiercely protective of their children and often longed for a life free of their cheating or criminal husbands. Yet Sepinwall (2012) argues that the wives of the first decade of prestige TV served as the series' villains. Vaage (2012) paraphrases an interview response of Anna Gunn, the actress who played Walter White's wife Skyler, as she sums up internet comments about her character: "Skyler was a ball-and-chain, a drag, a shrew, an annoying bitch wife" (p. 151). Vaage hypothesizes that "...[Skyler's] problem, narratively speaking, is that she is holding her husband back from what the audience perceives as enjoyable transgressions" (p. 151). These antihero women are their husband's foils sometimes as much as the villains on the shows. So the complex

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women of the first decade of prestige TV either got half hour comedy-laced shows, or were "bitch" wives to the men in leading roles.

Women antiheroes of horror TV

True Blood and *The Walking Dead* later join *Dexter* as prestige horror TV shows of the 2000s, and both massively popular shows feature complex, conflicted, and ultimately sympathetic white male antiheroes[15]. *The Walking Dead*'s Lori Grimes fits neatly into the prestige TV wife who is sometimes sympathetic – as a mother trying to keep her child and small community together after the apocalypse – but often villainous – as a woman who had an affair with her husband's best friend. Dexter's romantic partners come and go throughout the series, but it is his sister Deb[16] who stands in as a wife-like character, constantly questioning Dexter's whereabouts and habits. *True Blood'*s Sookie Stackhouse stands out among these women. She is arguably the protagonist of the vampire drama, and there is little in her innocent, social-justice-oriented character to suggest that she is an antihero. Yet Sookie's entire trajectory through *True Blood* rests on her relationship to the leading vampire character, Bill. *True Blood* seems to be a bridge then between the first period of prestige TV and a second one that gives rise to leading women antihero characters, and largely within the horror genre.

I return here to the particular function of the horror genre within prestige TV and its potential to invite us to consider resistive and creative representations of both men and women. For although the antiheroes of the first decade of prestige TV subverted traditional ideals of

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[15] Some prestige TV critics consider *HBO*'s *Carnivale* to be a horror show (Miller, 2013, for example), yet the dark, Freakshow-based series more closely resembles a fantasy/mystery show. Additionally, although beautifully shot and produced, *Carnivale* failed to gain the popularity of many prestige TV shows, lasting only two seasons. Although a longer analysis is out of scope for this work, in many ways *Carnivale* is a precursor for *Freakshow.*
[16] Although of interest to note that the actors playing the roles of Dexter and Deb were married in real life during much of *Dexter*'s filming.

morality and social justice, they do so in a way that ultimately shore up their dominant societal position (Byers, 2010; Johnson, 2017). In 2018, where prestige TV is now the norm or expectation for many popular cable channels and streaming services, I suggest we have entered the post-prestige TV era, and further, that horror TV has led the way. Here, we see a shift in the antihero characteristics of many white men who lead horror TV shows, and we also see a genre dominated by white women.

It is unsurprising that horror TV presents many antiheroes, given the moral quagmires surrounding the use of violence and the ambiguousness of monstrosity. Above I argue that prestige TV is an ideal outlet for stories about antiheroes, as they struggle with dominant systems of "right" and "wrong." Another key characteristic of prestige TV is "grim and thought-provoking" subject matter (Thompson, 1997). This is an intriguing characterization considering that "grim" and "thought-provoking" are not, in and of themselves, reliant on one another. Considering that prestige TV can almost always be defined in terms of "dark" subject matter, as well as graphic violence that premium *and* basic cable increasingly allow, long-form horror found a home on TV. Horror TV is not the only genre experiencing a boom of antihero leading women: they appear in prestige dramas such as *Homeland*, *Damages*, *UnReal*, and *Orange is the New Black*, to name a few. Yet, horror TV regularly contains women in leading roles; women who are *not* defined by their relationship to a husband, brother, or son. True, there would be no *Bates Motel* without Norman Bates, but the show is primarily told through Norma's perspective and considering she does not actually appear in *Psycho,* it seems that *Bates Motel* - a pseudo-horror psychological thriller TV show- prioritizes Norma's autonomous and deeply complicated worldview just as much as her infamous son's.

Many horror TV shows still rely on obviously nefarious villains as they orbit around the traditionally "good" characters, as well as the morally ambiguous antihero. That is, there are still villains in prestige TV generally, and horror TV specifically; those characters that are *only* set up as antagonists for other characters. *Coven* perhaps most clearly sets up such a dynamic in its pilot episode, "Bitchcraft." *Coven* uses three distinct scenes back to back to establish who will be the hero, the villain, and the antihero. The very first scenes of *Coven* introduce Madame LaLaurie, as she imprisons and maims her house slave. As argued in the previous chapter, LaLaurie is excessively wicked. She is a clear villain. LaLaurie, played by critically-acclaimed actress Kathy Bates, is a white woman of size who is loud, bossy, selfish, spiteful, and abusive to everyone around her. Beyond the abhorrent treatment of her slaves, she cruelly berates her husband and her daughters. The camerawork in the scene where she paints her face with blood is so tight-that her blood-streaked face takes up the entire screen- it is almost as if she is complaining about her jiggly chin directly to the viewer. After the credits and title card play (thus neatly truncating our previous experience with LaLaurie), *Coven* introduces Cordelia Foxx and the young witches who inhabit Miss Robicheaux's Academy for Gifted Girls (the name of the "finishing" school that disguises the witches' coven). Cordelia, played by Sarah Paulson, is a petite, blonde, soft spoken middle aged white woman. The camera swoops through the opulent, Plantation-style mansion. Everything is white (including the walls and all of the furniture). The camera then closes in on Cordelia addressing the four young witches in a sitting parlor: she clearly and carefully explains that assimilation into the dominant, natural (as opposed to supernatural) society is necessary for their safety. Cordelia sounds reasonable, intelligent, and caring. When Queenie retorts that Cordelia is asking them to "suppress" their powers, Cordelia reminds the young witch that their kind has been killed off almost to the point of extinction: "We are a dying breed." Queenie

comes off as an impulsive, even bratty, teenager, while Cordelia's sober and maternal warning conveys that she is looking out for her wards. Cordelia's rhetoric, combined with her blonde, conventionally-attractive body, and delivered within the pure, white space of the Academy, tell us that Cordelia is Good: she will play the role of a traditional heroine.

The camera rests on Cordelia's face for a beat before the scene changes. From high above, we are now looking straight down on a limousine coming to a stop in a circular driveway. From this view, we see that the driveway is comprised of hexagonal pavers: they are mostly light gray but a few are dark gray, literally "dotting" the ground. It is pouring rain. The limo door opens and the camera switches to a ground-view shot of one leg emerging, wearing a patent leather black, high heeled stiletto boot. The camera switches back up to an ultra-high view to show a figure open a black umbrella as it exits the back of the car. The umbrella creates a large "dot," both matching and competing with the smaller circles on the ground. We follow the black circle from high above as it crosses the driveway to an enormous door being held open by two men. The scene is awash in grays and blacks, and we only hear the sound of thunder and rain. Fiona Foxx, Cordelia's mother, and *Coven*'s antihero main character, has arrived. Of the three introductions, Fiona's is rife with abstraction: we meet her in pieces (by the close up on her leg) and then her body disappears altogether as she moves underneath the umbrella. LaLaurie and Cordelia's politics emerged immediately in *Coven*'s opening scenes: Fiona will stick and move her way through thirteen episodes, acting as protective mother figure at times, in others slicing the throats of her competition. Finally, we see that the limo dropped Fiona off at a cancer-treatment clinic. She is dying. The opening scenes of the show present the three main characters, but Fiona's introduction elicits more questions than it provides answers.

Trauma and antihero women

Abdi & Calafell (2017) suggest that women who use violence to protect themselves and their broader communities are feminist, monstrous antiheroes, queering traditional dichotomies of helpless victim and infallible hero. Fiona's cancer plays a role throughout *Coven*, compelling her to reconsider a lifetime of selfish deeds while also motivating her to retain her power as long as she is on the Earth. Trauma largely motivates the morally-complex behaviors of the women of horror TV, whether acute acts of violence (as Elsa experience, for experience) or culturally forbidden experiences. Trauma is a ''wound to the psyche'' so violent and unexpected that ''ordinary mechanisms of awareness and cognition are destroyed'' (Leys, 2000, p. 2). Thus, trauma is a kind of reversal of "normal" experiences and interactions with each other and our environment. A traumatic incident or experience is often horrific itself, but the lasting impact that trauma induces affects our very perception of reality. Leys (2000) notes that victims can become "haunted or possessed by intrusive traumatic memories" (p.2), a ghostly description that can help us make sense of the presentation of the monstrous women antiheroes of horror TV. These intrusions may include ''flashbacks, nightmares and other re-experiences, emotional numbing, depression, guilt, autonomic arousal, explosive violence or tendency toward hypervigilance'' (Leys, 2000, p. 2)."

Freakshow uses the backdrop of Post-WWI Germany in perhaps the most explicit horror TV connection to the impact of national and cultural upheaval on individuals. Episode 4, "Edward Mordrake, Part 2," reveals how Elsa lost the bottom half of her legs. The long scene, over ten minutes, is shot in grainy black and white, contrasting the vibrant color typical of *Freakshow*. Elsa's voiceover tells us it is 1932 in Berlin: "They said you could get the blowjob of a lifetime for an American nickel. It was sexual chaos." In rapidly-edited montage, we see

people engaging in various sex acts. We see representations of bondage, same-gender sex, and fetishes (including a heavily pregnant woman, and a woman teasing a man with a marionette puppet). Faintly in the background we hear the sounds of sexual pleasure (and pain), but two sounds dominate the scene: Elsa's narration and the flicker of a projector. Like the opening scenes of *Coven* and the candy striper's orgy film in the pilot episode of *Freakshow*, the filmic qualities of Elsa's experience in the underground sex scene in Berlin remind us this is the stuff of Elsa's past, a painful one. "All of the pain and humiliations of Germany's surrender, before Hitler would channel into another war, German citizens expressed with their cocks." This is not just Elsa's traumatic past: this is Germany's. Elsa's narration continues to explain that, unable to find legitimate work performing in the Weimar Republic, she resorted to sex work, specifically as a dominatrix. As she tells us her story, we see her whipping a man as though he were a bad dog (she makes him yell "woof!" and walks him on a leash). She brags that "even in this world, I was a star" as we see a stiletto heel dig into the man's backside.

Elsa's position as the "star" in the underground sex industry aligns with some of the common antihero trajectories of being the best in a bad world: Walter White as meth kingpin, Tony Soprano as mob boss, and Don Draper as the smoothest talking ad man. All of these examples follow along with King's (2010) assertion that antiheroes' emerge to stand in for the instability of a changing political and cultural world. As men antiheroes toggle back and forth between heroic and villainous motivations and behaviors, they are really fighting to maintain a status quo: to keep things the way they were. Specifically, if nationalism is directly tied to ''masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation, and masculinized hope'' (Enloe, 1989, p.44), then antiheroes often operate to (re)gain position in a world where they see a threat to such masculine systems. Horror TV, however, presents women antiheroes who never benefited from

the patriarchal order. Although Elsa finds momentary stardom, the thing she longed for most in this world, as a sex worker, the industry literally cuts her down. The camera stays low during Elsa's explanation of her dominatrix world, focusing on her garters and boots; as her stiletto heel digs into her client's backside, *Freakshow* foreshadows Elsa's trauma. She tells us that her taboo yet satisfying sex work takes a dark turn when, unknowingly, she takes a job for a snuff film director. So eager to be on camera, young Elsa lets her guard down, and is drugged, tied down, and maimed. The editing picks up pace again. The viewer is as disoriented as Elsa is now: we do not have a clear picture of what is happening. We see a man chaining Elsa to a bed as she druggedly yells out for help. We then hear the sound of a chainsaw as the camera cuts to a close up of Elsa's face: she is fully screaming. The editing further picks up speed and inter-splices images of machinery and abstract backgrounds. We see one quick cut of the snuff director's face splattered with blood. Elsa's screams and the sound of the chainsaw intensify. Finally, we see that Elsa's legs have been amputated on film to satisfy the most violent sexual desires.

Elsa's back-story does several things: it reveals a violently traumatic wound, presenting the vulnerability about an otherwise powerful woman, while couching a very personal assault within a national and political context. Many traumatic acts connect in some way to cultural circumstances, and *Freakshow* makes explicit that Elsa's participation in sex work followed the economic crisis of post-World War I Germany. Her amputation- her bodily violation -was political collateral damage that drives her behaviors in Jupiter Florida in the early 1950s. 1930s German national threats to Elsa were *not* like the early 2000's threats to Walter White, Tony Soprano, and Don Draper. The men stood to lose prestige, sex, and money in a changing political and cultural landscape. Elsa lost her sexual autonomy, her economic freedom, mobility, and body parts. The antihero women of horror TV consistently experience trauma as embodied

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wounds and losses. This is seen in horror TV shows beyond just the texts I examine in this work. As a teenager, Norma Bates' brother sexually assaults and impregnates her. Norma is almost raped in the pilot episode of *Bates Motel*, but she gains the upper hand in the struggle and kills her assailant. *Fear the Walking Dead*'s Madison endured years of mental and physical abuse from her father. Her sharp survival skills at the onset of the zombie-apocalypse help her keep her family alive. *The Exorcist*'s Reagan was, famously, possessed by a demon, wreaking havoc in the teenager's body and mind. The first season of the TV version, named after the film, follows a middle aged Reagan, now going by Angela, trying to save her teenage daughter from the same possession. As a young orphan, Sookie Stackhouse's uncle physically abuses her. Finally, loss of pregnancy and children motivate many antihero women in horror TV, which for some is an incredibly devastating experience. *Salem*'s puritan antihero Mary Sibley makes a pact with the witches of Salem for an abortion when she becomes pregnant out of wedlock. *AHS: Hotel*'s Countess Elizabeth also seeks an abortion as an unmarried woman in the 1930s; instead she delivers an immortal half-vampire creature that she must care for indefinitely. *The Walking Dead*'s Michonne loses her young son in the zombie apocalypse. I bring in these examples to demonstrate that horror TV presents a landscape of women lead characters who, compared to their masculine counterparts, disproportionately experience gendered traumas to the body.

Penny Dreadful explicitly connects the strict cultural boundaries of femininity and the body to Vanessa's demonic possession in Victorian England: namely, purity and piety. Episode 5, "Closer than Sisters," is a flashback episode, taking the viewer to when Vanessa and her best friend, Mina, are young women. The episode opens when the girls are about twelve years old: they live in waterfront mansions with full staffs of servants. Vanessa and Mina play in the vast yard that connects the properties, talking and laughing about which men they will someday

marry. This scene is awash in light, and wearing lacy, white dresses, the girls giggle and talk excitedly about their futures. It is a gendered and classed-based custom that the girls will marry by their late teens, and their conversation is framed as an innocent, natural inquisition into their prospects. That evening, Vanessa accidently walks in on her mother having sex with Mina's father, Sir Malcolm. This scene is as dark as the earlier one was light: only the blue-hued moonlight illuminates Vanessa's face as she watches the forbidden act. Vanessa recalls: "More than the shock, the sinfulness...there was this: I enjoyed it. Something whispered, I listened." Vanessa goes home to pray, acknowledging that "perhaps it has always been there with me, this demon. Behind my back, waiting for me to turn around." The monster takes a hold of her at this point in her life, compelling Vanessa to do "little acts of wickedness;" stealing small items, or sneaking around the same hedge maze where she caught the salacious tryst. Explicitly throughout *Penny Dreadful*, Vanessa's possession is related to sex: the dormant demon awakens when she is excited to watch illicit sex, and as an adult, during sex with Dorian Gray, the demon subsumes Vanessa, requiring an exorcism. Importantly, as a 2013 cultural text that *takes place in* Victorian England, *Penny Dreadful* relays a particular story about sex in the past which does not necessarily reflect the mores and rules of that culture. Indeed, Foucault (1976) points out that modern takes on the 19th century, in particular Victorian England, frame this era as much more prudish than it actually was. By constructing Vanessa's entire back-story around her relationship with forbidden and taboo sex, *Penny Dreadful* participates in a story about Victorian culture that is *so* traumatized by pre-marital and extra-marital sex, that Vanessa became possessed by a demon as a result of those behaviors. Vanessa's possession stands in for the conflicted experience of desiring and enjoying passionate and unbridled sex.

More implicitly, however, *Penny Dreadful* connects Vanessa's possession to her feelings of jealousy and inadequacy regarding Mina. This piece of the storyline works to soften Vanessa's characterization. "Closer than Sisters" takes us to when the women are about eighteen years old, and Mina is engaged to be married. Vanessa narrates as a montage of scenes playout depicting Mina's courtship and the preparations for her wedding. The women hug, smile at each other, sometimes even prance through the mansions as they plan the big day. Yet, Vanessa's voiceover tells us that she believes *she* is worthier of such good fortune, for she is stronger and Mina has always been so "meek and obliging." On the night before the wedding, Vanessa seduces Mina's fiancé and they have violent sex on a dining room table. Mina, like Vanessa many years before, walks in on the affair, forever ruining the relationship between the women. This is a villainous act of betrayal in any context, and a scene where Sir Malcolm (Mina's father) slams the mansion gates in Vanessa's face when she goes to apologize indicates that particularly in a traditional, Victorian setting, Vanessa committed an awful crime. But the camera lingers on Vanessa's face through the gate: tears rolling down her eyes tell us she is devastated by her behavior. She is Both/And: sorry and guilty, caring and carefree, closer-than-a-sister and exiled.

Vanessa's experience as a young woman, witnessing taboo sex that ultimately stirs feelings of excitement and arousal, is not traumatic in the same way as Elsa's amputation or Norma Bates' rape. The latter examples are clear, and clearly horrific, acts of violence that affect victims in significant and lasting ways. For several of the women of horror TV, however, trauma is the enduring and powerful cultural standards placed disproportionally onto women. Like the antihero men of prestige TV, trauma can rise from the gendered, raced, and classed pressures that wound our ability for self-actualization. Unlike the men of prestige TV, however, the women antiheroes of horror TV reconcile this trauma by attending to *both* the self and other. The women

of horror TV *do* care for others, often explicitly so. They display a precarious balance between egocentrism and benevolence. They differ from the men antiheroes of prestige TV in that overwhelmingly, the woman antihero character arcs and traits revolve around them taking care of, or looking after, people. This may not be surprising overall, given that media has historically portrayed women as mothers, wives, and mother-figures. Yet, these women also display some of the most violent, selfish, and despicable behavior on TV. They are victims who rise to become heroes of their own stories, toggling between caring for other vulnerable people while always prioritizing their own interests. In this way, the women antiheroes of horror TV are monstrous.

Beware the antiheroic reversals

For these reasons, in many ways, I invite and celebrate the woman antihero on TV. She complicates conventional representations of women, allowing for strengths, weaknesses, benevolence, and selfishness. Particular to horror TV, antiheroes explore supernatural powers, and even practice violence for reasons beyond self-defense: because they *can*. However, my enthusiasm wanes when I consider other ways that the women antihero figure performs reversals for these characters; for if the women of horror TV subvert normative rules of morality that have traditionally weighed on women's lives, then it seems that their antihero status performs other reversals to consider.

Although Fiona represents progressive or anti-racist politics, she is a mean, self-serving, alcoholic desperate to retain her power within the coven. In "Boy Parts" when Fiona declares she "hates racists," she comes across as the kind of benevolent white hero who rushes to the aid of struggling people of color in films such as *The Help* or *The Blindside.* Madison (1999) calls this role the anti-racist-white-hero. Fiona's explicit anti-racist rhetoric seems to be a redeeming

quality of an otherwise-selfish woman. Her anti-racist heroism is unique from her white movie

hero saviors, however, because her goal is to help a white woman not be racist, rather than help a

person of color escape racism. Her lesson to LaLaurie ends with the listing off of a few

contemporary accomplished black people. Post-racial structures continuously (re)constitute

whiteness as the center via the conversations we do not have (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Importantly,

between Fiona and LaLaurie, there is no explicit acknowledgement of white supremacy past or

present; the attention is only on successful people of color. Historical and contemporary

oppression by white people and institutions is always present in Fiona's speech, for the very need

to list the privileged positions to LaLaurie suggests that these successful black people have

overcome adversity, but the nature of this adversity (racism) is unspoken. Fiona shows no

interest in coming to the aid of the black women in *Coven* who have experienced racism (Marie

or Queenie, for example). Further, Fiona displays an inordinate amount of villainous behavior

throughout the series: she places her own interests and needs above those of everyone else. Like

LaLaurie, much of Fiona's behavior is over the top and evil. For instance, in a scene from "The

Replacements," Fiona recounts how she became the coven's Supreme: "My mentor...Now there

was a Supreme. She was majestic and powerful. She taught me everything I know. You know

how I thanked her? By cutting her throat." She will do whatever it takes to retain power and

control. Fiona, then, is an anti-racist white anti-hero, her status as antihero performing a reverse

on her anti-racism, which seems only to undergird her antagonism with LaLaurie. Fiona herself

spells out her wickedness explicitly in episode seven, "The Dead": "I am a wretched human

being. A miserable, mean, goddamn bitch, I always have been." So then even Fiona's anti-racist

dialogue can be read as self-serving. That is, by antagonizing LaLaurie, Fiona's words and

behaviors fall in line with her broader anti-hero characterization: she is satisfied when LaLaurie

squirms in disgust at the thought of being Queenie's maid. Fiona's antihero anti-racism comes

not from a desire for social justice, but rather a desire to cut others down.

The antiheroism of *Freakshow*'s Elsa, another Jessica Lange *AHS* character, toes the line

between wicked and benevolent in ways that also ignore the particular oppressions of her Freak

show performers. The opening of this chapter explores Elsa's cruel, but potentially liberating,

confrontation with Penny. The young candy striper realizes that she enjoyed her time with the

performers the night before, but such satisfaction defies the strict code of conduct for white

women. Penny berates Elsa and the performers for being "depraved monsters," to which Elsa

replies:

> They're depraved monsters!? I'll tell you who the monsters are! The people outside this
> tent! In your town, in all these little towns. Housewives pinched with bitterness, stupefied
> with boredom as they doze off in front of their laundry detergent commercials, and dream
> of strange, erotic pleasures. They have no souls. My monsters, the ones you call
> depraved, they are the beautiful, heroic ones. They offer their oddity to the world. They
> provide a laugh, or a fright, to people in need of entertainment. Everyone is living the life
> they chose. But you! You undoubtedly will be one of those soulless monsters. Perhaps
> you already are.

In another show, this might be the type of monologue where people cheer: perhaps some

watching at home do. Indeed, *Freakshow* is filled with short speeches and quips about how

society (in the show, 1950s Florida) treats people with disabilities as freaks, monsters, and

altogether less-than-human. Jimmy (The Lobster Boy) points out that "at best they tolerate us

because we remind them they're normal." Desiree (Three Breasted Woman) makes a similar

point in the season finale: "That's where you think freaks belong, parlors, behind glass, a human

car crash to stare at and remind you how lucky you are?" Overtly, *Freakshow* invites

comparisons between the discrimination of people with disabilities in the past, and present

discrimination, and even violence, against any community that is "different:" the LGBT

community, people with intellectual disabilities, people of size, people of color, and immigrants. Through all this, Elsa is our ringleader.

Elsa's final "act," however, negates her impassioned speech and her sometimes-fierce defense of her monsters. Popular and academic critics tend to point out that *Coven*'s Fiona Goode is the most deplorable lead of an *American Horror Story* season (Salemme, 2017; Robinson-Greene, 2018), placing her further towards the villain side of the antihero spectrum. Fiona eventually does die – even goes to hell- leaving the coven to flourish under her daughter Cordelia's reign. Elsa, on the other hand, literally sells her performers out when she sells the Freak show to uber-villain Dandy Mott and heads to Hollywood to become a star. Episode four foreshadows Elsa's dubious motives, when the spirit Edward Mordrake accosts Elsa: "There's nothing worse than a freak like you. Someone who would pretend to be the benevolent zookeeper but she is nothing but a pernicious, diseased, animal herself." Mordrake's refusal to empathize with Elsa parallels Fiona's failure to sell her soul to the voodoo spirit Papa Legba. He can see that Fiona "has no soul." Elsa, too, is soulless to abandon the family of vulnerable people she constructed. While Elsa shoots to fame on a variety TV show, Dandy massacres almost all of the Freak show performers.

Throughout *Freakshow*, Elsa toggles between compassionate champion for those who are different, and narcissistic champion for herself. As argued above, in some ways, this is a refreshing turn for a leading woman on TV, one that eschews either/or trajectories of selflessness and selfishness. Yet the contradictions inherent in a woman antihero character also seem to reverse the social-justice perspective that is so explicit in some horror TV. This is not to say that women characters necessarily ought to be social-justice minded--this is a burden that women (and in particular women of color) have overwhelmingly shouldered. Yet, horror TV often

presents overt premises, characters, and dialogues that points to political, economic, and cultural oppression and provides women, however imperfect, lead characters that in some capacity care for others. The antihero figure, while providing a depth of character historically not afforded to many women leads on TV, also seems to reverse some of the resistive potential they could offer.

Conclusion

In the twelfth episode of *Coven*, "Go to Hell," Madame LaLaurie laments the (post)modern world as being full of people who say they are sorry when they really are not: "All anybody has to do nowadays is shed some tears, say some words. It's called repentance. Oh, repentance my ass!" As noted above and argued in the previous chapter, *Coven* sets up LaLaurie as an obvious and monolithically evil villain through the graphic presentations of her wicked violence. As she complains about the duplicity of contemporary iterations of regret, we also learn that LaLaurie endorses transparent politics. She longs for a world where people "tell it like it is," regardless of whether or not those words are vicious, hateful, or dangerous. LaLaurie seems to be lamenting the multifaceted characters that dominate prestige TV: she pines for the days of heroes and villains. Love them or hate them, you knew where they stood. She is not alone. As TV moves into what I call the post-prestige era (the expectation that good TV ought to be cinematic, dark and complex), several TV critics express a similar nostalgia for wickedly captivating villains. A writer for NPR laments the shift from TV villain to antihero: "Anti-heroes happened; the bad guys became our good guys. We started building shows around ruthless mobsters, drug kingpins, womanizing cads. They do lots of villainous things — Tony Soprano murdered his own nephew, for pity's sake — but now they're the characters with whom we're meant to identify. To be sure to keep our sympathies, writers are careful to show these anti-heroes forever

struggling with their actions. But villains — true villains — don't struggle with the evil that they do. They bask in it" (Weldon, 2016). A *Salon* writer became frustrated when *Mad Men*'s Don Draper took an introspective turn in the series' last season, becoming more fleshed out and sympathetic. Writing for *Vox*, VanDerWerff (2014) is ready for TV "...to slough off its antihero malaise." I find this critique, Weldon's in particular, to be short-sighted, or perhaps merely too narrowly focused on a few prominent shows the (male) authors repeatedly refer to *The Sopranos, Mad Men*, and *Breaking Bad*), in that contemporary prestige TV series do have villains. Vaage (2012) points out that the villain is a crucial component to gain audience sympathy for the antihero, for the ruthless "bad guy" makes the antihero "emotionally and morally preferable" (p. 150).

There is an important, gendered criticism of the very categorization of prestige TV; as TV critics and scholars construct a hierarchy of "bad," good," and "great" TV, we risk (re)relegating genres and shows that have typically been deemed feminine as "bad" or "trashy." These include soap operas, family dramas, and reality TV. Prestige TV, as noted in the Introduction and above in this chapter, mirrors many devices and techniques of film, long a masculine-oriented entertainment medium. Coupled with the dominance of men behind and in front of the camera, there is a case to be made that prestige TV has shifted the medium from being historically regarded as feminine to masculine.

Did the "difficult [white] men" of prestige TV bring masculinity into the once-feminized medium of TV? My analysis of both the men and the women that now occupy the antihero position suggests that the medium is functioning as a complicating factor in TV as a gendered space, while it is also being complicated by cultural progress that seeks to include more voices and varied stories. That is, the long form of TV, as compared to films, coupled with the turn

towards high-art of (some) TV invited the antihero as a subject, yet it is unsurprising that, at first at least, he was a white man. Prestige TV's penchant for complexity, ambiguity, and mature content also opens the door for the woman antihero.

Women antiheroes of horror TV serve an important function as they muddy the distinctions between good and evil, right and wrong, human and monster. They ask us to question oft-assumed scenarios and expectations. In particular, the woman antihero always already resists gendered norms as she subverts traditional ideals about femininity. That she is emerging as a trend in the horror genre of TV, and that horror TV revels in grotesque and macabre violence points us towards women characters breaking the molds often filled by heroes or villains. This is not to say that this type of character is a feminist victory, for the horror TV woman antihero is almost exclusively white, upper middle class, thin, cisgendered, able-bodied, and heterosexual. As Fiona's and Elsa's broader characterization points to, antihero status may also reverse explicit anti-racist or anti-ablest rhetoric. Rather, we can perhaps look towards the women antihero of horror TV for an emerging discourse of a complex and multilayered women character.

Conclusion:

Monstrous possibilities through the imagined violence of women

In a recent article in the literary magazine *VQR*, Lili Loofbourow (2018) argues that TV audiences' viewing habits are largely shaped by the "beauty myth[17]" wherein we have been culturally "trained" to glance at shows about women and traditionally feminine issues and expect perfection. She calls this the Male Glance, which operates in a corollary but opposite way as Mulvey's Male Gaze: We still expect women to appear as adornments to the settings and narratives of most mainstream media, yet Loofbourow finds that when women are the main characters, we tend not to dissect their stories as deeply as we do shows with and about men. In the previous chapter, I pointed to the changing landscape of prestige TV, arguing that we are now in an era of post-prestige TV where networks and streaming services *must* provide cinematic-like and award winning TV. This new TV-world seems to invite more women than ever before into its thoughtful, sometimes artful, space. Indeed, I find that horror TV is leading the way here. Yet Loofbourow, notes that critics and audiences alike neither critique shows about men and women with the same rigor, nor do they have the *same intellectual expectations* for shows about women. Loofbourow conducts a side by side comparison of analyses about *HBO*'s uber-serious crime drama *True Detective* and *HBO*'s show-business satire *Doll and Em*, noting

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[17]Loofbourow never cites Naomi Wolff's 1990 feminist book, I am not sure why. Her analysis, aside from taking the name of the theory, indicates that she is familiar with Wolf's assertion that the contemporary beauty product industry, run largely by white men, drives what women understand to be "beautiful" as unrealistically perfect.

that while critics analyzed *True Detective* to the point of parody, critics dismissed *Doll and Em* as light women's fair. To be sure, I have never even *heard* of *Doll and Em*.

But I do know, as a fan and researcher of *Hannibal*, she could have done the same experiment comparing the horror-drama to women-led *NBC* shows with similar results. *Rolling Stone*, *The New Yorker*, and *The Guardian* are just the tip of the journalism-iceberg for long-form analyses into the philosophy, psychology, and artwork of *Hannibal*. Loofbourow's argument struck me as particularly important in this moment of post-prestige TV, a time when we *see* more women on the small screen than in any other era, yet I began my dissertation thinking about *how* are we seeing them. Glancing at TV shows that feature women means we miss (possible) presentations of depth, contradictions, strangeness, even ugliness. "We have not yet learned to see within female ugliness the possibility of transcendent art the way we do its male counterpart..." Loofbourow claims. Horror TV may provide a reprieve. Horror TV compels more than a glance. Because of the graphic depictions of violence, horror TV seems to be inviting visual and intellectual consideration in ways that other genres, such as comedy, reality, or drama do. The women of horror TV, too, command attention. These women refuse to be easily summarized or categorized: they are multifaceted, contradictory, and altogether human in their monstrous flaws.

So I set out to do this work. I quickly found that yes: analysis of horror TV resists neat and tidy thematization. As Pinedo (1997) notes, contemporary (post-modern) horror revels in the chaotic, the unexpected, and the bizarre. Prestige horror TV shows present a dizzying amount of characters, story arcs, and themes. As I set out to conduct a critical examination of horror TV, I got quickly stuck trying to pin down which characters commit violence and which ones are victims. Which characters are sympathetic? Who are our villains? I decided that work was futile:

the TV shows were directing me elsewhere, *towards* the messiness, literally and figuratively, of violence and monstrosity. Violence asks us to see that any*body* can speak to radical and alternative perspectives about what it means to be human. In this dissertation I examined literal and figurative performance spaces, queer white masculine villains, white-centered perspectives, and complex white women antiheroes. Each focus of analysis reveals that horror TV reflects a stronghold of white-centered values while also enabling innovative and progressive representations of gender, sexuality, and ability. Horror TV asks us to watch dismemberment, mutilation, and (re)animation, all forms of transformation. These depictions invite us to consider what *else* can be.

As I have been arguing, these shows are not perfect or ideal in their representations of gender, race, class, sexuality, or ability. But they do push the boundaries of which TV and which genres get dissected, awards, and renewals. This is not to say that comedies, reality TV shows, and dramas do not deserve a close inspection for their portrayals of gendered, raced, classed, and sexualized politics. This is work that feminist and antiracist critical cultural scholars have been doing. But what are the implications when popular critics and audiences do more than glance at shows featuring women leads? After all, these are the viewers who can post, Tweet, and Snap their opinions, interpretations, and critiques faster and further than those in the Ivory Tower. With its unique mix of low- (presentations of bloody gore a la the slasher film, for instance) and high (stunning cinematography and big name stars, for instance) art, horror TV seems an ideal form for a deep look.

Important to note, all horror TV, including the woman-centric *American Horror Story*, have men show runners, indicating a masculine imagination even where we see many women characters. I could extend Loofbourow's analysis and find that the men behind horror TV's

women amounts to a victory for the genre. For with famous (men's) names such as Ryan Murphy, Brad Fulchuk, Frank Darabont, Guillermo del Toro, and Bryan Fuller, audiences may be inclined to pay closer attention to the stories, symbols, and characters of horror TV. *The Walking Dead* recently made headlines for an upcoming show runner shift (the fourth overall for the series), when a woman will take over the ninth season. Important to note, however, is that recent criticism for the once-massively popular show has indicated that *The Walking Dead* has "jumped the shark:" it has hit its creative apex and cannot recover from silly or nonsensical plot points. Moving a woman show runner into *The Walking Dead* at this point parallels a similar tendency of Fortune 500 companies to promote women to CEO positions as a company looms precariously on the edge of disaster, de facto setting would-be-powerful women up for certain criticism and failure (McCullough, 2014). We can root for better and more: women *creating* shows *about* and *with* women who are interesting, funny, deep, silly, provocative, and like men's shows that do all of those things, can point audiences towards important discourses about lived experience.

Part of championing for more and better means more and better representation of women of color. Since I began the research for this dissertation, I have seen progress regarding roles for black women in horror TV, particularly in the *American Horror Story* series. The black Enduring Women of *AHS: Roanoke* and *Cult* push the representation of black women in horror past the role of angry adversary, (monstrous) sex object, or strong sidekick. *Roanoke* and *Cult* are both set in the present in the United States, potentially helping to avoid the Dark Continent of Africa or the Exotic East tropes of earlier iterations of *AHS*. *Black Mirror* (BBC, then *Netflix*) although not traditionally a "horror" show, regularly features black women in leading roles. *Black Mirror*'s 2017 episode "Black Museum" stands out in the anthology series as having a black

woman protagonist, a story about racist violence, and graphic violence in the style of horror TV. This is progress, but it is slow and does not include LatinX, Asian, or Middle Eastern women. White women seem to fare best in the world of horror TV, perhaps not surprising and perhaps a group that has had enough wins (for now). The horror TV shows I examine reflect the 2000s and early 2010s *idea* of collective womanhood (exemplified in *Coven*) that ultimately ignores women of color, queer women, and women with disabilities. White men get some queer representation in horror TV. The ending of *Hannibal* provides the kind of romantic drama typically reserves for feminine texts (indeed, Will and Hannibal Thelma-and-Louise themselves off a cliff). But the white dandy figure troubles optimism about the creative representation of masculinity in horror TV because his violence is senseless. As I have been arguing, violence on TV *can* be productive, as it opens up possibilities (sometimes as it literally opens up bodies) for new and interesting ways of thinking about power, resistance, and identity. But the dandy's violence is always and only narcissistic, in service of flaunting his dominance, and satiating his hunger for things, experiences, and power.

Horror TV combines slasher/shocker/Grand Guignol style of post-New Wave cinema with the artful, even avant-garde, grotesque presentation of bodies after they have been injured or killed. This is the bringing together, both within a series and across a genre, of high and low constructions of art. Indeed, prestige horror TV itself does this as a genre; elevating the traditionally tasteless form of horror into a thoughtful and complex format, while asking audiences to consider macabre violence as an important story-telling technique. The space where they meet enables new consideration for representations of gender, race, sexual identity, and ability. It is not always the case that horror TV, or prestige TV for that matter, forwards

innovative or progressive politics – indeed my work demonstrates that horror TV upholds several dominant paradigms.

Despite the shift in TV towards the high-art of prestige writing, filmmaking, budgets, and star power, and despite the multiplication of avenues through which we are able to watch TV, TV is still an industry in the business of making money. Thus TV - like cinema, Broadway, and literature –often invests in just enough progressivism and edginess to be on-trend with a diverse audience. And yet, I am optimistic about horror TV as a particular genre and in a particular medium to use a long format to thrust macabre and uncanny images into our living rooms. In "Imagined violence/queer violence: Representation, rage, and resistance," Halberstam (1993) locates productive potential in political interventions that explore the tension between the questions: Where does the system make us nervous, and where do we make the system nervous? My work finds that the interplay between these trajectories plays out in TV shows with and about violence and the grotesque. Horror TV presents culturally taboo material, itself a resistance to hegemonic norms and expectations, but which also sometimes functions to shore up those very values. Horror TV provides resistive potential to Western, Christian, Victorian, polite, law-abiding norms through presenting more questions than providing clear answers for, and by presenting radical possibilities about the body. Halberstam suggests subversive potential within imaginative violence – resituating the idea of violence as not always a bad thing. A radical approach to violence opens up space for new and Other bodies to assert a voice.

But someone needs to be there to listen. *Coven, Freakshow, Hannibal,* and *Penny Dreadful* are all shows about artful horror that invite us to (re)consider what is worthy of intellectual and aesthetic consideration. They are all pointing to the genre itself – grotesque things are ugly and *that's ok*, look anyway. Loofbourow suggests that imperfection is connected

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to masculinity, which does not *hinder* the popularity of media products that show "warts and all." Rather, multifaceted, sometimes nonsensical narrative, and complex to the point of being unlikeable main characters actually *elevate* prestige TV shows as something academic, subjective, genius, and ultimately beautiful in its ugliness. Since femininity has been connected to perfection (physical beauty, purity, piety, maternity) audiences and critics do not as often give these shows the opportunity to try and fail, to risk, to stumble, to be anything but what we see on the surface. This is a monstrous pedestal to be placed on: perfect but trapped. Horror TV thrusts women into complex ringleaders that are sometimes good (beautiful, gracious, giving, caring) and sometimes bad (selfish, ugly, taking, uncaring). Horror TV, in many ways, (re)casts men as complex, too, something they're not always allowed to be, even in traditional antihero roles. Everyone benefits from an expanded worldview, and although horror TV certainly does not always perform this function, it certainly contains within it moments that demand we (re)consider what we (think we) know.

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