Queer Monsters Within: Trauma and the Emergence of
Gothic Queer Discourse in U.S. Cultural Production, 1945-2011

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For my dad, James Westengard,

who read every word I wrote until he couldn’t
This project explores how gothic metaphors appear in American cultural productions concerned with non-normative gender and sexuality and why this gothicism spikes when American experience becomes traumatic. I claim that there are particularly gothic periods in the cultural production that follows collective trauma, and I focus on a single gothic trope for analysis in each of these historical moments—sadomasochism in performances responding to insidious trauma, haunting in historical fiction following the Watts riots of 1965, live burial in AIDS literature, containment in cold war lesbian pulp fiction, and vampirism in post-9/11 popular culture. Trauma shatters established notions of normalcy, disrupting the status quo and creating an anxious flurry of discourse—steeped in gothic tropes and metaphors—that often renegotiates gender
and sexual norms. I identify the repressive uses of gothicism in these contexts and then examine activist redeployments in texts by LGBTIQ writers, artists, and theorists, such as Lee Edelman, Ron Athey, Ann Bannon, Migdalia Cruz, and Jack Halberstam. This analysis is concerned with questions such as: What are the temporal and causal links between the traumatic historical moment and the gothic-themed productions that follow? In what ways are gothic symbols used to negotiate concepts of gender and sexuality? Are they used to contain and regulate non-normative sexual or gender expressions, subvert popular understanding of “normal” gender and/or sexuality, or both? What other factors intersect with gender and sexuality to create this discourse (such as race, class, and ability), and how can an intersectional analysis deepen our understanding of the phenomenon? Finally, how has the subversive redeployment of gothic metaphors been used to speak to issues of social justice in response to oppression? In spite of the presence of this phenomenon in American literature and culture, the implications of gothicism in relation to American LGBTIQ experience have not been explicitly addressed within queer theory nor within American literary studies. My project builds on scholarship in queer Gothic literature by identifying gothic queer theory as a mode of literary and critical discourse and by constructing a crisis-based historical trajectory for repressive and redeployed gothicisms in U.S. cultural production.
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INTRODUCTION

The 2010 Darren Aronofsky film, *Black Swan*, portrays a professional ballet dancer (Natalie Portman) who, under extreme pressure as the Swan Queen in a production of *Swan Lake*, slips increasingly into a state of paranoia, doubling, self-mutilation, and lesbianism. In Hollywood, the correlation between paranoia, sexy self-mutilation as a kind of sadomasochistic practice, and queer identity is not a new phenomenon. As Vito Russo outlines in *The Celluloid Closet*, Hollywood has a long and complicated history with queerness, and the portrayal of gay and lesbian characters as monstrous, pathological creatures that are inevitably punished in the end of the film is a familiar occurrence. While the most obvious explanation for this phenomenon posited by Russo is that the addition of queerness as a character trait simply plays upon the public understanding of gays and lesbians as creepy, sick, and villainous, he also acknowledges that these characters were sites of clandestine representation for queer writers and directors as well as for queer viewers. Although at times the portrayal of the LGBT community in popular culture seems to have come a long way from *Rebecca*’s obsessive Mrs. Danvers with her crazed look and black high-necked gown, Natalie Portman’s character in *Black Swan* fits right in to Russo’s “Necrology” of queer characters who are miserable, homicidal, insane, and who inevitably end up dead (usually by suicide or murder). The return of the paranoid, insane, homicidal/suicidal queer character not only fits into an identifiable genealogy, or necrology perhaps, but it also finds itself in the center of a flurry of gothicism within contemporary popular culture. From the immense
popularity of the *Twilight* saga and the subsequent vampire narratives to emerge in its wake to the obsession with reality programs that serve as a modern day freakshows and haunted houses, one cannot ignore the cultural trend toward the unsettlingly odd, the ominously supernatural, and the titillatingly unusual. The common thread that runs through these productions, in many cases, lies both in the gothic nature of this cultural phenomenon and in the underlying link between a gothic presence and the negotiation of gender and sexuality.

It is the tie between these two elements that is the main concern of this project—why have the arts (both high and low) returned again and again to the gothic as a means of communicating queerness? Why are there spikes in this type of sexualized gothicism within twentieth and twenty-first century American cultural productions, and how are these trends linked to specific historical moments? It is not only within literature, art, and film that this phenomenon occurs. Theorists who examine the intricacies of genders and sexualities—critics who write about the history and the future of queerness, such as Lee Edelman, Kate Bornstein, Carla Freccero, and Leo Bersani—also turn again and again to the gothic as an apt and resonant cache of metaphors for communicating the complexities of queerness. This project explores why these gothic metaphors are resonant for theorists of gender and sexuality, how they appear in other American cultural productions concerned with queerness, and why there seems to be apparent spikes in this kind of gothicism in relation to certain moments of traumatic American experience.

My work frames these gothic high points as locations of personal and social trauma. Through a historicist approach to reading the cultural productions in which
gothic tropes are central, my chapters will argue that there are certain particularly gothic periods in cultural production that follow moments of collective trauma, such as World War II and the advent of atomic warfare, the Watts riots of 1965, the AIDS crisis, and the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center. As feminist trauma theorists such as Laura Brown and Judith Herman point out, however, these collective events are generally public traumas and are therefore often located within a masculinist discourse around trauma and recovery. When one is considering issues of trauma, it is important to also address those personal, or private, traumas that might be attributed to “feminine” experience (although they are certainly not tied exclusively to “female” bodies). Often this kind of trauma is a result of domestic violence, sexual assault, and childhood sexual abuse. Brown notes that “feminine” trauma is simply feminine because it occupies the realm beyond what is considered “normal” (read white, middle class, Christian, heterosexual male) human experience, and as a result many personal traumas that result from marginalization and the threat of violence due to a non-dominant subject position are also moments of feminized, and therefore often unacknowledged, trauma. With this in mind, I work to trace the explosion of gothicism not only within cultural production following moments of cultural, or public, trauma but also within those productions that arise out of personal, or private, traumas. My claim is that both cultural and personal traumas disrupt public and private conceptions of reality creating an anxious flurry of discourse that often involves the negotiation of issues of gender and sexuality. These post-traumatic disruptions frequently turn to the gothic as a means of either reimagining or reinscribing norms of gender and sexuality—there is an uncanny spike in gothicism stemming from
both sides of the table, resulting in an environment in which some voices use gothic symbols to anxiously reestablish old norms and some voices use gothic symbols to explore new subversive and productive ways to rebuild identities and social structures following traumatic disruption.

First, let me clarify the specific deployment of the term gothic within the context of this project. Historically, Gothic literature emerged as a popular form of British fiction during the eighteenth century. This form addressed British anxieties and fears about race, class, gender, and sexuality in the face of an emerging modern cultural identity, and Gothic fiction dealt with such anxieties through the use of supernatural, psychological, and highly sexualized themes and recurring symbols. Beginning with the first arguably Gothic novel, Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764, and continuing into such nineteenth century novels such as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula,* eighteenth and nineteenth century Gothic literature emerged as a genre obsessed with themes such as paranoia and doubling, terror, incarceration, sadomasochism and torture (often within the context of the Spanish inquisition), monstrosity, ghostliness and haunting (especially in dark, mysterious castles), the abject, the grotesque, and the uncanny. In *Queer Gothic,* George Haggerty notes that while some literary critics attempt to historicize the Gothic period, this attempt does not “radically change the way ‘gothic’ functions as a literary device in the period under discussion.” When viewed in this manner, gothicism becomes a kind of sensibility, or perhaps an aesthetic, that may have originated from but is not strictly tied to a single historical and geographical location. Haggerty asserts that the term “gothic” is used to “evoke a queer
world that attempts to transgress the binaries of sexual decorum” and goes on to claim that gothic fiction is queer partially because “[t]ransgressive social-sexual relations are the most basic common denominator of gothic writing.” Because of this historical fact, the symbols and themes associated with the most famous Gothic texts have retained their associations with non-normative gender and sexual expression in many literary and popular cultural forms. Clearly, these symbols and themes have maintained their relevance and popularity outside of the strictly “Gothic period” of literary history. One need only to look at the overwhelming number of television shows and movies that evoke vampires, dark sexualized power struggles, paranoid doublings, and live burials in order to be convinced of the refusal of the gothic to be contained within a specific historical moment. With this in mind, this project explores the mobility of the gothic as a set of symbols, themes, and metaphors that find their root in the literature of the Gothic period but that are deployed in even the most contemporary cultural productions. Each chapter, then, will focus on a specific gothic trope, locate its origins in one or more classic Gothic texts, and trace its use as a queer metaphor within various American cultural productions that arise in reaction to both public and private traumatic moments.

As one might note from the example of Black Swan with which I began this introduction, the use of gothicism is not generally a celebration of the queer community. Instead, it is often loosely tied to non-normative sexualities or a resistance to mainstream behavior and ideology as a means of censure—a message to readers and viewers that this type of gothic queerness will be punished in the end either by insanity, death, or a forced reversion to “normal” behavior and ideological alignment. After all, the truly gothic
figures are so often cast as the villain or the monster that is too hideous and perverse to exist in the world. There is a complicated and conflicted purpose in this didactic mode. While the gothic villain may be killed in the end and while the heroine trapped in the dark recesses of the castle may eventually enter into her proper role and location as a wife within the domestic space, the twisted path that leads to this reestablishment of norms is, nonetheless, queer. And this spectacle of queerness usually occupies the majority of the narrative, exposing audience members/viewers/readers to these transgressive modes of being and often reveling in the highly stylized, elevated nature of gothic queerness. There is no doubt that while gothicism, both within the literature of the Gothic period and the gothic devices of today, may overtly work to censure queerness, the gothic mode is a space of disruption and conflict—a battleground in which discourse involving gender and sexuality takes shape specifically using gothic symbols and forms as its vehicle.

Before I examine the American cultural productions that utilize gothic tropes, I will first argue that queer theorists themselves, those on the forefront of the discourse that constructs and deconstructs gender and sexuality, have utilized and often attempt to reappropriate this gothicism for exploring queerness and reimagining power structures that would marginalize queer subjects. While the gothic coding of non-normative gender and sexual expressions is often used to vilify, marginalize and contain those expressions, contemporary queer theorists have found ways to turn that negative coding into a productive critical space. I do not believe it is a mere coincidence that several prominent queer theorists such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Judith (Jack) Halberstam published some of their first work not specifically on queer theory or lesbian and gay studies but
rather on the issues of sexuality within gothic literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Queer theorists, it seems, have utilized gothic literature, and subsequently the themes and figures associated with that literature, to productively illustrate and expand theories of genders and sexualities. This is a move that Haggerty has specifically identified as “queer Gothic,” or the exploration of queerness within the literature produced during this moment in literary history. This project is an inversion of the queer Gothic—instead of looking for transgressive gender and sexuality within Gothic literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, I search for the gothic within queer theory. Like the term “queer” itself, gothic tropes have been appropriated by theorists in order to find productive value in something initially developed to marginalize, contain, and traumatize those who transgress heteronormative identities and behaviors. Out of this atmosphere of containment and alienation, queer theorists have been able to craft a fertile and innovative discourse—one that is able to critically circumvent limiting mainstream paradigms precisely because it occupies and embraces its “incarceration” in the margins of dominant culture. While I claim that critical theorists intentionally reappropriate the gothic discourse that emerges after cultural and personal trauma, the discourse itself usually enters the cultural consciousness through fiction, film and other artistic endeavors as, often unintentional, sites of tension. The establishment of gothic queer theory will then serve as a foundational theoretical toolbox to which I will return throughout my chapters in order to better understand and theorize the way that gothicism functions as a type of queer discourse within the American cultural productions that utilize the gothic mode.
While there are several critics who explicitly tie together issues of gender and sexuality with the use of gothic tropes, I work to extend this discourse by introducing the unique possibilities of trauma as a place of potential for the productive shattering of hegemonic metanarratives. The usefulness of trauma as a lens through which to read the periodic emergence of gothicism is dependent upon the general understanding of trauma as a moment of shattering. In *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*, trauma theorist Kalí Tal identifies the way that trauma both develops and destroys schematic systems, or myths, on both a personal and national level due to this shattering effect. Where personal myths are sets of explanations developed to account for an individual’s circumstances and actions, national myths are those schemas propagated in textbooks and official histories. When one experiences a traumatic event, her personal myths are “tragically shattered,” and this is equally true for the disruption of national myths as a result of a collective trauma such as a war or natural disaster. Traumatic events, then, destroy both personal and national myth systems and force the individuals and societies to revise these guiding schemas. If trauma shatters personal and national myths, then the moments following cultural traumas are moments of disruption, conflict, and anxiety. This shattering not only creates an anxious (sometimes nostalgic) move to “repair” these shattered cultural norms, but it also paradoxically provides an opportunity for reimagining discourses of not only gender and sexuality but of queerness itself as a more fluid and subversive category.

This brings my project into some of the most current questions and discussions within queer theory. For example, I address how a specifically gothic queerness might
remain subversive in the face of queer liberalism by providing a space for the disruption of hegemonic metanarratives involving certain basic notions of space, time, and power. This project engages in the tension between the pragmatism of contemporary LGBT political movements and the more radical approach to culture and politics often identified as “queer.” What are the strategies that queer theorists, artists, and writers use to resist, what Lisa Duggan terms, homonormativity? How does the gothic mode open up a space for a more subversive queerness as differentiated from a politics of inclusion and civil rights? What are the benefits and dangers of such a position? However, while I am grappling with these questions, my grounding in the reality of material violence arising from oppressive metanarratives remains central to this project. Because of my investment in the future of queer theory as a field, I am dedicated to the task of addressing and resisting the classed and raced myopia that often plagues the discourse, and it is because of this that I will attempt to build my project out of a unique methodological compilation that addresses these issues through the lens of trauma and material violence.

Queer theory is not the only discourse that utilizes gothic metaphors, however. In her introduction to the American Imago issue on trauma, Cathy Caruth conceptualizes trauma as a haunting or a possession: “the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event.” This quote illuminates two important elements of trauma: First, the language of trauma is frequently gothic, which is not entirely surprising since Gothic novels are preoccupied with such traumatic occurrences as rape, murder, cannibalism, and live burial. Second, many
trauma theorists argue that it is not the event itself that is traumatic but the return of the event, as a kind of haunting, that inevitably follows. According to Caruth, it is because of this spectral nature that traumatic reaction is “not so much a symptom of the unconscious, as it is a symptom of history. The traumatized person, we might say, carries an impossible history within them, or they become themselves a symptom of a history they cannot entirely possess.” While Caruth is speaking about the relationship between an individual and his or her own personal history, this statement could very well be mapped onto the larger, cultural, reactions to national traumas. In other words, both individuals and societies respond to the haunting of past traumas, and often this response is in the form of testimony, or the need to express the unspeakable trauma by any means possible. It is from this drive that the gothic cultural productions included in this project emerge.

This complex relationship between trauma, history, and the gothic is one that informs each stage of this project since it allows me to address and historicize not only the phenomenon of gothicism within American cultural production, but it also serves as a critical intervention in both queer theory and trauma theory. In fact, trauma theory has taken its current shape only in the last few decades with the inclusion of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders III in 1980. This was primarily an attempt to explain and diagnose the lingering mental and behavioral effects of the Vietnam War on its veterans. Shortly after, feminists adopted the terminology in order to allow them to discuss the effects of rape and childhood sexual abuse on women. The use of PTSD as a diagnosis and representation of traumatic
response has been one that has primarily occurred within the mental health professions and social sciences. Judith Herman and Laura Brown, for example, write specifically about treatment modalities for practicing therapists. Their unique contribution to the field, and one that directly influences my work, is the bridging between the publicly acknowledged traumas of war and the Holocaust, for example, and the private traumas often experienced by women and children. My project, too, attempts to equally acknowledge the validity and severity of both public and private traumas; however, rather than locating my discourse within the social sciences or behavioral health arenas, I use these concepts to look at the way that traumatic effects become apparent within cultural productions. In order to enter into and move this critical conversation forward, however, I focus my readings specifically on those productions that utilize gothicism as a mode of traumatic expression and connect this mode to discourse on queerness—discourse that is engaged in a conflict between reestablishing heteronormative metanarratives and using the aftermath of trauma as an opportunity for reimagining those marginalizing schemas.

As I have outlined above, Chapter One, “From Queer Gothic to Gothic Queer,” will describe and explore the work done by queer theorists that is infused with gothic symbols and concepts. This is not to be an outline of the theorists who have worked through Gothic literature in order to address issues of queerness. Instead, this chapter will read those theorists who are writing pieces dedicated to issues of gender and sexuality and who adopt gothic terminology, symbolism, and figures as illustrative examples or productive terminologies. After beginning with Freud’s “Psychoanalytic Notes Upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)” because of its
accepted status as both a seminal work in the field of sexology and for its gothic elements, I will move on to explore more contemporary theorists of gender and sexuality who utilize gothicism such as Lee Edelman, Karen Tongson, and Judith (Jack) Halberstam, considering the historical and social forces to which they are responding, the extent to which trauma impacts their work, and how they fit into the historical framework I will use for the remainder of my project. This chapter is designed to establish gothic queer theory as a specific theoretical mode, an assumption that I will rely on throughout the remaining chapters. It will also serve as a theoretical toolbox in which I will set up the theories that will be informing my reading of American cultural productions throughout the rest of the text.

After Chapter One, each subsequent chapter will be organized around a specific gothic trope and located within a specific traumatic history, whether personal or cultural. Chapter Two, “Body Text: Sadism, Masochism, and Traumatic Narrative Assault,” explores the appearance of sadism and masochism in the work of playwright, Migdalia Cruz, and performance artist, Ron Athey, as a reaction to personal trauma. Although I characterize the traumas at work here as “personal,” I complicate the binary of personal versus cultural trauma by introducing the concept of insidious trauma as one that is simultaneously personal and caused by oppressive social structures and policies. Sadomasochism, I claim, can be used to work through insidious personal trauma in productive, even activist, ways—potentially leading to a more fluid, less rigidly hegemonic social consciousness.
Chapter Three, “Live Burial/Queer History,” explores the concept of live burial as it relates to melancholia, loss, and the development of queer subjects following the Watts riots of 1965 and the AIDS crisis. Here Judith Butler’s work on melancholia and the development of gendered subjects is central to my thinking as is Carla Freccero’s work on queer spectrality as a subversive mode of historiography. In this chapter, I pair Nina Revoyr’s *Southland*, as a text about live burial, queerness, raced subjectivity, and subversive histories in the aftermath of the Watts riots with Gil Cuadros’ text *City of God* as a narrative of queer subjectivity in the face of the AIDS crisis.

Chapter Four, “Containing the Beast: Containment Culture and the Golden Age of Lesbian Pulp,” depends on archival research of the popular lesbian paperback originals that became so popular during the cold war era. This chapter explores the way queer authors negotiated cold war narratives of containment as they worked to censor and alienate queer subjects during, what Alan Nadel calls, the post-World War II “containment culture” in which paranoia and surveillance dominated the popular imagination and were used by the U.S. government as a means of vigorously enforcing “normality,” sexual and otherwise.  

Considering how queer productions redeploy this cultural trend as a means for subversive resistance and identity formation, the chapter analyzes the juxtaposition of original cover images and copy with the content of the novels themselves.

Chapter Five, “Vampire Fantasy: Neoliberalism and the Undead in Post-9/11 Popular Culture,” explores the saturation of popular culture by the figure of the vampire, looking specifically at Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* saga and Charlaine Harris’ *Sookie*
Stackhouse series (on which HBO’s True Blood is based) as battlegrounds of gender and sexuality arising out of a post-9/11 cultural obsession with terrorism. Arguing that the decade following 9/11 was infused with a unique blend of neoliberal and neoconservative rationalities, this chapter reads these vampires as fantasy screens that represent this new worldview rather than challenge it. While vampires have historically functioned as subversive and dangerously erotic, the post-9/11 vampires instead function as idealized figures that elide the traumatic reality of 9/11 and its political and social aftermath. How is the post-9/11 vampire used to reestablish norms of hegemonic culture through the threat of the vampire as terrorist? Which is preferable in the context of queer theory—a pragmatist vampire or a terrorist one?

Through my work in this project, my goal is to address the experiences of subjects who encounter intersecting modes of oppression while simultaneously extending the conversation within queer theory and trauma theory as well as within the fields of American literature, theater, film, and art. The importance of inserting an, often elided, discussion of the violent realities of marginalized subjects while at the same time examining the potential for personal empowerment and social change through the reappropriation of gothicism as queer discourse is the foundation of my project. Hopefully, through this work, I can help to exhume those queer monsters who are buried within America’s cultural productions yet insist on haunting our popular imagination.
CHAPTER ONE

From Queer Gothic to Gothic Queer

In a move that itself models the embedded nature of gothic texts, this chapter will attempt to unpack the language of queer theory texts that are working to unpack the intricacies and overdeterminations of queer bodies, subjectivities, and discourses within mainstream culture. Asking why the gothic almost casually appears and reappears in theories of gender and sexuality and what, exactly, is queer about gothicism, I will return to Julia Kristeva’s theory of the abject as a central feature of this mode of discourse. The nature of Kristeva’s abject is, itself, both gothic and inherently queer, making it a theoretical foundation on which one can, uncannily, map most gothic queer theory.

First, however, it is important to establish my use of the term “queer” and to expand on the established queer nature of Gothic literature in order to provide a foundation from which to shift into my discussion of gothic queer theory. I use the term “queer” in this project primarily to refer to any behavior, embodiment, identity, or aesthetic of gender and/or sexuality that is non-normative within its cultural context. This serves as a term that encapsulates the broad range of identities and behaviors that resist dominant notions of gender and/or sexuality while it acknowledges a kind of fluidity that the categorical term “LGBT” does not. As a verb, “to queer” appears in certain discussions as a term less firmly grounded in, but still highly related to, gender and sexuality since the adjectival notion of “queer” serves as an analogy for the verb “to queer.” In other words, one can “queer” any type of dominant ideology by reimagining
the ideology and deploying that revision as a cultural subversion in the same way as, say, the gay and lesbian community has reimagined the normative notion of romantic coupling. While these cultural reimaginings are often related to notions of gender and sexuality, I use “queering” to describe any alternative practice or conception that resists dominant narratives and structures.

Studies of Gothic literature often locate queerness in both senses deployed by this project—as expressions of non-normative gender and sexuality and as the subversion of dominant social (and often literary) structures. In Gothic Fiction/Gothic Form, George Haggerty outlines some of the formal conventions of eighteenth century Gothic literature, otherwise known as modern romance by writers and critics of the period. He claims that Gothic literature is primarily an “affective form” that is concerned with the objective manifestation of psychic realities that are often inexpressible by other means. This results in a novelistic form that was highly unconventional for its historical moment and that often challenged established notions of meaning—Gothic fiction, in other words, is notoriously indeterminate and “structured so as to heighten this multiplicity of interpretive possibilities.” Fred Botting and Dale Townshend note that it was commonly thought that the “Cartesian distinctions between the body and the mind are unsettled” through reading of the Gothic genre, corrupting young readers and undermining structures of authority within society. The genre was also thought to have disrupted the eighteenth century notions of aesthetics, “rendering aesthetic borders unclear and stimulating unlimited imaginative expansion” in contrast to the Classical aesthetics of symmetry and order, leading to the designation of the form as monstrous.
deformation of form combined with the challenging of meaning brought about by the excesses of the genre combine to create eighteenth century Gothic fiction that is inherently queer since it challenges established structures—both social and generic—as well as meaning itself, not to mention the sexually transgressive themes that serve as hallmarks of the genre.

Haggerty further explores the queerness of gothic fiction in his later work by arguing that the indeterminacy of meaning in the gothic results from its “uncanny structure,” or the ubiquitous “shadow-presence of the real” and the “distortions of the symbolic.”

In other words, the repeated themes, the multiplicity of interpretations, and often the apparent critical failure of gothic literature lies in its obsession with, what Slavoj Žižek terms, the Real, or the traumatic “kernel” that defies symbolization. This leads Gothic writers to perform a compulsive revisiting of cultural “primal scenes” that are invariably queer, creating a genre of literature that actually provides a new kind of history of sexuality that predates Freud and that is infinitely more complex than accepted notions of the history of sexuality.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick also famously began her career by locating queerness in Gothic literature. Her early work *The Coherence of Gothic Convention* focuses almost exclusively on the formal conventions of Gothic literature, identifying themes such as the “unspeakable” and “live burial” and exploring their function within canonical Gothic texts. The groundbreaking work, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, serves as a bridge between her Gothic literary criticism and her later fame as queer theory scholar. She illustrates the concepts of homosocial desire, triangulation, and
homosexual panic through readings of English culture, “chiefly as embodied in the mid-eighteenth- to mid-nineteenth-century novel.” While not all of the literary texts she uses are Gothic, she devotes two chapters to the discussion and reading of Gothic literature because “the Gothic was the first novelistic form in England to have close, relatively visible links to male homosexuality” and because it “seems to offer a privileged view of individual and family psychology.” These specific elements of Gothic literature allowed her to explore both the function of queerness within the texts and the way that the texts themselves reflect larger cultural trends as they relate to genders and sexualities.

Sedgwick deconstructs Gothic literature, identifying its sexually transgressive aspects and reflecting on the larger cultural trends that they imply.

Judith (Jack) Halberstam’s Skin Shows also works to find illustrations of queerness within Gothic literature although his notions of the gothic extend far beyond eighteenth century British literature. Halberstam instead traces gothicism from nineteenth century Gothic texts such as Frankenstein and Dracula through twentieth century horror films such as The Texas Chainsaw Massacre and Silence of the Lambs, defining the gothic as a “technology of subjectivity, one which produces the deviant subjectivities opposite which the normal, the healthy, and the pure can be known.” This technology works by “produc[ing] fear and desire within the reader” through the excess of meaning, or “interpretive mayhem,” the representation of which becomes embodied in the figure of the monster. He traces the figure of the monster within gothic texts in order to illustrate the way these figures are marked by signs of “deviant race, class and gender” in nineteenth century texts and “deviant sexualities and gendering but less clearly the signs
of class or race” within twentieth century texts. Halberstam clearly identifies and theorizes the role of the monster in several nineteenth and twentieth century gothic texts as it represents various, historically contingent, notions of otherness. Sedgwick, Halberstam, and Haggerty, then, all identify the queer aspects of Gothic literature and eventually conclude that this display of queerness works to shore up historical notions of the “normal” while simultaneously reveling in the queer. There is no doubt, however, that the proliferation and popularity of the queer gothic texts they analyze speak to the public desire for the depiction of transgressive genders and sexualities—whether for the purposes of representation or for the purposes of censure and marginalization.

How do these explorations of the gothic contribute to my attempt to propose a gothic mode of queer theory? First, they provide a rich theoretical testament to the way that queerness and the gothic are linked, allowing me to make a necessary critical reversal from queer gothic to gothic queer theory. Second, outlining these thoughtful examinations of gothic literature has established some of the basic features of gothic form and content that will reappear throughout this project. Finally, within this conversation are the seeds that have led to me to propose gothic queer theory as a critical discourse interlaced with notions of trauma and the abject.

Julia Kristeva’s groundbreaking work on abjection, *Powers of Horror*, describes the abject in relation to the psychosexual development of the individual and the notion of taboo within cultures. On the developmental level, the traumatic moment in which the child individuates from the maternal body leads to a sense of “becoming an other at the expense of my own death,” and the simultaneous desire to return to this original sense of
oceanic wholeness is tempered by the fact that a return destroys the subjecthood created by the process of abjection. 27 Objects that embody the liminality of this state by somehow destroying boundaries and/or challenging binaries become abject, and often taboo, within cultures. Elizabeth Grosz describes these abject entities as that which is “undecidably [sic] inside and outside the body (like the skin of milk), dead and alive (like the corpse), autonomous and engulfing (like infection and pollution). It is what disturbs identity, system and order, disrupting the social boundaries demanded by the symbolic.” 28 In a “vortex of summons and repulsion,” individuals and societies respond to the abject with simultaneous horror and fascination because of this categorical disruption that is reminiscent of the moment of individuation when “self” and “other” do not yet exist as differentiated concepts. 29

As a dialectical site of becoming, the abject has served as a critical tool for theorizing the productive possibilities of the marginalized, disgusting, and disturbing, and as such theories of the abject are certainly relevant in the consideration of gothic tropes within queer theory. In fact The Abject of Desire, a 2007 compilation by Konstanze Kutzbach and Monika Mueller, speaks to the continuing theoretical deployment of abjection and the abject as a means of examining sexuality, gender, and identity. In their introduction to this collection, Kutzbach and Mueller claim that “aestheticizing the unaesthetic” in cultural productions can be read using Kristeva’s abject as a social theory. 30 They claim to have chosen the essays to illustrate that “different manifestations of the abject/abjection relate to a negotiable and flexible sign system within which they produce various representations of gender between conservative and progressive
approaches,” and they go on to argue “as different as these representations may be, they all reference identity as dependent on an unequivocally dialectic relationship of fear and desire.” While this collection works to connect identity, gender, and sexuality with the abject, it is notable that the essays are almost consistently tinged with what could easily be termed gothic—haunting, bodies-as-technology (reminiscent of Frankenstein’s creature), lesbian vampires, werewolves, and sexualized murder. This unmentioned element of the collection indicates a relevant critical intersection (or perhaps a collapse) of topics. Kristeva’s theory of the abject—with its focus on the becoming subject, the maternal, and desire—is certainly central to many ideas of gender and sexual identity, but it also becomes clear that it is also highly bound to gothicism because it illustrates that (gothic) horror is a powerful way to both theorize and to queer subjectivity. The horror of the abject stems from the disruption of boundaries that places the one “haunted by it literally beside himself”—a horror that queers not only identity but also one’s understanding of reality itself. Theories that deploy the gothic as a means of negotiating queerness are unified by their dependence on the horror of the abject, and thus the abject is a common foundational element of the gothic queer theory that I am proposing here.

The dependence upon abject gothic tropes within discussions of sexuality is nowhere more apparent than in Sigmund Freud’s work. As arguably one of the most influential early writers on sexological theory, Freud’s work is filled with gothic tropes that he uses specifically to explore and explain transgressive, or queer, sexuality, but beyond this gothic content, one can read many of Freud’s written texts as, themselves, gothic in structure. “Psychoanalytic Notes Upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case
of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoïdes)” is an oddly unconventional case study in which Freud analyzes a man named Dr. Daniel Paul Schreber who exhibits paranoid nervous disorders. It is important to note, however, that Dr. Schreber is not a patient of Freud’s, but that Freud performs his entire analysis based on Dr. Schreber’s written autobiographical account of his struggles with paranoia and hypochondria (Denkwürdigkeiten eines Nervenkranken). Like the theorists outlined above, Freud is performing a close reading of a piece of literature in order to understand and explain the forces at work in the text, and this creates a labyrinthine piece of writing that flaunts conventions of both literature and psychoanalysis and defies generic categorization.

Paranoia itself is a hallmark of the gothic, so an entire text dedicated to the explanation of paranoia and the close reading of paranoid symptoms relies on unmistakably gothic imagery and themes. Freud finds this case of paranoia intriguing, however, specifically because it serves to illustrate his emerging theory that “a defence [sic] against a homosexual wish was clearly recognizable at the very centre of the conflict which underlay the disease [paranoia].”\(^{34}\) The gothic trope of paranoia, then, is used here as a means of exploring and expressing the nature of repressed homosexual desire.

Freud’s text is sexuality theory that uses gothicism as its expressive vehicle, and beyond the example of paranoia, the case of Dr. Schreber is decidedly gothic in form and content. In this way, Freud has both written a gothic text that highlights transgressive sexuality, and he has written a piece of queer theory that explores notions of sexuality through the use of gothic tropes and conventions—he quite possibly is the pivot upon which one can locate the move from queer gothic to gothic queer.
A prime example of gothic queer theory, as I will show, Schreber also functions as a queer gothic text. Freud’s unusual choice to produce analysis from a published text rather than from actual patient interaction creates a piece of writing that is not only unconventional for its historical moment and within its discipline, but also is deeply (and sometimes bewilderingly) embedded with multiple voices and narratives. This creates a text that is strangely similar in form to Gothic literature from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Concerned with communicating affect—by presenting and interpreting Schreber’s feelings and motivations—Freud presents the manifestations of Schreber’s psychic realities in the “Case History” section of the text. Dr. Schreber’s bout of hypochondria, his appearances before the mirror “wearing sundry feminine adornments,” his feelings of “voluptuousness” that often accompany the “call to sh—,” are first presented to the readers and then later interpreted as physical manifestations of Schreber’s affective state—a move that reflects the supernatural manifestation of affect that can be found in Gothic texts. In addition to the text’s unconventional nature and its use of supernatural physical events as representations of affect, Freud embeds Schreber’s narrative within his own by beginning the piece with an introduction justifying his use of the autobiography, moving into a “Case History” section in which he narrates Schreber’s story using extended quotes from the autobiography (creating a kind of dual narration), then providing a second narrative of the events in the “Attempts at Interpretation” section, and finally ending with a generalization developed from this case in the section entitled “On the Mechanism of Paranoia.” Within this convoluted narrative, the lines between Freud’s voice and Schreber’s become quite blurry at times since Freud moves between
voicing his own position as narrator and voicing the reasoning behind Schreber’s neurosis as if the irrational logic were his own:

The behavior of God in the matter of the “call to sh—“ (the need for evacuating the bowels) rouses him to a specially high pitch of indignation. The passage is so characteristic that I will quote it in full. But to make it clear, I must first explain that both the miracles and the voices proceeded from God, that is, from the divine rays.36

At the beginning of this passage, it is clear through the use of third person that Freud is summarizing Schreber’s beliefs and feelings, and his position as a kind of omniscient narrator is quite overt when he explains that he will “quote” a passage from the autobiography “in full.” The following sentence, however, does not maintain this authorial distance when it lapses into clarifying Schreber’s logic as if it were a matter of fact (“both the miracles and voices proceeded from God”) and without qualifying the statement with any language such as “Schreber believes” or “Schreber claims.” While the first two sentences in this passage are clearly proceeding from Freud’s position as narrator/analyst, the final sentence could just as easily have been written by Schreber himself. This slippage of narrative voice occurs throughout the text—at one point, Freud even interrupts the narrative of Schreber with a story of another patient in order to illustrate what he calls “the father-complex”—and this calls to mind those Gothic novels, Melmoth the Wanderer, The Monk, and Frankenstein for example, in which lengthy embedded stories are narrated within embedded stories, often stalling the main narrative and causing the reader to lose sight of the dominant narrative voice.
Beyond these embedded, convoluted narratives and the gothic nature of paranoia as a subject, the text itself exhibits a kind of paranoid structure that may very well find its roots in the gothic. James Hogg’s *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* is considered a key example of what Sedgwick terms the “paranoid Gothic,” or those novels that include paranoid homosexual content as a means of reinscribing homophobia and reinstating “prohibition and control.” Published in 1824, Hogg’s novel is divided into three sections, all of which attempt to communicate the same set of events but from different narrative perspectives—first, an “Editor’s Narrative” conveys the events from an outsider’s point of view, then an “original document” is inserted providing an autobiographical account of the same events, followed by the editor attempting to justify the account with various rumors and theories quoted from (an apparently inaccurate) letter supposedly written by a man named James Hogg and eventually excavating a grave site at which he discovers the autobiographical document that he had presented in the previous section of the text. The structure of this text exhibits a multiplicity of nearly undifferentiated narrative voices and an account of a single event from multiple perspectives, one of which is an autobiographical account and the others as told by the editor but stemming from information gathered in a fictional sleuthing and interpretive process. This structure is almost identically mirrored in Freud’s text, which is a compilation of autobiography and outside interpretation, having been divided into multiple sections that serve to tell and retell a single set of events.

While both Hogg’s and Freud’s texts are overtly written to explain and interpret a case of paranoia, the texts themselves come into focus as paranoid in form. When
explaining paranoia as a neurosis, Freud notes that splitting, or “decomposition” is a central characteristic of paranoia that follows a sense of catastrophe stemming from the withdrawal of homosexual libidinal cathexes that are considered inappropriate. “*The delusion-formation,*” he goes on to note, “*is in reality an attempt at recovery, a process of reconstruction.*”\(^{38}\) The paranoid “decomposition” and “reconstruction” of narrative is certainly present in the fractured, multiple structures of both *Justified Sinner* and “Psychoanalytic Notes,” making them not only texts *about* paranoia but texts that *embody* paranoia in their gothic form—an embodiment that serves to illustrate and explain the complexities of non-normative identity formations and that are themselves queer because of the way they challenge conventions and highlight the contingency of meaning, and even reality. Both are certainly examples of queer gothic.

Freud, however, is also writing as a theorist of sexuality who uses gothicism as an effective means of describing, understanding, and theorizing queerness—a gothic queer theorist. In order to develop and illustrate a theory of homosexuality and gender transgression, Freud chooses to analyze Schreber’s narrative over any other available documented case of paranoia. Like queer gothic theorists Haggerty, Sedgwick, Halberstam and many others, Freud has chosen to close read and analyze Schreber’s memoir, a decidedly gothic text. Containing descriptions of Schreber’s “dead and decomposing” body, his notion that he was both in communication with God and “the plaything of devils,” and the allusion to necrophilia in which Schreber imagined his “soul was to be murdered” and his “body used like a strumpet” by God who “was only accustomed to intercourse with corpses,”\(^{39}\) Schreber’s autobiography contains the gothic
elements of decay, necrophilia, and demonic manipulation that can be found in Gothic novels such as Matthew Lewis’ *The Monk* and Charlotte Dacre’s *Zofloya*. Beyond the reading of Schreber’s gothic text, however, Freud’s piece utilizes the gothic mode in order to theorize homosexuality and transgender behavior, and although these theories are rudimentary and flawed in many ways, they find their expression through the gothic tropes contained within the text.

One noteworthy section of the Freud’s text contains an extended discussion of the paranoid notion of “catastrophe” as a response to homosexual desire. As I mentioned earlier, Freud posits that the idea of catastrophe stems from the withdrawing of forbidden libidinal cathexes from the paranoid subject’s environment. For the homosexual subject, the forced detachment from his objects of desire results in a sense of “internal catastrophe” since “his subjective world has come to an end since he has withdrawn his love from it.” The delusions of paranoia arise as a process of reconstruction, or the rebuilding of the subject’s sense of reality in relation to the surrounding world. While Freud does not identify it as such, what he is describing here is a process of traumatic fragmentation for a queer subject whose desires are deemed pathological and unacceptable by his culture. Threatened by social rejection, institutionalization, juridical punishment, and even physical violence, a queer subject in Schreber’s time and place might certainly exhibit the kind of fragmentation that characterizes those who suffer from insidious trauma, or the development of traumatogenic symptoms that arise from the internalized threat of social violence and marginalization. The process of traumatic fragmentation, or dissociation, followed by the drive to somehow reconstruct what was shattered becomes a common
narrative in studies of trauma, and this process could very well be mapped on to what Freud describes as “catastrophe” followed by “delusion-formation” in paranoid neurosis. Further, the socially motivated trauma here mirrors the trauma of abjection in which one’s notions of self in relation to the world are fundamentally challenged by the abjection of, or removal of catexes from, the maternal. The result of the process of abjection creates a kind of paranoid symptom because the disruption of signification stemming from this liminal state places one in conflict with (while simultaneously desiring) the abject, which is also somehow the self. The result of this is a traumatic fracturing of the subject that places one “literally beside himself”—a narrative that is common to both paranoia and traumatogenic reactions.

I am in no way attempting to justify Freud’s pathologization of homosexuality or to pathologize traumatogenic reactions. Instead, I am attempting to point to the way that paranoia as a metaphor of abjection is working within Freud’s text as a gothic mode arising as a means of explaining the trauma of marginalized queer identity. Freud’s discussion of gothic paranoia rooted in abjection serves as a vehicle (unintentionally perhaps) for addressing the traumatic realities of non-normative gender and sexual identities and behaviors, and with this the text transitions from a queer gothic text to an early example of gothic queer theory.

In more contemporary examples of gothic queer theory, the relationship between queer gothic and gothic queer is not so muddy. In fact, contemporary queer theory is often merely infused with gothicism—Gothic literature does not serve as a source for its primary examples, and it often does not explicitly engage with theories of the gothic.
Instead, gothicism often lurks under the surface, popping through the text in moments when its metaphoric power is needed to describe or theorize a concept, but the texts that I identify as gothic queer theory are certainly far removed from the work of the queer gothic theorists outlined above in that they are rooted firmly in gender and sexuality studies. However gothicism, inevitably, finds a way to haunt these texts and theories.

In 1978, the year in which *The History of Sexuality* was published in the United States, Michel Foucault discovered and published the memoirs of Herculine Barbin, a “Nineteenth Century French Hermaphrodite” in order to highlight the development of medical and juridical notions of “true sex” as an inherent and identifiable identity. Rather than simply including the memoirs themselves, Foucault includes an introduction, the memoir, a “dossier” of various documents, medical, and press reports, and a fictional story based on the memoirs of Herculine Barbin. The similarity in form to both Hogg’s novel and Freud’s case study on paranoia is striking with its multiple narrative tellings and retellings of a single event. But beyond this, Foucault has included documents created by the doctors who examined Barbin both during her life and after her death in order to demonstrate that the experience stemming from her “monstrous” physicality was largely a result of developing notions of “true sex” as a medically diagnosable identity determined both by physical characteristics and sexual desires. At one point, he claims, society believed that hermaphrodites simply had two sexes. A paternal figure determined which gender they would function as until they became marriageable and then they could decide whether to remain their assigned gender or switch, giving the hermaphrodite a certain degree of agency. During the nineteenth century, this decision was made for the
hermaphrodite by a medical authority with the implication that a true sex existed beneath the ambiguous physicality to be discovered and documented. As noted in the “dossier” section of the text, the medical study of these cases was called “teratology,” or the “science of monstrosities,” but Foucault positions himself against the negative coding of the monstrous by glorifying the ambiguity of Barbin’s gender and sexual (non)identity preceding the teratological examination at twenty-two in which the doctors determined her true sex to be male. He calls this the “happy limbo of non-identity” and praises the fact that the “narrative baffles every possible attempt to make an identification” and rests more firmly on affect than on sexual identity.

These pages are the seeds from which Foucault developed his groundbreaking theories on the emergence of sexual identity. In fact, he introduces the documents pertaining to Barbin’s case by claiming that the “question of strange destinies” such as hers “will be dealt with in the volume of *The History of Sexuality* that will be devoted to hermaphrodites.” In this compilation of materials, the social urge to marginalize and objectify those who cannot be easily categorized in terms of normative gender and/or sexuality becomes clear as one reads the medical documents that describe Barbin’s genital structures and secretions in graphic detail as a scientific account devoted to the study of teratology, but this very approach is reappropriated by Foucault in an attempt to theorize a kind of sexuality that is not tied to notions of a single, true sex. His adoption of Barbin’s monstrously coded body as a symbol of a desirable non-identity, or perhaps more accurately, pre-identity stems partially from the very aspects that caused it to be marginalized during her time. The abject ambiguity of a subject who defies binaries and
troubles notions of gender and sexuality prompts medical and juridical discourses to deploy the gothic notion of monstrosity as a justification for their intrusion and reassignment, and this very same abject ambiguity is redeployed by Foucault as a symbol of what subjectivity might look like outside of these discourses.

He does not avoid monstrous terms such as “chimera” to describe contemporary queerness in relation to Barbin’s text. Instead, the implication of hybridity and ambiguity that accompanies the image of monstrosity serves as a queer reminder of the limits of binary linguistic structures. He mentions in a footnote that Barbin’s systematized use of gendered pronouns in the memoir “does not seem to describe a consciousness of being a woman becoming a consciousness of being a man” but instead serves as an “ironic reminder of grammatical, medical, and juridical categories that language must utilize but that the content of the narrative contradicts.” In other words, the use of language exists within yet contradicts the content of the narrative, and I would argue that the multiplicity of the narratives that Foucault has compiled functions in a similar manner—ironically juxtaposing the purpose of the original documents with the contradictory purpose of Foucault’s publication. In its hybridity and ironic reappropriation of the medical discourses of monstrosity that marginalized Barbin and led to her suicide, Foucault’s text disrupts meaning by calling attention to the multiple interpretive possibilities of Barbin’s body, her memoir, and the documents that circulated around her. He utilizes both gothic form and the monstrous to highlight the queer potential located in Barbin’s existence, and because of this move I would categorize this text as an example of gothic queer theory.
Lee Edelman’s *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, like Foucault’s publication of Barbin’s memoir, is a text that never explicitly alludes to gothic literature but frequently employs gothic tropes in order to explain and illustrate his concept of queerness, or *sinthomosexual*ity. Edelman claims that contemporary culture is dominated by the ideology of reproductive futurity—the idea that all decisions must be made with the future generation of children in mind and that is characterized by terms that “impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations.” Any position one takes within this ideology cannot be resistant or subversive, cannot be truly queer, yet taking a position that resists reproductive futurity itself risks the accusation of being against children. Queer theory, he claims “marks the ‘other’ side of politics: the ‘side’ where narrative realization and derealization overlap, where the energies of vitalization ceaselessly turn against themselves; the ‘side’ outside all political sides, committed as they are on every side, to futurism’s unquestioned good.” The value of queer theory and queerness in general, he claims, should not be cast in terms of “some positive social value; its value, instead, resides in its challenge to value as defined by the social, and thus in its radical challenge to the very value of the social itself.” In this definition, one can begin to see some vague similarities between Edelman’s queerness and the origins of the gothic genre in that they both pose a deep threat to conventional notions of social order and value. In fact, Edelman goes on to describe the threatening function of queerness in relation to meaning itself when he notes that “whatever refuses
this mandate by which our political institutions compel the collective reproduction of the Child must appear as a threat not only to the organization of a given social order but also, and far more ominously, to social order as such, insofar as it threatens the logic of futurism on which meaning always depends.”\textsuperscript{51} Through its excess, its alienation from the ideology of reproductive futurity, queerness challenges meaning itself because it is simultaneously empty and overdetermined—a status that certainly recalls the multiplicity of interpretive possibilities that characterizes gothic form.

Homosexuality is frightening to mainstream culture because it represents a rejection of this ideology of reproductive futurity—queers embrace pleasure without regard to reproduction or future generations of children. As a result, queers come to represent the death drive; queerness functions “as a name for the death drive that always informs the symbolic order, it also names the jouissance forbidden by, but permeating, the Symbolic order itself.”\textsuperscript{52} Queers, then, are sinthomosexuals—the sinthome being that which “connects us to the unsymbolizable Thing over which we constantly stumble, and so, in turn, to the death drive,”\textsuperscript{53} and the sinthomosexual being those queers who embrace their own fantasy structures, their sinthomes, while revealing that these structures are, in fact, fantasies thereby providing a glimpse into the Real and exposing the meaninglessness of that fantasy structure. In other words, they expose the ideologies on which people base their existences as merely fantasy, subverting the closed debate of reproductive futurity through their identification with the death drive and indulgence in jouissance.
Through the figure of the *sinthomosexual*, Edelman introduces a decidedly gothic element into his text. As representatives of the death drive, *sinthomosexuals* become a kind of uncanny, undead figure in Edelman’s text. The uncanny, or *unheimlich*, is famously described by Freud, but it is a phenomenon that frequently appears as a gothic device since it so strongly “arouses dread and horror.” Edelman quotes Žižek’s explanation that the death drive itself “functions in exactly the same way as ‘heimlich’ in the Freudian *unheimlich*, as coinciding with its negation” making the death drive representative of “what horror fiction calls the ‘undead,’ a strange, immortal, indestructible life that persists beyond death.” Queers, then, become figures of the undead, like vampires or Frankensteinian monsters, because they represent death in life, challenging the neat separation of oppositional binaries and exposing that very structure as, itself, a fiction. Further, as a positionality that sheds light on the fantasy of reproductive futurity, *sithomosexuality* is uncanny because it “offers us fantasy turned inside out, the seams of its costume exposing reality’s seamlessness as mere seaming, the fraying knots that hold each sequin in place now usurping that place.” In other words, *sinthomosexuals* turn the sequined fabric of society’s fantasy structure inside out to reveal the knotted underbelly—to make what was once familiar and homelike horrifically exposed as something foreign and constructed, uncanny because of the hidden nature it reveals. This frightening, threatening function “haunts” heteronormative society, and by extension the contemporary cult of the Child, with the constant possibility that it will expose what has been repressed within society. *Sinthomosexuals*, then, are the “unacknowledged ghosts that always haunt the social machinery.” With this language,
Edelman’s *sinthomosexual* circulates throughout the text not only as an undead figure, haunting the text just as it haunts heteronormative society, but also as a figure that is simultaneously disturbing and productive due to its abject liminality. Like Kristeva’s corpse, both living and dead, repressed and returned, necessary and repugnant, these figures are threatening to dominant culture because they force people to recognize the fantasy structures that govern their existence.

As one may note from some of the above quotes, Edelman’s text is filled with word play, which creates sentences overdetermined by the multiplicity of possible interpretations. In other words, Edelman puns mercilessly in this text—a choice that is clearly intentional but one that is, perhaps unintentionally, gothic in form. Halberstam identifies punning as a specifically gothic narrative device “employed repeatedly within both nineteenth-century Gothic novels and twentieth-century Gothic cinema” in order to provide some “light (very light) relief to the dark dramas of blood and mutilation.”

According to Halberstam, punning, has an economy of meaning—a single word may have multiple interpretive possibilities—and as a result the punned sentence embodies an excess of meaning and often causes meanings to slip into their opposite, making “mincemeat out of any notion of binaries.” He notes that “puns posit a surface relation but absolutely eschew a depth relation,” and this observation suddenly brings Edelman’s nearly excessive punning into focus as a gothic play of surfaces whose function is epistemological disruption. Like the undead and abject *sinthomosexual*, Edelman’s postmodern linguistic playfulness challenges meaning by drawing attention to the surface, or the words on the page, and foregrounds the pleasure of his indulgence in
the written word without apparent concern for the text’s accessibility. The gothic punning embodies the primacy of pleasure in the present, in the surface, while drawing attention to the fantasy that words can ever avoid slippage. Instead, Edelman’s words are designed to slip into one another, refusing “the Symbolic logic that determines the exchange of signifiers” and serving as the site where “meaning comes undone”—a perfect description of the sinthome itself but also a perfect reflection of the moment of abjection in which linguistic meaning rooted in binaries does not yet exist. While this meaning-confounding writing style may simply be a postmodern foregrounding of the written text or an intentional choice to model the theory that it describes, one could most certainly identify this move as an example of gothic queer theory. Gothic tropes and gothic forms have made their way into a text about queer theory, making it a prime example of this discursive mode.

_In a Queer Time and Place_, Halberstam’s book on the intersection of postmodernism, transgender bodies, and queer theory, also incorporates decidedly gothic elements. He first notes the absence of gender as a category of analysis within current work on sexuality and space, and in response to this void, Halberstam proposes a “new conception of space and sexuality” termed “technotopic.” A technotopic aesthetic is one that “tests technological potentialities against the limits of a human body anchored in time and space, and that powerfully reimagines the relations between the organic and the machinic, the toxic and the domestic, the surgical and the cosmetic,” and Halberstam locates the representation of transgender bodies in contemporary art as a productive arena for exploring this postmodern aesthetic while considering the elided category of gender.
He posits the transgender body as “an in-between body” that “retains the marks of its own ambiguity and ambivalence,” and this fairly broad conception allows for the theorization of ambiguous form within avant-garde contemporary art as specifically transgendered. “[T]he transgender body,” he continues, “performs self as a gesture not as will, a possibility and as an effect of deliberate misrecognition,” and with this description of the trans body as ambiguous and concerned with gesture and misrecognition, the function of transgender bodies within this text begin to reflect the gothic disruption of meaning and overdetermination of surfaces as well as the abject, with its binary collapse, as a space of becoming.

In his chapter on technotopic bodies, Halberstam describes the contemporary art piece The Art(ificial) Womb, by art research group SymbioticA in order to illustrate the transgender elements of mutation. SymbioticA’s project consists of “modern versions of the legendary Guatemalan Worry Dolls” that are “seeded with endothelial, muscle, and osteoblast cell (skin, muscle and bone tissue) that are grown over/into the polymers. The polymers degrade as the tissue grows. As a result the dolls become partially alive.” As the tissue grows in unexpected ways, the polymer decomposes creating a work of art that is unpredictably both human and other. The result is a piece of art that is not-dead and not-alive, part human and part plastic—technotopic. In growing a kind of new organ, this art is loosely transgendered, according to Halberstam, but it is also certainly abject, monstrous, and gothic. In fact, the descriptive language Halberstam uses—“semi-living,” “grotesque little conglomerates,” with “Frankensteinian form”—clearly evokes the gothic within his discussion of postmodern spacio-temporality.
Monstrosity and the grotesque often function together as paired concepts, but Halberstam’s use of the term grotesque to describe these hybrid creatures reflects theories of the grotesque and point toward the intersection of hybridity, monstrosity, and queerness that often occurs when considering the grotesque. Geoffrey Galt Harpham explains that hybrid creatures are nearly always associated with the words “monster, object or thing” because this in-between state “designates a condition of being just out of focus, just beyond the reach of language” due to its “irreducible queerness.”67 The worry dolls represent “ambiguous states of being that can be summarized as transgender” because they are in the process of becoming something different without engaging in the myth of a predictable end point that might reinforce binary thinking.68 They embody in-betweenness without a destination, and this state of being begins to collapse with the grotesque and the monstrous because the grotesque is a class of objects that “occupies multiple categories or . . . falls between categories.” Often grotesque objects are portrayed as part animal part human, but this description is insufficient because, as Harpham claims, grotesque objects cause a “paralysis of language” since they are something beyond what the mere listing of the various parts can convey, and they challenge the binary structure of language itself.69 Once again, Kristeva’s notion of the abject as a space of ambiguity in which language is confounded and meaning is both disrupted and produced becomes a lens through which one can read this turn toward the grotesque and the monstrous in queer theory.70 Since the abject is that location of differentiation from the maternal in which the notion of self and other is not yet existent, a linguistic system based on subject and object fails to describe it, so it represents a
threatening challenge to established modes of knowing and being. This is the very role played by the queer figures that I have described above (both Edelman’s *sinthomosexuals* and Halberstam’s transgendered bodies), so the abject nature of queerness lends itself to gothic representation on multiple levels—in the turn toward the grotesque, the uncanny, and the monstrous as well as in the turn toward gothic form as a means of queering language through the play of surfaces and indeterminacy of meaning.

While Karen Tongson’s essay, “The Light That Never Goes Out: Butch Intimacies and Sub-Urban Sociabilities in ‘Lesser Los Angeles,’” does not evoke such strikingly gothic imagery as Halberstam’s grotesque worry dolls, its gothic nature lurks within the queer spaces that she describes. Tongson juxtaposes the “vertical and bustling metropolis” that serves as the center of queer life in the popular imaginary with the spaces of “lesser Los Angeles” from which emerge “narratives of queer of color sociability and self-creation beyond the vertical metropolis in lands of sprawl.” Through the performance art of the *Butchlalis de Panochtitlan* (BdP), Tongson illustrates her critique of “metronormativity” as a facet of urban gentrification. Whereas white urban queers and creative classers are on the forefront of urban gentrification, “classed, raced, and gendered bodies” embody a “temporal belatedness” (based on Elizabeth Freeman’s concept of “temporal drag”) in relation to space and trends. She claims that “Race, class, and specific incarnations of female masculinity like butchness—especially racialized forms of butchness—continue to ‘burden’ queers with their stubborn attachments to certain styles, forms, histories, and narratives from elsewhere, from beyond the purview of the queer metropolis and its purported innovations.” The performances of BdP work
to acknowledge and reclaim this “drag” by embodying the subject position “from elsewhere, from beyond.” Tongson’s description of the BdP sketch, “Lolo and Perla Return to Avenge Klub Fantasy,” casts Lolo and Perla as the ghosts haunting “the ruins” of the once racialized queer space of Klub Fantasy at Nayarit in Echo Park, since it reopened as hipster venue The Echo. Lolo and Perla begin the sketch by dancing to “a banda party anthem” until they slowly realize that they are in—not the wrong place—but the wrong time. What was once a “lesbian Latina club. . . [or] a Latina lesbian club” has suddenly become “a punk rock dyke club,” and Lolo and Perla suddenly realize that they have been displaced. 74 Their reaction, rather than leaving the venue, is to “act out” against the “indifferent” punk rock dykes through tasteless jokes. Tongson points out that “Lolo and Perla transport themselves from the scenes of spatial conquest unfolding in the present tense by activating their own memories, their own retrospective fantasies about owning the scene back in the day.” 75 While Tonson provides this example as a means of illustrating the deployment of temporal drag by queers of color, one might note that this temporal drag places Lolo and Perla as subjects from the past—who continue to reside in the past through their “retrospective fantasies”—that haunt the current incarnation of their once racialized queer space. Temporal drag, then, causes the ghosting of racialized subjects who continue to occupy those spaces to which they were once relegated but from which they are now displaced and who react by acting out upon the indifferent punk rock dykes who do not even seem to see them. This is a narrative of haunting, of subjects who are out of step with white, straight, normative time.
With this ghosting trope in mind, Tongson’s opening and closing references to The Smith’s “Light that Never Goes Out” become quite resonant. She quotes the lyrics that glorify “mutual annihilation” on the way from “nowhere” to “somewhere” and implies that this illustrates the queer drive to move from the nowhere of the suburbs to the somewhere of the urban metropolis.\(^6\) However, by the end of the piece, she notes that for queer people of color it may not be about the destination but instead “about never getting there, never arriving at that somewhere” but instead “protecting the nowhere you call your own.”\(^7\) This casts queer people of color as those who are moving within a “nowhere” space, constantly threatened or perhaps already the victim of the traumatic annihilation promised by the lyric “And if a double-decker bus / Crashes into us/ To die by your side / Is such a heavenly way to die.”\(^8\) It is important to note that the ghosting that occurs here is the result of either an imagined trauma—the double decker bus—or a real one—the classed and raced social structures that place queer people of color within these “nowhere” spaces and then invade those spaces, alienating those who would like to remain attached to these places and histories. This trauma places Lolo and Perla in the abject, liminal space of the gentrified urban environment in which the trauma of containment and then displacement causes those who once occupied the space to lose their location in time and to become spectral as a result. While this spectralization may not elicit the kind of visceral horror that occurs with the monstrous or the grotesque, it does create a traumatic collapse of time and space in which boundaries blur and people “from elsewhere, from beyond” haunt the space that once contained them and that they once owned—an echo of the original traumatic displacement of abjection. Tongson’s
deployment of ghosting not only creates a gothic queer narrative, but it also serves to illustrate the traumatic indifference of white, queer urban gentrification to the racialized queers who occupied, and continue to haunt, those spaces to which they were once relegated—this spectral presence is an agential refusal to be either contained or displaced by the process of gentrification. The ghosting also becomes a source of empowerment for Tongson because it allows Lolo and Perla the agency to remain tied to those places and memories through their haunting presence, and it allows Tongson to propose an alternate understanding of queer time and space that is not dependent on whitewashed notions of metronormativity—one that instead circulates around community and the “inevitably aimless transport of accidental reverie” that dominates her revision of queer time and space as a journey without a destination.79

While the medical, juridical, and political community may use the monstrous and the grotesque to marginalize the queerness that threatens social meaning and while the violent indifference of queer urban gentrification may attempt to erase the presence of those queer subjects who threaten to collapse raced and classed spatial boundaries, these gothic queer theorists reappropriate the original trauma of the abject as one of both horror and of productive potential, opening up a gothic queer space that reimagines discourses dominated by heteronormative narratives about meaning, existence, and belonging. The use of gothic tropes by these theorists of gender and sexuality is located, then, in the traumatic power that horror has to shatter the fantasy of binaries, and in this way gothic tropes are redeployed by these theorists in order to illustrate the subversive and theoretically productive possibilities of a queerness that confounds,
or exposes the fantasies of, the existing hegemonic structures that work to marginalize and alienate queer subjects.
CHAPTER TWO

Body Text: Sadism, Masochism, and Traumatic Narrative Assault

In *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, Elaine Scarry describes three concentric conceptual circles: “the difficulty of expressing physical pain,” “the political and perceptual complications that arise as a result of that difficulty,” and “the nature of human creation.” To be in the center of one of these subjects is to be in the center of all of these subjects. She then goes on to claim that when one is in pain, the concept of pain itself is “‘effortlessly’ grasped”; whereas, when one is observing another in pain “what is ‘effortless’ is not grasping it.” I begin this chapter with these claims for two reasons. First, to talk about sadomasochism is to talk about pain and power, and Scarry’s theorizing of physical pain and its links to power is both germinal and iconic. If one is to think about pain one must begin with her. Second, the concentric circles she draws imply the inextricability of pain, power, and creation—a premise that guides my own thinking about the subject of sadomasochism and personal trauma. Rather than adhering faithfully to Scarry’s claims, however, I would like to riff on her repeated mantra: “To have pain is to have *certainty*; to hear about pain is to have *doubt*.” The notions of certainty and doubt, like other binary constructions, circulate fluidly in my work, and in this chapter I will be examining how survivors of personal trauma can, within the venue of performance, adopt the ritual use of pain in order to collapse, or queer, the notion of discrete identity and create the impetus for social change. While Scarry’s statement implies that pain creates, or reifies, the separation between self and other, I am
interested in how the public demonstration of pain can be used to appropriate and redeploy this paradoxical interpersonal relationship in order to work through trauma in productive, even activist, ways—potentially leading to a more fluid, less rigidly hegemonic social consciousness.

How exactly does pain create this fundamental disruption? Scarry explains that physical pain cannot be ignored, but at the same time one cannot effectively verbalize this sensation because “[p]hysical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned.” Therefore, to be the one in pain is to be unequivocally sure that the pain exists; whereas, to be the one who is merely a witness to another’s pain creates a sense of doubt, of distance. The one in anguish cannot describe the state, and the one witnessing this anguish cannot understand it. Indeed, the witness is often willfully immune to the other’s pain—a chasm opens up between the two until they are deeply alienated from one another, producing a distinct notion of self in oppositional relation to other. While Scarry insists that the characteristics of pain are strictly in relation to physical pain and do not represent psychological anguish in any way, this description is strikingly similar to theories on traumatogenic reactions. Scarry makes a point, however, to emphasize that while physical pain creates a communicative gulf between subjects because of its resistance to language “[p]sychological suffering, though often difficult for any one person to express, does have referential content, is susceptible to verbal objectification” and therefore is constantly being communicated through art and literature. Scarry sets up a binary, then,
that implies an oppositional distinction between physical and psychological pain on the basis of their respective abilities to be represented through language.

I believe that it is important to dislocate Scarry’s descriptions of the relational aspects of pain from an exclusive association with the corporeal, however, because of the way this distinction is challenged by some of the most contemporary thinking in trauma theory that casts trauma itself as the bridge between the psychological and the corporeal while simultaneously identifying its resistance to, and even destruction of, language. In his comprehensive overview of the field of trauma studies, Roger Luckhurst points out that, originating as a term for corporeal wounding and developing as a “metaphor of psychological ‘impact,’” the “meanings of trauma have stalled somewhere between the physical and psychical.” The paradoxical nature of trauma as both a marker of bodily harm or threat and mental wounding comes from the notion that the slippery, indefinable quality of trauma is characterized by its disruption of borders or boundaries. It cannot be easily categorized because it is inherently, and multivalently, liminal—a quality of trauma that Freud describes in Beyond the Pleasure Principle and that has been echoed throughout the field. Luckhurst describes trauma as “a piercing or breach of a border that puts inside and outside into a strange communication. Trauma violently opens passageways between systems that were once discrete, making unforeseen connections that distress or confound.” Cathy Caruth, a central figure in the development of trauma studies in the 1990s, also addresses the liminal nature of trauma as an “aporia,” or paradox, because the “force of this [traumatic] experience would appear to arise precisely, in other words, in the collapse of its understanding.” When one is exposed to a
traumatic event, the ability to neatly categorize the event and integrate it into a coherent understanding of existence is disrupted. The paradox, then, arises from trauma’s disruption of discrete categories of understanding. Since language is structured around a system of binaries, this liminality challenges language and disrupts one’s ability to effectively communicate the trauma through linguistic means, a quality that Luckhurst summarizes as “a crisis of representation” because the traumatic event is characterized by its very inability to be represented. Caruth characterizes the resulting collapse as “the radical disruption and gaps of traumatic experience” and claims that this disruptive paradox “brings us to the limits of our understanding.” Another layer to this paradox is that, in spite of the “crisis of representation” associated with trauma, the person who has experienced trauma is often driven to communicate the event and its subsequent effects resulting in an almost obsessive need for cathartic testimony. This aporetic nature is not simply due to the link between trauma and physical pain, as one might guess based on Scarry’s claims about physical pain and its resistance to representation, but the paradox arises from the fact that trauma disrupts boundaries on a broader scale due to its “insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time.” In this way, trauma defies linguistic representation as it simultaneously demands testimony and results in a kind of “unsharability” that is strongly reminiscent of Scarry’s description of the alienation resulting from purely physical pain.

In *The Unsayable: The Hidden Language of Trauma*, Annie Rogers, a clinical psychologist, explores this linguistic, communicative disruption resulting from traumatic experience and reiterates the survivor’s paradoxical need to testify and inability to do so
effectively. She explains her first-hand experience with survivors of childhood sexual abuse, the link between the physical and mental wounds they suffered and continue to suffer through treatment, and their inability to put their experience into language. She writes, “I saw what is so terrible about trauma is not abuse itself, no matter the brutality of treatment, but the way terror marks the body and then becomes invisible and inarticulate.”

Rogers’ extended case studies reveal that even within the clinical setting, the tie between physical pain, mental pain, and the destruction of language appears in a way that challenges Scarry’s neat distinction between physical and psychological pain. In order to help her young patients communicate their trauma, Rogers recognizes that direct, linguistic communication is impossible, and she instead focuses on the dislocated chains of seemingly unrelated, yet compulsively repeated, signifiers that provide clues about her patients’ traumatic histories. This text illustrates, with real-life, concrete examples, the aporia that Caruth describes. Trauma destroys language as well as the ability to communicate the extent of the wounding while at the very same time demanding that it is communicated as a means of processing the experience, or perhaps even as a means of basic survival. Because linguistic communication is not an option for most trauma survivors, the testimony circumvents language and is expressed in other, extra-linguistic, forms. In a clinical setting, this expression might be through cutting, selective mutism, or perpetrating the very same abuse that one experienced in a kind of intergenerational expression of trauma. However, this compulsion to repeatedly express an “unsayable” trauma may also take shape in art, music, sometimes poetry, and other more apparently productive forms of expression. Since the very nature of trauma is to disrupt boundaries,
it is prudent to suspend judgment about “healthy” versus “pathological” traumatogenic responses. Reactions to trauma, like the trauma itself, challenge this binary and force us to reconsider the convenient distinction between sick and healthy. Additionally, the introduction of trauma theory into the conversation about pain and linguistic expression should also challenge the binary that Scarry sets up between physical and psychical pain. Pain may challenge the relationship between subjects, but the psychical trauma associated with that pain also performs a similar function. The collapse of meaning that exists as a result of this physical/psychological bridge is not a new topic of literary, artistic, and theoretical discourse. Rather, because of this challenging complexity, pain and trauma have proven to be rich, if sometimes uncomfortable, subjects within cultural production and thought.

The subject of pain leads us inevitably toward the decidedly gothic concepts of sadism and masochism as highly ritualized, highly performative embodiments of pain, pleasure, and power. Sadism and masochism first entered the popular imagination through the violent and sexually transgressive novels of the Marquis de Sade and the Gothic novels that became immensely popular in the eighteenth century. While the play of sexualized power in these texts is not the consensual sadomasochistic fantasy play that we might recognize in the leather bars and BDSM clubs today, Gothic novels such as Charlotte Dacre’s Zofloya and Matthew Lewis’ The Monk begin to explore the sexually charged nature of differential power in relationships. For example, the main character in The Monk, Ambrosio, is masochistic in that he is driven to sexually posses only those who will ensure a painful deferral of his sexual satisfaction. He first desires Rosario, a
woman who has disguised herself as a young monk. For Ambrosio, she is a forbidden sexual object both because of her ambiguous gender and his vows of chastity, and this promise of deferral fuels his desire. However, as soon as he discovers that she will not resist consummation, he becomes quickly bored and disgusted by her presence. Moving on, Ambrosio jumps to the next object who promises to resist his sexual advances, Antonia, a woman who is not only characterized by innocence and chastity but who is also his sister. Through his shifting desires, Ambrosio creates sexual scenarios in which he must struggle for sexual satisfaction and in which he is almost guaranteed a kind of masochistic deferral of that satisfaction. Ambrosio’s actions, however, are not solely masochistic since Ambrosio does everything in his means to gain sexual dominance over Antonia, even dabbling in spells and potions in order to have non-consensual access to Antonia’s body and eventually succeeding in his plans to rape her. Here his masochistic leanings come into focus as sadistic, pointing out the messy and not always legible nature of sexual power in the Gothic novel due to its status as such an early articulation of the transgressive erotics of power. George Haggerty elegantly describes the complex presence of eroticized power in Gothic literature as “crudely” sadomasochistic because “desire is expressed as the exercise of (or resistance to) power. But that power itself is charged with a sexual force—a sexuality—that determines the action and gives it shape. By the same token, powerlessness has a similar valence and performs a similar function.” Eroticized power is fluid in these texts, and while it circulates within the narratives, it often defies the rigid, top-down power structure identified with contemporary sadomasochistic practices. It is important to note that while Haggerty
identifies these sexualized power dynamics as roughly sadomasochistic, he maintains that this binary is as constructed, and therefore as limiting, as any other binary by which society structures itself. I think this is an important reminder to question and challenge the construction of sadism and masochism as an always related and strictly oppositional pairing. This is precisely why I am exploring the appearance of contemporary modes of sadism and masochism as fluid and often engaged in artifice and ritual in a way that defies the limited binary meaning that many ascribe to the terms.

When one explores the current groups that practice and promote sadomasochism, BDSM, and other forms of power-differential erotics, the playful, normalizing discourse surrounding contemporary sadomasochistic practices comes into focus. For example, the highly visible leather group, Avatar, in Los Angeles, California, promotes themselves on their website as a “non-profit organization providing education about safe, sane, and consensual bondage, discipline, and sadomasochistic (BDSM) sex between adults.”97 They offer “university style” hands-on classes in BDSM related topics, monthly programs, and BDSM “play events.”98 While this avenue of sexual identity would still be considered “kinky” by dominant, heteronormative notions of sex and sexual identity, the longevity and public presence of groups such as Avatar speak to a post-Stonewall, identity-based pride amongst these communities. Rather than practicing BDSM erotics as a closeted part of their sexual behavior, groups are demanding visibility and respect for sadomasochistic sexual practices as simply another kind of queer identity, and in order to be seen by the public as such they emphasize the “non-kinky” aspects of the practice. They cast themselves as “non-profit” educators who mimic the style of a respectable
university classroom in order to teach people about “safe, sane, and consensual” nature of their practice and hold “play” events. The language they have chosen clearly brings BDSM out of the dark dungeon and into the light of public policy, education, and action based on identity politics. When a representative of Avatar, dressed in full leather regalia and sporting a waxed handlebar moustache and leather facemask with pig nose, attends an LGBT meeting with local politicians, the notion of queer liberalism may not immediately come to mind. After all, he probably did not buy his ball gag from *The Gap*, but he probably does own a house, a car, and a respectable line of credit leaving one to wonder how queer the leather identity truly is. Additionally, the visible presence of a group representative at a public policy meeting paired with the rhetoric of the non-profit, university style, playful, safe, sane and consensual workshops does indicate that there is a move toward the kind of civil rights discourse used by more mainstream LGBT groups.

There is an overwhelming sense that this group may choose to wear “crazy” clothes, and they may have non-normative sex, but otherwise they are just like the rest of mainstream society deserving access to the same rights and services provided to the white, middle class, reproductive heterosexual, family down the street. After all, they fill out the proper paper work with government in order to qualify as a non-profit organization, they deflect their sexuality with the language of education, and they really just “play” in their dungeons—nothing to be frightened of, and nothing that is a genuinely subversive threat to dominant hegemonic social norms.

This version of sadomasochism is, perhaps, the most visible contemporary incarnation the gothic practice, but its current focus on identity politics and pragmatic
integration into mainstream politics marks it as, what José Muñoz describes as, the “anemic, short-sighted, and retrograde politics” of the present LGBT movement that calls simply for “inclusion” within the current, unequal, structure of society without calling for any radical change. Muñoz acknowledges that, even in the face of this kind of political pragmatism, there may be some “avatars of a queer futurity . . . especially in sites of cultural production.” The focus, however, should be on queerness as “something that is not yet here,” something not yet in focus, because of the potential that exists in a utopian futurity rather than a pragmatic present. I see the potential for this out of focus type of queerness in cultural productions whose genesis is trauma and whose expression is in the form of pain. The traumatic collapse of meaning brings the present out of focus and allows for possibility in that collapse—perhaps simply an analogy for Muñoz’s queer futurity but also perhaps a means of accessing that distant horizon of revolutionary queer potential. The discourse around sadism and masochism—the highly performative and artistic representation of trauma and pain—comes to life around this very blurriness, and the future-oriented “avatars” who work with these tropes ironically depend on the history of this conversation.

The phenomenon of sadomasochism entered into the popular consciousness with the Gothic links made between power, or lack of power, and sexuality, and the practice today has evolved into a blend of unabashed queerness in appearance and sexual practice paired with a queer liberal approach to politics and consumer culture. The critical approaches to sadomasochism provide a theoretical richness that can help unpack the political and cultural undercurrents at work here. Sigmund Freud first began to theorize
about the implications of sadomasochism in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* in which he attempts to define sadism and masochism as the “most common and the most significant of all” sexual perversions. Sadism, he claims, “oscillates between . . . an active or violent attitude to the sexual object, and . . . cases in which satisfaction is entirely conditional on the humiliation and maltreatment of the object.” Masochism, on the other hand, consists of a passive sexual aim in which “satisfaction is conditional upon suffering physical or mental pain at the hands of the sexual object.” Even in these early articulations of sadism and masochism, the oppositional binary structure of the terms does not completely hold. Freud eventually privileges sadism as the primary phenomenon when he claims that often “masochism is nothing more than an extension of sadism turned round upon the subject’s own self.”

Leo Bersani performs a productive theoretical inversion of this move in *The Freudian Body* when he uses Freud’s musings on sadism, masochism, and the development of sexuality in general to determine that all sexuality is, in fact, masochistic. He remarks on Freud’s paradox that sexuality “is characterized by the simultaneous production of pleasure and unpleasurable tension” and that “the pleasurable unpleasurable tension of sexual stimulation seeks not to be released, but to be increased.” This observation along with Freud’s implication that sexual excitement can result from any powerful emotion, even a distressing one, leads Bersani to conclude that all sexuality involves a shattering of the self and “could be thought of as a tautology for masochism.” In Bersani’s sexual universe, sadism is simply a result of masochistic identification with the submissive object. Bersani makes an important move in his
exploration of masochism as sexuality and sexuality as masochism—he insists on sexuality as “productive masochism” and emphasizes “the possibility of exploiting the shattering effects of sexuality in order to maintain the tensions of an eroticized, de-narrativized, and mobile consciousness.” This is a claim that I will return to later in the chapter in order to reflect on the possible motivations of a ritualized masochistic response to personal trauma. For now, however, I would like to focus on the fact that Bersani privileges masochism as the dominant sexual phenomenon and Freud privileges sadism. What remains clear is the idea that the sadism/masochism binary is not so neatly divided into two structurally oppositional, yet dependently paired, positionalities. In Coldness and Cruelty, Gilles Deleuze also refuses the notion of sadism and masochism as a dependent oppositional pairing, calling this common assumption a “spurious sadomasochistic unity.” For Deleuze, sadism and masochism both exist, yet they do so as distinctly separate situations with distinct motivations and distinct aims. He, more so than Freud or Bersani, maintains the separation of sadism and masochism, but he insists on operating completely outside the assumption that they form a binary pair or are related in any form beyond the coincidental.

My use of these terms in this chapter will be informed by the conversation I have just traced and will be structured around a few commonalities. First, I will assume that sadism and masochism cannot be reduced to a structured, oppositional binary pair in which two subjects achieve sexual satisfaction through a mutual and reciprocal relationship in which one is clearly dominant and one clearly submissive. Sadomasochism, defined in this way, presents conceptual paradigm that becomes
theoretically limiting. Second, since the anchoring of sadism and masochism in a kind of literal sexuality leads one quickly back to Freudian theories of perversions and psychosexual development, I would like to dislocate my use of these terms from explicit and necessary ties to sex itself. Instead, I find the terms to be more valuable as theoretical tools with which to explore and develop thinking about the messy links between power, pleasure, and pain. These links may be sexual, but often arise out of non-sexual circumstances and motivations or their erotic nature is ambiguous. While the development of this line of inquiry depends upon the various articulations of sadism and masochism that I have outlined, I do not wish to be limited to a strict, or in any way traditional, understanding of the concepts. With this in mind, I will use the term sadism to refer roughly to any type of aggression, infliction of pain, and/or dominant positionality that serves a productive end. The end may be physical or emotional pleasure, sexual satisfaction, political action and incitement, personal growth, or any number of ends that the participant finds productive to some degree. Sadism may imply an engagement with another subject, but that engagement is not necessary for sadism to make an appearance (for it may be turned upon the self in certain circumstances). Masochism will refer roughly to any type of desire for pain to be inflicted upon one’s own body or psyche and/or the desire to embody a passive, or submissive, positionality in relation to others to serve some productive end. My focus is on the intra- and interpersonal aspects of sadism and masochism as conceptual tools with which to visualize and theorize relationships, personal trauma, healing, and the challenging of constructed social hierarchies. In other words, the use of sadism and masochism (because of way that these terms simultaneously
imply and challenge binaries) will help to explore the ways in which pain, pleasure, and power are deployed by theorists, artists, and authors to paradoxically challenge various hierarchical and oppressive power structures.

The adoption of discourse around sadomasochism by theorists of gender and sexuality both attests to the problematics associated with a theorization of this type of power dynamic and demonstrates the potential housed in the blurriness of sadomasochistic relationships. Although the engagement with sadism and masochism within the feminist movement has been complex and varied, a particularly fruitful thread took shape within a second wave feminist discussion of narrative. Teresa De Lauretis performed an early discussion of sadism and masochism in *Alice Doesn’t* that addresses and to some degree challenges the feminist discourse that demonized sadism and masochism as mere internalizations of oppressive patriarchal power dynamics. In this piece, De Lauretis begins with Laura Mulvey’s famous declaration from “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” that “sadism demands a story.” In other words, De Lauretis claims, through Mulvey, that the definition of narrative and the definition of sadism are almost identical. In both cases, the movement of the action is entirely dependent upon the desires of the man/hero while the female represents object/space/border/obstacle through which the hero must pass to achieve his goals. In the end, the woman becomes passive object and all subjectivity belongs to the man—a sexualized power dynamic that is sadomasochistic in form but that simply, and problematically, mimics the dynamics of heteronormative relationships. The sadomasochistic relationship for De Lauretis and Mulvey (and for many second wave feminists) is problematic in terms of gendered
divisions of power. The sadist in narrative is always the male and the agent of action while the masochist is always the female and the object of the man’s desire or the obstacle along their journey towards a goal. This problematic is the foundation of both Mulvey’s and De Lauretis’ arguments because they are rooted in the anti-sadomasochism rhetoric of the feminist movement at the time. In other words, although they couch their discussion within the context of narrative, they begin with the assumption that sadomasochism is simply mimicking the hegemonic gender relations the woman’s movement was combating. A woman who found sexual pleasure in masochism had simply internalized this dynamic and needed a good dose of consciousness-raising.

However, De Lauretis begins to complicate this notion and step away from the outright rejection of sadomasochism as a theoretical tool by looking more deeply at the function of the woman as not only an object within the narrative but as a consumer, or spectator, of the narrative. She claims that the female spectator must embody a double positionality—she must simultaneously identify with the male hero/subject and the passive female object, an identification that De Lauretis still identifies as masochistic. However, rather than rejecting this position as simply an internalized form of sexism, De Lauretis claims that women should embrace this double positionality by working both within and against the structures of narrative (and by extension, society) in order to change them and reorder the gendered power dynamics which casts the woman as passive masochist and the man as active sadist. This double positionality supports a defiance of the binary position that is assumed when one completely buys into or denounces sadism and masochism as an oppositional, yet mutually dependent, pairing, an assumption that
mimics the binary of male and female in a heteronormative, patriarchal society. De Lauretis is essentially queering that assumption by encouraging women to view their position as simultaneously double and fluid, and in this way women can reappropriate the potentially stifling position they have been dealt and become subversive and agential from within the very system created to cast them as passive objects. De Lauretis’ unintentionally queer move is central to the theoretical foundations of this chapter because this is an early articulation a tactic that has become central to contemporary queer theory—fucking with the binary constructions that create hegemonic notions of self and other, subject and object. She continues to work through these notions in her 1987 text, *Technologies of Gender*, in which she more clearly articulates the “subject of feminism” as “at the same time inside and outside the ideology of gender, and conscious of being so, conscious of that twofold pull, of that division, that doubled vision.”

In this way, De Lauretis pioneers the move that many queer theorists will later make in their explorations of the constructedness and ambiguity of both gender and sexuality, causing a radical questioning of those hegemonic identity constructions that violently alienate certain subjects.

To see how queer theorists have adopted this feminist move, one can look to early work by Sue-Ellen Case. While De Lauretis pushes toward the queering of the sadist/masochist binary, her approach to sadism and masochism follows the second wave feminist line casting sadism and masochism as illustrations of an oppressive, patriarchal power dynamic. In a direct response to this subtle move by De Lauretis in *Technologies of Gender*, Sue-Ellen Case begins to shift this negative portrayal of sadomasochism by
mapping these concepts onto sexual identity. In “Towards a Butch-Femme Aesthetic,” Case takes De Lauretis’ call for a female subject who works both within and against the gendered power dynamics that cast her in the role of masochist and applies the notions of sadism and masochism to the lesbian notions of butch and femme. She claims that the butch-femme coupled subject (for one cannot exist without the other in her conception of this pairing) is the perfect illustration of De Lauretis’ call for the embrace of double positionality and the ability to work simultaneously within and against an oppressive system. The butch-femme subject does this by adopting gendered roles and behavior patterns that are associated with the unequal power dynamics of a patriarchal culture through a distinctly performative practice, allowing the butch-femme subject to “self-determine her role and her conditions on the micropolitical level.” Case identifies this appropriation as subversive to oppressive power structures because of the way that the butch-femme couple uses camp and artifice in their self-conscious performance of gendered roles. In this way, the butch-femme camp aesthetic ironizes those oppressive power dynamics by playfully adopting them and redeploying them on queer bodies. Although Case does not explicitly refer to the butch-femme couple in terms of sadomasochism, Case’s theorizing of butch and femme subjectivity is infused with the dynamics of sadomasochism partially because she is working out of De Lauretis’ explicit discussion of sadism and masochism in narrative. Additionally, Case’s description of the campy butch-femme subject position is deeply analogous to sadomasochistic performance since the arguments that she develops specifically in relation to butch-femme dynamics may very well be transposed into thinking about sadomasochism.
There are, in fact, some clear parallels to be drawn between her descriptions of the butch-femme aesthetic and sadomasochistic practices on a very basic level. Like the butch-femme couple, sadomasochism plays with power by establishing sexual and fantasy scenes that adopt and reconfigure oppressive power structures. Case’s emphasis on camp and artifice become relevant to sadomasochistic practices when one considers the emphasis on play and constructed fantasy in groups such as Avatar. The couple (or group) engaging in sadomasochistic play is able to disrupt the potentially oppressive aspects of the differential power dynamic by making their scene explicitly playful, using artifice, and emphasizing consent. Case claims that the butch-femme couple also enter into their “scene” with a conscious play on the concept of masquerade in which they are adopting and reconfiguring power dynamics in a kind “penis, penis, who’s got the penis” game. If we think about masochism in Deleuzian terms, the masochist is the “master” of the scene in which he or she is subject to a “master.” Because of its grounding in fantasy and role-playing, the power in this situation, like that of the butch-femme couple, also becomes a game of phallic hide and seek. In other words, in both the butch-femme and sadomasochistic power dynamics, the phallus becomes a prosthetic and fantasmatic object that can be fluidly exchanged, denaturalizing the link between power and the male body, and it also has the potential to denaturalize the power dynamics of other types of hegemonic configurations.

Further, the butch-femme couple, according to Case, utilizes fantasy by idolizing and ironically adopting the looks/behaviors of popular culture stars in a way that grounds their behavior in fantasy. When describing the production of *Beauty and the Beast* by the
butch-femme performance troop, Split Britches, she notes that their butch/femme fantasy included the iconic figures of Katherine Hepburn and James Dean. This grounding in role playing is again very similar to the description of masochism deployed by Deleuze—the masochist designs a fantasy scene and both players consent to perform that scene which is designed to defer the masochist’s pleasure for as long as possible. The scene, for the masochist, is constructed and designed with clear roles for each player, and these roles are often based on iconic “types” that represent certain culturally understood forms of power and sexuality.\textsuperscript{116} According to Case, butch and femme roles are also based on certain iconic types, or “character construction[s],” that because they are “always acknowledged as roles, not biological birthrights,” provide a kind of “agency and self-determination to the historically passive subject, providing her with at least two options for gender identification and, with the aid of camp, an irony that allows her perception to be constructed from outside ideology, with a gender role that makes her appear as if she is inside of it.”\textsuperscript{117} The playful redeployment of fantasy, iconic imagery, and power dynamics for both pleasure and the political rethinking of normative subject position, draws some fundamental links between sadomasochism, performativity, and butch-femme practices.\textsuperscript{118} Case, then, seems to be evolving the second wave feminist assumptions about sadism and masochism and adapting it to the butch/femme double positionality by inserting the concept of play, artifice, and camp to show how queer subjects can work both within and against an oppressive system with the use of role-playing and fantasy. The butch-femme queering of heterosexual gender roles through playful mimicry and the appropriation of power structures associated with those roles
uses a gothic-style sadomasochism in which the power relations are sexualized in a kind of “crude” approximation of sadomasochism that does not clearly adhere to the strict binary oppositions but instead appropriates and redeployes those binaries as a transgressive, yet subversive, sexuality.

Sadism and masochism, then, have served as fertile ground for critical discourse around gender and sexuality, and I believe that this phenomenon stems, not from their rigidly hierarchical structure, but instead from their potential for a kind of gothic messiness that brings issues of power out of clear focus and allows for more future-oriented theories. The use of sadism and masochism as productive conceptual platforms is not limited to critical discourse, however. Sadomasochism is also frequently deployed in American cultural productions such as literature, art, and performance. Sue Ellen Case, herself, cautions against the kind of violent realism portrayed in plays such as Mud by Irene Fornes because she claims that realism is at odds with the butch-femme project of “recuperating the space of seduction” through “playfully inhabiting the camp space of irony and wit.” For Case, a play that highlights violence with realistic narrative “chokes the women to death and strangles the play of symbols, or the possibility of seduction.” The “consequences of realism for women are deadly,” she states boldly. I find Case’s emphasis on irony and wit to be a useful theoretical step in the exploration of the productive nature of sadomasochism theory, but I believe that this possibility for productive subversion can also be housed in the kind of violent realism that Case maligns. In order to retain this theoretical emphasis on performativity and explore the practical applications of violence and staged pain as a non-pathological reaction to trauma,
I will discuss two different forms of performance. First, I will focus my discussion on two plays by Migdalia Cruz—*Miriam’s Flowers* and *Fur*—as a violent, activist use of the sadism/masochism dynamic. Then I will move on to examine the provocative performance art of Ron Athey as an aggressive assault on identity and social structure through live self-mutilation.

**Flowers and Fur: Staged Trauma**

Migdalia Cruz is a Puerto Rican playwright who is widely known for her plays that depict the violence and poverty of the South Bronx community in which she grew up. Cruz studied under the mentorship of Irene Fornes, and at times writes plays based in Fornes’ style of avant-garde realism. However, Cruz is also known for her willingness to experiment with genre and technique in order to effectively communicate, what Tiffany Ana López describes as, the experiences of characters “belonging to a Latino underworld.”122 While López admits that these characters and situations arise out of Cruz’s experience of “growing up female in the South Bronx during the 1960s,” she cautions readers and critics about placing too much emphasis on autobiography when thinking about Cruz’s work. She quotes Cruz’s description of the “dilemma of Latina writers” who work in realism: “People always think I’ve had this tragic childhood and that all of these horrible things that I write about have happened. In real life, I had a great childhood; I just had a bad neighborhood.”123 It is safe to assume, then, that Cruz’s subject position, growing up as a working class Puerto Rican in the South Bronx, informs her work. However, since it is important to take care to not make the problematic
assumption that “Latina dramatic writing is inherently autobiographical.”¹²⁴ I will focus our discussion of trauma on the subject position of her characters, and rather than making any assumptions about Cruz’s working through of trauma through playwriting, I would like to look at two types of trauma that the main character of Miriam’s Flowers, Miriam Nieves, is coping with. Additionally, I will consider the implications of the depiction of sadistic and masochistic violence within the genre of live performance and the way in which Cruz intentionally assaults her audience with these depictions for activist purposes.

Miriam’s Flowers begins with Miriam, a 16 year old Puerto Rican woman living in the South Bronx, screaming out from a nightmare, presumably an intrusive symptom arising from her younger brother, Puli’s, tragic death after being hit by a train.¹²⁵ The family has no access to therapy due to their social class, and they receive only eight thousand dollars from the courts in order to compensate them for their loss. The family copes with this insufficiently recognized trauma in various ways. Delphina, the mother of both Puli and Miriam, refuses to acknowledge Puli’s death, becomes depressed, and eventually is driven to suicide. Nando, Puli’s father, spends time at Puli’s grave, giving him fatherly advice about masculinity. Miriam, however, has an extremely complex and sometimes disturbing response to the death of her brother. She becomes hypersexual, walking the streets at night, exposing her body to men she encounters, and eventually developing a sexual relationship with the local grocer, Enrique, a thirty-five year old married man. In addition to the aggressive sexual reaction, Miriam attempts to work through her trauma through self-mutilation. She pulls out her eyelashes, clips off
pieces of her labia with nail clippers, and carves pictures of flowers into her flesh with a razor blade.

In the context of the play, Miriam’s behavior, both the cutting and the hypersexuality, comes into focus as masochistic, and while this masochism can be disturbing to observe, it does serve some productive ends. She begins carving into her arms as she kneels before the altar of San Martín, the patron saint of social justice who was born to a Spanish nobleman and a “beautiful colored woman” in Peru in 1579. She also cuts her arms in front of a statue of Mary holding the crucified Christ, emphasizing the fact that she identifies with the physical suffering of these martyrs while creating a physical manifestation of her mental anguish on her own flesh. Cruz makes the connection between mutilation and ritual by frequently having Miriam perform her cutting in front of these religious altars. Miriam explicitly compares the blood of these martyrs to her own, carving into her arm with a razor to see if it smells like violets (as is purported of saints’ blood) and allowing her cuts to bleed onto the statue of Mary and Jesus. While Scarry insists that physical pain destroys language and alienates individuals, physical pain is precisely what Miriam uses in order to attempt to communicate of her suffering. Her family’s suffering is unheard by an indifferent court system, no one provides this sixteen year old girl with access to therapy, and her mother flatly refuses to acknowledge their loss. This trauma, like Annie Rogers’ case studies, is unspeakable and unhearable, but it is also the bridge that links Miriam’s psychological pain and its physical manifestation. Because of its unspeakable nature, Miriam begins to create a
narrative of the trauma on her own body—the infliction of pain becomes the text that can most effectively speak her psychic wounds.

The audience becomes more explicitly aware of her masochistic practices as traumatic narrative when she describes the practice of labia-cutting and masturbation to Enrique. She consciously connects this act with her brother’s death:

I cut my pussy sometimes wif a nail clipper. I jus’ clip off little parts and then I pump and pump until I come so there’s blood on my pillow—so I know somefin’ fuckin’ happened. He only got hurt once, but I hurt all the time for him. I take his hurt from him so he don’ feel it no more. My pussy is his little brain being smooshed between metal. That red was blood and rust. The purple’s his brain.\(^{127}\)

In this description the link between pleasure and pain is apparent. Miriam expresses the psychological pain of remembering the traumatic scene of her brother’s death by linking physical pain with a sexual act, and once again her masochism becomes a kind of ritualized tribute to Puli’s experience as well as a communication of her traumatic loss in a way that circumvents the failure of language that characterizes trauma.

As I have been stressing throughout this chapter, most instances of sadism and masochism are much more complex than the neat binary called to mind by the term sadomasochism (possibly a relic of their “crude” gothic nature), and this is certainly true in *Miriam’s Flowers*. While Miriam is certainly masochistic in her attempt to narrativize trauma through the infliction of physical pain, the infliction is not limited to her own body. In fact, Miriam’s relationship with Enrique is decidedly sadistic in nature. Although Enrique is much older than Miriam, she is the one who initially pursues their
relationship and who maintains dominance throughout by both instigating and withholding sex. Although Miriam initially attempts to seduce a resistant Enrique, in their next scene together it is Enrique who is begging for sexual contact. As a means of asserting power through the deferral of the sexual act, Miriam instead offers to paint him a picture and begins cutting on his arm with a razor blade, saying “It’ll hurt really good. Close your eyes.” In an overt instance of sadistic dominance, Miriam wields the power of her painful “drawings” in order to assert control within her relationship. While Enrique is resistant and nervous to revoke his control, Miriam succeeds in asserting her power in this scene and in her relationship with Enrique in general. At various moments in the play, Miriam occupies the position of both sadist and masochist, inflicting pain and asserting dominance over others as well as inflicting a more ritualized deployment of pain upon her own body. Like the carving that Miriam performs upon her arms in the presence of the altars, the carving upon Enrique is another means for Miriam to attempt to speak the unspeakable pain associated with her trauma. If, as Scarry claims, “to have pain is to have certainty,” then the sadistic infliction of pain is the only way that Miriam can circumvent a traumatic collapse of meaning—if Enrique experiences pain, then he may begin to understand Miriam’s pain with greater certainty. The presence of power, pain, and productivity circulates fluidly in the space of the play. Cruz’s deployment of the dynamics of sadism and masochism is used not only to narrativize Miriam’s trauma on her body, but it is also used to demonstrate the possibility of a more fluid expression of power. If the assumption is that sadism and masochism are a strictly paired, top-down expression of power that reflects dominant culture, then this demonstration of the
potential for fluidity of power is a kind of queer redeployment of those dynamics, similar to Case’s argument regarding the butch-femme reappropriation of patriarchal power.

Not only is Cruz demonstrating the ways that Miriam narrativizes this unspeakable traumatic experience through her own body, but she is also working to foreground the social injustices that created this situation of personal trauma. By writing about the death of a young boy in a poverty stricken neighborhood, Cruz forces the audience to consider the lack of appropriate supervision and infrastructure that contributed to Puli’s death. It is no coincidence that the statue of San Martín de Porres is lit by candles that burn throughout the play, for San Martin represents the plight of people of color within a colonial system as well as the struggles of the poor and wounded, making him the patron saint of social justice. While the role of this saint is never explicitly addressed, his constant watchful presence indicates that these issues drive the narrative. For example, the lack of public representation of this community is established in the opening scenes of the play when Miriam points out the objectifying coverage of the tragedy in the local paper: “And . . . they show him, Ma. How he was. All in pieces. I di’nt want to look at it, but . . . he’s the first one of us ever been in the paper.” The desperate need for recognition is counterbalanced by the grotesque freakshow quality of the newspaper coverage—an exposure that would spark outrage if the subject were part of a more politically empowered and socially visible demographic. This lack of recognition is compounded by the paltry compensation awarded to the Nieves family by the court system, and Miriam’s sensitivity to the meaning of this ruling as an indication of social disempowerment is clear when she explains, “We got eight thousand dollars for
Puli. That’s how much the judge figures he’s worth. Who can fight with a judge? He must be right.” It is this event that then directly triggers Miriam’s subsequent hypersexuality, an indication of the direct psychological impact of this public indifference to the extent of her suffering. Rather than spending the money on therapy, she internalizes the ruling regarding the estimated worth of their lives and instead spends the money on various material goods and begins exposing herself on the street. This may be a reaction that indicates her sense that she, like Puli, is merely a spectacle for consumption, not worthy of psychological healing, or it may indicate that she and the family are entirely unaware of the type of psychological services that might be available to them. In either case, Cruz is asking her audience to consider the ways that lack of access to psychological services and public declarations of worthlessness are written on the bodies of certain marginalized subjects who must find unconventional ways to work through their traumas.

Interestingly, Cruz chooses a fairly sadistic delivery of this social commentary. Rather than attempting to communicate these painful social issues to her audience through the didactic use of language, she challenges her audience to address these issues on their own by creating an environment of aggressive discomfort. Remember, Miriam’s masochistic rituals of self-mutilation are to be performed on the stage in the live, and intimate, space of the theater. The stage directions for the various scenes of carving are simple and straightforward, using language such as “She then cuts into her own arm,” “she takes out a razor and begins to cut lightly into his arm,” and after discovering her mother’s lifeless body, “MIRIAM sits over her, carving flowers into DELFINA’S arms
López points out the foregrounding of violence in these directions by listing a number of questions that must be addressed by the director and performers of this piece:

[How might a director actually stage this play? Do Miriam’s acts of scarification need to be represented realistically by, for example, having the actress burst blood packs or write on her arm in red ink? Must the wounds be shown at all? What is the significance of metaphor in this work? In what ways is Cruz complicating a vocabulary of “writing the body”? Ultimately, what kind of cultural critique is Cruz attempting with such a work?]

Clearly, the simplicity of the stage directions belies the complicated and potentially disturbing nature of the actions. Performing the actual cutting night after night in a staged play would prove difficult and dangerous for the actors, so we have to imagine that the director might choose special effects that imply or mimic blood in more or less representational way (such as red ribbons or an actual fake blood substance). Regardless of the choice the director makes regarding how to convey this mutilation, there is no doubt that even simulated cutting and the vivid descriptions of Miriam’s masturbatory acts with the nail clippers are designed to create a sense of discomfort amongst the audience members watching this performance within the intimate space of the theater.

The very nature of a live performance, in fact, allows less protective distance between the audience and the text than a movie or novel since the audience must consider the physicality of the actors’ bodies and their own within the theatrical space, and this has the potential to create a kind of trauma through the vivid depiction of trauma and its effects.
Following Lopez’s line of questioning, then, what kind of cultural critique is being performed through this sadistic assault on the audience members?

I will answer this question by first exploring the function of this sadistic creation of a traumatized spectatorship. In Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma, Kalí Tal explains that traumatic events often cause personal and national myth systems to be “tragically shattered.”¹³³ A national, or collective, myth is “propagated in textbooks, official histories, popular culture documents, public schools and the like” while a personal myth is “the particular set of explanations and expectations generated by an individual to account for his or her circumstances and actions.”¹³⁴ Trauma, Tal claims, is a “transformative experience” because it shatters one’s sense of reality, rendering their investment in personal and national myths meaningless.¹³⁵ The state that one enters as the result of this shattering is liminal since the trauma has both destroyed structuring schemas and created the simultaneous drive to testify and the inability to do so through language (Caruth’s aporia). To bear witness to this shattering, Tal claims, is an “aggressive act” because “if survivors retain control over the interpretation of their trauma they can sometimes force a shift in the social and political structure.”¹³⁶ In other words, their questioning of problematic national structural schemas (such as racism and classism, for example) can also lead them to question and then change the status quo that may have created the traumatic circumstances in the first place. The survivor, then, “comes to represent the shattering of our national myths” as a result of their shattered personal myths since “it is those personal myths that support and uphold the most widely accepted national ones.”¹³⁷ Another paradox that arises from the attempt to create change through
the communication of trauma in literature according to Tal is that “the personal myths of
the reader are never ‘tragically shattered’ by reading. Only trauma can accomplish that
kind of destruction.”138 Tal is adamant about this distinction, but a play such as Miriam’s
Flowers raises some significant questions in relation to the potential for productive
shattering of oppressive personal and national myth systems. Since trauma cannot be
successfully communicated through language, the characters are forced to narrativize
their trauma in ways that circumvent language, and Miriam chooses to use her body as a
text through which to convey her shattering experience. Perhaps, if one were merely
reading the text of the play, the descriptions of Miriam’s acts of self-mutilation would not
warrant a shattering of the reader’s personal myths. However, when these acts are
performed in the live theatrical setting, the visual assault on the audience members opens
up the possibility that the viewers might be sufficiently traumatized to experience the
shattering of their personal and national myth systems. Since trauma creates liminality,
the display of ritualized pain in Miriam’s Flowers has the potential of disrupting even the
basic binary structuring schema of discrete identity, or the assumption that the self is
distinct from the other, thereby queering identity and implying social interconnection and
the implications of personal actions upon others. While Tal might argue that this
shattering cannot be achieved with literature and Scarry might argue that the display of
pain opens up a gulf between self and other rather than collapsing it, I believe that the
unique space of the theater allows for a kind of productive outcome through the
deployment of pain and the subsequent shattering of myths. This play assaults the
audience with its subject matter in order compel them to consider the systemic forces
that created the traumatic circumstances that then lead to the disturbing sadistic and masochistic practices performed within the narrative of the play itself—an example of the theater’s potential to create an “activism-driven viewer,” or what López terms a “critical witness.” The genre of live performance, then, specifically allows for the extra-discursive expression of trauma as a body text, and it also allows the author/performer to truly assault the viewer through this corporeal witnessing as a kind of sadistic call to action.

Perhaps not coincidentally, Miriam’s Flowers appears in the anthology Shattering the Myth: Plays by Hispanic Women, edited by Linda Feyder. Although there is no specific allusion to the traumatic nature of shattering/shattered myths, Feyder points out both the oppressive structure of certain myths as well as the productive possibilities housed in shattering. She consciously gathered plays that reflect “Hispanic-American women” as “members of two marginalized groups in American society: one of women, the other of color.” Feyder implies that the myths being shattered are those that contribute to the double marginalization of the playwrights as well as their characters because they “circumscribe the freedom of expression and life fulfillment for Hispanic women,” but she then goes on to assert that their plays “shatter myths, and, in so doing, are creating a broader, freer space for women’s identity and cultural development.” Feyder does not go into any detail about exactly how these myths are shattered, but when read through the lens of trauma and its corporeal expression through sadomasochistic practices, the method of shattering comes into focus.
If *Miriam’s Flowers* uses the depiction of sadism and masochism to traumatize audiences and queer their structuring schemas of reality, Cruz’s *Fur: A Play in Nineteen Scenes* also works to traumatize audiences with this gothic trope. However, *Fur* is a significant departure from the genre of realism, and therefore functions a bit differently. In a note preceding the play, Cruz defines the production as a “postapocalyptic fairy tale”—a retelling of the beauty and the beast myth. Opening in a carnival sideshow in a “desert suburb of Los Angeles,” *Fur* tells the story of Citrona, a hirsute young woman, who is sexually mutilated and then sold to this sideshow by her mother. She is then bought by Michael, the owner of a pet shop and a man who keeps her in a cage in his basement and says he loves her. Michael’s servant, Nena, feeds Citrona live furry animals and cleans her cage, and Citrona falls in love with her while Nena falls in love with Michael. This is clearly not realism but a kind of grotesque and surreal fantasy space, full of dripping blood, furry pelts, and animalistic sexuality. As such, I believe that this play addresses the more abstract myth systems governing our understanding of reality rather than focusing on a specific, personal trauma (such as Puli’s death in *Miriam’s Flowers*). Citrona represents the intersection of multiple marginalized subjectivities, and her “less than ideal” appearance is an embodiment of this traumatic marginalization.

Marginalization itself is not often acknowledged as a valid source of trauma when compared to events such as war and natural disasters, but this myopia is precisely what Cruz is confronting with the character of Citrona. In her essay “Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma,” Laura Brown posits that marginalized and oppressed groups within a culture experience “insidious trauma,” or “the traumatogenic
effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment but that do violence to the soul and spirit.”¹⁴⁴ Brown’s essay represents a break with the more traditional notions of trauma as an event “that is outside the range of human experience.”¹⁴⁵ She argues that the very concept of “human experience” implies an invisible, privileged norm: “[t]he range of human experience becomes the range of what is normal and usual in the lives of men in the dominant class; white, young, able-bodied, educated, middle-class, Christian men.”¹⁴⁶ Insidious trauma, she claims, is very much a common experience among marginalized subjects who feel constantly threatened by the prospect of violence. This type of trauma is constant and internalized, but it creates a traumatogenic reaction that is similar to reactions to the more “traditional” traumas such as war, rape, or life-threatening accidents.

In spite the traumatic moment of sexual mutilation in which Citrona’s mother pierces her hymen with a letter opener, which is only verbalized and not depicted, Fur is surreal and does not circulate around a single traumatic event. Because of this, I read it as a representation of the effects of insidious trauma with Citrona’s character functioning as a mythic figure of traumatic marginalization, embodying the “violence to the soul and spirit” that can result from intersecting marginalized subjectivities. First, she is a woman, and as such she is bought and sold as a commodity then owned and contained within a cage. The trope of marriage is used within the action of the play to allude to the kind of ownership and captivity associated with the traditional position of women within a patriarchal institution. Citrona’s status as a young woman deprives her of any agency to control her own destiny—first she is under the control of her mother, then she is
controlled by the owner of the sideshow, and finally through marriage she is controlled by Michael. In order to establish his power over Citrona, Michael attempts to rename her by saying, “I’m going to call you . . . Beauty,” and then he places a ring on her finger telling her, “When you take off that ring, you’ll die. That ring is attached to your heart.” Her utter lack of power and the constant threat of death, as well as the constant threat of rape as a result of the unequal power dynamic between Citrona and Michael, represents the persistent sense of danger and vulnerability Brown cites as sources of insidious trauma for female subjects in a violently patriarchal society. Further, Citrona is fetishized and therefore objectified as a result of her physical difference. Michael’s attraction to Citrona, as Cruz explains in an author’s note, is “about her otherness, her exoticness, her Latina-ness.” In this way, Citrona not only represents the female subject position in patriarchal culture, but she also represents a specifically Latina subject position in a white supremacist patriarchal culture. The fact that Michael fetishizes her exoticness removes her ability to exist as a sexual being outside of the role of performer or spectacle. As a result of her otherness, then, Citrona is objectified and stripped of sexual agency. In addition, Citrona clearly displays lesbian desire within the action of the play, and this is yet another subjectivity that is associated with insidious trauma. Brown argues that gays and lesbians not only are constantly aware of the possibility of physical violence but that their vulnerability is not taken seriously by a justice system that often implies “gays and lesbians bring such violence upon” themselves. Lesbian desire, then, is clearly another marginalized subjectivity represented by Citrona’s character. She openly and vocally desires Nena, yet she is
constantly repudiated and rejected by Nena, and her desire goes unfulfilled. Citrona’s character, as a Latina and a lesbian, is certainly a palimpsest of marginalized subjectivities, but is she, in fact, traumatized by her social position?

Cruz creates a character that is overdetermined by her otherness, resulting in a body that represents ultimate otherness through its animalism and a situation that represents utter disempowerment through caging. Citrona’s traumatogenic reaction to this situation becomes clear when her behavior is read as symptomatic of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The DSM describes the symptoms of PTSD, as “autonomic arousal,” “preoccupation with the traumatic event,” and “general dysphoria” or “numbness.” Judith Herman’s succinctly labels these symptoms as “hyperarousal,” “intrusion,” and “constriction.”\textsuperscript{150} When a survivor experiences hyperarousal, he or she “startles easily, reacts irritably to small provocations, and sleeps poorly.”\textsuperscript{151} When the audience is first introduced to Citrona, she clearly exhibits the symptoms of hyperarousal. At one point, she lies on the bottom of her cage with her arms spread. When Michael also lies down and \textit{“the tips of their fingers meet, Citrona pulls away in fear and makes herself as small as possible against the bars of the cage.”}\textsuperscript{152} The smallest provocation (the touching of finger tips), here, evokes a disproportionately intense response because Citrona is in a state of hyperarousal. The reality of Citrona’s physicality is constantly intruding into her consciousness, and in this way her own body functions as a trigger for traumatic reaction indicating the presence of intrusion as a symptom. Nearly every time Citrona speaks at length she mentions her own body, speaking candidly about her hair, skin and other body parts. The first words that she speaks to the audience, in fact, are a
graphic description of her own shit and masturbation. The effects of Citrona’s experience of difference are clearly intrusive and present in the character’s consciousness and behavior throughout the action of the play. Citrona also exhibits signs of mental numbing and detachment from the horror of her situation. Rather than screaming or protesting her abject and powerless situation, Citrona sings *Beatles* songs throughout the play. The pairing of nostalgic upbeat rock ‘n roll music with the images of blood, containment, and objectification provides a glimpse into Citrona’s numbing and emotional detachment from her situation. Also, survivors exhibiting constriction often form memories and responses “devoid of emotion and meaning,” and Citrona’s penchant for telling jokes at inappropriate times is symptomatic of this lack of emotion. While the audience witnesses Citrona covered in blood and eating a live rabbit, Citrona sings the Beatles’ “Yes It Is” and quips, “What do you call a woman without an asshole? Single! I like that one a lot.” Again, the pairing of abject gore and dehumanizing conditions with *Beatles* music and one-liners reflects the kind of emotional detachment experienced by the trauma survivor suffering from constriction, and in this way Cruz represents the traumatogenic effects of insidious trauma upon marginalized subjects.

The framing of *Fur* as an abstract representation of insidious trauma begs the question of whether this type of traumatic content can shatter the audience’s personal and national myth systems. Is the grotesque and freakshowesque quality of the play disturbing enough to incite trauma within the audience? Is the physical pain of caging sufficient to destroy language and challenge binaries? First, let’s return to the way that sadism and masochism functions in this play in order to consider how they might
contribute to this kind of disruption. The trope of caging and containment certainly calls
to mind the idea of bondage and dominance. Michael keeps Citrona in a cage as a
representation of his sexualized power over her, claiming that the size of the cage
represents his love for her: “That cage is the biggest cage you’ve ever been in—doesn’t
that tell you a little something about my intentions? About how I feel?”155 This line is
closely followed by Citrona’s observation, “You want to fuck me, don’t you?”156 Here
Michael’s ability to dominate Citrona through caging leads to his sexual arousal, an
instance of sadistic erotics. Once again, however, there is no neat masochistic response to
Michael’s sadism. In fact, Citrona herself exhibits a kind of sadism in her relationship
with Nena. Although Nena holds a certain type of power since she is the only one who
can trap the small, furry animals that feed Citrona, Citrona finds Nena’s submissive
servant status attractive, explaining “I liked the way she cleaned my room. I liked her on
all fours. Her neck arches like rubber when she wipes my floor.”157 This sadistic
sexualized power dynamic comes to a climax at the end of the play when Citrona invites
Nena to spend the night with her in her cage and Nena agrees to in order to make Michael
jealous. Citrona has succeeded in her attempts to dominate Nena by mirroring Michael’s
mode of domination and essentially caging her. While this may seem to be a moment of
empowerment for Citrona (since she temporarily is able to assert her dominance over
Nena), the audience is well aware that the entire situation is contingent upon Michael’s
approval. He watches their interactions and eventually sleeps above them on top of the
cage—a visual representation of gendered power at work in the play. The next morning,
when Nena wakes up and frantically rejects Citrona, Michael advises Citrona that
eventually “[s]he’ll submit” and then hands Citrona the letter opener that her mother had used to pierce her hymen. The implication here is that Michael is inviting Citrona to kill Nena, and the stage directions read “Citrona slowly takes the opener realizing that she must kill Nena in order to have her. She uses the letter opener like a stake and pounds it into Nena. Blood gushes from the wound.” Citrona then “rips into Nena and eats a piece of her” and asks Michael to let her out of the cage. When he opens the cage, they move to kiss followed by a blackout. Then “Michael screams in the darkness,” implying that Citrona has killed again and finally regained her dominance over both Michael and Nena through murder and sexualized cannibalism. In this climax, the erotics of dominance and submission culminate in the liberation of the marginalized subject—a representation of the power that can potentially be wielded through the trope of sadism and masochism.

Like Miriam’s Flowers, Fur clearly assaults the audience with its graphic content, but in addition to the depiction of murder at the end of the play, one of the most potentially traumatic concepts is that of cannibalism. As a caged hirsute, Citrona is a grotesque hybrid of both woman and animal simultaneously. She is covered with hair, just like the furry animals she eats throughout the play, and the consumption of these furry creatures that so closely resemble herself is strongly cannibalistic. Citrona’s status as a cannibal figure is further reinforced by the highly sexualized language of consumption she uses when addressing Nena. She tells Nena, “You’re so beautiful. I could eat you right up” and describes Nena’s skin as “Jersey corn—milk and honey. So sweet you can eat it raw.” And then, of course, there is the literal cannibalistic act that
ends the play. This cannibalism functions on multiple levels—as a symbol of otherness and marginalization, as a representation of liminality and collapsed meaning, as the ultimate representation of liberation and sexual dominance, and finally as a disturbing taboo with which to assault spectators. In *Cannibal Fictions* Jeff Berglund explains the historic, specifically colonial, use of the cannibal as a paradoxical symbol of otherness. He claims that while the cannibal label was used to dehumanize indigenous populations and thereby justify colonization of already occupied territories, the cannibal actually “presents a disturbing fiction of otherness because it both constructs and consumes the very possibility of radical difference.”163 In other words, cannibalism was used to mark the difference of the native peoples, but the act of cannibalism itself disrupts difference because what was once “other” becomes “self” through cannibalistic incorporation. The resulting hybridity creates a liminal figure that, like trauma itself, shatters linguistic binaries, collapsing such linguistically-based concepts as self and other and collapsing meaning. Cruz takes advantage of the traumatizing discomfort that cannibalism evokes by assaulting the audience with a live act of cannibalism thereby challenging their myth systems. The personal myth that structures identity through the binary of self and other is radically challenged by the presence of cannibalism, and the cultural taboo against cannibalism makes this act particularly uncomfortable and potentially traumatizing. The pairing of this liminal presence with the representation of Citrona as a hyper-marginalized, disempowered, and insidiously traumatized subject, has the potential of “tragically shattering” the audience into a more critically aware group of spectators who
may be prompted to reflect on the personal and national myths that create the intersecting modes of oppression that Citrona embodies.

**Aggressive Obliteration: Ron Athey and “Real” Blood**

Cruz’s plays use sadism and masochism as productive measures to both work through traumatic experiences and to incite activism with their performed depictions of violence. Both engage with queer sexualities, and both in turn attempt to queer their audience’s structural schemas through the shattering of myth systems and disruption of binary assumptions. Although *Miriam’s Flowers* is realism and *Fur* is a surreal fairy tale, both are fictional, literary productions. The final piece that I will be reading moves the discussion out of the genre of dramatic literature and into the genre of performance art. In his performances, artist Ron Athey uses live self-mutilation, sadomasochism, self-flagellation, and the ironic appropriation of religious ritual in order to address and narrativize trauma. He is perhaps most well-known for his controversial 1994 performance *Four Scenes from a Harsh Life* in which he made cuts on the back of co-performer, Divinity Fudge, blotting the blood onto paper towels and stringing them on clothes lines above the audience. While the blood was Divinity Fudge’s and not Athey’s, the specter of Athey’s HIV positive status created a controversy, causing United States senators Byrd and Nickels to condemn the piece as dangerous and to call for cuts in *National Endowment for the Arts* funding of such performances.¹⁶⁴ This controversy is a testament to the aggressive boundary pushing around which Athey’s work circulates as well as to the centrality of his queer, HIV positive status to audience reception and
reaction. While Athey is not always explicit about his political intentions, he clearly articulates the intersection between trauma, shattering, and the sadomasochistic practices of his art in his biographical statement: “If the inside of your head gets pummeled with enough emotional blunt force trauma to splinter the psyche, you develop ways to punish the body, that fleshy prison which houses the pain.”

Athey, then, is clearly responding to some kind of “emotional blunt force trauma” in his work through his acts of self-mutilation, but in contrast to the pieces by Migdalia Cruz that I have discussed, Athey moves beyond the mere representation of these acts. Instead, his cutting, piercing, and other modes of sadomasochistic self-mutilation are “real” and performed live on his own body, denying the audience members the comforting distance that fiction provides.

To examine the effects of Athey’s performance art, I will be focusing specifically on a piece that I experienced live in 2009, *Self-Obliteration #1, Ecstatic*. In this piece, Athey climbs on a platform completely naked and poses on his hands and knees with a long blond wig on his head while deep, amelodic digital feedback music plays. He proceeds to slowly and firmly brush this wig over his face, allowing the brush to violently hit the platform at the end of each stroke. After an extended period of brushing, he removes the wig by pulling out a series of pins that had attached the wig directly to his scalp. Once the pins have all been pulled out of the flesh of his scalp, he tips his body down to allow the blood to flow onto a glass pane placed under his body. He then performs complex choreography with the bloodied glass, passing it over his body and smearing the blood between himself and the glass. He finally places the pane in a groove...
at the end of the platform precariously perching it there to display the “blood blot” while he repeats the procedure with a second pane.

Athey was raised in a dysfunctional Pentecostal household and viewed by his family and church members as a child preacher, and he certainly may be accessing a history of personal trauma in his ritualistic performances; however, I am interested in looking at his work as a reflection of insidious trauma because of the violent, often irrational reactions elicited by his art. Since Athey is both queer and HIV positive, he, like the characters in Cruz’s plays, is certainly a member of at least two intersecting minority identities that have historically dealt with the threats of violence and violent indifference, especially as that indifference has played out in the medical and political responses to HIV in the United States. In reaction to the lack of corporeal agency for minority subjects in a society that wishes to control and contain the threats of queer flesh, Athey locates a kind reclamation and liberation in the performance a self inflicted blend of sadism and masochism by aggressively refusing to be circumscribed and contained—even to the extent of disrupting the boundaries of his own body. He sadistically inflicts the pain upon himself and goes through a series of difficult and painful manipulations slowly and methodically in a kind of masochistic act of prolonging and deferral. In an overt reference to the social oppressions that he is responding to in his performance, Athey claims, “We all need to break free from the shackles placed upon the individual by society, family, religion and gender. And possibly through the catharsis of performance, and ritual, we might finally be able to lay to rest the demons who’ve sent us in search of the respite only a knife or needle could at one time provide.”

Note that Athey is making
an important distinction that has to do with genre. By staging the practices of self-mutilation in a public forum, they move into the realm of ritual. The staged aspect allows the performer to retain control over the action and the body—precisely the elements that are out of control in the context of trauma. By reenacting trauma on the body within the genre of live performance, one can narrativize past and current traumas and work through those experiences with a refocused emphasis on the fluidity of power.

While the ritualized nature of this performance might seem to echo the campy artifice of Sue Ellen Case’s butch-femme response to heteronormative patriarchal power since the power is reallocated and redefined through the ritual adoption of oppressive power structures, and while it seems to echo the reliance on ritual that occurs in Miriam’s Flowers, there is an important distinction to be made between Athey’s work and these examples of the redeployment of power through sadomasochistic practices. Although Case’s butch-femme subject performs these roles in life rather than on a stage, the effectiveness of the role-play is predicted on the fact that the power dynamics are played out on female-bodied people whose biology does not match their gendered performance and even more dependent upon the fact that “real” gender oppression does not actually occur. In other words, the performance of butch-femme gender roles must be just that—a performance, and a playful one at that. If the butch of the butch-femme dyad were to force her femme partner into rigid social roles (such as denying her access to education or equal pay) or if the butch was found to be male-bodied, the butch-femme subject would lose all of its political capital and activist potential. They would simply be a heteronormative representation of all that the women’s movement has worked to change.
Artifice as opposed to “realness” is central to Case’s theory of butch-femme resistance. Similarly, Miriam’s ritualized cutting, while graphic, is clearly not actually occurring on stage. The presence of the actress’ physical body in the space of the theater is “real” to a certain extent, but the audience is assured that her actions are fictional representations of self-mutilation, also dependent upon artifice. Athey’s work, on the other hand, blurs the line between performance and reality when, as himself, he actually penetrates his body with needles, razor blades, hypodermic needles, and the like. Lynda Hart explores this important distinction in her discussion of Athey and other performance artists that depend on the “realness” of their work. She writes that Athey “insists quite emphatically on the ‘realness’ of his performance. He says ‘my work is based on physically, dynamically altering the body. I cannot fake cutting. My theater is controlled actual experience.’”

With this in mind, Hart goes on to claim that the feminist controversy surrounding sadomasochism stems from the “eroticism [that] is provoked precisely in the ambiguity between the real and the performed,” an ambiguity that always exists in sadomasochism and that is echoed in queer performance art. Hart is creates this analogy to explain the lesbian feminist sadomasochism controversy, but for my purposes the relevant issue is Hart’s conclusion that both sadomasochism and queer performance art are able to unsettle people by challenging the distinct boundary between “real” and performed. Athey performs sadomasochistic acts as a means to collapse this binary and challenge the distinction between art and reality, and it is his ability to create discomfort amongst the spectators in this way that places Athey’s art on the forefront of queer activism.
The activist potential in Athey’s work is precisely in the disruption he creates within the space of his performances. At the end of her discussion of sadomasochism and queer performance art, Hart concludes that sadomasochistic sexuality and queer performance “disrupt the hegemony” of certain basic understandings such as life/death and top/bottom, and I think this is certainly true. However, I believe that this disruption depends not just on the blurring of the performance/reality line, but also on the shattering, liminal effect that arises from the trauma of viewing live pain. Athey not only is both sadist and masochist in relationship to his own physicality, but because of the real presence of blood in the performance space and his public HIV status, Athey performs a sadistic, traumatizing act upon the audience members. They are constantly threatened with the splatter of his blood and the possible shattering of the bloodied glass perched at the end of the platform, and the reaction of the audience when I saw the piece certainly reflected a sense of discomfort and fear. Many audience members removed themselves from the performance area to sit down by the wall, backed away from the line demarcating the performance space, or fled the building entirely. The sight of blood and Athey’s carefully choreographed performance was certainly traumatizing to the audience because they were forced to consider the meaning of this mutilation in relation to Athey’s sexualized corporeal presence as well as his status as HIV positive.

The threat the audience feels when viewing her performances stems not solely from the sight of blood, however, but from the fact that this bloody practice is shockingly real with imagined real consequences upon the audience members. His blood is only threatening because the audience imagines it somehow exposes them to his virus. While
this response may not be conscious or rational, it implies a kind of penetrative threat. By perforating his skin, the imagined border between inside and outside, and releasing his blood from containment, Athey forces the audience to address the permeability of their own sense of separate corporeal space, and this disrupts their understanding of identity. If one is not clearly separate from others, if subject and object do not exist in any rigid relational structure, if sadism and masochism can become dislodged from their binary pairing and fluidly circulate within a single man, then identity itself may come into question. The title of the piece, *Self-Obliteration*, may not only refer to Athey’s body but may also imply the obliteration, or at least the challenging, of the audience’s sense of discrete selfhood. Rather than allowing an audience to safely disconnect from the affective experience of his performance, the audience’s imagined permeation, or penetration, forces them to consider their sense of self and identity as fluid and changeable—an uncomfortable epiphany for most Western thinkers. This imagined permeation and challenging of discrete identity could be viewed as a kind of traumatic shattering experienced by the audience. Not only is the audience threatened by the presence of HIV positive blood, but their visceral and irrational responses to the blood also force them to reconsider their identification as compassionate, tolerant, rational, liberal thinkers (if they do, in fact, identify as such). Here we can see that Athey’s aggressive narrativization of insidious trauma allows him to retain control over its interpretation through a sadomasochistic circulation of power, to circumvent the “unspeakable” nature of trauma by using his body as trauma text, and to then traumatize
the audience—shattering their preconceived myths and asking them to rethink their complicity in an oppressive status quo.

This brings us back to the argument that Bersani makes for a kind of productive masochism as “the possibility of exploiting the shattering effects of sexuality in order to maintain the tensions of an eroticized, de-narrativized, and mobile consciousness.” The potential that Bersani locates (coming from Freud’s original stumbling point regarding the complexities of sexual arousal and response as a type of trauma) arises from a kind of failure that pushes sexuality beyond the bounds of simple pleasure. For Bersani, sexuality is “a sign of the mind’s failure to account for, to find the terms adequate to, the body’s experience,” and this failure is also characteristic of physical pain itself (when meaning collapses) as well as traumatic aporia, or the inability to comprehend and speak an experience that demands to be spoken. All of these experiences result in a shattering—the basis of sexuality itself, the experience of physical trauma, emotional trauma, and insidious trauma—but this shattering can be manipulated through the deployment of sadism and masochism in order to exploit the possibilities of broken myths and challenged identities. In a kind of tautology, sadism and masochism arise as useful and empowering tropes that can respond to and speak trauma as a body text and can then be deployed, though the use of “real” bodies in pain, in order to create trauma, liminality, and the collapse of meaning—three states that are generally associated with negativity and marginalization but that might also lead to a universally shared “eroticized, de-narrativized, and mobile consciousness,” a radically queer, future-oriented, mode of being that resists the liberal discourse of tolerance and integration and
instead shatters those very social structures that create the traumatizing hegemonic notion of center and margins.
Some of the most gruesome Gothic novels include depictions of those imprisoned alive in crypts, forced to occupy the space of the dead and often driven to drastic measures for survival or simply driven to insanity. Matthew Lewis’ *The Monk* includes two instances of live burial with the stories of Agnes and Antonia, both entombed alive within the labyrinthine passages of the same crypt. Charles Robert Maturin’s 1820 novel, *Melmoth the Wanderer* includes, within its impossibly embedded narratives, a tale in which two lovers, attempting to run away together, are instead locked away in a chamber deep within the subterranean vaults of a convent—the desperate young man eventually attempting to eat his lover by biting into the flesh of her shoulder. These texts attest to a Gothic obsession with imprisonment, live burial, and desperation that leads to savageries such as cannibalism. An atmosphere of loss pervades the claustrophobic and grotesque narratives of live burial—the stories of the living swallowed within the catacombs reserved for the dead and perhaps lost forever as a result of this burial, the fear that those who remain to search for the lost will fail in their quest, and always the unspoken fear that those entombed will succumb to the temptations of cannibalism or other unimaginable acts, that they will cease to be human. Surprisingly, this web of concepts and concerns emerges in some twentieth and twenty-first century American texts that work through loss and dehumanization in the wake of crisis. Since the notion of space is central to the gothic trope of live burial, in this chapter I will explore these issues in two
pieces grounded in the space of Los Angeles. Gil Cuadros’ *City of God* explores the enveloping loss and dehumanization that faced the queer community during the peak of the AIDS crisis in the 1990s. Nina Revoyr’s *Southland* confronts the racially charged erasure of history that followed the Watts riot of 1965 and points to the potential for change that comes about when those buried stories are exhumed. Both texts look to the gothic trope of live burial (along with those fears that characteristically attend traumatic entombments) in order to queer notions of subjectivity and history.

**“Conquering Immortality:” Monstrous Subjects and Queer Futurity**

In a recent story on *NPR* covering the Broadway revival of Larry Kramer’s *The Normal Heart*, Jeff Lunden notes that the play was highly controversial during its original run in 1985. Although the revival, produced to coincide with the thirtieth anniversary of the discovery of AIDS, is critically acclaimed (winning the 2011 Tony Award for Best Revival of a Play), Lunden implies that it takes some effort to convince today’s audiences that the struggles depicted on stage are still relevant—noting that Kramer himself often stands outside the theater and distributes letters to the crowd “to let people know that the AIDS crisis is not a thing of the past.” While the play is now technically a period piece, co-director George C. Wolfe argues that it “feels like anything but.” This speaks to the fact that, while pieces responding to the AIDS crisis such as *The Normal Heart* may still have affective impact, public opinion and awareness about the threat of HIV and AIDS have changed significantly since the emergence of the disease; there is an attendant shift in American literary productions as well—marking those pieces coming out of the AIDS
crisis in the 1980s and 90s as a distinct canon. AIDS literature has yet to be comprehensively anthologized, but it is now popping up as the topic of literature courses in universities across the country. What exactly marks a work as AIDS literature is still up for careful definition; however, the specter of death—and the grief and anger that accompany such physical and communal suffering—uniquely pervades texts that arise out of the AIDS crisis.

*City of God*, Gil Cuadros’ collection of short stories and poems, certainly belongs in this emerging canon. Cuadros was a Latino writer with AIDS, writing about AIDS, during the 1990s—a time when so many were battling a disease that seemed insurmountable and that linked the queer community with a culture of death in the minds of the mainstream. He lived in Los Angeles, and the city itself serves as a character in many of his stories and poems, often infusing his work with that nostalgia, pride, and melancholy that can accompany an affective connection to place. During his life, the public was only beginning to become aware of the depth and quality of his work, and now his writing is nearly lost, with *City of God* the only published piece that is readily available. As a Latino writer, as a Los Angeles writer, as a queer writer, as an AIDS writer, and as a writer that exceeds all of these categories, Cuadros is an important figure for those interested in the complex literary depiction of the AIDS crisis. Even as he was surrounded by death (and may now be faced with a literary death) Cuadros allowed the frightening reality of mortality to enter his work while somehow entertaining the vague and often evanescent possibility of immortality, resulting in a nuanced and complicated body of writing that certainly deserves further consideration.
City of God begins with a death. In the opening short story, “Indulgences,” the narrator’s grandfather has just died, and he and his family are traveling to Merced, California for the funeral. The last item in the book is the poem “Conquering Immortality”—a reflection on the imminence of death and decay for a man whose body is ravaged by AIDS. Arguably, one could view Cuadros’ body of work as a production by a man who has a fatalistic obsession with death in a culture where being gay and HIV positive promises only limits and endings. But somehow, despite the heart-wrenching depictions of loss, illness, and impending death, Cuadros, like so many authors of AIDS literature, has crafted a work that presents the promise of a different and more hopeful future amidst the horrors of its present. These days the threat of HIV and AIDS has become more muted in our minds, and it seems hard for many to remember what a crisis it was. Queer culture has moved from being a marginalized and feared group to one that has largely been assimilated into the neoliberal cultural and economic machinery. While the queer community was once limited by its entombment within the cultural imagination as always already dying, it is now becoming solidified as simply another consumer demographic, perhaps a subject position just as limiting as marginalization due to its insistence on the adoption of normative bourgeois values and practices. Whether the queer community is associated with death as a result of the AIDS epidemic (literal death) or as a result of homonormative assimilation (cultural death), queer subjects certainly face problematic limits. Queers of color, specifically, face erasure on multiple fronts as hetero and homonormative society imagines that raced bodies and queer bodies cannot coexist within a single subject. Cuadros resists this erasure through what José Esteban
Muñoz might call a critical recycling of, or disidentification with, the notion that queerness is monstrous in its march toward death. Through an almost gothic preoccupation with death and a reterritorialization of monstrosity, Cuadros presents the possibility of a queer futurity in the face of physical and cultural mortality.

In order to address the way Cuadros subverts mainstream notions of queerness, it will be productive to look at City of God as not simply an example of AIDS literature but specifically as gothic AIDS literature. As Judith (Jack) Halberstam notes, Gothic fiction arose in Britain as a response to cultural anxieties surrounding race, class, gender and sexuality, and one of the most prevalent gothic tropes was the monster, which served as a “screen” on which these cultural anxieties could be projected. The appeal of the monstrous body is that it “allows for a whole range of specific monstrosities to coalesce in the same form.” In other words, because of its excess the gothic monster cannot be contained by a single, knowable semiotic. Instead, it is a constantly shifting and multifaceted representation of cultural anxiety. In Queer Gothic, George Haggerty aligns the apex of Gothic fiction with “the very moment when gender and sexuality were beginning to be codified for modern culture,” and as a result, “[t]ransgressive social-sexual relations are the most basic common denominator of gothic writing.” Queerness, then, is a central element of gothic fiction, and queerness is also one of the primary anxieties that is projected onto the monstrous body.

Like the popular Gothic novels written and published in the eighteenth century, City of God certainly responds to cultural anxieties about queerness and the unknown, and Cuadros reappropriates the monstrous and threatening queer body in order to
reimagine the queer subject in the face of death. The notion of the “gothic” as a literary
device rather than a historical period or genre can be a slippery one, so for this project I rely on Halberstam’s definition of gothic as “the rhetorical style and narrative structure designed to produce fear and desire within the reader.”¹⁸¹ He explains that this fear is produced by “a vertiginous excess of meaning” since “multiple interpretations are embedded in the text and part of the experience of horror comes from the realization that meaning itself runs riot.”¹⁸² A disorienting and frightening multiplicity of meaning coupled with charged sexuality, then, serves as the backbone of the gothic literary aesthetic. Often both fear and desire are projected onto gothic forms and tropes that embody the “excess of meaning” that Halberstam identifies. Monsters, the undead, live burial, and haunting are a few of the more common gothic forms and tropes that dominated Gothic fiction of the eighteenth century, and they reappear in contemporary texts that utilize gothicism as a literary device. City of God, as a piece of gothic AIDS literature, overflows with excessive meaning in its exploration of emotions, relationality, disease, sexuality, race, class, death, abuse, and love, and through a rather sparse presentation of these weighty subjects, Cuadros at times challenges meaning, evokes fear, and dives headlong into desire, creating a text that is infused with gothicism.

Cuadros presents multiple valences of queer desire throughout his short stories and poems; however, this desire is always paired with the readers’ knowledge that this is a book written in the shadow of AIDS, a fact made clear in the author’s acknowledgments and brief biographical sketch.¹⁸³ As Simon Watney points out in his 1989 text Policing Desire: Pornography AIDS & the Media, “the notion of
homosexuality as a contagious condition” is a deep and abiding social belief, leading to a public fearfulness in response to contact with the LGBT community. In addition to this notion that one can become a homosexual through contact with other homosexuals, the public messages about AIDS during the 1980s and 90s strongly implied that AIDS is an “intrinsically sexual” disease that arises as a result of promiscuity and questionable moral behavior. In *City of God*’s moment, desire is never simply desire because it is inflected by this social and medical narrative—desire here is accompanied by fear of that dangerous unknowable disease and the belief that any kind of non-normative sexual contact implicates one in his or her own infection.

The story “Unprotected,” for example, is permeated with both sexual desire and the fear/guilt of contagion. The narrator’s animalistic, unfocused sexuality dominates the scene as he enters a west-side bar called “The Brick” during their “Hawaiian Daze” party: “I needed to do something,” he notes, “make something happen, and like a cat, I pawed at the great white shark, suspended by the smallest test line.” Even in this playful moment, the narrator’s desire for sexual agency places him in the metaphoric position of a cat in relation to the ominously threatening great white shark, a figure that is notably restrained only by a precarious wire or string, implying the threat that exists in relation to the narrator’s sexually motivated actions. He soon is picked up by a man at the bar, and when they get to the man’s condo we become voyeurs, watching them have sex in the “spotless” bedroom with a “cream-colored wood [headboard] twisted like a Bernini pulpit” and a “ceiling sparkling with glitter.” The room is romantic, clean, and dedicated to sensuality rather than gritty, seedy, or public (as this type of cruising might imply),
and it invites even the more conventional readers to feel comfortable experiencing sexual excitement along with the narrator. The animalistic sexual tension continues as the narrator explains that he “was like a scavenger, hands tearing the hair that grew over his shoulders, tugging at his prick, pointed upright and bent. I was gentle with his foreskin, letting it peel back on its own.” This voyeuristic moment is explicit and erotic, but I have notably ignored a large portion of this narrative that functions along side the expression of queer desire. The narrator is HIV-positive, and the man he is having sex with is not. This fact is constantly in the thoughts of the first person narrator, so the reader is unable to completely ignore the danger and risk involved in this erotic situation. Juxtaposed with the immaculate condo and bedroom is the narrator’s sense that he is “infectious material . . . being transported in an orange-red garbage bag, getting tossed out by sallow-colored gloves.” When he learns that the other man has tested negative, he resents him, revealing his internalized notion that infection is a kind of punishment for immoral sexual behavior, “thinking that he was some seedy person who escaped the curse. I saw him do these things, in my mind, things that are considered unsafe, almost sinful now.” He, in turn, feels shameful and morally irresponsible for allowing this man to have unprotected sex with him. The fear of infection and shame permeates the entire erotic encounter, causing an oscillation between erotic arousal and fear and grief-induced flaccidity. Death, both witnessed and impending, infects the narrative and disrupts the meaning of this erotic encounter leaving the reader and the narrator with questions. Was it sexy? Was it dangerous? Does someone ever “deserve” the disease because of his or her behavior? This sense of fear and shame becomes a more palpable sense of disgust and
repulsion as the narrator focuses not on the pleasure or excitement of the encounter but on the bodily remnants that speak to his “sinful” sexual choice. Riding home on the bus in the morning he becomes overwhelmed with the fear that the other riders “could smell the shit that was in my beard, see the sticky shine of cum over my body, and know what I had done that night.” The narrator, marked as abject and infectious and overdetermined by the fluids that stain his body, takes the reader on a journey from the erotic intimate encounter to the disgust and repulsion that occurs as the result of the narrator’s fear and shame. Infection and death haunt this story, itself an affective rollercoaster, to create a gothic AIDS narrative.

Indeed, the book as a whole oscillates between such extremes of desire and fear, including stories that pair young love with haunting loss and juxtaposing lusty poems with heart wrenching verse about the frighteningly abject decay of a lover’s body and mind. It works to evoke desire from its readers, yet because of its status as AIDS literature, the readers’ desire is always inflected with the knowledge that each sexual encounter might be dangerous. Additionally, each narrator or lover we encounter might be the next to die—indeed, may already be dead since the chronology of the text is not strictly linear. The consistent undercurrent of death and decay lurking behind the corners and within the crevices of the narrative creates a piece that is as gothic as a horror film or the most classic eighteenth century Gothic novel, capitalizing on the readers’ shared subconscious fear of annihilation. The notable difference is that this fear invades the narrative precisely because it is responding to the AIDS crisis, and it continues to be relevant not only because it captures a historical moment that should not be forgotten.
but also because of its ability to tap into a kind of primal fear of contagion, decay, and death—a characteristic that marks it as unmistakably gothic.

*City of God* is an uncomfortable text for this reason, but it also elicits discomfort because of its form—it cannot be reduced to a single genre, a single meaning, a single narrative arc, or a single narrator, and as a result “meaning itself runs riot.” I have avoided using the term “novel” to describe Cuadros’ work because it encompasses both prose and poetry, and it defies any tidy definition in terms of its fictional or autobiographical nature. Rather than presenting the events in a chronological narrative form, Cuadros writes the first half of the book as a series of short stories with shifting narrators and points of view. While the reader is inclined to assume that many of the narrators are versions of Cuadros himself due to biographical similarities, there is no identifiable continuity of narrative voice throughout the stories. The narrator’s name changes from story to story (sometimes we are given no name at all), the narrator is sometimes male and sometimes female, and the narrator’s age changes in no discernable chronological manner. Then, more than half way through the book, the genre shifts from prose to poetry. The poetry also includes various personas who often appear to represent Cuadros himself, but this association is slippery since it is based merely on biographical coincidence and the often confessional nature of the poems. The text pulls the reader into thinking that it is autobiographical but then subverts that comfortable assumption through these choices. In this way, the text disrupts coherent meaning and exceeds our understanding of narrative voice and conventional literary genres thereby allowing for multiple interpretations; thus, the reader encounters a text modeled after those Gothic
works in which genre, point of view, and narrative structure are disrupted. The biographical knowledge that Cuadros wrote this text in the late 80s and early 90s while HIV-positive and that he died in 1996, two years after its publication, contributes to the sense that the only consistency in the text is death—a concept which itself defies meaning and pushes the limits of human understanding.

Here, then, we have a piece of literature that is haunted by the specter of AIDS, produces both fear and desire, and defies meaning with its multiple narrators, shifting genres, and non-linear chronology, but beyond these subtle gothic elements I would like to explore the way Cuadros disidentifies with monstrosity, a more explicit gothic trope. As I mentioned above, Halberstam discusses the way that gothic monsters are marked with a constantly shifting meaning, and the “chameleonic nature of this monster makes it a symbol of multiplicity and indeed invites multiple interpretations.” In order to illustrate this concept, he draws on Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein because of its “preoccupation with bodily monstrosity.” Frankenstein’s monster, he argues, is a “totalizing monster” or one “who threatens to never be vanquished, one immune to temporary restorations of order and peace” because of its multiplicity. This multiplicity is partially due to the fact that Frankenstein’s creature is pieced together from parts harvested from “the unhallowed damps of the grave” and the “living animal.” The monster is constructed from human and animal, man and woman, and most likely from the deceased of several different races and classes. He defies a solid, orderly subjectivity because of this and is the embodiment of excess, containing meaning beyond his mere material existence. Frankenstein’s monster is not killed in the course of the
narrative, and he lives on in popular culture in myriad forms because of this excess. He
cannot be vanquished because he cannot be fully and coherently known, and he will
always be the scapegoat for a culture, representing the thing that needs to be marginalized
and contained. A monstrous form with excessive meaning also haunted America in the
1990s: the queer body and the HIV-positive body (often imagined as one and the same).
The American mainstream certainly wanted to contain these abject subjects, so the
popular portrayal of the body decaying from an unknowable disease was often
intentionally horrifying. The monstrous, AIDS-ravaged, queer body powerfully
dominated the popular imagination. Rather than accepting this identity formation or
refusing it, Cuadros instead chooses to disidentify with it. Muñoz explains that
disidentification “for the minority subject is a mode of recycling or re-forming an object
that has already been invested with powerful energy,”¹⁹⁹ and Cuadros uses this strategy in
order to accept his cultural (and physical) association with death while transforming this
notion of monstrosity into a “new model of identity and a newly available site of
identification” for himself and others like him—a model of identity that paradoxically
resists its relegation to the grave by recycling the figure of the queer monster.²⁰⁰ By
presenting a queer subject and a queer text that are pieced together, like Frankenstein’s
monster, into a new whole, Cuadros proposes an identity characterized by its multiplicity,
one that “can never be vanquished.”²⁰¹

Cuadros begins the text with a narrative that portraits heteronormative patriarchal
subjects reinforcing dominant culture through the violent exclusion of the sexually non-
normative. “Indulgences” begins with a recounting of Gilberto’s parents’ nostalgia for the
cozy Americana of their hometown, Merced, California. They “romanticized the red checkerboard-patterned water tower on J Street, the Purina feed store on K, the old, semi-demolished church that looked like Mexico, rough-hewn, gritty pink stone L Street” and “the time when blacks kept to their own side of town.” Their memories were of a time when things were simple because they were clearly normative—commercialism and religion dominated a landscape where racial borders were neatly demarcated. Also, the family is clearly invested in policing heteronormative sexual borders. Gilberto is thirteen in this story, and rather than being interested in girls, he is becoming aware of his attraction to the boys who would punch him and call him a “[f]ucking sissy” at school. In reaction to his apparent romantic apathy, he says his mother begged him to find a girlfriend and argued that “it was natural” for him to “like girls.” This demonstrates a kind of desperation in the family to maintain clear heteronormative behaviors and pursuits. The strongest testament to this familial investment in heteronormativity is the way that the family scapegoats Gilberto’s mother’s cousin, Evelyn, for the death of Gilberto’s grandfather. She was his caretaker, and when he passes away the family projects their grief and angst in the face of death upon her body. She, like Frankenstein’s monster, becomes a screen on which the family projects multiple anxieties—in their eyes she becomes everything that is outside of their heteronormative comfort zone. They would “tell each other what a tramp, a slut Evelyn had become. They’d snicker about how she slept with black men, white men. Papa should have put her away. Evelyn’s Papa’s angel. Evelyn’s a lesbian.” Here, Evelyn becomes the symbol of a multiplicity of racial and sexual boundary crossings, and by projecting their anxieties upon her non-
normative body, the family members are able to shore up their own normative status. Here, she serves very much as a totalizing monster, and the physicality of her monstrous embodiment is emphasized when the family actually surrounds Evelyn and “rushed in like a mob, women pulling her hair, kicking Evelyn in the stomach, the ass, her breast.”

By destroying her body through physical violence (focused, notably, on regions associated with female embodiment—the womb, ass, and breasts), the family members reinforce their own normative status at the expense of the destruction of her monstrous queer one. Despite his own emerging queerness, Gilberto is aligned with the normative family rather than with Evelyn. He and his brother “jumped up and down in the back seat, acted as if we could feel the blows or were giving them, vocalized the sound of each good hit.” In this opening story, then, we have a narrator who is very strongly linked to Cuadros—his name is Gilberto, his family is Latino, and he is a young gay man. This is a very traditional, and therefore comfortable and understandable, narrative voice. In addition to this coherent and traditional kind of narrator, we have a character who is normative in the sense that he is aligned with his patriarchal heteronormative family in opposition to the queer monster that is Evelyn. In other words, *City of God* begins with a narrative structure and a narrative voice that is far from the gothic monster that it later becomes. After the attack on Evelyn, the narrator wonders “if my family would ever turn on me.” This is a moment of epiphany in which he realizes that perhaps he, in his emerging queerness, is more like the monstrous Evelyn than like the rest of his family. After this moment, the coherent narrative voice and structure begins to pull apart as the text disintegrates into a fractured multiplicity of

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fragmented subjects and stories—divorced from that coherent, heteronormative subject with which his text begins.

In “Chivalry,” Cuadros presents a narrator who is well on his way toward a fractured, incoherent subjectivity—one that more closely mimics the pieces of Frankenstein’s monster than the consistent, intelligible narrator that begins the text. Although the narrator appears to be a member of the same family from “Indulgences” (both he and Gilberto share a Grandma Lupe), he is unnamed, so it becomes more difficult to place him in relation to the original narrator or the author himself. The narrator begins the story by explaining how he is frequently on the threshold of life and death when he explains his brushes with death—a wrist cutting at the age of nine and “a near-drowning the year before.” In both cases, it is unclear if these near-death experiences were intentional (the result of suicide attempts) or accidents. Their meaning, like the troubled understanding of narrative voice, slips from our grasp. Also, the coherence of the narrator becomes further troubled when this story is read next to “Baptism.” In “Chivalry,” the narrator identifies himself as a first-born son and describes his near-drowning as the sudden realization that his feet “were tied in fishing line and algae at the lakes’ bottom.” In “Baptism,” this very event occurs when Angela, the narrator, describes a near-drowning in a lake in which she suddenly feels her “foot tangle in some kind of line” until “a warm feeling of having nothing to worry about” comes over her. Although the events align very closely, the narrators differ in gender and age. The reader is invited to make comparisons and attempt to draw links between the stories, but this attempt is confounded by the increasingly fractured narrative voice in the text.
The coherent subject who begins the book is both breaking from and merging with other narrative voices in the text. Further, the narrator’s predilection for near-death experiences in “Chivalry” haunts each event that occurs, creating the sense that he is permanently situated in a liminal space between life and death—a liminality that easily disrupts the concepts of subject and object, self and other.

This disruption associated with near-death liminality and marked by the confusing alignments and subsequent shifts in narration is also associated with early queer sexual experiences. When the narrator of “Chivalry” and his cousin, David, are looking at pornographic magazines together, the narrator describes his arousal as “the same buoyancy inside as if I were held underwater, a similar dizziness to losing blood,” evoking that warm, carefree feeling described as the process of drowning in “Baptism.” In the scene following the one in which the narrator is introduced to dirty magazines, his cousin David also introduces him to another of his hobbies, and it becomes clearer that the arousal the narrator experiences stems more from the sexual mentorship of his older cousin than from the images of women in the magazines. David takes the narrator into a shed to show him “something special.” Thinking that this secret was another stash of pornography that the two could enjoy together, the narrator gets sexually aroused. He says, “my dick pressed against my zipper” as he reaches into a red clay pot to touch “something dry and porous.” After his “fingers found holes to slip into,” he looks more closely and sees teeth emerge from the dark, unintelligible shapes he had been touching. The objects he has been touching are partially decayed mouse and bird heads that his cousin had collected from the fields and saved in pots. The bird heads
had “small feathers still attached” and “rotted eyes,” and the mouse skulls were “sun bleached.” The final pot he reaches into is full of rattlesnake tails. This scene provides the culmination of the tropes of dismemberment and fragmentation that have been building throughout the story. The anticipation brings sexual arousal, and the arousal is paired with the tactile discovery of the mouse and bird heads as fascinatingly disgusting images of both dismemberment and death—emerging queer sexuality, here, becomes associated with decay and fragmentation. Leo Bersani describes the association of sex, death, and shattered subjectivity when he talks about sex as a “masochistic jouissance” or a “self-shattering” that necessarily happens to the subject as a result of sexuality. The “mystery of sexuality,” he argues, “is that we seek not only to get rid of this shattering tension but also to repeat, even to increase it.” There is something both frightening and appealing about the shattering that comes with sexuality, and people both desire it and fear it, much like the narrator’s flirtation with death throughout the story. Sexuality itself, then, becomes a gothic element in its paired association with fear and desire, and once again we are reminded of the presence of death within the narrative—there is the literal near-death of the narrator, the dead animals that he encounters during his sexual awakening, and the death of the coherent subject that is associated with the fragmentation of sexuality. Since the death of the coherent narrator results from a shattering into adult sexuality, however, it is coded as desirable in certain ways since humans generally seek “to increase” the “shattering tension” of sexuality. The result is that both the liminality of near death and the self-shattering of sexuality emerge in this story in order to trouble the
assumption that our narrator is a knowable, unified subject. What, then, is the function of this trend toward narrative fragmentation?

Cuadros is dismantling his narrator by bringing together death, decay, and sexuality. This is clearly a reversal of the usual narrative trajectory, the *bildungsroman* for example, that drives toward wholeness and coherence. Instead, this text moves from a more coherent whole towards a monstrosity that is excessive and unknowable in its fragmentation. It is as if we begin with a vision of the whole corpses that Victor Frankenstein then pulls apart before our eyes in order to build his monster as the narrators are dismembered in order to rebuild a subject that is constructed from the remaining multiple and disparate pieces—a move of critical recycling.

The body/subject is not simply deconstructed within this text, however. The narrative moves from this emphasis on fragmentation and self-shattering to one in which those shards are combined and rearranged into a new kind of patchwork subjectivity as Cuadros works to create the possibility of existence beyond the promise of death for those who are HIV-positive and for the queer community as a whole. In a moment dominated by unfathomable loss, Cuadros is working to propose a means of reconstitution and survival, a new vision of a queer subject that can move beyond the moment of crisis, using grief itself as his primary weapon. According to Freud, melancholia is the pathological response to loss in which one cannot properly detach his or her cathexis from the lost object. Instead, he or she incorporates the lost object into the ego causing an “identification of the ego with the abandoned object.” In this way the object does not need to be given up because it can be eternally entombed within the ego
of the melancholic. He goes on to say that the “ego wants to incorporate this object into itself, in accordance with the oral or cannibalistic phase of libidinal development in which it is, it wants to do so by devouring it.” Freud also claims that loss reconstitutes the ego—when the lost object is incorporated into the ego, the melancholic’s ego becomes new and hybrid—a blend of the subject and all of the lost objects that the subject has incorporated over the years. This mode of cannibalistic incorporation is quite fitting in a book that is gothic in form and monstrous in content, and it cannot be denied that the text deals with loss on many levels—lost lovers and friends, lost health, and lost freedom (especially the perceived sexual freedom that comes with being HIV-negative as we saw in “Unprotected”).

Since it is a narrative of loss, the book’s numerous images of burial and consumption can be read as symbols of cannibalistic melancholic incorporation—a paradoxical adoption of melancholia as productive and reconstitutive rather than pathological for a queer subject whose only resources seem to stem from overwhelming loss. “My Aztlan: White Place” begins with the narrator, an unnamed HIV-positive Latino man, driving down the San Bernardino freeway in order to locate the place where he imagines his childhood home is “buried, near the call box, under the fast lane.” Immediately, we are confronted with an image of loss and burial. He returns to this site of burial after having “watched my lover and friends melt away, their hands held in mine. The last of their body’s heat: fuel to move me along, to my own impending death,” but in addition to this loss, the narrator mourns the loss of his Aztlan, “my ancient home, my family.” These multiple losses—lost friends and lovers, lost family bonds, lost
mythical homeland and cultural heritage, and the loss of his own future—are tied together in the narrator’s mind, and all of them are contained and buried with the image of his childhood home. The loss of his own coherent subjectivity is present, notably as a burial image, in this narrative as well when he says, “I can feel my body becoming tar, limbs divide, north and south. My house smells of earth and it rumbles from the traffic above. White clay sifts through the ceiling. My bones shine in the dark.” Not only does this image conflate the burial of the house with the burial of the narrator himself, but it also attests to the narrator’s fragmentation and decay since the line “My bones shine in the dark” is so strongly reminiscent of the dismembered, sun-bleached mouse heads from “Chivalry” that shone white in the dim light of the shed. The burial, however, does not do away with these losses because, as melancholic incorporation, burial retains the losses deep within the narrator’s psyche. Instead, this burial allows him to revisit the lost people and places whenever he chooses, and as a result, the images evoke a kind of grief-infused nostalgia rather than utter, hopeless loss. Here Cuadros queers melancholia by pointing out the possibility for an ongoing attachment to loss that accepts the pathology assigned to melancholia. If the narrator had progressed appropriately through the stages of grief, as a mourner rather than a melancholic, he would have had to detach from his losses and move on. Since persistent loss is one of the only resources available to our narrator in the midst of an epidemic, he embraces melancholia as a means of existing both with pathology and also with unrestricted access to the losses he has buried within his psyche.

This melancholic burial is a cannibalistic move, and indeed, images of consumption infiltrate this text. In “My Aztlan,” the narrator explains how the virus that
had infected his lover’s brain is now infecting his own—apparently the same infection that infiltrates his lover’s brain and leaves it “half-eaten” in the “Quilt Series” poems in the book’s second half. Cannibalistic consumption also appears in various instances as, frequently erotic, references to being “eaten alive,” having “parts of my body chewed,” and swallowing semen. In “My Aztlan,” the image of semen brings together the tropes of cannibalism and burial to reflect on the narrator’s response to the, frequently oppositional, pull of race and sexual identity. As the narrator increasingly exhibits signs that the virus is taking hold, his mother refuses to “think about the white man who infected me” because the “milky white fluid” of his lover’s semen infiltrates his “body’s space, breaks into the secret bonding of her sex, my father’s sex, and the marriage of their cells.” Here the cannibalistic swallowing of semen becomes a kind of burial within the narrator’s body, an ingestion of his (lost) lover. It is also an ingestion of whiteness that disrupts the narrator’s racial and sexual identity, threatening his mother’s understanding of proper subjectivity—her refusal to acknowledge his lover an erasure of her son’s queer identity.

As the narrator recalls the relationship with his lover, he points to the challenges of being both queer and a person of color—mutually exclusive identities in the popular imagination. When his lover was alive, the narrator “became white, too,” buried under the assumption that queerness equals whiteness and erased by the exoticizing impulses of his lover’s friends. Rather than resenting that burial, the narrator instead “beat[s] off to their memories,” recalling being “buried under their bodies’ weight.” He accesses this complex memory of sexual freedom and racial erasure for a moment of pleasure in the
midst of his grief, and with this burial he addresses his nuanced and unresolved experience of being an HIV-positive, queer person of color. If melancholic incorporation is a means of retaining loss through burial, then this narrative emphasis on cannibalism and burial allows the narrator to retain and reimagine his identity as a complex web of identification and counter-identification with dominant narratives of race and sexuality, thereby resisting erasure. When characterized in this way, this melancholic response comes into focus as simply another form of disidentification—a process that is “informed by the structure of feeling that is melancholia,” according to Muñoz. These images of consumption and burial signal a kind of melancholic response to multivalent loss that has the potential to restructure limiting dominant ideologies of race and sexuality because it allows the narrator to “mingle the power of the past with the decay of the present,” creating new possibilities for identification.

Melancholic incorporation as a strategy of disidentification opens up a space for queerness as a kind of recycled identity, one that fuses the bits and pieces of dominant narratives (and resistance to those narratives) to create a new subject. Judith Butler describes this melancholic process as “the congealment of a history of loss, the sedimentation of relations of substitution over time, the resolution of a tropological function into the ontological effect of the self.” The ego is constituted by the “sedimentation of objects loved and lost.” Melancholic incorporation, then, produces a new, hybrid ego that includes many lost objects brought together into an unstable, multiple subject. I would like to imagine this newly formed ego as a patchwork—rather than as a sedimentation—of lost objects, like Frankenstein’s monster, pieced together
from multiple sources. With this in mind, Halberstam’s concept of the monster as a representation of “the disruption of categories, the destruction of boundaries, and the presence of impurities” can be aligned with the melancholic ego. Both exceed meaning because of their multiplicity, and both allow for a kind of immortality—the melancholic ego retains the lost object indefinitely, and the monster escapes our grasp and cannot be destroyed due to its slippery and shifting meanings. In *City of God*, then, melancholic incorporation is a way of suturing together the pieces of the dismantled narrative/subject. The result is a possibility for identity that is monstrous in its patchwork existence, created by what was lost and what still remains. In that monstrosity is a promise for a futurity that defies death, as well as any dependence on reproduction as the only means for future existence, because of its resistance to solidification and annihilation.

As I mentioned above, death haunts the queer community in two ways: the threatened death of a community as a result of AIDS (an issue perhaps more salient in the 80s and 90s) and the death of queerness as a subversive mode of existence that resists the normalizing effects of capitalist culture (an issue being dealt with in the queer community today). In his essay “Queerness as Horizon,” Muñoz identifies the latter threat as “gay pragmatism,” which seeks “a life integrated within North American capitalist culture.” Muñoz identifies this gay pragmatism as an adoption of “an auto-naturalizing temporality that we might call *straight time*. Straight time tells us that there is no future but the here and now of our everyday life.” With an exclusive focus on the present and an assimilation into the straight time of capitalist culture, queerness as resistance to neoliberal ideology dies out. In order to resist this assimilationist movement,
Muñoz claims that the queer community must embrace a utopian ideology which disrupts “any ossified understanding of the human” by adopting an economy of desire that is always focused on “ecstasy in retrospect” and a desire for ecstasies to come. Muñoz is searching for a means by which queerness can live on as a fluid and subversive culture in the face of assimilative death, and he locates this possibility in a reinterpretation of what it means to be “human,” allowing for Cuadros’ brand of Frankensteinian monstrosity to become a viable mode of subjectivity that encourages this necessary future-orientation.

In the context of Muñoz’s queer futurity, then, Cuadros’ text can be read as an anti-gay pragmatist move. Cuadros aggressively resists straight time in his narratives by insisting on a non-linear chronology that presents both the past and the future as simultaneous realities, and as my earlier discussion of cannibalistic incorporation and burial points out, the melancholic impulse is a means of fusing past losses and present reality in order to create a hybrid notion of time, place, and identity. Additionally, the text and the narrative voices strongly defy any “ossified understanding of the human” by disrupting coherent subjectivity and creating a monstrous, excessive text/subject, and one of the modes which accomplishes this reconfigured subject is desire—that sexual self-shattering and jumbled, hybrid reconstitution that occurs through the desire to retain those lost within the recesses of the ego.

The final poem in City of God, “Conquering Immortality,” is itself a hybrid blend of narrative and poetry, bringing together the disparate genres from the text into a single form. It begins with an image of the Egyptian theater, once extravagantly grand, now decaying on Hollywood Boulevard, and its former glory is compared to the queer
community before it was ravaged by the AIDS crisis when “we only used first names/on their quilts.” The quilt image, here, calls to mind a community impacted by loss and a consciousness that is made of many parts. The narrator compares himself to the “derelict theater,” but there is hope in this depiction of decay and neglect. Although the theater may eventually be “bulldozed in haste/this sacred space can never die out.” In spite of the theater’s impending destruction, there remains a promise of immortality. This concept is punctuated by the story of Osiris who was dismembered and scattered throughout Egypt by his brother Seth. The dismembered pieces were brought back together to form a new type of subject—he “became the god of the dead.” Like the theater, like the narrator’s decaying queer body, and like City of God itself, Osiris is pulled apart, breaks down, but he is reconstituted in a new form that lives on. In the poem, the Egyptian becomes a tomb, like the pyramids, that swallows the dead and dying and preserves them for eternity in its “sacred space.” We see that it is also a place of queer desire, when the narrator reminisces about a sexual encounter with a black man in the public restroom of the theater in a kind of queer temporality that remembers the ecstasies of the past while looking toward the future, or the “dream of immortality” with which he ends the poem. The narrator finds this immortality through melancholic burial as the poem (and the book itself) ends with an image of the narrator being “enfolded in this theater’s/tomb-like darkness.” He seems to finally come to terms with his impending death and allows himself to be incorporated into the community, entombed, as one of the lost—like a patch added to the AIDS quilt and like a limb sutured to the monstrous body of Frankenstein’s creature. This final poem is a culmination of the book’s move toward a queer patchwork
subjectivity as it encompasses the concepts of monstrosity, decay, loss, desire, burial, and immortality.

Although monsters are generally cast as inhuman, frightening, and grotesque, the monstrosity in *City of God* is a queer mode of being that defies the erasure that the AIDS crisis promised the queer community, one that uses melancholia to resist limiting narratives of race, sexuality, and even temporality, and one that embraces desire in order to move beyond solidified and limiting notions of the human as merely an assimilated consumer, a pawn in neoliberal ideology. This piece of gothic AIDS literature embodies a conscious reappropriation of the way sexual difference and transgression has been negatively coded as monstrous and performs a disidentification with the popular narratives about queer and HIV-positive bodies. The gothic assignment of monstrosity was originally intended to limit and contain the monstrous body, but as Halberstam notes, monstrosity is paradoxically “mobile, permeable, infinitely interpretable” because of its excessive meaning and its defiance of categories and boundaries, making it an optimal mode for the lasting queer subject. By deconstructing heteronormative narratives of identity and quilting the monstrous out of its pieces, Cuadros creates a queer mode of existence—a monstrous queer subject—that is future-oriented and cannot be vanquished by AIDS or neoliberalism. Cuadros offers the queer community a vision of a subject, both rooted in history and kinship and reaching toward the future, that defies boundaries and gains lasting agency through its excess. This is a monstrous patchwork subjectivity—fluid, mobile, and lasting—and, perhaps, a new direction of queer futurity.
Spectral Southland: Queering History

While Cuadros’ work addresses the complexities of crisis when refracted through the prism of race and sexuality, and he does this in order to resist the stagnation of death by instead illuminating the future-orientation that can grow out of a culture of death. Future-orientation, however, is not the only way to work through issues of race and sexuality in the wake of crisis. In her 2003 novel Southland, Nina Revoyr instead adopts a past orientation in order to present a vision of subjectivity that is both defined by its crises and that moves beyond them. Although her approach to traumatic historic moments focuses on opening up the past rather than looking toward the future, Revoyr, like Cuadros, adopts the gothic trope of burial in order to explore the stories of raced, queer subjects faced with physical and cultural death. Of course, the experiences of Cuadros and Revoyr as authors and the experiences of the characters they bring to life are certainly different. Revoyr identifies with her subjects, but Southland lacks the autobiographical inclination that we see in City of God. As I have noted the overwhelming presence of AIDS within Cuadros’ life (as well as literally within his body) infiltrates the text, so even though both authors are writing about Los Angeles during the 1990s, their perspectives certainly diverge. Strikingly, however, both texts are concerned with the losses following moments of trauma and both texts deploy gothicism. The dominant figure that arises from the burial trope in Revoyr’s Southland, however, is not Cuadros’ queer monster but instead the ghosts of buried histories that return to shape the subjects who are open to their hauntings.
In August of 1965, a riot erupted in Watts, a predominantly black neighborhood in Los Angeles, California. A DUI arrest and excessive use of force on the part of a California highway patrolman triggered widespread violence, property damage, and looting in a roughly 46 square mile zone covering Watts, South Central, and surrounding neighborhoods. As Janet L. Abu-Jughod notes in *Race, Space, and Riots*, the uprising in 1965 was the result of building tensions due to “high rates of unemployment, dependency, and poverty” plaguing the neighborhood. The chaos lasted for seven days and finally ended when the California National Guard was called in. Because there was very little effort to address the issues leading to this revolt, an eerily similar riot erupted in the same general area in 1992, with more widespread violence leading to at least 52 deaths. While the city of Los Angeles formed the group Rebuild L.A. to repair damaged buildings, restore business in the effected areas, and to address some of the underlying social and economic causes of this uprising, their efforts were interrupted and deflected by the Northridge earthquake that struck on January 17, 1994. It is in the wake of this one-two punch, first the 1992 riot and then the 1994 earthquake, that Nina Revoyr sets *Southland*, a novel about the 1965 riot’s refusal to remain buried in history.

*Southland* begins with a prologue about the “old neighborhood” of Angeles Mesa, which was located in what is now the Crenshaw district of Los Angeles. The narrator implies that the old neighborhood is buried within the newer blighted and dangerous one, and that if “some outsider looked closely, some driver who’d taken a wrong turn and ended up on the run-down streets, if that driver looked past the weather-worn lettering and cracked or broken windows, he’d have a sense of what the neighborhood once
The old neighborhood is lost but still retained within the disintegrating district—“hidden beneath the weeds.” Following this opening journey, the narrative begins with a more personal loss as Jackie Ishida, a Japanese-American law student, arrives at her grandfather, Frank Sakai’s, apartment complex ten days after his death to help her aunt arrange some of his affairs. These two beginnings—the story of the lost neighborhood and the story of Jackie’s familial loss—set a melancholic tone, but Revoyr also frequently leads her readers down a certain path only to change routes, to make an intentional “wrong turn” in the narrative. However, Revoyr ultimately challenges the melancholic impulse with which the novel begins. By acknowledging lost histories and allowing those stories to haunt the narrative, Southland reimagines traditional notions of linear temporality and the assumption that buried stories must remain silently entombed in the past.

The old neighborhood in Southland’s prologue is not entirely lost but buried by the present state of things, a move that evokes a kind of Freudian melancholia, or pathologically lingering form of mourning. As I noted in my discussion of Cuadros above, mourning is the healthy process in which one gradually breaks his or her emotional cathexis with the lost loved one and reattaches that emotional connection to a new replacement love object. The melancholic, unlike the mourner, is not able to complete this process of “withdrawal of the libido from this object and a displacement of it on to a new one,” and instead “establish[es] an identification of the ego with the abandoned object” and regresses into a highly ambivalent narcissistic state. As the narrative develops, it becomes clear that the prologue’s idyllic neighborhood of plenty
and cultural diversity is irretrievably lost after the Watts riot of 1965, which caused many to flee the area and become suspicious of the diversity that once existed there. Like the melancholic’s lost object, the pastoral “old neighborhood” with “fields of wheat and barley” and a friendly blending of many different cultures has been swallowed by the one that is now “feared and avoided.” While the traditional—and for Freud, the non-pathological—understanding of loss is that the loved one is part of an irretrievable past and the mourner has no choice but to detach and move on in a unidirectional progression, the melancholic defies this temporality by essentially trapping the loss within his or her ego, a type of burial that refuses to see the lost object retreat into the historical past and instead insists on retaining their remains within the tomb of the ego. In this way, the lost neighborhood is not completely absent, for it is engulfed by the new—assumed gone forever but still retained within the crumbling cityscape.

The prologue presents a version of history in which the independence of racialized subjects was once flourishing but has since been lost, and the function of melancholia in the text comes into focus when it is cast specifically as “racial melancholia,” Anne Cheng’s vision of melancholia set within the social realm. Cheng emphasizes the cannibalistic aspect of melancholia as ego production: “The melancholic eats the lost object—feeds on it, as it were” in order to build the ego though a “chain of loss, denial, and incorporation.” The concept of melancholia, she claims, is an apt metaphor for racialization in America because “[r]acialization in America may be said to operate through the institutional process of producing a dominant standard, white national ideal, which is sustained by the exclusion-yet-retention of racialized others.”
The notion of the “universal” subject in America comes about through this process of “racial melancholia,” and the detached, omniscient narrator of *Southland’s* prologue appears to buy in to this mode of racialization by emphasizing the exclusion-yet-retention of the lost neighborhood characterized by its racial and ethnic diversity. After the idealized community was “lost” in the wake of the 1965 riot, it did not disappear but was instead entombed within the larger city of Los Angeles—a ghettoization caused by the very impulse toward exclusion-yet-retention Anne Cheng cites.260

As the larger city of Los Angeles became alienated from the “old neighborhood” after the riot, Watts and South Central became even more highly isolated, both socially and economically—excluded-yet-retained—in a kind of spatial melancholia that defined the middle and upper class, predominantly white, neighborhoods in opposition to the “ghettos” that erupted in violence and other criminal activity. In fact, data compiled after the Watts riot indicated “black respondents were hopeful that the riot would help to improve race relations by calling the attention of whites to their difficulties and pains. In actual fact, however, white attitudes became more negative.”261 The novel reflects the isolation and containment of the neighborhood through the depiction of community establishments such as the “All Are Welcome Church,” a remnant of the pre-1965 community. The church remains, but after the trauma of the riot, it “has steel bars over its windows,” undercutting its message of welcome while simultaneously representing the racial and classed-based isolation of the ghetto neighborhood.262 “No one thinks about the neighborhood,” the prologue notes, yet it still exists within the larger limits of the city and serves to define the city’s other neighborhoods through its very undesirability.263 The
prologue also explains that the old Angeles Mesa neighborhood was “part of the growing city only in name” since “everybody knew it was country,” but after the 1965 riot, the perception of the neighborhood shifted. Paradoxically, it became part of the city, developing an urban identity in place of its rural one, but simultaneously it was marked as “a place the rest of the city dismisses as ghetto.” The move from the neighborhood’s separate identity to one that is incorporated yet dismissed is a function of racial melancholia. The larger city of Los Angeles no longer envisions the district as a separate, bucolic space. Instead, its incorporation into the popular understanding of Los Angeles as a whole reifies dominant white, middle class identities as the rest of the city is defined by its exclusion-yet-retention of this ghetto space.

The prologue appears to establish a melancholic approach to history in which the lost past is entombed within a linear historic narrative, but the reader quickly comes to discover that the body of the novel takes a very different approach to history. Cheng argues that the melancholic incorporation of racialized others within American literature and history functions as a kind of crypt upon which white American identities are built. Revoyr appears to recreate this problematic entombment in her prologue—possibly solidifying a history of racialized others within a literary crypt by representing the “lost” history of a community that is not her own. This approach to American history, and the specific history of this Los Angeles neighborhood, has the potential to elide the true stories of those she depicts with some nostalgic fantasy that serves only to reify their difference. However, contrary to the linear historical narrative that she establishes in her prologue, Revoyr sets up this version of historical melancholic entombment in order to
subvert that very impulse within the remainder of the novel. She takes us down the road of racial melancholia, but then at the end of the prologue, she writes that in Los Angeles, “history is useless and the future reinvented every day.”268 This critique of history as “useless” marks Southland’s departure from a sentimental prologue that casts history as the irretrievable past to a narrative that queers this melancholic historical methodology by indicating that the future is not fixed or determined but can instead can be shaped, or reinvented. What becomes clear as the narrative progresses is that it is history itself that has the potential to reach into the future to shape it, a move that acknowledges the potential for the agency of the past through a kind of haunting of the present.

The style of narration Revoyr adopts in the prologue, then, enacts and establishes the traditional linear approach to history and then subverts the narrative it establishes by contrasting the melancholia of the prologue with a queered sense of temporality and spatiality throughout the rest of the narrative. Each subsequent chapter is a different (non-chronological) temporality, located in a different space, and told through the experience of a different subject—an approach that I envision as an adoption of Carla Freccero’s concept of “Queer Spectrality,” or the approach to history that remains open to the return, or haunting, of the past.269 Freccero is specifically concerned with traditional approaches to history and historiography and their tendency to either bury or appropriate the past. She identifies two dominant historical methodologies—the burial approach and the colonial approach. The burial approach to history is enacted when “the historian’s gesture is a melancholic one, an attempt to entomb within writings the lost other of the past” whereas the colonial approach to history is one of “outright mastery or appropriation.”270
Either approach casts the “lost other” as one without agency, trapped in the annals of history or used as a tool to accomplish the goals of the colonizer/appropriator. In this discussion of historiography, Freccero grapples with the concept of the consumption of racialized others by hegemonic cultures and claims that the “ghost” of the other that is incorporated into the melancholic ego should, rather than remaining in the past, haunt history in a subversive disruption of dominant narratives through a series of persistent returns, an approach she terms “penetrative reciprocity.”  

When the writer or historiographer is open to the possibility of the buried past haunting, or penetrating, the present, the lost other regains agency since “ghosts figure the impossibility of mastering, through either knowledge or action, the past or the present.” She also critiques Cheng’s notion of melancholia because of the limits it imposes on the racialized melancholic object, for if Cheng’s excluded-yet-retained object returned it would be devastating to the ego whose construction is dependent on the object’s absence/exclusion. Freccero claims that “haunting” reimagines Cheng’s buried object as one with agency, a subject that still holds the ability to impact the story of the present. With queer spectrality, the linear historical narratives that keep these objects safely buried in the past are disrupted, opening up the possibility for a new kind of historiography. This “queer spectral” approach to history both acknowledges and questions the concept of melancholic incorporation, and Freccero poses it as an empowering alternative to Cheng’s notion of the passive entombment of racialized others. If the incorporated other haunts history and disrupts linear narratives, then it is able to exhibit agency by challenging containment and colonization.
Although Freccero claims that Cheng’s melancholic object is denied subjectivity, Cheng does speak to the issue of agency for the melancholic object, and since containment is so central to the narrative in *Southland*, it is important to address the way in which Cheng locates agency in the incorporated object. Cheng argues that a “serious effort at rethinking the term ‘agency’ in relation to forms of racial grief” is needed because “subjective agency” is a “convoluted, ongoing, generative, and at times self-contradicting negotiation with pain.” She goes on to argue that agency can be accessed through fantasy and cites Laplanche and Pontalis’ argument that fantasy is not “an activity of an already formed and stable subject, but rather as the constitutive and contingent staging of the subject in the unconscious.” In order to gain agency, one must use the fantasmatic, but the “fantasmatic signifies a process of desubjectivation, a state of agencylessness, that nonetheless constitutes the subject’s sense of integrity and hence his/her potential for agency—a process of scattering the ‘self’ in order to constitute a stage for the ‘self.’” In other words, the melancholic object depends upon its very objectification in order to create a stage upon which the self can be reconstituted as a subject with agency. One can see how the dependence upon desubjectivation for agency could be problematic for racialized others, and perhaps this is another reason that Freccero posits an alternative access to agency through haunting, or the persistent reappearance of the buried object.

Throughout *Southland*, there are instances of burial and containment as well as a queered and spectral temporality through which those buried subjects and histories return again and again. Chapter one includes a *mise-en-abyme* of containment. It begins with
Jackie entering the tightly secured gates of the Tara Estates apartment complex and then stepping into the apartment that her grandfather shared with her aunt and uncle, Lois and Ted. Eventually, Lois brings out two boxes that had been hidden within the closet in Frank’s bedroom and tells Jackie that there is a makeshift will hidden in one of the boxes that leaves the $38,000 dollars from the other box to someone named Curtis Martindale. Lois asks Jackie to assist her in finding this person, but Jackie is hesitant; however, when Jackie shuts herself in Frank’s bedroom, she is haunted by memories of her grandfather. After exiting this space, Jackie decides to pursue the task, admitting that “something had happened in the bedroom.”276 The action in this story is prompted by entering into contained spaces—the complex, the apartment, the bedroom, the closet, the boxes—because the space itself seems to have a kind of agency to make things happen and propel the narrative. Within these multiple containments, the description is littered with references to haunting—she “smelled the ghosts of burned eggs and onions” and she “kept expecting her grandfather to enter the room, grinning when he saw her.”277 Already, there is the undeniable presence of containment and haunting, and out of the boxes arises the story of Curtis Martindale as well as the dawning sense in Jackie of “Frank Sakai not as an aging old grandfather, but as an individual with a story, as a man.”278 Two possibilities for agency and two stories arise out of the forced silence of this multiple burial.

Spatiality, then, is central to the narrative because it is out of the space of containment that silenced subjects regain a voice. Perhaps the most striking example of silencing through entombment is the story of Curtis Martindale. His is the story that
Jackie is on a quest to discover, and it proves to be quite difficult because of the extent to which Curtis has been silenced as a subject. Jackie eventually learns that Curtis was a young African American employee at her grandfather’s store in the Crenshaw district and who was, secretly, Frank’s son. During the Watts riot, he and three other boys were locked in a freezer in the back of the store where they all died. Like the first chapter, there is a series of concentric containments functioning here—the neighborhood, the store, the freezer, and the ring of frozen bodies that were found in the freezer as the older boys encircled the younger ones in a final attempt to keep warm. Curtis’ existence as a subject is so completely erased in this situation that his story becomes a lacuna in history. In fact, when Jackie meets with James Lanier, Curtis Martindale’s cousin, he tells her about the event, adding, “It was never reported in the mainstream press, since so many other things were going on. Not that anyone would have given a shit about a bunch of dead niggers. But I’m surprised that your family . . .”

Jackie responds to this by thinking that her family did not talk about such topics: “More than gaps in the narrative; there was no narrative. Whole years, like the years of World War II, dropped cleanly from their collective history.” Curtis and his story are contained within the narrative gaps in history, and the meaning of his experience is lost through this silencing.

In order to address Cheng’s claims regarding the locus of agency for the melancholic object, it is important to explore the larger story of Curtis as a racialized other and the social implications of his literal and figurative entombment. Curtis’ part of the narrative begins in the chapter entitled “Curtis and Alma, 1961.” In this chapter, he has his first scrape with the law when he and a couple of friends vandalize their junior
high school campus. As Curtis’ mother Alma, a teacher at another local middle school, contemplates the fate of many young African American children who live in the neighborhood, she “was afraid for him. . . . Most of the trouble her kids got into was of the minor variety—fist fights and truancy and shoplifting—but a few of them fell harder. Several of her former students were in prison now, a couple of them were dead.”

This tendency for young people of color to end up incarcerated at alarming rates is certainly a mode of exclusion-yet-retention within dominant culture. Although the crime was clearly “childish fare” and the school decided not to press charges, the cops that were called were “angry at being denied the quarry they’d been summoned to flush.”

Here we see an overzealous desire to contain these young children in a manner inconsistent with their crime because the prison system is one of those institutions Cheng writes about that “often do not want to fully expel the racial other; instead, they wish to maintain that other within existing structures.” The prison system does just that—it houses a disproportionate number of non-white inmates, and by doing so it can exclude them from society while retaining them through incarceration in a kind of melancholic incorporation. Curtis, then, is a young man beginning to enter adult society yet becoming a racialized other through this encounter with racist institutions.

Although Curtis narrowly escapes legal incarceration, he is eventually entombed and othered by the law when a police officer locks him in the freezer during the riot. Revoyr leads her readers down the wrong path by implying throughout the narrative that it was Nick Lawson, a crooked white cop, who is ultimately responsible for Curtis’ death. Eventually, Jackie and James Lanier learn that it was Bob Thomas, an African-American
cop, who locked the boys in the freezer. The fact that Curtis was buried alive within the freezer is certainly an enactment of othering even though a white cop did not actually commit the murder. The moment before Thomas decides to usher the boys into the freezer, he contemplates the impact that the riots would have on the other officers’ perception of him as a black cop. He thinks,

This fool talking to him as if he, Curtis, were an equal. When it was fools like him that made his job so hard, made men like Lawson not see him as a peer. This riot was the worst thing he’d ever experienced, and beneath his anger at the punks who were tearing up the city was a deep and gnawing shame. Shame that he was the color of the arsonists and looters. Shame that other people’s worst beliefs had been confirmed.285

Although Thomas attempts to align himself with the dominant white culture by becoming a police officer and moving to a neighborhood outside of the ghetto, he remains nevertheless a racialized subject. In “A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia,” David Eng and Shinhee Han claim that “assimilation into mainstream culture for people of color still means adopting a set of dominant norms and ideals—whiteness, heterosexuality, middle-class family values—often foreclosed to them,” so racialized subjects operate within a melancholic framework since they must struggle with the persistent “loss of these norms—the reiterated loss of whiteness as an ideal, for example.”286 Thomas functions within this melancholic framework in that he attempts to assimilate into dominant culture through his alignment with middle class spaces and values, but this assimilation entails an adoption of “dominant norms and ideals” that are always
foreclosed to him because of his blackness. While he can adopt heterosexuality, middle-
class family values, and ideological alignment with police authority, Thomas cannot
escape the materiality of his skin color. As a result of this persistent failure, the
melancholic often becomes suicidal, and Eng and Han add, “suicide may not be merely
physical; it may also be a psychical erasure of one’s identity—racial, sexual, or
gender.” While Thomas does not become suicidal, the victims of his homicidal
tendency are material representatives of his failure to attain whiteness—they embody the
blackness that symbolizes his perpetual exclusion from dominant culture, and in that
sense he attempts to kill that part of his own identity through their murders. In this way,
the figure of Thomas is a melancholic object in that he is excluded-yet-retained within the
social institution of the police force, and he is also a melancholic subject in that he has
internalized the ambivalence associated with his “suspended, conflicted, and unresolved”
process of assimilation. In an attempt to gain agency and escape desubjectivation,
however, Thomas operates as a tool of dominant white culture, excluding-yet-retaining
Curtis in the symbolic crypt of the freezer and turning Curtis into the ultimate
melancholic object whose desubjectivation is complete when he dies as a result of that
containment. Rather than an erasure of Thomas’ identity, he has erased Curtis—the
symbol of his racialization.

Death would seem to be a realm from which agency is completely unrecoverable,
and the discovery of Curtis’ true murderer is rather inexplicably followed by a sexual
encounter between Jackie and Lanier, implying a connection between Curtis’ story and
this unexpected expression of desire. The sexual encounter is odd because Jackie is a
lesbian who has been dating Laura for about three years, and Lanier is a much older
heterosexual man who is toughened and emotionally removed. Neither of them is overtly
attracted to the other, and the issue of some kind of romance arising between them is cast
as absurd in the course of the narrative, yet just following the discovery of Curtis’ story,
they “kissed softly at first and then harder, hands grasping and caressing, trying
desperately to leave themselves behind.” Freccero draws a link between haunting and
desire that begins to elucidate this surprising narrative turn. Quoting Wendy Brown, she
explains that the origin of a specter is unimportant because “we inherit not ‘what really
happened’ to the dead but what lives on from that happening” and that place from which
the ghost emerges, that crypt, “is the secret vault of desire.” Freccero suggests that if
“desire for—and of—the other is part of what is hidden in the crypt . . . then a spectral
approach can make room for, or leave itself open to, the materialization and voicing of
that desire so that it might thereby appear and speak. Here, then, desire stands in for
what was buried in the crypt of history, what was silenced and objectified. The dead
exhibit agency when they “appear and speak” or “live on from that happening.” Openness
to that haunting, a “penetrative reciprocity,” is central to a queer spectral approach to
history—allowing “the very force from the past” to move us “perhaps not into the future,
but somewhere else.” As Jackie and Lanier penetrate the past, they allow themselves to
become receptive to the stories (even those they may not want to hear) from the past that
return and haunt their consciousness; they open the crypt that housed a diffuse desire and
allow those ghosts of desire to act upon them, to penetrate them. In this scene, the “force
from the past” moves them in unexpected ways, not forward into an intelligible future,
but “somewhere else” causing them to momentarily exceed the limitations of their
established identities. This is an example of Curtis’ renewed agency as his story emerges
from silence and inspires action. In a moment of queer spectrality, Lanier’s desires are
unclear and contradictory (“he knew that he didn’t want this as much as he did”)
and Jackie’s very queerness is queered when, despite the fact that she desires women,
she “felt her body rise against him” in response to his “hard, shifting muscles.”
This moment of inexplicable desire is, in fact, the moment in which Curtis emerges,
through desire, as a subject with agency and voice.

Throughout the narrative, Jackie becomes increasingly receptive to her own past
and the story of her family, but she begins as a kind of melancholic subject who has
buried her past in order to attain assimilation. She initially resists being haunted by the
memory of her grandfather by avoiding her own mourning as well as the sympathies of
others. She claims that she is not “totally shattered” by her grandfather’s death, so her
developing sense of loss seems “shallow and unearned.”

We soon learn, however, that Jackie had emotionally buried her grandfather long before his death and, along with him,
any acknowledgment of her family history. She recalls that in response to his letters,
phone calls, and emails, she “hadn’t answered, hadn’t thanked him, hadn’t noticed him
much at all. By the time of his death she hardly knew him.” In conjunction with this
denial of family history, Jackie also chooses objects of desire who will bring her closer to
whiteness and distance her from her own Asianness. One evening, Jackie runs into
Rebecca Nakanishi, a friend from law school, and they begin to discuss Jackie’s pattern
of choosing girlfriends. Rebecca says, “your last two girlfriends at Berkeley were just
like Laura. What’s the deal with you anyway? You’re like a reverse missionary. Rescuing lost white children.” 297 Jackie’s pattern of desire is more clearly solidified when she explains why she is not attracted to Rebecca: “she looked Asian enough to turn Jackie off; to make Jackie think of her as a mirror she didn’t want to look into. Kissing Rebecca would be like kissing a sister, if she had one—unerotic, strange, slightly creepy.” 298 Also, Rebecca directly accuses Jackie of denying her Japanese heritage, and Jackie responds by suspecting that Rebecca’s comment “had to do with Laura, and with the place she grew up, and with the fact that, except for Rebecca herself, Jackie didn’t really have Asian friends.” 299 Jackie surrounds herself with whiteness and attempts to bury her Japanese history. She has locked away the desire for knowledge of her own family history as well as the desire for women who remind her of her own materiality, and she is unreceptive to their hauntings. Like Thomas, Jackie is a melancholic subject because she attempts to assimilate into dominant white culture by distancing herself from those who represent her racialization, but the visibility of her Asianness permanently forecloses complete assimilation.

Jackie’s relationship with Laura reflects her melancholic attempts at assimilation. Laura, a young Stanford graduate, works for the City Councilman for the 4th district, a lawyer and wealthy entrepreneur and also a potential candidate for mayor, and Jackie admits that she was “impressed by Laura’s proximity to him.” 300 Laura, as a highly educated member of the political elite, represents dominant American culture, and Jackie’s proximity to her, then, is an attempt at attaining that ideal herself. However, Jackie finds that there is a constant barrier between them that keeps Jackie from moving
into Laura’s idealized subject position. Because of her Asianness and her increasing investment in her own family history, Jackie is unable to fully attain proximity to Laura as a representative of dominant American culture. She is able to have a relationship but one in which distance and barriers are inevitable—Jackie is always excluded-yet-retained as a melancholic object and always falling short of assimilation into whiteness.

If the dynamic between Jackie and Laura reflects the melancholic exclusion-yet-retention of racialized others within dominant culture, Rebecca represents an alternate mode of subjectivity that is more closely aligned with queer spectrality. She is a figure who refuses to conform to dominant ideals—in law school she is “irreverent, colorful, and disrespectful of convention, but she was brilliant—third in her class.” Here we have a picture of color rather than whiteness and fluidity rather than conformity. Rebecca does not deny her Asianness, and she does not bother to conform to the “ironed pants and buttoned-down shirts” of dominant culture. Additionally, Rebecca is flexible in her receptivity to shifting sexual desires. She is bisexual and encourages Jackie to explore options outside of her predictable dating patterns. In this way, Rebecca is an example of a more fluid queerness—one that is open to a multiplicity of desires and emotional connections. Rebecca, who works for Legal Aid rather than as a corporate lawyer, exhibits a sense of ethical responsibility by being open to those stories of (frequently) race-related hardships and can perhaps be considered a model for a queer spectral approach to racialization and melancholic history. Rebecca’s openness to various desires can be seen in terms of the “spectral approach” that “can make room for, or leave itself open to, the materialization and voicing of that desire,” and her erotic sensuality that is
fully receptive to Jackie as an object of desire is, perhaps, a result of her openness to being haunted by the stories of racialized others. Beyond the merely erotic, however, a receptivity to haunting also “engenders a certain responsibility. Spectrality is, thus, also a way of thinking ethics in relation to the project of historiography.” Since this approach to history does not objectify or silence the unpleasant realities of the past, it also must accept the ethical calls to action that attend spectral penetrations. Rebecca’s sense of professional and social ethics as well as her fluidly queer desires combine to form a subject who successfully embodies a queer spectral approach to life as well as history, and as Jackie finds herself becoming more and more receptive to her own family history, she grows closer to Rebecca and more aware of her own foreclosed desires.

In addition to her shifting desires, Jackie’s focus shifts from a driven search for Curtis Martindale to a more open and passive receptivity to the hauntings of her own heritage. The grandfather that she had buried and excluded-yet-retained within her consciousness begins to emerge when she finally opens the boxes that contain pictures and memories of his life—the crypt that had enclosed his history and that she avoids opening until more than half way through the narrative. Her penetrative reciprocity becomes clear when she reaches in the box and notes that the “documents seemed alive to her, and when she picked up her first handful of papers and photographs, she felt something like a pulse beat through her.” She is suddenly receptive to the life that these items hold, and she admits that this “was where her search for Curtis had started, and also, in a sense, her search for Frank.” Her openness to the ghosts of her own past finally allows her to admit that she is indeed searching for Frank—that his story is
relevant to her and even has the capacity to change her. Interestingly, the story that surfaces at this moment is one involving her grandfather’s service in the military. In order “to be free” from that extreme case of institutionalized racial melancholia, the internment camps, Frank decided to join the military, eventually earning several medals; however, the pictures in the box remind Jackie of a long-forgotten memory in which she asked her grandfather about why he never spoke about his service. He replied, “Because it didn’t make any difference.” For the first time, Jackie realizes that her grandfather’s disillusionment was in response to the hate crimes that greeted the families of his fellow Japanese-American soldiers who had died in the war rather than (as she had previously assumed) that “the army, or his part of it, hadn’t done anything of consequence.”

Here again we have an instance of that racial melancholia that Eng and Han describe. Frank was a melancholic object contained within the internment camps, and his dream of assimilation and acceptance through military service was never achieved because no matter how nobly he and his fellow Japanese-American soldiers fought and no matter how much they sacrificed, dominant American culture would never fully accept them as citizens. Military service was an attempt to demonstrate his alignment with American ideals, but the material markers of his Japanese heritage barred Frank from achieving full acceptance. His experience as a racialized other in American culture is something that Jackie had chosen to divorce herself from because it implied that her attempts at assimilation might be similarly foreclosed. Instead she had denied that part of her grandfather’s story, focusing on the innocuous, non-racialized aspects of his life such as his love of baseball and interest in her education. Opening the metaphoric box that
contained that past, however, causes a shift in Jackie’s perception of herself and her relation to others.

Her receptiveness to the hauntings of her buried racial past changes her sense of identity and causes her to identify more and more with her Asianness rather than with Laura as a figure of ideal of whiteness. Like Curtis, Frank regains some agency through this haunting—enough agency, at least, to alter Jackie’s sense of self as well as her desires as she begins to adopt a spectral approach that “can make room for, or leave itself open to, the materialization and voicing of that desire [for and of the other] so that it might thereby appear and speak.”

In a reversal of Jackie’s previous attraction to whiteness, Laura suddenly becomes repulsive to her. She realizes, “Now, looking at Laura—at her red cheeks, her tense mouth, her blonde hair and milky skin—she felt a repulsion so strong it made her shudder.” Immediately following this realization, Jackie calls Rebecca. As her “heart beat with an anticipation which surprised her,” she invites Rebecca to “get drunk” with her. Paired with this sudden shift in desire from Laura to Rebecca, comes an interest in ethical issues. Jackie had been on the path to become a corporate lawyer fully invested in the needs and ethics of capitalist culture while Rebecca was working for Legal Aid. In the scene immediately following the one in which Jackie opens the box of her grandfather’s memorabilia, she grills Laura on the fact that the councilman she is working for is not defending a group of women who have been held as indentured servants in the country and are now being deported in spite of their need for political amnesty. She yells at Laura that her boss is “going back on everything he’s ever stood for” and accusingly questions how Laura “can go along with this.” This
sudden concern with the ethical protection of racialized others trapped in “dark and windowless sweatshops” and “watched over by a man with a gun” becomes more interesting when we realize that this is a case that Rebecca will be working on through Legal Aid. When Rebecca had mentioned the case to Jackie earlier, Jackie was completely unaware of it, feeling “inadequate, out of touch” because of her lack of knowledge about these women. After opening the box and becoming receptive to the stories from her own past, however, Jackie also suddenly becomes invested in the ethical implications of the Legal Aid case (and presumably others like it). Here Jackie moves from melancholic subject, divorced from her raced past and the ethical demands of unpleasant situations such as the Legal Aid case and stories such as Curtis Martindale’s, to one who is open to these penetrations and responsive to the “ghost’s demand” that attends the spectral approach to history and identity.

The combination of Jackie’s morphing sense of self, her growing investment in ethical responsibility, and her newly recognized desire for Rebecca confirms that the ghosts of Curtis and Frank are exhibiting agency as “the very force from the past that moves us.” Jackie’s full conversion to the queer spectral approach, rather than her original melancholic one, culminates in the scene in which Jackie and Rebecca first kiss. As they are getting ready for a party together, Jackie becomes more and more intrigued with Rebecca, and after their kiss she “looked at her friend, her beautiful friend, the moist lips, the cut cheeks, the green, cat-like eyes.” The signifiers of Asianness that once turned Jackie off because they reminded her too much of her own materiality now become signifiers of beauty and desire. While, in the past, the idea of Rebecca’s
Asian features made Jackie “think of her as a mirror she didn’t want to look into,”
now it is through the mirror that their erotic encounter begins. As they are getting ready
for the party, they “both leaned over Rebecca’s vanity, inches away from the mirror,
putting on make-up and doing their hair,” and it is through their refracted gazes in the
mirror as well as their proximity to each other that Jackie notices the “sparks jumping off
her skin” in response to Rebecca. Rebecca, a subject invested in queer spectrality,
becomes a reflection of Jackie’s new sense of identity. As a result of her receptivity to the
desire and cultural history represented in the figure of Rebecca, Jackie “knew, for the first
time—and, finally, with this person—that in surrendering herself, she would also,
somehow, be given herself in return—stronger, newer, and complete.” This new mode
of being speaks to Jackie’s developing queer spectrality in that it involves both “patience
and passion” and an “opening up—or remaining open to the uncanny but somehow
strangely familiar.”

The final chapter of the novel, too, adopts a tone of patience and opening. This is
Curtis’ story, and although the readers know that he will be entombed, the novel ends
with the moment just before the murders occur. Revoyr once again leads us down an
avenue that we think we know and are in control of, but instead of a wrong turn, she stops
short and leaves us with Curtis going to “defend the store” from looters. Rather than
tying up the novel with Curtis’ death or a neat closure in which Frank reveals to Curtis
that he is Curtis’ father, Revoyr leaves it open, and with this lack of closure asks the
readers to remain open and patient. By being passively receptive to the possibilities
within the text as well as the reverberations that may exist outside and beyond the text,
the readers can be haunted by the memories contained within. The silence at the end of
the text is uncanny because, as readers, we are already familiar with what will happen,
but that satisfaction is withheld prompting a kind of frustration, a shattering of our sense
of mastery over the text, forcing the readers to learn openness and receptivity—just as
Jackie has over the course of the narrative.

While *Southland* begins with loss and burial, it ends with surrender and
emergence, and while *City of God* begins with a death, it ends with the promise of
immortality. Or, perhaps more accurately, these texts resist “the end” by remaining open.
The many “wrong turns” in the *Southland* disrupt the readers just enough to allow a
yielding that mirrors Jackie’s release and surrender to the stories of those racialized by
dominant culture and buried in history. Like Jackie, we are called upon “to be demanded
of and to respond” in a reciprocal relationship with history.323 The text’s very subversion
of linear narrative form enacts the ability of queer spectrality to create a space for agency
to emerge and haunt those who are open to it by embodying the “very force from the past
that moves us, perhaps not into the future, but somewhere else.”324 *City of God*, too,
provides its own share of “wrong turns” as the reader is encouraged to make connections
that are ultimately confounded by the twisting and overlapping narratives. Both texts are
based on being contained—about those buried alive both literally and by social narratives
about race, gender, class, and sexuality—and the potential for exceeding that containment
using available resources, however limited. While Cuadros presents a future-orientation
for subjects who have been silenced and Revoyr suggests a turn toward the past, both
acknowledge the deep losses that come about when crises cause a society to divide.
Both also suggest queered approaches to identity and to history that have the potential to exhume those who have been silenced and to rescue from the crypt those who are threatened with a silent future.
CHAPTER FOUR

Containing the Beast: Containment Culture and the Golden Age of Lesbian Pulp

“With ‘morality’ seemingly pervasive in the land, lurid covers of paperbacks screamed sex from every retail bookshelf and Americans gobbled up the books by the millions. For lesbian books, cover copy proclaimed our evil in order to meet morality requirements while the come-hither illustrations beckoned the reader into their pages and promised lascivious details.”

—Katherine V. Forrest

At the beginning of Horace Walpole’s 1764 Gothic tale, The Castle of Otranto, a giant helmet “an hundred times more large than any casque ever made for human being” falls from the sky, crushing young Conrad to death. Conrad’s father Manfred is so shocked by the “horror of the spectacle” that he “seemed less attentive to his loss, than buried in meditation on the stupendous object that had occasioned it.” The spectacle of the “stupendous object” overshadows Conrad’s gory death with its alien attributes—a communal trauma that causes an intense disruption to the already tenuous structure of the family estate. The story that follows is considered the founding piece of the modern Gothic genre, replete with sexualized power dynamics, gloomy subterranean passages, and outlandish supernatural occurrences. It is notable that Walpole initiated this gothicism with a moment of trauma.
On August 6, 1945 the United States dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, an alien and unimaginably destructive object that not only traumatized those immediately impacted by it but that also created an international disruption. Like Walpole’s giant helmet, the atomic bomb irrevocably fractured the already crumbling trajectory of history, its very spectacle causing obsessive reverberations that focused on atomic power itself to the extent that it often overshadowed any international mourning for the overwhelming loss of life experienced in the towns of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In this chapter, I will examine some of the atomic aftershocks that occurred in American culture between 1946 and 1964, the peak years of the cold war that followed from the trauma of deployed atomic power. Focusing specifically on the gothicisms that arose as a means of restructuring an American society obsessed with reestablishing “normalcy” in the new atomic age, I will examine the lowbrow literature known as lesbian pulp as a gothic site, one that reflects the cold war ethos by housing a complex interaction of containment and resistance within its mass-produced pages. Befitting a cultural obsession with duality and containment and arising from the stealth inclusion of sympathetic lesbian subjects in tales overtly published for the purposes of exploitation and morality, many of these texts imply moralistic notions of natural/unnatural, healthy/sick, and normal/abnormal on their covers while providing a more nuanced portrayal of queerness within their pages. The queer pulp fiction from the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s highlights the ways authors, artists, and publishers deployed gothic language and imagery as strategies of containment in this post-traumatic moment. Many authors of lesbian pulp fiction, however, consciously reappropriated these gothic tropes in order to utilize the discourse of the day as a means
of creating new notions of community and identity, paradoxically fostering visibility through the very language deployed to contain difference.

The notion of containment circulates in eighteenth and nineteenth century Gothic novels concerned with live burial, navigating inescapable subterranean passages, and imprisonment within crypts, castles, and convents, but during the cold war period containment takes on a new valence as it becomes an overt strategy of foreign and domestic policy. As Alan Nadel establishes in *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age*, containment was a U.S. cold war foreign policy strategy that sought to contain the spread of communism as well as the threat of atomic arms development and deployment. This was to be accomplished by restricting the “flow” of communism by aiding countries attempting to maintain democracy in the face of Soviet pressures as well as by providing a strong counterexample to communism, thereby “making the Soviets look less potent and attractive” in comparison to American society.\(^{328}\) The notion of American society as counterexample necessitated the extension of this containment-based foreign policy into the realm of domestic policy. Nadel describes this domestic encroachment of containment culture:

Although technically referring to U.S. foreign policy from 1948 until at least the mid-1960s, it also describes American life in numerous venues and under sundry rubrics during that period: to the extent that corporate production and biological reproduction, military deployment and industrial technology, televised hearings and filmed teleplays, the cult of domesticity and the fetishizing of domestic
security, the arms race and atoms for peace all contributed to the containment of communism, the disparate acts performed in the name of these practices joined the legible agenda of American history as aspects of containment culture.\textsuperscript{329}

This description makes clear how the narrative of containment infiltrated nearly every aspect of American life during the height of the cold war period, indicating the decidedly gothic presence of paranoia informing the national imagination during the decades following the deployment of the atomic bomb.\textsuperscript{330} Nadel notes that this paranoia manifested itself in the obsessive desire to “foreclose dissent, preempt dialogue, and preclude contradiction” within all spheres of American life, accomplished by emphasizing the binary of “Other and Same” and instituting practices that attempted to ferret out the “Other” hidden within the ranks of the “Same.”\textsuperscript{331} This notion of duality dominated what Nadel calls a “nuclear gaze,” or a gaze that is able to define the “difference between dangerous and nondangerous activity” in order to “prohibit actions with ambiguous motives” and thereby contain any non-normative behaviors that might put national security at risk.\textsuperscript{332}

The key to national security, then, was to identify the inherent dual nature of all things, prohibit any behavior or identity that threatens to migrate to the “dangerous” side of that duality, and question any hint of ambiguity or duplicity that might defy the binary assumption as a whole. Paranoid surveillance in the form of McCarthyism became the method for containing humanity’s dual nature and controlling any subversion that might be lurking within the ranks of those supposedly “normal” and “loyal” citizens, and it is well known that Senator Joseph McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities
Committee (HUAC) spearheaded the campaign to root out any subversives by, amongst other things, identifying any citizen who could not be contained within notions of “normal” sexuality and gender. McCarthy’s policing of gender and sexuality might simply be the most public and infamous example of queer containment, but policing of social norms regarding gender and sexuality occurred on all levels of society, primarily though the narrative of the cult of domesticity—leading to “strictly censored television programming, the drop in average marriage age, the suburban housing development, the public elaboration of dating etiquette, and the rigidly constrictive and restrictive structure of female undergarments.” The idyllic, white, suburban, Christian, middle class, heteronormative nuclear family became the picture of health and happiness, and anything that deviated from this structure—or functioned within the structure but failed to achieve happiness as a result—became the face of the enemy subversive. Containment culture and McCarthyism worked to maintain this standard along with heightened notions of decency and censorship, but the biggest threats were not those who were blatantly anti-establishment (for they were easy to spot and keep track of). The true threats arose out of the notion of duality; the subjects who were most subversive were those who were in the “closet,” passing as “normal,” defying surveillance practices, and possibly secretly corrupting those who were exposed to them. The language and imagery that arise out of containment culture and appear on the covers of pulp texts is certainly informed by the notion of containment and marginality, frequently leading to vaguely (or overtly) gothic representations of this containment.
At first glance, it is surprising that this moment of paranoia, containment, and
domestic normativity gave birth to the popular genre of gay and lesbian pulp fiction, as
publishers began to recognize a clandestine demand for literature that exploits the very
limitations established by containment practices. “Pulp” names the genre of cheap, mass-
produced paperback novels that began to gain popularity after World War II as American
culture became more interested in portability and disposability. Woody Haut points out in
his study of cold war era pulp fiction, without explicitly commenting on the traumatic
element of this historical relationship, that the genre’s beginnings can be traced to the
years following August 6, 1945, with some of the most classic pulp novels published
shortly after this date.334 Originally associated with hardboiled mystery and crime novels,
the genre evolved into novels that “emphasized violence, sex, and paranoia” as well as
blatantly queer sexual themes such as bisexual love triangles, gay male and lesbian
romances, sadomasochism, and other supposedly sordid “perversities.”335 While the
censors of the day believed that the pulp phenomenon dangerously encouraged the “dark”
side of the human duality, queer theorists now recognize the outgrowth of pulp fiction as
a causal reaction to containment oppression. Susan Stryker notes that pulp novels served
as a forum for unconscious cultural fantasies that were forced into containment through
policing practices of the era and as a screen for “the brooding content that lingered
beneath the bright, false, chrome-plated surfaces covering much of postwar American
life.”336 As such, she argues that pulp “paperbacks in the 1940s and ‘50s were
undoubtedly the venue of choice for exploring and exploiting certain taboo topics
disallowed in movies and radio and the pages of reputable hardcover books” because of
their disposability and affordability, allowing closeted readers to pick up a copy of a novel at the drug store or bus station for twenty-five cents, slip it in their pocket, read it on the bus or a park bench in anonymity, and leave it there when finished. This proved to be a life-saving practice for many gay and lesbian people who felt deeply isolated by the narratives of heterosexuality and domesticity circulating in cold war American containment culture.

In the introduction to her collection *Lesbian Pulp Fiction: The Sexually Intrepid World of Lesbian Paperback Novels 1950-1965*, Katherine V. Forrest explains the alienating aspects of the cult of domesticity for anyone falling outside of the norms of gender and sexuality: “I grew up in the post-war 1950s, an idyllic world if you were a straight white male or if you were naïve enough to believe TV’s idealistic ‘Leave It To Beaver’ image of the average American family.” Queer folks, however, found that they had no place in this world, and the widespread popularity of Freudian psychoanalysis during this period served to pathologize their difference—another method of containment used to police deviation. Simultaneously, however, the prevalence of psychoanalytic discourse circulating throughout popular and medical culture paradoxically provided people with a new vocabulary for talking about sexuality and gender, and the contradictory effects of psychoanalytic language certainly appear in the text of pulp paperbacks. In addition to this medical discourse, queer pulp provided some much needed visibility and knowledge for queer people who felt deeply isolated by their non-normative genders and sexualities, but it is also because of this visibility that strict anti-pornography
censorship laws, attempting to contain the “perverse” side of human sexuality, targeted queer pulp fiction. In relation to this censorship campaign, Haut notes,

According to one U.S. Senator, “alien-minded radicals and moral perverts” had infiltrated the pocket-book market, while, in 1952, the House Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials concluded: “Some of the most offensive infractions of the moral code were found to be contained in low-cost, paper-bound publications known as ‘pocket-size books’ . . . which . . . have denigrated into media for the artful appeals to sensuality, immorality, filth, perversion, and degeneracy. 339 Committees such as this one were formed to target the writers and publishers of those novels concerned with sex because they represented the underbelly of American sexuality—with gothic subjects such as monstrous sexual urges, sadomasochism, and incest—or the other side of the duality that needed to be contained in order to control subversion in the name of national security. Note that the Senator’s language equates “moral perverts” with “alien-minded radicals,” implying that deviant morality derives specifically from sexual perversion and that these qualities stem from the Other, or alien, presence hidden within American society. Note also that the House Committee is not concerned with the poor quality of exploitative literature but instead they are concerned with the “artful appeals” that might convince those on the “normal” side of the sexual binary to defect to the side of perversion, or perhaps more frighteningly, be caught somewhere in an ambiguous liminal space between the binary poles where established surveillance practices might be ineffective. This concern implies that queer pulp held
a significant amount of power to subvert narratives of normativity, and it also speaks to
the assumed parallels between queer “recruiters” and artful undercover agents, making
queer pulp an imperative target for containment.

In order to counter this claim and avoid prosecution under anti-pornography laws
while still cashing in on the shocking retail success of these queer-themed pocket-books,
publishers took great pains to craft cover art and copy that was simultaneously appealing
to their queer audiences while indicating that the novels were, in fact, morality tales
designed to teach people about the “wrong” sexual path so that they might be guided
toward the “right” one. While the content of the texts themselves vary widely, with many
novels decidedly exploitative and designed for straight male audiences, many of the texts
were written by gay and lesbian writers with sensitive and thoughtful approaches to queer
sexuality that belie the cautionary nature of the cover art and copy. Often, however, the
only narrative caveat that a publisher insisted on was that any novel about queer romance
must end badly. This usually consisted of one of several options: suicide, insanity, or the
character’s realization that he or she was never actually in love with their same-sex
romantic interest (usually after finding the a more appropriate and desirable hetero-
romantic interest).

Queer pulp covered a fairly wide spectrum of sexuality, but for this chapter, I will
focus on those pocket-books that circulated around lesbianism, a corner of the pulp
publishing market that experienced surprising success in America during the height of the
cold war period. While the early years of pulp publication often focused on reprints of
older novels, what is most commonly known as pulp fiction from this period consists of
paperback originals (PBOs). These PBOs were developed when publishers accepted original manuscripts submitted to them by unknown or little-known authors or commissioned writers who would be willing to conform to their standards in order to avoid obscenity charges and maximize sales. Often this meant that the novels were written by people eager to earn the publishers advance fee above all else, so they were willing to write about subjects that were completely unfamiliar to them (such as straight male writers drafting a novel about lesbianism) and/or they were willing to create sensational storylines that objectified, fetishized, and mischaracterized the queer sexualities they portrayed. This often took the form of storylines that exploited lesbianism, for example, for the straight male pornographic gaze and then concluded with deeply pathologizing resolutions that othered queer characters and emphasized their alien freakishness. While even the most lurid of these exploitative texts provided a degree of queer visibility, however fraught, there was a small segment of lesbian PBOs that were written by lesbian or bisexual women and that attempted to portray queer sexuality with some accuracy and sensitivity even in the face of editorial and juridical pressures, leading to the sudden emergence of a previously unrecognized lesbian demographic who desperately sought out representation no matter how alienating the cover art or how poorly the lesbian characters fared at the end of the novels. The “unprecedented and unexpected success” of novels centering on lesbianism “later led paperback fans to label the period between the mid-1940s and the mid-1960s, when these lesbian PBOs flourished, as a ‘golden age’ for the representation of sexual diversity in mass-market paperbacks.” 340 Notably, this “golden age” coincides precisely with “peak cold war
“America” and the height of containment culture (1946-1964), as delineated by Alan Nadel. Because of the dual nature of cold war lesbian pulp texts, the remainder of this chapter will be divided into two sections. First, I will provide an overview of the cover art and copy of lesbian pulp novels that fall roughly within the “golden age” of lesbian pulp in order to explore the ways these covers expose methods of gothic containment and function as literal containers for the interior text. In the second portion of the chapter, I will examine the actual text of Ann Bannon’s iconic “Beebo Brinker Chronicles,” looking at the strategic redeployment of gothicism as a means of queer visibility and knowledge dissemination in an era of censorship and persecution.

**Light, Darkness, and Twilight: Containment Dualities and Queer In-Betweenness**

When sifting through lists of queer pulp titles, one begins to notice the frequent appearance of language deploying terms such as “twilight,” “shadows,” and “third.” While the notion of queerness as an in-between state existed before World War II (the term “demi-monde,” for example, was used to describe fringe lifestyles since the middle of the nineteenth century), the language of in-betweenness takes on new relevance in the context of cold war containment culture when those who crossed between the patriot/subversive binary were considered extremely dangerous. The titles, cover images, and copy of queer pulp novels often emphasize the threatening aspect of those who lurk in margins of the normative, domestic sphere by featuring darkness, and indeed, even utilizing black ink to create an aura of fear and titillation. In a genre governed by profit margins, it is notable that publishers found the concept of darkness
important enough to ignore common paperback printing conventions when queerness was a dominant theme of the text. Stryker explains that at this time “most publishers avoided using black on paperback covers because it tended to show scratches and wear too easily. It was used primarily on gothic and horror story covers. The extensive use of black on these [queer pulp] covers thus subtly suggested the psychological horror a straight mind might experience when confronted with bisexual ménages a trois and the prospect of homosexuality.” The horror of crossing over into the realm of homosexuality, signaled by gothic black ink, resonated with a culture obsessed with double agents and subversion. Perhaps more frightening, however, was the realm between, for most queer pulp did not offer the overt binary of heterosexuality versus homosexuality. Instead, there was often a love triangle, a foray into the dark side of sexuality in the context of confusion or desperation. Further, those who were confirmed lesbians in these texts generally spent their days “passing” in straight society and their nights engaging in “perverse” sexual encounters. The horror, for mainstream society, was that they might be interacting with a queer double agent at any time, unable to tell that this “lesbian sicko” has brought a little bit of darkness into their world of light, casting shadows of doubt on all interactions.

Robert J. Corber highlights the threat of the subversive homosexual in his essay examining the 1950 film All About Eve. He notes that there was a fear of queer “invisibility” that linked “gays and lesbians to the communists and fellow travelers who were supposedly conspiring to over throw the nation, a link that encouraged the view that gender and sexual nonconformity were un-American.” This aura of suspicion played
perfectly into the paranoid atmosphere of containment culture and was reflected in the covers of lesbian pulp.

Valerie Taylor’s novel, *Stranger on Lesbos* serves as an example of this gothic atmosphere of darkness merged with the even more disturbing notion of crossing over. In accordance with Stryker’s observations, the cover features the black ink associated with gothic or horror texts and includes some dark shades of red and brown. Other
common pulp features on this cover are the scantily clad woman turned away from the viewer, looking ashamed and grief-stricken. Often covers feature two women or two women and a man in order to simultaneously signal same-sex desire (for queer readers) and the bisexual love triangle with a promise of heterosexual resolution (for the censors). This text, however, seems more concerned with emphasizing the loneliness of “unnatural love” with its single woman, having been “left alone too often” by her husband yet still a “stranger” to lesbianism. Implied here, too, is the risk of the unfulfilled domestic contract. The message: Men, if you do not occupy your husbandly role properly, your wife may be tempted to cross between worlds—implying not only a failure at containing her on the proper side of the sexual duality but also implying that an appealing “undercover” agent might draw her into the shadows and perhaps out of your masculine reach. She might, more horrifyingly, fall between worlds into a shady twilight zone within which nothing is clearly identifiable and any known means of surveillance and character assessment are unreliable. This risk of ambiguity is the true fear of containment culture, and it is because of this fear that shadows and twilight appear and reappear in the language and imagery of pulp cover art.
The cover of Aldo Lucchesi’s *Strange Breed*, too, implies the unknowablity of women who lurk in the shadows of sexually normative culture. Again, printed on a black background with predominantly yellow text, this cover features the requisite topless woman with back turned and gaze diverted. Here, a post-coital scene is more strongly implied than on the cover of *Stranger on Lesbos*, but without the love triangle and promise of eventual heterosexuality, the women on this cover are more strongly dehumanized and pathologized than the sympathetic and lonely housewife of *Stranger on*
Lesbos who is presumably recruited by Bake “with her dark, knowing eyes.” Instead, these women are not strangers on Lesbos but are cast as an entirely different “breed of women,” intentional lesbians (perhaps more animal than human) who very well may be those double agents who infiltrate the homes of lonely housewives and tempt them to enter the twilight. Notable, here, is the cover copy—consisting exclusively of quotes on lesbianism from supposedly reputable psychiatric and medical authorities. The inclusion of commentary by a medical expert on the cover copy was not uncommon since it allowed the publishers to present these texts as socially redeeming in some form, a psychological study of sorts. Interestingly, if one looks past the sympathetic language (“Lesbians should be neither pitied nor ridiculed”), the narrative of the broken domestic contract appears once again: “For, if there were fewer brutal, bungling, sexually inept and self-centered men, there would be far fewer Lesbians.” In addition to exposing lesbians as dark and inhuman beasts, lurking in the shadows, passing as normal in the daylight, and waiting to snatch unsuspecting, yet neglected, heterosexual women, this is a narrative about the failures of masculinity. As a tool of containment culture, these novels serve the dual purpose of attempting to name and control lesbians while working to coerce conformity amongst men, implying that their failures allow women to fall prey to subversive forces and indeed that they are complicit in the undermining of the American domestic sphere and, by extension, the weakening of America as a virile counterexample to communism.

In the context of containment, the notion of gothic darkness asserted in so many lesbian pulp covers serves as also as a metaphor of racial and cultural othering. George
Kennan, whose essay “The Sources of Soviet Conduct” (1947) introduced the term containment in relation to U.S. foreign policy, also worked to establish the othering of Russia by associating it with racial and cultural difference. In his memoir, he remarks on “the basic backwardness of Russia,” “the differentness of Russia,” and “its close proximity to the Orient.” Nadel argues that this language constructed and represented the association between Russia and the Orient in the American imaginary. “As the Orient, they are the West’s Other, potentially a part of the Oriental harem,” and as such, Russia functions as the other side of a sexualized binary—both “perverse seductress” and potential “rival suitor”—attempting to both tempt American defection and infiltrate those countries that America would like to claim for democracy. Nadel notes that this narrative “raises questions about Russia’s orientation,” so the Oriental “darkness” associated with Russia becomes legible as a queer threat—one that blurs notions of appropriate sexuality and gender roles while simultaneously nodding toward the specter of miscegenation. Again, this cold war consciousness extended into the paperback world. Lesbian pulp, a genre almost exclusively centered around white, middle or working class storylines and characters, frequently extracts race itself from the texts by substituting raced bodies with racialized metaphors of darkness and foreignness, thus representing the threat of queerness as both perverse seductress and rival suitor and, like the Soviets, a threat to American domesticity and national security.

In addition to the visual darkness and allusions to shadows that pervade the covers of these texts, the pulp lesbian is othered through her unspoken foreignness. She is often masculine, dark and swarthy, with an unusual or foreign sounding name. Consider, for
example, the name of the temptress in *Stranger on Lesbos*; she is worldly with “dark, knowing eyes” and bears the strange name Bake. The back cover of *The Scorpion* by Anna Elisabet Weirauch, originally published in 1932 and reprinted in 1948, explains that the “[y]oung, sensitive Myra meets and is conquered by Olga’s worldliness” until the two women can do nothing but “live in the twilight zone of sex.” In addition to the worldly Olga, names that ring of Eastern Europe and other foreign locales abound, such as Magda, Draga, and Hilda from *The One Between* (1962), *Queer Affair* (1957), and *Forbidden* (1952) respectively. Further, as Jaye Zimet explains in *Strange Sisters: The Art of Lesbian Pulp Fiction, 1949-1969*, the cover art often features a dark, often short-haired woman (sometimes wearing pants) who occupies the role of abnormally masculine temptress in relation to the frequently unhappy-looking feminine woman.
The covers featured here are just a sampling of many that contain the short-haired “butch,” looking tough, knowing, and seductive. Although the women read as white (whiteness is implied on the covers of most of these texts), race is replaced by markers of otherness including dark hair and eyes, as appears on the covers of The One Between and Unnatural Wife. Forbidden features a short haired woman with her back to viewers, obscuring her eye color but featuring prominently the fact that she is wearing pants.

All three “butch” women featured on the covers here exhibit dominance by standing in relation to the more passive, feminized woman. And while on each cover the short-haired woman is looking directly, almost intimidatingly, at her implied lover, it is only on the cover of Unnatural Wife that the other woman gazes back. The dynamics strongly imply
that these lovers are assuming masculine and feminine gender roles, and although these roles place ambiguous sexualities back in a readable gender binary, the fact that the masculine role is playing out on a clearly female body marks the masculine woman as strange, unknowable, and other. Further, though these cover images are not so clearly gothic as those printed in black, red, and yellow, the dynamics of the couples in each mirror what Tania Modleski calls the “Shadow-Male” of Gothic fiction. Modleski claims that eighteenth century Gothic texts marketed to female audiences reflect the readers’ paranoid “tendency to classify men into two extreme categories” while looking for mates with an “extremely unlikely combination” of those polar qualities. This classification appears in Gothic literature in the form of the “Super-Male and the Shadow-Male, the former almost always the apparent villain but the real hero, the latter usually a kind, considerate, gentle male who turns out to be vicious, insane, and/or murderous.”

The seductive butch figures on these covers serve as the sly “Shadow-Male” who tempt vulnerable women into their world and who are frequently revealed as insane and/or vicious—a gothic queer version of the foreign undercover agent who passes in the American mainstream only to subvert our vulnerable citizens in the service of the dark, orientalized Soviet power. Of course, it is impossible to ignore the sexualization of the exotic here, with two out of three of these images featuring the dark woman in some state of undress, speaking to the multiple functions of lesbian pulp in general. While there was a large following of lesbian readers to whom the gothic Shadow-(Fe)male figure might appeal, the texts were overtly designed for male voyeuristic pleasure or moralizing about
the evils of queer sexuality, and these apparently competing purposes play out in the sexualized exotic-yet-suspicious threat of the women featured on the covers.

The intense effort to imply foreignness on these covers forces them into a cold war discourse, using vaguely racialized associations to mark these women as alien threats. In spite of implications of darkness, difference, and foreign orientalism on the covers, the overt appearance of any race outside of whiteness is exceedingly rare. In fact, Stryker notes that the cover art for books *Cloak of Evil* and *Duet in Darkness* by author Rea Michaels “are among the only representations of lesbians of color in the entire lesbian paperback genre.” While lesbians of color and interracial lesbian couples exist within the pages of some rare lesbian pulp novels, with few exceptions they do not overtly occupy the covers. Notions of darkness and the foreign, however, clearly exist as markers of otherness that resonate with cold war notions of an Oriental threat while allowing them to conveniently circumvent the increasingly charged topic of U.S. race relations. The presence of the foreign Other also suggests the frightening prospect that these figures might pass into white American life in order to subvert the domestic sphere and pull straight women into the “twilight zone” as queer lovers—seductive and competitive with “normal” and “healthy” relations. Like Kennan’s move to associate Russia with its Oriental neighbors in opposition to America’s Occidentalism, pulp’s inclusion of a slippery, not clearly marked or identifiable, darkness served to cast gender and sexual non-conformists as an inscrutable alien other that both defines normality and threatens it from both without and within.
The notion of the Oriental as dark, foreign, and slightly exciting in its sexualized exoticism is, of course, not new to mid-century America. Edward Said notes that since the late eighteenth century, European culture has “gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self,” and it is this relationship between Orient and Occident that begins to develop in the United States most strongly after World War II. In the juxtaposition between the socially visible self and the “underground self,” one begins to see the roots of that duality narrative so heavily utilized in containment culture—a narrative that also serves as a “Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.” Further, orientalism as late eighteenth century discourse introduced a “complex array of ‘Oriental’ ideas” such as “Oriental despotism, Oriental splendor, cruelty, sensuality” to the popular consciousness, creating a vision of the Oriental other as a muddy combination of animalistic sexuality and sadistic desire, simultaneously threatening and fascinating. The Orient in eighteenth century Gothic fiction functions as a marker of the exotic, exciting, and slightly creepy. For example, Charlotte Dacre’s Zofloya; or The Moor (1806) utilizes the dark figure of the Moor to represent ominous power paired with sexual desirability, with the magical and seductive Moor revealing himself in the end as the ultimate inhumanly frightening (yet deliciously tempting) other, Satan. While Zofloya’s body is partially determined by his blackness, it is the combination of racism, orientalism, and desire that marks Zofloya as a dangerous and powerful presence, tempting those who encounter him (namely Victoria) to perform increasingly evil and sexually perverse acts. Notably, too, Satan is able to “pass” throughout the novel as a dark and foreign figure,
successfully infiltrating the domestic sphere, undetected, and undermining any remaining notion of an already crumbling patriarchal structure. In the course of the novel, Victoria is ultimately punished for her powerful and transgressive behavior as she not only falls prey to the dark presence of Zofloya but also slowly becomes darker and more foreign as the novel progresses. This shift gestures toward the cultural fear of unleashed female sexuality and miscegenation by implying that otherness is a kind of contagion, infiltrating the domestic, influencing behavior, and ultimately drawing the vulnerable into a muddy and frightening space of ambiguity from which they might continue the subversion of the domestic as the new foreign agent. This theme, then, had been circulating for centuries by the time it was deployed on the cover of cold war lesbian pulps, and orientalism as a strategy of containment culture certainly draws on these gothic roots as it attempts to portray a threatening, yet desirable, sexuality that has to potential to infiltrate and subvert the domestic.

Although I have used Zofloya as an example of pulp’s gothic orientalist roots, I think it a mistake to conflate blackness itself with the representations of darkness deployed by pulp cover art and copy. As I mentioned, race is elided by the imagery of darkness, twilight, and shadows in the majority of “golden age” lesbian pulp fiction, but beyond the impulse to avoid heightening racial tensions in American society, the elision of blackness, specifically, reflects the anxieties that arise out of those elements of culture that resist binary categorization. In other words, the black/white racial binary was well understood by post-World War II culture. Regardless of the actual complexities of race, during this era of Jim Crow segregation it was assumed that race-based social restrictions
could be readily enforced because blackness was easily recognizable in opposition to whiteness. Of course, in practice, this was not so clearly the case since people with African ancestry had been passing as white for centuries. Unlike the notion of blackness in the popular imagination, the figure of the Oriental challenged the black/white racial binary since it did not neatly conform to either category, thereby disrupting the social structures and institutions built on white hegemony. It is notable that the cultural paranoia of the lurking subversive, then, was not characterized by blackness but by shadowy, nondescript darkness. The gothic impulse to use the Oriental as a figure of the seductive, threatening other circulates during the cold war period because it represents the dusky realm in which the comfortable black/white binary breaks down. Again, it is not the ultimate Other that functions as the truly frightening but the muddy, ambiguous figure that falls between any knowable dualities.

The pulp obsession with in-betweenness arises out of this binary collapse. The realm of queer sexuality is housed in the twilight world, between night and day, and in order to name and understand that place that resists categorization, there is an almost desperate attempt to explain the potentially subversive queer figure as a “third sex.” The notion of the “third” functions as a kind of containment device, or what I call a “containment crypt,” that creates a third space in which to bury those who might queer existing notions of gender and sexuality founded on binaries such as male/female and heterosexual/homosexual. Classic Gothic villains such as Ambrosio and the Prioress in Matthew Lewis’s The Monk famously utilize the crypt as a means of containment and control; when their victims are buried within those subterranean passages, the villains can
find them, study them, and act upon them as they please. Ann Radcliffe, too, frequently engages the convent, an isolated space with its own winding passages and crypts, as a location of imprisonment and surveillance. Similarly, the containment crypt in relation to queer subjects is deployed to regain control over an element of society that slips between knowable poles of behavior, identity, and embodiment by creating a new region between the cracks of the binary, a “third” region that serves as both prison and viewing area and in which the complexities of queerness can be named, fetishized, and controlled.

Figure 4: Courtesy of the ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives
Artemis Smith’s novel, *The Third Sex*, presents a tale of a front marriage between Joan, a woman who could only find the “satisfactions of love” with other women, and Marc, her lover’s brother who had a “twisted fondness” for other men. This is an anxiety provoking situation within the context of containment culture because the marriage creates the illusion of heterosexuality, allowing two sexual Others to infiltrate and undermine the hetero-exclusive domestic sphere. Joan and Marc move between worlds and utilize dominant social conventions as screens for their “curse.” This passing might certainly trigger paranoid thoughts of queer subversion, but the cover material creates a containment crypt that works to control the slipperiness of the characters by proposing a “third sex” that might characterize those who slip between worlds and confound assumptions regarding the inextricability of gender performance and sexual object choice. The crypt of the “third sex,” then, works to name those subjects that might slip under the radar and threaten to distort social institutions such as marriage. The impulse to contain these subjects so that they might be scrutinized and controlled emerges again with pathologizing language similar to that which we observed on the cover copy of *Strange Breed*. *The Third Sex*, a novel that is clearly a specimen of popular fiction, is instead cast as a “penetrating study” that “compellingly comes to grips with the problems of the third sex.” In other words, the notion of the third sex allows the publisher to present this erotic and potentially subversive tale as a pseudoscientific study of that namable social problem, the third sex. Rather than allowing the characters and the storyline to remain muddy and complex in terms of gender and sexuality, the cover text instead offers a space of containment, effectively codifying and cauterizing queer identity.
The 3rd Theme, by March Hastings, also attempts to situate sexual fluidity within a space of containment. The cover copy, in this case, does not attempt to pathologize or assume a scientific or psychological mode of discourse. Instead this text, clearly labeled as “Adult Reading,” focuses on the sexual drama of the storyline, placing the image of a tormented-looking, yet exotically sexy, woman in between a man in a gray (flannel?) suit and a blonde woman in a light green pants suit. The back cover consists exclusively of text from the novel itself, but the publisher has not refrained entirely from shaping the reader’s understanding of this love triangle. The text is divided into three portions: the
first portion of black text describes a narrative of straight sex and self-loathing, the
second portion of black text describes the moments preceding a lesbian sexual encounter,
and the third portion is written in white and placed between the two sections of black text.
The white section describes, not a sex scene, but an interior monologue, reflecting upon
how the “she” of this story had “ruined her own life. . . with desire.” The editorial
arrangement of the text effectively places her between the two poles of a sexual binary.
The notion of thirds is implied throughout the cover design, and it is the queer woman
who is caught between—in an unhappy space from which she is powerless to escape.
Without this containment, the unhappy protagonist might slip between worlds free from
scrutiny, and the readers would be denied a venue for voyeuristically observing the erotic
spectacle of her queerness.
The Third Street does, spatially, what The Third Sex attempts to do with its pseudoscientific naming and what The 3rd Theme does for erotic titillation. This text speaks of a street on which “no questions were asked” and “where few men were ever seen”—in other words, a kind of lesbian ghetto space. As with many of the novels I have discussed so far, this cover features darkness, a brunette with short hair and pants, and her more feminine sexual interest. This “gay street” contains a range of writhing, tormented souls seeking companionship and sexual satisfaction in a world set apart from the rest of society. Their “world of exotic evil” exists as a kind of catch all space for any one with
“secret hungers” that are “condemned by society” but may not be easily categorized within the heterosexual/homosexual binary. Explicitly, this copy is probably meant to simply describe a street in Greenwich Village, or some other urban bohemian space in which queer folks congregate, but regardless of the fact that there are probably more than three streets in this urban neighborhood, it is labeled as the “third street” and characterized as an exotic, yet slightly terrifying, menagerie of freakishness, pathology, and sexual desperation. The “third,” here as with the previous texts, functions as a label that attempts to contain and control queerness, isolating it as a spectacle and fetishizing its exoticism. Those who walk the street at night might easily pass as “normal” during the day, so spatially localizing that threat in a position between two presumably non-gay streets creates a sense that these subjects are knowable, locatable, and even exploitable—their subversive power removed once they are trapped in the containment crypt.

Unlike many of the novels in which the foreign looking, masculine woman occupies the aggressive role in relation to a miserable looking feminine woman, on the cover of The Third Street the more feminine woman seems to be leading the couple down this street, grabbing the butch’s hand and looking back expectantly. This seems to be a kind of reversal of the common butch aggression found on the covers of many pulps. With her long blonde hair, this feminine woman is not dark and foreign; wearing a skirt and heels, she does not defy the norms of feminine appearance. In the schema of containment culture’s impulse to categorize and alienate, it seems as if she plays by the gender rules and is therefore less threatening. Usually, within the plotlines of lesbian pulp, this type of woman is not a “true” lesbian, probably lonely, confused, and desperate, and
tempted by the butch lesbian into the twilight world of queerness—not here, however. This femme, instead, is leading the more masculine woman into the shadows of the third street, and this narrative reversal actually illustrates the even more deeply felt containment culture fear of the feminine lesbian. The feminine lesbian not only challenges assumptions regarding the link between gender identification and sexual object choice (for a masculine lesbian who loves a feminine woman was understood, at the time, to be choosing a type of heterosexual orientation), but she also is less clearly identifiable since she looks like a “normal” woman. While the butch lesbian might be cast as the dark and threatening Other in the context of cold war discourse, the increasing scrutiny that the queer community faced during this period led to developments in common assumptions about queer readability. In other words, after much consideration, society began to realize that perhaps not all gay men were effeminate and not all lesbian women were masculine. Corber notes that this realization created a “Cold War shift in thinking about homosexuality” that eventually “transposed the positions that the butch and the femme traditionally occupied in homophobic discourse.”

Suddenly, the masculine lesbian who was once so threatening because of her defiance of gender norms and seductive infiltration of the domestic was less threatening because she was readable to the trained eye and even pitiable because she was simply “sick” and in need of treatment. The feminine lesbian’s sexual object choice, on the other hand, could not be so easily explained away in the context of opposite gender attraction (especially if she did not conform strictly to butch/femme romances). She became even more threatening than the butch because “her ability to use her femininity to disguise her lesbianism supposedly

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enabled her to infiltrate the institutions of heterosexuality and subvert them from within. While Corber implies that this reversal of the homophobic discourse regarding the butch and the femme during the cold war period was a unified and widely accepted shift, it seems clear that both of these modes of homophobic discourse are functioning simultaneously in many of the lesbian pulp texts of the time. The truly frightening prospect for a paranoid culture was the ambiguity of queerness—the way that these non-conformists challenged assumptions about gender and sexuality—and this muddiness plays out on the covers of these texts. The masculine lesbian is alienated as a racialized Other, and the increasing awareness of “real” feminine lesbians also appears, as on the cover of The Third Street, as a different threat circulating within the same space. This is the nature of paranoia; the threat is perceived as slippery and pervasive, and this cultural paranoia shows itself through the visual presence of both butch Others and passing femme subversives. Since the feminine lesbian represents the eerily subversive, she must too be contained, and so we find her locked in the containment crypt of The Third Street, alongside her more clearly monstrous sisters. This move allows a culture concerned with double agents to capture her and control her movements within the third space.

Although the containment crypt functioned to name and control those who were confined there, its existence, along with the lesbian pulp texts themselves, also created a virtual subcultural location in which lesbians found representation and recognized themselves as members of a community. Faderman describes the isolation many lesbians struggled with in the 1950s and 60s: “Not only were American lesbians without a history such as helped to guide other minority groups, but they were also without a geography:
there were no lesbian ghettos where they could be assured of meeting others like themselves and being accepted precisely for that attribute that the outside world shunned.\textsuperscript{369} Although the concept of the ghetto is inherently oppressive, Faderman somewhat mourns the lack of “lesbian ghettos” because she recognizes that persecution itself can be powerfully reappropriated by marginalized subjects. The pulp novels, despite their propagandistic cover art and copy that served to enforce conformity using cold war containment discourse, provided just such a space and began to create a shared history for lesbians around the country. In this way, a kind of lesbian ghetto did exist.

Pulp’s homophobic cover art and copy made the lesbian content visible and created a virtual space in which lesbians could recognize and learn about each other. Faderman acknowledges that “were it not for the publicity that was inevitably attendant on persecution, some women, even by the 1950s, might not have realized that there were so many who shared their desires and aspirations, that various lesbian subcultures existed, that lesbianism could be a way of life,” but she does not recognize that this very persecution, played out on the covers and in the pages of pulp fiction, created a ghetto space within which lesbians could begin to form a subculture.\textsuperscript{370}

This paradox could not have escaped the lesbian pulp writers at the time. The prevalence of lesbian romances that take place within confined spaces and limiting heterosexual institutions speaks to the conscious use of containment discourse to surreptitiously circulate images and stories of queer love and desire. Tereska Torres’ novel \textit{Women’s Barracks} (1950) is considered the first lesbian pulp novel to become widely popular, its story taking place primarily within the confinement of the London
barracks for the Free French Soldiers during World War II. After its unexpected success, publishers were eager to find manuscripts with similar elements—confined, all-female spaces being one of the most prominent. Vin Packer famously describes the events leading up to the publication of *Spring Fire*, one of the most iconic of lesbian pulps, in her introduction to the 2004 reprint of the novel. Following the success of *Women’s Barracks*, Dick Carroll, editor for the newly created Gold Metal Books, commissioned a novel from his secretary, Marijane Meaker (Vin Packer). She said she wanted to write about a lesbian romance in boarding school. Carroll said that she would have to set the novel in a college sorority, rather than a boarding school, and that the story would have to have an unhappy ending. When she completed her novel, *Sorority Girl*, Carroll changed the title to *Spring Fire*, saying “[w]e have to jazz up the title and wrap it in a sexy cover. We have to! This is a business.” The novel, with its racy cover and its romance located within the all-female sorority space, made it a perfect example of the multiple valences in which lesbian pulp circulated. Its cover included “two females who looked a lot like hookers, sitting in their slips on a bed” presumably to entice male readers, and its story implied that lesbianism could be located within confined spaces that caused young, confused women to make desperate choices. This allowed readers and censors to explain away the presence of “real” lesbians by placing them in a containment crypt, to study the causes of their behavior, and finally to dismiss their existence entirely by the end (for one of the women turns out to be “normal” and the other turns out to be insane). In spite of the lurid cover, the misleading title, and the unhappy ending, Packer notes that “the fan mail came from women all over the United
States” because “[l]esbian readers were able to look past the cover: to find themselves between the pages” even if many aspects of the text were oppressive and implausible. Following the success of Women’s Barracks and Spring Fire came a slew of lesbian pulp set within confined spaces. There were sorority narratives such as Susan Sherman’s Give Me Myself (1963) or Ann Bannon’s Odd Girl Out (1957), and there were also a large number of lesbian narratives set in prison such as Sara Harris’ The Wayward Ones: Life in a Girls’ Reformatory (1952), Reed Marr’s Women Without Men (1957), and Kay Johnson’s My Name is Rusty: A Story of Lesbian Life Behind Prison Bars (1958).

Overtly, these containment crypt narratives made the publishers and censors feel more comfortable that lesbianism was characterized as knowable, locatable, and ultimately situational, but it was also true that the presence of the all-female confined spaces signaled lesbian readers that the text might provide a virtual lesbian ghetto space—one in which lesbians could find visibility and community, even if it was cast in oppressive terms.

The containment crypt, then, functioned as a third space, or catchall, for those who might subvert and undermine the dualities that dominated the American imaginary during the cold war period. The space contained those fluid and leaky aspects of queerness that shadowed the paranoid understanding of communism as an oozing threat—simultaneously seductive and foreign, fascinating and frightening. It is relevant that the attempt to contain queer fluidity became located in a liminal space, the twilight or third space, because it evokes the inherently gothic notion of the abject, which I identified in Chapter One as the foundation of gothic queer discourse. Recall that objects or states that embody the liminality of the moment of a child’s individuation from the maternal are
perceived as abject because they destroy boundaries and challenge binaries. They simultaneously fascinate and repulse us because they point toward an idyllic state of oceanic wholeness that preexisted subjectivity, yet they also mark the place where, if we were to return, the notion of self and other would be destroyed, confronting us with annihilation. According to Kristeva, this is a frightening, haunted place, strewn with corpses and human wastes, and in the social imagination the spaces designated for society’s castoffs are abject places—shadowy and full of the inhuman, the perverse, and the desperate. A culture regulates the abject through the notion of the taboo, taking the form of incest taboos, food taboos, and menstruation taboos, for example. Recall, too, that the abject is a space of becoming in which language is temporarily confounded yet being produced as the concepts of subject and object, a binary upon which our linguistic system is based, are forming out of the fluid, incomprehensible mass of abjection. As one considers the function of queer containment in cold war era lesbian pulp fiction, it becomes clear that the language of taboo, perversity, and liminal spaces in which the desperate writhe and suffer without differentiation reflects not only the domestic policy of containment discourse but also the notion of the abject. The containment crypt, like a true crypt full of bodies in varying states of decay, becomes a gothic abject space that contains those whose leaky and fluid existence defies comforting binaries, and this allows dominant culture to simultaneously fetishize and abhor them. But of course, the abject space is one of becoming, which allows the queer folks writhing in the shadows to locate the productive possibilities housed within the limiting ghetto space of this abject container, for out of the oppressive limitations, exploitations, and alienations pasted all
over the covers of these lesbian pulp texts arose a sense of community and visibility, essentially bringing contemporary lesbian identity into existence. The covers that contain the texts of these lesbian pulps cannot, in the end, contain those subjects they would like to trap in abject third spaces because it is that frightening liminality that is simultaneously threatening to a paranoid culture obsessed with subversion and inherently productive.

**Under the Covers: Queer Reappropriations of the Containment Crypt**

Until this point I have focused entirely on reading the cover art and copy of lesbian pulp novels published during the height of the cold war period, but I have generally refrained from discussing the content of the novels themselves. As I noted earlier, there was a huge range of authors, audiences, and topics for these novels, but although PBOs “actually written by lesbian authors constituted only a tiny fraction of the more than two thousand lesbian-themed mass-market books published in the 1940s, ‘50s, and ‘60s,” at least “fifteen lesbian authors during the golden age produced over a hundred paperbacks in which lesbianism was presented in as favorable a light as publishers would allow.” Some of these lesbian authors include Ann Bannon, Randy Salem, Vin Packer, March Hastings, Patricia Highsmith, Artemis Smith, Rea Michaels, and Paula Christian.

For this portion of the chapter, I will look at the textual reverberations and reappropriations of those gothic elements of containment discourse that I located in lesbian pulp cover art. The story that Vin Packer tells about her experience with the editor of Gold Metal Books makes clear that the creation of thoughtful lesbian pulp was restricted by many elements of the publication process—from publishers’ capitalistic
concerns to the desire for pornographic appeal and fears of censorship. Lesbian pulp authors rarely, if ever, had any say about the titles, covers, or endings of the novels, but within these limits, many were able to craft impressively sensitive, if flawed, portrayals of lesbian love and desire. If they were clever enough, the interior of the novel could offer hungry lesbian readers glimpses of the possibilities that the world held, even if those visions were consistently tempered by the dictates of publishers and market forces.

Perhaps some of the most iconic and successful of these novels are the five texts that comprise Ann Bannon’s “Beebo Brinker Chronicles”: *Odd Girl Out* (1957), *I Am a Woman* (1959), *Women in the Shadows* (1959), *Journey to a Woman* (1960), and *Beebo Brinker* (1962). As you can see from the titles alone, Bannon was not immune to alluding to the strange and shadowy, yet these novels play with the conventions that confined so many queer authors of this period, working cleverly with the stereotypes of the day and the requirements of the unhappy ending. Through these texts, Bannon was able to expose a specific segment of lesbian life—the middle and working class, white urban lesbians who pilgrimaged to Greenwich Village in New York to find each other. Circulating throughout this series of novels one can find the echoes of the gothicism deployed to alienate and contain lesbians, but beneath the covers of her iconic novels, Bannon works to delicately reappropriate those tropes for her readers.

As I mentioned in my discussion of the confined all-female spaces that appear in lesbian pulp during the cold war period, Bannon’s first novel of the Beebo Brinker series, *Odd Girl Out*, takes place in a sorority and introduces her readers to Laura, a recurring character, who falls in love and has an affair with her roommate, Beth. On the verge of
running off to New York with Laura, Beth decides to marry a man instead, leaving Laura to find her way home to her sadistic father in Chicago. The remaining novels in the series, however, take place primarily within the lesbian scene of Greenwich Village, and they, too, play with the notion of the confined spaces evoked by containment discourse.

As many have noted, the gay and lesbian bar scene was central to queer life in the 1950s and 60s. Even though one always ran the risk of being arrested during a police raid, people flocked to the bars because, as Faderman explains, “to many young and working-class lesbians the bars were a principal stage where they could act out the roles and relationships that elsewhere they had to pretend did not exist. The bars were their home turf.” Lesbian bars, in a more tangible form than the pulp novels themselves, served as a kind of ghetto space, the existence of which Faderman initially denies in her study. She later acknowledges, however, that the lesbians in the bar scene functioned as pioneers by “create[ing] a lesbian geography despite slim resources and particularly unsympathetic times.” Interestingly, the portrayal of these spaces in Bannon’s novels often reflects those dark third spaces described by the homophobic cover copy, and even Faderman’s historical study adopts a similar tone, describing the scene as “dark, secret, a nighttime place, located usually in dismal areas.” These “dismal” places circulate throughout the remaining Bannon novels as locations both overwhelmingly intimidating to green lesbians, who often did not even have a word for what they were seeing there, and desperately attractive. Lesbian bars play a larger role in the two novels that describe their protagonists’ discovery of the scene in Greenwich Village—first, Laura in *I Am a Woman* and then Beebo in the final novel of the series, the prequel *Beebo Brinker*. The bars, as
they function in all of these novels, are portrayed as dark, fascinating and frightening, subterranean spaces. As the “third spaces” that house those sexual non-conformists who fall outside of the normative sphere, the bar space represents the development of an underground community in response to containment culture; it is fitting, then, that they take shape literally as underground spaces, basement bars whose passages are tight and confined but that lead to discovery, sexual freedom, and identity formation. So in response to the containment narratives of “perverse” third spaces, the bars in Bannon’s texts become abject and gothic for the lesbian characters whose journey to “becoming” depends partially on entrance into the containment crypt.

The bar scene is highlighted most predominately in *Beebo Brinker*, the final book of the series that tells the story of Beebo’s arrival in Greenwich Village and her discovery of the bar scene that later becomes her stomping ground. Beebo learns about her own desires and about lesbians in general through this bar scene by haunting bars that are literally underground—primarily, the Colophon, Julian’s, and The Cellar. The first time Beebo enters the Colophon, a “basement bar” with “[m]ore girls, more sizes, types, and ages, than Beebo had ever seen collected together in one place,” she is excited and extremely anxious. When she sees women dancing together for the first time, she is “startled by it, afraid of it. And yet so passionately moved that she caught her breath.” In this cramped subterranean space, Beebo experiences the abject state of becoming—while containment culture would, too, cast the bar in terms of the abject in order to codify it as marginal and taboo, the bar exists for Beebo as a Kristevan “vortex of summons and repulsion” as it challenges her assumptions about her own desires. In this abject liminal
space and on the verge of entering the “twilight” world of lesbian identity, Beebo suddenly perceives the basement bar as a gothic threat—evoking the trope of the frighteningly sexualized chase first established in Walpole’s *Castle of Otranto* when, in a scene charged with erotic fear, Manfred chases Isabella through the underground passages of the crumbling estate. After watching the dancing couples for a moment, Beebo is suddenly panic-stricken:

> At that point she murmured, “Oh, God!” and turned to flee. She felt the way she had in childhood dreams when she was being chased by some vague terrible menace, and she had to move slowly and tortuously, with great effort, as through a wall of water, while the monster gained on her from behind. 386

Beebo’s sudden repulsion from the space is followed by her realization that the monster gaining on her was a “fearful desire.” 387 The abject, here, takes the form of an exotic foreign threat, a monster, echoing the images of the seductive and alien lesbian women of pulp cover art who tempt “normal” American women into the murky darkness of queer sexuality. Bannon, quite consciously it seems, brings in the language and imagery of homophobic containment narratives, but by casting it as abject gothicism, she is able to craft from the Colophon a space of becoming and emergence rather than one that is used as a means of containment and control. The complexities of this negotiation play out in the overwhelming and conflicted emotions that Beebo first experiences in the underground bar. Eventually, however, the Colophon and the other underground lesbian bars of the Village scene become a kind of home for Beebo rather than a monstrous, threatening space. This occurs gradually, as she is drawn again and again to those dark
passages that once repelled her. As she tries, and fails, to ignore “the one place she wanted to visit: the Colophon,” Beebo learns to enjoy the scene that initially repulsed her because of its associations with desperate, shameful sexuality, noting later that she “liked to watch the girls move around the floor together, now that the initial revolt had worn off.” At this point Beebo has emerged from the abject containment crypt with a formed lesbian identity, able to acknowledge her own desires and to initiate practices that will satisfy them.

The space of the bar becomes, to Beebo and to the other characters in the Chronicles, such a strong lesbian community that it even serves as a kind of lesbian phone book for those whose marginal status has erased them from conventional records and institutions. While marriage, or even steady employment, might have created a social record of these women, their marginalized status as single wage-earners frequently erased them from public record in a society in which “65 percent of white women had married by age twenty-four” (1954) and “95 percent of all adults in North America were or had been married” (1960). The Chronicles almost casually depict the characters’ inability to gain and retain steady employment or residence, sometimes because of their gender expression (Beebo’s employment, for example, is limited to jobs in which she is able to wear pants) and sometimes because of the instability of a single, nightlife-centric lifestyle that often involves alcoholism. Instead of finding each other in the phone book or at the workplace, the characters in the Chronicles simply enter the contained space of the Village bars to locate each other, and generally, they succeed. In Journey to a Woman, for example, Beth travels unannounced from Pasadena to New York to find Laura, her
college love, whom she has not seen in nine years.\textsuperscript{391} Despite the fact that she had not been to New York since she was a child, Beth knows about the lesbian bar scene because of the lesbian pulp she had been reading by the author, Nina Spicer. She contacts Nina who then escorts her to the bars. After only a week or two, Beth easily tracks down Laura simply by asking around within the space of the bar, speaking to the tightness of that community and its ability to function as a surrogate record based on oral and spatial contact. The depiction of these abject spaces as containers for both identity and community formation rather than as the disgusting realm of perverts, as the cover copy would imply, becomes representative of the new “lesbian geography” being created by the very containment designed to stamp out lesbianism. In addition to the bars themselves, the depiction of the bars in the novels provided an imaginary location for lesbian community for readers across the country. Despite the fact that these depictions were contained within homophobic, sensationalizing covers and despite the fact that these depictions were limited to the low-brow sphere of paperback originals, the containment provided a discrete and discreet location in which to find lesbian community—a virtual lesbian geography of sorts. The depiction of the lesbian bar scene in Bannon’s novels, an example of the conflicted yet ultimately productive interaction with narratives of containment, has come to be one of the few archives of this community that still exists and informs our understanding of this specific lesbian history.

Bannon’s reappropriation of containment discourse to develop this virtual lesbian geography redeployes a gothicism intended to censure and pathologize lesbian identity, and this specific historic interaction leads to a new inflection of queer gothicism in her
text. However, the queer infused gothic is nothing new. Recall that Gothic fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth century begins as a titillating venture into transgressive sexualities, similarly deployed as both moral tale and queer expression. In twentieth century American literature, the use of the gothic in tales with queer undercurrents is not uncommon. For example, Lillian Hellman’s dark play *The Children’s Hour*, originally produced in 1934 and revived in 1952, controversially addressed lesbianism in the context of a residential girl’s school. Later, Shirley Jackson published *The Haunting of Hill House* in 1959, a very literally gothic text that serves as a vehicle for a tale of lesbian obsession, and *The Talented Mr. Ripley* by Patricia Highsmith, published in 1955, is also a gothic vehicle for queer sexuality, although more gay male oriented. With this in mind, it is important to note that gothicism already existed as a vehicle for tales of transgressive sexuality by the time Bannon entered the literary scene; however, within the historical and cultural context of a post-traumatic cold war period that I have been addressing, one can see that Bannon’s particular lesbian gothic is inflected by the containment conversation of its moment. It emerges as a gothicism that specifically redeploys the tropes of paranoid victimization and confined spaces—a lesbian gothic that is, perhaps, so iconic because of its timely participation in containment discourse.

Bannon’s containment gothic plays out most strongly in *I Am a Woman*, the story of Laura’s escape to New York from her sadistic father. The novel chronicles Laura’s developing lesbian identity and discovery of the bar scene in Greenwich Village. As in *Beebo Brinker*, the bars are featured prominently as a space of initial discomfort that develops into a space for identity formation and community networking. When Laura
arrives in New York, she already understands herself as gay (although she does not yet have the vocabulary to express this), but she is still uninitiated into the Village scene. Jack Mann, a recurring gay character with whom she has been set up on a blind double date, first escorts her (along with the other couple on the date, Marcie and Burr) into The Cellar, once again a basement bar that “sounded sinister” to Laura when she first learns about it. Once she realizes that she has been taken to a lesbian bar, she becomes “acutely uncomfortable,” thinking, “[i]t was as if she were a child of civilization, reared among the savages, who suddenly found herself among the civilized. She recognized them as her own. And yet she had adopted the habits of another race and she was embarrassed and lost with her own kind.” At this moment, Laura is attempting to situate herself in relation to sexual identity, and it is telling that she uses the racialized language of Self and Other so common in containment discourse. She sets up a binary between the civilized and the savages and then goes on to cast this duality in racial terms. The portrayal of the lesbian as a raced Other that occurs in so much of the pulp cover art is ironically reversed in Laura’s introduction to lesbian bar culture. Outside of this space, as we saw in the cover art above, lesbians are cast as perverse, shadowy and nearly inhuman savages, but within this space Laura’s lesbian identity becomes aligned, not with the savages, but instead with the “civilization” of lesbian culture. This is a reversal that is casually inserted into the scene, easy to misread if one assumes the more common alignment of queerness with savagery. This traditional alignment is reinforced by the conversation she has with Jack, Marcie, and Burr in which Laura becomes enraged that they are talking about the bar patrons “as if they were a bunch of animals.”
Her instinct to characterize the bar patrons in resistance to this dehumanizing language reinforces the fact that Bannon is intentionally playing with these hierarchical binaries. Here Bannon presents a queer redeployment of containment dualities that depends upon the “third space” of the subterranean bar, for once Laura realizes that she is in a lesbian bar and is given a vocabulary with which to name what she sees, she subverts the gay/straight hierarchy by casting her new lesbian community as a “civilization” amongst the heterosexual “savages” she has been associating with. It is only within the confined space of the bar that there is a strong enough sense of safety and community for Laura to make this inversion and comfortably identify as a member.

While the lesbian bars seem to provide a productive space as a result of their abject gothicism, *I Am a Woman* plays with gothic horror outside of these subterranean realms to a different effect. To the uninitiated in Bannon’s novels, the lesbian bar scene seems frightening and grotesque, but these initial associations are quickly subverted by the possibilities for identity formation and community networking located there. Bannon continues with her unexpected strategy of inversion and redeployment as she casts heteronormative spaces, rather than the lesbian bar scene, as frighteningly gothic locales that do not ultimately emerge as productive. After running away from her sadistic father in Chicago, Laura is desperately in need of an apartment and a job in New York, and she is put in touch with Marcie who is looking for a roommate. When she goes to meet with Marcie about the apartment, she arrives before Marcie gets home, and observes the decaying apartment building as if it were a kind of eerie gothic castle:
Laura entered the vestibule. It looked like the reception hall in a medieval fort. The only light came from a small bare bulb on a desk in one corner. The whole hall was full of heavy shadows. . . . She swung slowly around on her heels to look at the hall while she waited. It gave her the shivers.  

As she enters this space, it is vaguely threatening in its shadowy gothicism, and as she continues to explore the space in which she will live she observes even more gothic elements, including a stone griffin on the roof and “pitiful groaning” coming from the pipes. The sinister nature of this space is never recuperated and redeployed in the way the lesbian bar space consistently is. The apartment, despite the fact that Laura decides to live there and eventually becomes desensitized to its eeriness, remains gothic because its threat is not from its function as an abject space of becoming. Instead, the “shivers” the space elicits from Laura stem from the very real threat that she faces as a lesbian entering into a hetero-domestic sphere at the height of containment culture—here she is not protected by a close-knit community but is exposed to the marginalizing strategies so frequently used to censure “subversive” queerness when it is discovered within the ranks of the “normal.” As Laura gets closer to Marcie, she begins to fall in love with this free-spirited, but straight, woman. Even though Laura believes she is subtly seducing Marcie without fully revealing herself as a lesbian, Marcie recognizes Laura’s attraction to her and makes a bet with Burr, her ex-husband and current lover, that she can get Laura to make a pass at her. Marcie and Burr engage in this thoughtless game, operated from a position of heterosexual privilege, without realizing that their actions might be deeply hurtful and even dangerous to someone who is so invested in her infatuation with Marcie.
They also do not initially realize that this game might tempt Marcie to step into the “twilight” of lesbianism and never come back to her straight relationship with Burr, a possibility that upsets Burr to the point that he threatens to physically hurt Laura and call the cops to report her criminal lesbianism. The space of the apartment, then, becomes a space of heteronormativity, dominated by Marcie and Burr’s heterosexual relationship. By casting this space as a gothic castle, Bannon reverses the narrative of queer horror that plays out on the covers of pulp novels. The truly frightening space, for a lesbian, is the space in which there is a drive toward normative domesticity, and in the context of containment culture, Laura has infiltrated that space and is threatened by violence—both physical and juridical—in order to root out her subversive presence and protect that sacred sphere from the “contagion” of queerness. The deployment of gothic horror in this space depends upon common assumptions of the gothic as undesirable, but Bannon displaces that narrative from its usual queer associations and instead casts the hetero-domestic sphere as the truly frightening gothic space that does not offer any potential for lesbian becoming, only for censure and violence.

Bannon continues this reversal of gothicism as containment narrative in her portrayal of Laura’s paranoid relationship with her father. In the first novel of the series, *Odd Girl Out*, Laura is portrayed as a masochist, frequently biting her lips and scratching her arms when she is tense or upset, and her masochistic behavior does not go unnoticed by her sorority sisters: “They marveled at her two baths a day. They watched her scrub her face until it was almost raw and red and they noted how she always volunteered for the most dreary and uninteresting tasks in the whole house.” Her masochism begins to
come into focus when the nature of her relationship with her father is revealed at the beginning of *I Am A Woman*; Laura feels like her abusive father’s slave and, during their frequent arguments, she often “trembled in terror, expecting him to brutalize her.”

Like Beebo’s initial flight from the Colophon, Laura’s relationship with her father eventually mirrors the ultimate in gothic erotic chases—the interaction of Manfred and Isabella in *The Castle of Otranto*. Isabella is initially engaged to be married to Conrad when he is killed by the giant helmet, but in a semi-incestuous turn, Manfred decides to marry Isabella himself, setting off the erotically charged pursuit that occurs in the dark passages underneath the crumbling estate. In *I Am A Woman*, Laura runs away to New York in order to flee her father’s abusive sadism, but she later encounters him when he is in the city attending a conference. Although he does not come to New York with the intention of looking for her, Laura creates the chase by obsessively appearing at his hotel and establishing a kind of cat and mouse game with him while avoiding all physical contact. During one of these visits, Laura sees him return her gaze in the hotel lobby and call out her name. Although she came to the hotel of her own accord, when she makes eye contact with her father, “her eyes went huge with fear and she gasped and turned and ran as if the devil were after her. She ran headlong, panicky, her heart huge and desperate, struggling to get out of her throat. She ran with all her strength and with an unreasoning terror whipping her heels.”

She ends up running into the subway, shoving her way into the ladies room, and telling a concerned “Negress” that a man was chasing her. The extreme and hysterical fear that Laura experiences in this passage evokes Haggerty’s description of the “hallmark of gothic fiction” first laid out in *Otranto*: 

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In a single image he combines the sexual anxiety of a victimized female, the incestuous desire of a libidinous male, the use of the actual physical features of the castle to represent political and sexual entrapment, and an atmosphere deftly rendered to produce terror and gloom.401 Laura is clearly a victimized female, having internalized the degradations of her father to the extent that she practices self-harm. As Laura arrives at the hotel by surprise, subconsciously drawn to the place as she had been on many other nights, the building itself becomes anthropomorphized when she realizes where she is, “as if the hotel had been sneaking up on her while she marked time on the sidewalk.”402 In this moment, the hotel itself comes to represent the threat of her father’s paralyzing power over her. The gothic terror of incestuous desire, however, is unspoken until a later scene in which she confronts her father in his hotel room and he admits to her, by violently kissing her, that he was cruel to her because he secretly desired her as a replacement for his dead wife. Laura’s reaction to this revelation is to strike him with an ashtray and, once again, flee—running “in a terrible panic to the elevators” and jabbing at the call button “over and over again hysterically.”403 In this relationship, then, we find all of the hallmarks of the gothic chase, including the terror caused by an incestuous libidinous male. Notably, however, it is in the space of a respectable hotel and in the presence of a figure whose goal is to establish and retain patriarchal authority that this gothicism arises rather than the “evil” spaces populated by queer “perverts” in which we might expect to find the gothic in a text such as this. Again, Bannon undermines containment culture’s deployment of gothicism by placing its truly terrifying elements squarely within the realm of dominant
culture rather than in the shadows of the lesbian “third space.” In contrast with these instances of the unrecuperated gothic, the gothicism of the lesbian bar space reads more clearly as a muddy, and sometimes frightening, space of productive becoming while the “true” terror lies in the spaces where conformity is enforced. With this in mind, it is notable that in Laura’s attempt to escape the gaze of her father, she runs into the all-female underground space of the subway ladies room and seeks comfort from a woman of color, another marginalized subject who, temporarily, stands in as the concerned mother Laura never had until Laura calms down enough to emerge from the underground space. This once again implies that the marginal subterranean spaces and subjectivities rejected by dominant culture might ironically offer marginalized subjects a new geography in which they can locate fellow outcasts and allies when threatened by mainstream containment practices.

Bannon’s challenge to the gothic binary becomes more complicated when one considers her apparent exaltation of marriage as an institution of safety and maturity. Most notably in Women in the Shadows, marriage is depicted as an institution that has the ability to save Laura from her unhappy relationship with Beebo and to help her rise above her own selfish immaturity. Considering Bannon’s portrayal of normative institutions, relationships, and spaces, one would assume that marriage would appear similarly gothic in her texts. The marriage that occurs in Women in the Shadows, however, is between Jack and Laura who agree to be married, providing each other with financial and emotional stability as well as the ability to continue with their respective homosexual affairs from the safe shelter of their “normal” domestic arrangement. It takes nearly the
entire novel for Jack to convince Laura that this is a good idea, arguing, “It’s either that or retire into a rotten little prison with the rest of the gay people and spend your life feeling sorry for yourself. No thanks, not for me.” Notably, Jack associates the gay world with the confined space of a prison and locates freedom in marriage, and Laura eventually agrees to marry him and even have his baby by artificial insemination. Julian Carter points out that the marriage between Jack and Laura is a version of gay marriage in which both parties remain firmly attached to their queer identities while accessing the privilege granted by the institution. This, of course, is in contrast with the contemporary notion of gay marriage as the union between two members of the same sex, but gay marriage in both cases, Carter notes, falls firmly in the realm of homonormativity. The safety that Jack and Laura gain as a married queer couple can only be accessed because their normative gender expression allows them to “pass” as a straight couple (in contrast to the character, Tris, a light skinned African American who passes as East Indian but is continually outed by her dark skinned husband), and their class status allows them to move out of the Village to an uptown apartment. These markers of privilege seem somewhat invisible to Bannon, who strongly implies that this gay marriage is the best and most mature choice for gay and lesbian people who are ready to escape the “rotten little prison” of gay life.

Adapting José Muñoz’s theory on disidentification, Carter goes on to argue that, while clearly homonormative, gay marriage in Bannon’s novels serves a disidentificatory purpose, allowing her characters to critically recycle the “toxic” cultural portrayals of
queerness in order to both claim it as an identity and to resist the negative coding associated with it by dominant culture:

To say that Bannon’s characters disidentify with their interpellation as “queer” is to say that they feel themselves constituted through their deviant desires while they refuse to accept the dominant culture’s phobic evaluation of deviance or the shame that follows from that evaluation. To say that they disidentify with the marital mandate is to say that they accept it — some more wholeheartedly than others — while they refuse to conform to the dominant cultural expectations for marriage as an expression of opposite-sex romantic and erotic desire.406

The institution of marriage, then, does not take on the coding of horror that Bannon places on other institutions and relationships associated with heteronormativity and containment because she offers Jack and Laura’s marriage as a gay one.407 Modern readers may recognize this move as homonormative, but Bannon portrays this gay marriage as decidedly powerful in its ability to strategically recycle the problematic institution of marriage into a truly queer, and truly subversive, space that both embraces queerness and reaps all of the social benefits of marriage. In spite of the invisible assumption of privilege at work in this position, Bannon’s choice to set gay marriage apart from the gothicism she deploys for other normative relationships becomes clearer when read as the empowered queer solution she imagined it to be.

The particular version of disidentification that Carter proposes when discussing the appearance of gay marriage in the “Beebo Brinker Chronicles” is also relevant to the exploration of the gothic elements in Bannon’s texts. Clearly, the complex and sometimes
contradictory depiction of queerness and heteronormativity in her novels both identifies with and critically recycles the toxic language and imagery deployed by containment discourse. When reviewing the exteriors of first edition paperback originals from the golden age of lesbian pulp—elements of the writing and publication process almost entirely outside of the authors’ control—it becomes clear that American society approached gender and sexual non-conformists with a gothic-infused blend of violent rejection and fetishization. And, indeed, the highly charged post-traumatic atmosphere of the cold war period offered gay and lesbian citizens a toxic and restrictive environment in which to exist. When one ventures under the book covers, however, the presence of disidentification comes into focus, for the highly vocal and vividly depicted denunciation of queerness provided people with a vocabulary and a geography, whether physical or virtual, with which to identify. Identification, however, was not a matter of simply internalizing the notions of pathology, immorality, and desperation that characterized mainstream depictions of queerness. Instead, some pioneering lesbians chose to adopt the, often gothic, language they found in popular, medical, and juridical culture in order to recognize and name themselves and to locate community while challenging, if not outright rejecting, the toxicity of those images. Bannon’s disidentification, regardless of its blind spots, simply represents the complicated relationship that many lesbians developed to these narratives while highlighting the gothic queer battle that raged within the cultural space of containment.
CHAPTER FIVE

Vampire Fantasy: Neoliberalism and the Undead in Post-9/11 Popular Culture

The headline “Vampires Ever After: Bride, Groom in ‘Twilight’ Wedding Change Names to Cullen” screams across the screen at TODAY.com, the MSNBC site dedicated to the Today Show’s web content. The article goes on to describe a wedding that is, undoubtedly, not alone in its emulation of the incredibly popular Twilight saga by Stephenie Meyer:

Abigail, 30, who has read the books about six times each and has watched all the films, knew at once that she wanted to incorporate elements from the movie wedding into her February wedding after she finally got to see “Breaking Dawn: Part 1.” She and Weeks wound up doing just that — in big ways, in subtle ways and in one exceptionally long-lasting way.

In the course of planning their nuptials, the couple decided to change their last names legally to Cullen.

This phenomenon points to the convergence of two fantasy spaces in the psyche of (predominately) young American women—the dream wedding and the world of the Cullens, the wealthy, sparkling vampires that appear in Twilight. The Twilight saga began when Stephenie Meyer published the young adult novel, Twilight, in 2005 and continued with the subsequent publication of New Moon (2006), Eclipse (2007), and Breaking Dawn (2008). The series became a film phenomenon in 2008 with the release of Twilight (director, Catherine Hardwicke), the first of five films based on the novels.
Twilight, however, is not the only vampire narrative to appear in popular culture during these years. In a strikingly simultaneous rise to popularity, Charlaine Harris’ Dead Until Dark (2001) began a series of twelve novels about a romance between spunky telepathic waitress, Sookie Stackhouse, and a newly-integrated vampire in rural Bon Temps, Louisiana. Just as the Twilight saga was developed into a film series, the Sookie Stackhouse novels (sometimes called the Southern Vampire series) were picked up as the television show True Blood on HBO beginning in 2008 and now in its fifth season. A 2009 Nielson report online attributes the recent outgrowth of vampire fascination to the Twilight/True Blood frenzy, stating that there “has been increasing mainstream interest in and gravitation towards all things vampire, most recently spurred by the Twilight books/movies and the HBO series, True Blood.” Out of these initial forays into vampiric obsession arose an entire industry of vampire related cultural productions—from games such as Vampire Wars on Facebook to derivative dramatic television series such as The Vampire Diaries on the CW network and Being Human on Syfy.

However, this new flood of vampire-themed cultural productions is not unusual. Vampires have maintained a consistent presence in the mythology and popular productions of many cultures over time. While “appear[ing] in India, China, and Tibet,” William Patrick Day notes, “the modern popular culture vampire has its folklore roots in Eastern Europe,” and in America, vampires in popular culture have emerged again and again in the century following the publication of Dracula by Bram Stoker in 1897. However, the shape of vampires and the position that American subjects take in relation to vampires is constantly shifting. In Our Vampires, Ourselves, Nina Auerbach traces the
“history of Anglo-American culture through its mutating vampires,” arguing that vampires are both ever present and constantly shifting because they reflect society’s changing needs, often mirroring cultural fears but also serving as a symbol of potential liberation from oppressive social mores. Ken Gelder focuses on the intersections between vampires and narratives of race and nation, noting that Dracula, as a foreigner figure, “can help us to understand why we are compelled to create the ‘other’ as the object of our hatred and our hunger.” Richard Dyer and Sue-Ellen Case also note in their respective pieces, Children of the Night and “Tracking the Vampire,” that vampires have historically reflected specific cultural anxieties about gender and sexuality, and like Auerbach and Gelder, they highlight the opportunities for identification and subversion that the vampire figure presents. Dyer, for example, points out the reciprocal relationship between mainstream vampiric representation and queer identification practices when he argues, “[w]hat has been imagined through the vampire image is of a piece with how people have thought and felt about lesbians and gay men—how others have thought and felt about us, and how we have thought and felt about ourselves.” While Day’s study does not specifically focus on the cultural race, class, and sexual anxieties that vampires often reflect, his chronological trajectory of vampire narrative characteristics in twentieth century American popular culture is a useful overview with which to trace the shifting phases of vampire representation. Beginning with Dracula, Day notes that the vampire of Stoker’s novel was both dangerous and erotic, warning readers about the evils of sexuality within the context of Christian morality. Stoker’s novel also places the main narrative emphasis on the vampire slayer, Van Helsing. Early twentieth century
depictions of vampires, such as Bela Lugosi’s famous 1933 cinematic portrayal, remain relatively true to this original cautionary purpose. The liberationist vampire, as appears in the television series *Dark Shadows* and several novels in Anne Rice’s *Vampire Chronicles*, shifts the narrative focus from the slayer to the vampire himself, often offering first person narratives from the vampire’s perspective. The liberationist vampire, Day notes, has been transformed “from monster or object of covert fascination into a protagonist embodying our utopian aspirations to freedom, self-acceptance, self-expression, and community outside of the restrictive limitations of conventional middle-class American society.” Their dangerous sexuality, in this iteration, becomes a representation of the vampires’ acceptance of the “dark side as natural” and their liberation from repressive sexual standards. George Haggerty points out that Rice’s *Vampire Chronicles*, for example, achieved such striking success because of “culture’s secret desire for, and fear of” the freedom from sexual constraints that these vampires represent. For Haggerty, the vampires can be read most strongly as gay men because of their willingness to exist outside of “the confines of heterosexual convention and bourgeois family life to explore unauthorized desires.” In the context of Day’s liberationist vampire, their homoeroticism can be read as an expression of the reader’s unexamined same-sex desires or simply an expression of the desire that the reader has to become liberated. In other words, liberationist vampires, while remaining frightening, no longer function as a cautionary tale but as something for straight-laced humans to aspire *to be* or desire *to have* rather than something to destroy. Post-human vampires, unlike liberationist vampires, are “self-alienated, fragmentary beings who cannot define their
own identities, feral intellects without a capacity for empathy or an ethic beyond need.\textsuperscript{423} Calling into question assumptions regarding the nature of humanity, the definition of nature itself, and the presence (or lack) of the soul, post-human vampires appear in films such as \textit{Nosferatu} (1979), \textit{The Hunger} (book—1981, and film—1983), and \textit{The Addiction} (1996) as creatures that unhesitatingly accommodate every appetite.\textsuperscript{424} Finally, Day traces the vampiric trajectory to the return of the slayer, a renewed emphasis on the Van Helsing-like characters who work to rid the world of these feral, post-human vampires. Central to this cultural trend are television figures such as Nick Knight from \textit{Forever Knight} and Buffy from \textit{Buffy the Vampire Slayer}, both serving as dark, uneasy figures that allow the narrative to explore “the troubled state of heroism in contemporary America.”\textsuperscript{425} Since Day’s text could not project its focus beyond its 2002 publication date, he does not explore the post-vampire slayer trend, and he simply may not have predicted the intensity of the twenty-first century surge in vampire popularity or the particularities of this new vampire breed.

In her 2011 study on the \textit{Twilight} phenomenon, Natalie Wilson places \textit{Twilight}’s Cullen clan and the vampires of \textit{True Blood} within Day’s category of “liberationist vampires,” noting that the “20th century (and now the 21st) has seen an increasing number of such sympathetic vampires;”\textsuperscript{426} however, there is a distinct difference between those vampires “liberated” from the oppression of conformity and the vampires that are so popular today. While the Cullens and Sookie’s Bill Compton fit nicely into the ever-shifting vampire landscape, they do not return to the strictly liberationist vampire past but instead reflect a contemporary development in historical circumstances. Like
Frankenstein’s creature, which I discussed at length in Chapters One and Three, the figure of the vampire serves as a kind of cultural fantasy screen on which we project our anxieties and desires and against which we understand ourselves as human subjects. But what, exactly, has shifted in the millennial years that have given birth to the most recent outgrowth of vampire narratives? In the context of this project, it becomes relevant that the years that began with the 2001 publication of Dead Until Dark and will culminate (perhaps) with the final installment of the Twilight film franchise in the summer of 2012 also coincide with the decade that has followed one of the deepest cultural traumas that America has experienced—the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001.

On the morning of September 11th, four commercial airliners were hijacked. American Airlines Flight 11 was flown into the World Trade Center North Tower in New York City, United Airlines Flight 175 was flown into the South Tower, American Airlines Flight 77 was flown into the Pentagon, and United Airlines Flight 93, heading toward the vicinity of the Capitol and the White House, crashed in a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania when passengers rushed the hijackers in an attempt to regain control of the airplane. Eventually, both World Trade Center Towers collapsed, killing thousands. The 9/11 Commission Report, a narrative of the September 11th events created by the National Commission on Terrorist Acts Upon the United States, explains that September 11th was a moment of “unprecedented shock and suffering in the history of the United States” since “the nation suffered the largest loss of life—2,973—on its soil as a result of hostile attack in history.” For anyone who witnessed the events of that morning or who has learned about them in history class, it was immediately clear that this was a traumatic
cultural event. In fact, the report itself exists as a kind of trauma narrative in which the group of commissioners (five Republicans and five Democrats) were charged with narrativizing and attributing meaning to the fragmented and incomprehensible traumatic moment, a common post-traumatic move. Roger Luckhurst, for example, notes that “[i]n its shock impact trauma is anti-narrative, but it also generates the manic production of retrospective narratives that seek to explicate the trauma. . . . culture rehearses or restages narratives that attempt to animate and explicate trauma that has been formulated as something that exceeds the possibility of narrative knowledge.”\textsuperscript{429} The \textit{9/11 Commission Report} does just this. The commissioners were ordered to “investigate ‘facts and circumstances relating to the terrorist attacks,’” so they gathered and reviewed “more than 2.5 million pages of documents and interviewed more than 1,200 individuals” in order to piece together these impossibly fragmented bits of information into a narrative.\textsuperscript{430} The stated goal of the report was to chronicle the “terrible losses” in order to “create something positive” (and I would add, something comprehensible) out of those overwhelmingly traumatic bits.\textsuperscript{431} While the \textit{9/11 Commission Report} might be the most overt attempt at gathering, compiling, and restaging the shards of fragmentary facts and memories of that traumatic morning, of course there are countless other cultural productions that do the same “manic” work—from the popular Jonathan Safran Foer novel, \textit{Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close}, to photo essays by \textit{Time Magazine}, to newspaper and magazine articles, to evening news programs that obsessively recount the events and their impact. Perhaps less obvious, however, are the wide-ranging reverberations in cultural productions that do not explicitly attempt to narrativize 9/11
but are instead reacting to the traumatic shattering of that day and the shift in cultural perceptions that have followed in the years after. It is in this category that I locate the most recent wave of vampire culture that has emerged since 2001.

One such cultural shift, of course, has been an American wartime paranoia about terrorism. As Judith Butler articulates in *Precarious Life*, her text on post-9/11 America, the United States could have chosen to react to the trauma by “redefin[ing] itself as part of a global community.” Instead, the country “heightened nationalist discourse, extended surveillance mechanisms, suspended constitutional rights, and developed forms of explicit and implicit censorship.” During this moment, dialogue about the events was foreclosed in favor of the simple narrative that portrayed the United States as the unquestionable and blameless victim, for as many well remember, President Bush cast the conversation in terms of a very clear binary: “Either you’re with us or you’re with the terrorists.” In the period following the attacks, terrorism and alignment with (or against) the terrorists took center stage in the public consciousness. The official narrative was that the country became unified in response to the events—“[that] September day, we came together as a nation,” the 9/11 Commission Report states in its preface. However, Butler counters this comforting narrative by noting that the binary created in the discourse following the 9/11 trauma made it “untenable to hold a position in which one opposes both [of the positions offered by Bush] and queries the terms in which the opposition is framed.” In other words, any citizen participating in thoughtful conversations that opposed or questioned the dominant discourse was labeled a terrorist or terrorist sympathizer and effectively silenced. This encouraged the spread
of a coherent narrative positing unity in the face of the multifaceted and confusing reality of the political world both before and after the traumatic event. Shortly after this initial response, the United States entered into the nebulous “War on Terror,” eventually waging ground wars in both Afghanistan and Iraq. These years created a synthesis of events in which citizens developed paranoia regarding the presence of terrorists “hidden” in plain view, dissenting opinions became signs that signified a possible terrorist presence, and the War on Terror threatened any suspected terrorist—both within and outside of national borders—with violent repercussions. The national obsession with the terrorist threat hidden within our national borders plays out in the 9/11 Commission Report itself since it dedicates an entire section to the retrospective identification of the hijackers within the country before 9/11, noting their undetected presence in Los Angeles, San Diego, and Florida and calling the chapter “The Attack Looms.” The report also enlists the public to help identify and report terrorist threats, explaining in a section entitled “Protect Against and Prepare for Terrorist Attacks” that “the vigilance of ordinary Americans also make[s] a difference” in the move toward greater protection. In a post-traumatic environment infused with paranoia, repression, and responsibility, American citizens were suddenly concerned with learning and identifying the “telltale” markers that might help one do their civic duty by spotting the hidden terrorist. This skill would also ensure that one did not inadvertently display any of those signs, staying clearly on the “us” side of the us/them binary.

These very concerns appear in the vampire fictions emerging in the post-9/11 years, for the vampires in the Twilight saga and the Sookie Stackhouse series are also
a threat lurking within the neighborhoods of mainstream America. These vampires, too, display certain telltale, though often hidden, signs that mark them as “other.” In this way, post-9/11 vampire narratives are simply another example of the drive to narrativize a massive cultural trauma by attempting to work through the complex demands and uncertainties that emerged in the war on terror decade. I will focus on the two foundational series in this current wave of vampire infiltration in the American popular psyche, *Twilight* and *Sookie Stackhouse*. In each I will work between fictional texts and visual media productions in order to explore the historical relevance of their meteoric rise to the status of popular culture icons, their differing treatment of the undead, and their function as post-traumatic gothic outgrowths in the decade following the 9/11 attacks.

I argue that the vampires of the *Twilight* saga and the *Sookie Stackhouse* series serve as fantasy screens upon which the American public projects the illusion of a more perfect, more coherent reality, thereby eliding the fragmentary, impossible traumatic reality of 9/11 and its aftermath. The *Twilight* fantasy projects an idealized moral past and a future guided by neoliberal ethics in order to reestablish a space of imagined domestic and economic stability. The *Sookie Stackhouse* fantasy, on the other hand, relies upon a moment of imagined past American triumph (the black civil rights movement) in order to screen the unpleasant racist core that bubbled up out of the ruins of 9/11 and to posit a future founded on the notions of liberal progress and consumer freedom.

The notion of the fantasy screen appears in Lacanian psychoanalytic discourse, and has often been associated with gothic forms in literary and popular culture. In *Skin Shows*, for example, Judith (Jack) Halberstam briefly reviews this psychoanalytic
explanation for the presence/function of monstrosity in Gothic fiction by positing that the
gothic monster houses a multiplicity of meanings for any cultural moment, reflecting the
anxieties and desires of readers. Halberstam paraphrases Slavoj Žižek’s argument that the
“monster/phantom” does not simply stand in for a “simple or unitary prejudice, it always
acts as a ‘fantasy screen’ upon which viewers and readers inscribe and sexualize
meaning.”

As Žižek explains in both *Looking Awry* and *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, the fantasy screen frequently makes an appearance in literature and popular
cultural productions (ideologies—and reality itself—are simply fantasy screens as well).
The fantasy screen serves to conceal the “traumatic, real kernel,” traumatic because it
defies symbolization while it structures our desire in relation to its fundamental lack.
The projected fantasy, then, works to give shape to the desire that stems from the trauma
of the real, and the screen on which it is projected both reflects and constitutes that desire.
In other words, “through fantasy, we learn how to desire.” Žižek’s monster/phantom,
cited by Halberstam, changes shape, form, and meaning depending on its cultural
and historical context, but it always simultaneously embodies both anxiety and desire:
“The boundary that separates beauty from disgust is for that reason far more unstable
than it may seem, since it is always contingent on a specific cultural space.”

The monster not only becomes variously repulsive and desirable depending on the
space in which it functions, but it also is consistently erotic since, as a fantasy projection,
it is shaped by the desire that is in turn shaped by the traumatic lack of the real. The
monster figure, then, embodies a complex and highly charged constellation of trauma,
anxiety, and sexuality.
Further, Žižek notes that monsters in the form of the living dead, specifically, hold particular relevance in the context of post-traumatic cultural productions. He argues that the “return of the dead signifies that they cannot find their proper place in the text of tradition,” and in a kind of reversal of the funereal burial, they return to remind the living of a “disturbance in the symbolic rite.”\(^{441}\) Interestingly, he contextualizes this, not with an example of an individual psychic disturbance, but in terms of “two great traumatic” historical events—the holocaust and the gulag—noting that the “shadows of their victims will continue to chase us as ‘living dead’ until we give them a decent burial, until we integrate the trauma of their death into our historical memory.”\(^{442}\) In other words, a national or global trauma such as the holocaust causes a disturbance in the symbolic rite of burial, gives the living a traumatic and unsymbolizable glimpse of the impossible real, and then continues to haunt the living with a demand that these traumatic deaths become narrativized, or integrated into the “historical memory.” In this sense, it comes as no surprise that gothic figures representing the undead pop up in cultural productions following moments of trauma, but it also follows that the shape of these figures would shift in relation to the particular trauma from which they are born.

As Žižek notes, the return of the living dead “deserves to be called the ‘fundamental fantasy of contemporary mass culture’” partially because of the plethora of examples that can be found in popular cultural production. Many of these undead figures take the form of vengeful killers such as Jason in *Friday the Thirteenth* or, perhaps more currently relevant, zombies in books such as *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009) or films such as *I Am Legend* (2007) and *Zombieland* (2009). And of course, the vampire is itself
a form of the living dead, an animated being whose heart has stopped beating. However, the vampire, as I noted earlier, has maintained a fairly constant presence in twentieth and twenty-first century American popular culture, notably shifting form and emphasis in relation to its contemporary moment. When viewed as a fantasy screen, this fluidity comes into focus as a reflection of the culture’s anxiety/desire, shaped in relation to historical trauma and, in turn, shaping its contemporary perceptions of desire. While the post-human vampires that appear only to be slain by the likes of Buffy may have reflected notions of anxiety/desire in the fin de siècle 1990s, the vampires of today emerge as the fantasy of a traumatized post-9/11 culture and are therefore significantly different than the vampires that existed in the popular imagination preceding this historical moment.

**Twilight (of Equality?)**

Vampires have a long history of being both frightening and erotic, but the breed of vampires that populates the world of *Twilight* reflects a new desirability that moves beyond the bedroom. As Žižek makes clear, the return of the living dead occurs when the funeral ritual goes wrong—instead of being properly “inscribed in the text of symbolic tradition,” the living dead represent a disturbance in the symbolic rite. These vampires return from the dead to haunt the popular imagination as reminders of the improperly buried dead of 9/11. Most of the victims of 9/11, especially those who were in the World Trade Center towers, simply never came home that day—no bodily remnants remained for burial or ritualistic closure. More importantly, however, the trauma of the event itself
functioned to disrupt any coherent narratives of life, death, and burial in the American imagination. This traumatic disruption of meaning, like the real, is anti-narrative—it “exceeds the possibility of narrative knowledge” as Luckhurst explains—and therefore it becomes very difficult to inscribe the event into our historical memory. The vampires that have risen to popularity in the years following this event speak to this improper burial, and in this role, they serve as a uniquely tinged fantasy that functions to not only obscure the glimpse of annihilation that flashed on America’s television screens on the morning of 9/11 but also to put in its place an idealized vision of what was lost that day. When they were alive, the employees who worked in the World Trade Center were marked in the global consciousness as the gears within a neoliberal machine. Through their relationship to capital and their unquestioning acceptance of their own concentrated power and financial success, the Cullen vampires take on the perfected form of this political and economic trend. They are neoliberal ghosts rising from the ashes of that ultimate signifier of global capital—the World Trade Center.

The fantastic undead in Meyer’s novels become, not monstrous, but god-like in their exquisite beauty, superhuman strength, and specialized sixth senses—beings to be desired and emulated rather than repulsed and alienated. Beyond their physical perfection, however, the Cullen vampires embody the fantasy of the idealized conservative American values that were disrupted by the intrusion of the foreign terrorist other upon the national consciousness, creating the desire for a new vision of America based on a unique constellation of neoliberal economic ideals and neoconservative morality. While the vampires in this world are traditional in the sense that they are
generally dangerous and nomadic, they thrive on human blood, and they murder in order to feed on this blood, the Cullen clan is held up as an exception to the rule. Rather than wandering from place to place alone or in pairs, like most other vampires, the Cullens have chosen to create a family structure, settle down in a single area, and integrate into the human community.

In order to create the semblance of family, Carlisle Cullen created a partner for himself, Esme, who looks to be approximately his own age. He also created, or accepted into the family, pairs of younger looking vampires who pose as Carlisle and Esme’s adopted children. Since the children are supposedly adopted (rather than biologically related), the community apparently accepts the fact that they are coupled into heterosexual romantic pairings, with the exception of Edward, who is single at the beginning of the series and who, eventually, falls in love with the human Isabella Swan (Bella). The Cullens live in a large house just outside of the town of Forks, Washington—a town carefully selected for its lack of sunshine, allowing them to function normally during the day. The “children” attend the local high school, the “father” works as a physician, and the “mother” has no stated profession (she apparently is a stay at home mom). This vampire clan is exceptional because they are the largest group of vampires living together consistently other than the Volturi, an ancient governing body of vampires that live in Italy (more on them later). They are also exceptional because they have chosen to live on a diet of wild animal blood exclusively, calling themselves “vegetarian” vampires. The text implies that this ethical move is the primary reason that they are able to form family units, since the only other “family” that exists in America is
also vegetarian. Finally, the Cullens are characterized predominately by their conspicuous wealth—the house is filled with opulent furniture, they drive extravagant cars, and they dress immaculately. This vampire type is very different from those noted in the beginning of the chapter. While bloodthirsty and dangerous if caught off guard, they are pinnacles of control and denial rather than the erotically sadistic Dracula of Bram Stoker’s novel. Rather than embracing their dark nature and indulging in a liberated approach to their appetites, they mourn their lost humanity and deny their vampire urges. Although they are something other than human (their chromosomal make up is different), they are highly moral and fairly socialized, nothing like those feral post-human vampires slayed by Buffy. Instead, the Cullens arise in this cultural moment as paternalistic, powerful, and concerned with the vestiges of capital.

This vampire outgrowth is a fantasy projection that plays out the increasing intersection of neoliberalism and neoconservative values occurring in the decade following 9/11. In “American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-Democratization,” Wendy Brown outlines the relationship between neoliberalism and neoconservatism in twenty-first century American political culture. Although the “two rationalities are not concordant,” Brown argues that neoliberal and neoconservative worldviews have paradoxically intersected in the post-9/11 decade, depending upon a “pacified and neutered citizenry” in order to create a political atmosphere in which “a combination of religious and neoliberal discourses have supplanted liberal democratic ones.” Neoliberalism, she explains, “casts the political and social spheres both as appropriately dominated by market concerns and as themselves
organized by market rationality. In this worldview, all facets of life—political, personal, moral—can be both understood and interacted with based on the principles of the free market. Additionally, the moral autonomy of individuals “is measured by their capacity for ‘self care’—their ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions.” Having the personal capital to do this reflects directly on the character of the individual: just as a business might be considered sound and respectable when they are able to support the needs of their employees by providing medical benefits, steady paychecks, and effective workplace safety. If the demands of the market concentrate wealth and power amongst a specific group of people or even a governing authority, this is considered a normative outgrowth of a free market system. Brown notes that it is this aspect of neoliberalism that “profoundly enable[s]” the encroachment of neoconservative values, even though at the core these two rationalities are deeply divergent. Neoconservatism is concerned with using state power predominantly to regulate issues of morality, offering a “theological model of the state” in response to neoliberalism’s “business model of the state.” Ironically, both neoliberal and neoconservative rationalities devalue equality, since both view concentrated power and capital as desirable—something to be wielded as a means of preserving/regaining morality (in the case of neocons) or as a “natural” outgrowth of free market forces in which a clear system of winners and losers emerges (in the case of neoliberals). She notes that in this way neoliberalism, a “market-political rationality,” paves the way for the intrusion of neoconservatism, a “moral-political rationality,” causing the two universes to “inadvertently converge at crucial points to extend a cannibalism of liberal
democracy.” In other words, the de-democratizing effect of neoliberalism “prepare[s] the ground for the authoritarian features of neoconservative governance . . . [and] simultaneously contours a submissive, obedient citizen and organizes a post-9/11 wounded and defensive national patriotism.” In the decade following 9/11, then, these conflicting rationalities have become increasingly intertwined as they are both posited as ideal forces with the potential to “fix” a disrupted national stability. These ideologies themselves are fantasy screens, as ideologies always are, and elements of their complicated intersections emerge in the depiction of the fantasy vampires that promise, too, to offer a “happily ever after” to a traumatized populace.

The Cullens seem to perfectly manifest the neoliberal vision of success. Carlisle Cullen, the patriarch of the family, became a vampire in the mid-seventeenth century and, once he decided that it was his moral duty to be a vegetarian, he also decided to become a doctor. This profession casts him as an unusual vampire who heals rather than kills, and it also apparently allows him to amass a large amount of wealth even as the sole breadwinner of the Cullen family. During Bella’s first few days at high school in Forks (she moves there to live with her father when her mother remarries), Bella notices the Cullen family’s conspicuous wealth. In the small-town economy, she notes that there were no new or fancy cars in her high school’s lot except those driven by the Cullens—a Volvo S60R and a BMW M3 convertible. Carlisle, who works at the small local hospital, drives a luxurious Mercedes S55 AMG, and as the series continues, the cars become more and more flashy and conspicuous, including a yellow Porsche 911 Turbo, a fictional Mercedes Guardian (“one step up from” the Mercedes S600 Guard),
and a Ferrari F430. Clearly, these are not cars that demonstrate an investment in blending in or rendering their wealth less apparent. Also, although the Cullens supposedly do their best to rectify their outsider status in the community, the “children” do not attempt to dress in ways that adopt the general standards of Forks High School. “It was obvious,” Bella notes, “that they were all dressed exceptionally well; simply, but in clothes that subtly hinted at designer origins. . . . It seemed excessive for them to have both good looks and money.” Later in the series, we learn that Alice, the member of the Cullen clan perhaps most preoccupied with material wealth, does not allow any family member to wear an outfit more than once and makes Bella consistently uncomfortable by dressing her in impractical silk cocktail gowns, even for mundane daily activities. Additionally, Bella is shocked by her first visit to the Cullens’ home, “timeless, graceful, and probably a hundred years old” but with massive and extravagant renovations. She marvels at “the high-beamed ceiling, the wooden floors, and the thick carpets” all in “varying shades of white” and the “spectacular grand piano” that stands in the center of the room. In the schema of the neoliberal universe, it becomes clear that the Cullens are financial “winners,” and in spite of their emphasis on the ethics of denial in terms of gastronomic consumption, they are unashamed to display their excessive material consumption. Their massive amount of capital accumulation is a sign of their goodness, their success, and their desirability—signs marking them as idealized objects of desire but also a “natural” outgrowth of a society dominated by market forces.

In an uncanny reflection of the political intersections Brown describes, the family’s acceptance of concentrated wealth and power intersects with a focus on
regaining a more moral past. Vampirism, to the Cullens, is a hand that they are dealt, but as Edward explain to Bella, “it doesn’t mean that we can’t choose to rise above—to conquer the boundaries of a destiny that none of us wanted. To try to retain whatever essential humanity we can.” This yearning for an idealized, moral past characterizes the “civilized” vampires in the Twilight saga. Carlisle, for example, created his family only from humans who were already on the verge of death—he refuses to turn anyone into a vampire who still has the opportunity to continue living as a human. For Carlisle, and for his family of philosophical converts, the issues of vampire identity are cast in a clear moral binary of good and evil. When he first became a vampire, he tried to kill himself until he realized that “he could exist without being a demon” by only drinking the blood of animals and by saving human lives as “penance.” He continues to impose his version of civility upon the people he meets, including each new member of his family as well as any other supernatural creature he encounters. Carlisle’s drive to spread his version of morality plays out specifically in relation to the Quileute, the local Native American tribe living in the region of Forks who have historically protected their land against “the cold ones” by becoming werewolves and killing any vampires who come near the town. Generations ago, the texts explain, Carlisle moved his family into the Forks area, met with the Quileute leaders, and agreed upon a truce in which there would be no bloodshed as long as the Cullens refrain from feeding on human blood and stay outside of the reservation borders. The text gives Carlisle full credit for this truce. Wilson argues that both Carlisle’s moral proselytizing and the Cullens relationship with the Quileutes stems from a colonizing impulse, noting that the texts present the “family as a
noble clan of benevolent rulers who act as a civilizing force.” This position of moral imposition is not limited to the Cullen’s relationship with the raced Native tribe, but it also extends towards all those they interact with.

This “civilizing” impulse, transplanted to the twenty-first century setting of the novels, can be read as a kind of free floating moral authoritarianism that imposes a kind of colonial moral burden, with its attendant notions of sexual propriety and restraint, upon the present. For example, Edward, as Carlisle’s devoted convert, refuses Bella’s repeated sexual advances until they are married, adamantly denies her requests to be turned into a vampire so that they can (not) grow old together, and consistently argues that she may not associate with her Quileute friend, Jacob, because he is too dangerous—a colonial position “akin to a white man talking about the dangerous men of color that violate and endanger white women.” Both Carlisle and Edward base their moral choices on the assumption that their vampire status makes them inherently evil, but through discipline and restraint they can be good in spite of the hand they were dealt. The implication, then, is that a moral code can (and should be) enforced as a means of correcting a state of sin. In other words, moral goodness is a learned behavior, and the imposition of that morality is the vampire’s burden, as the literal and figurative white men of the texts. As soon as they are able to openly discuss their state with a human, Bella, they begin to impose their moral code upon her as well, suggesting that, although Bella is intelligent, nurturing, and non-materialistic, her tendency toward independent thought and acceptance of her own sexual desires places her in as “evil” a category as the vampires or the Quileutes and in need of containment.
Edward is infinitely stronger, smarter, and more beautiful than Bella, and he approaches their relationship as a superior moral authority working to impose his vision of morality upon an unequal and increasingly disempowered populace. He asserts this authority by acting in a highly paternalistic mode in relation to Bella, again echoing a past-oriented, colonial approach to moral authority that reflects a devotion to his turn-of-the-century human existence as much as it reflects his devotion to Carlisle’s moral order. He is also as concerned with retaining Bella’s morality as he is with regaining his own—teaching her about the Cullens’ moral philosophy, forcing his will upon her by restricting her sexual expression, requiring that she participate in social rituals such as prom when she expressly states that she does not wish to participate, and forcing her into a wedding that she resists until the moment she walks down the aisle. The lack of equality in this relationship is apparent even to Bella, although she does not seem to have the strength to resist Edward’s authoritarianism. At one point, Bella is bitten by a nomadic vampire and has the opportunity to become a vampire herself, something that she finds intensely appealing. Ignoring her desire and denying her the choice entirely, Edward “saves” her by sucking out the vampire venom from her wound without her consent. When she wakes in the hospital, she laments the fact that he denied her wishes, casting it in terms of a desire for equality. “But it just seems logical,” she argues, “a man and woman have to be somewhat equal . . . as in, one of them can’t always be swooping in and saving the other one. They have to save each other equally.” Edward’s response to this reasoning is to discount Bella’s logic, reigning in his initial anger at her desire for equality and simply telling her, “[y]ou don’t know what you’re asking.” In this relationship, equality is not
of primary concern to Edward. In fact, he deems it more appropriate to make Bella’s choices for her, instruct her in terms of morality, and hopefully bring about her acquiescence to his notion of good versus evil behavior. And this gradual acquiescence is precisely what happens in the course of the saga. After an extended series of conflicts between the couple, always cast in terms of Edward attempting to preserve either Bella’s safety or her moral character when she is supposedly making the wrong choice, Bella eventually conforms to Edward’s wishes. She agrees to marry him even though the thought makes her literally ill, she agrees to wait until marriage to have sex rather than honor her emerging desires, and she even becomes a vampire only when she is nearly dead as the result of a dangerous pregnancy (according to the rule created by Carlisle). Edward’s moral philosophy is never compromised, and he stubbornly asserts his will until Bella accepts his worldview as her own—creating, in her, a proper subject of neocon moral authority.

Of course the Cullens do not exclusively represent the neoconservative or neoliberal rationalities alone, instead operating in both worlds. As Brown notes, the opposing universes of neoliberalism and neoconservatism have begun to intersect and join forces in the post-9/11 decade, and as fantasy projections of this world, the Cullens reflect this counterintuitive concurrence. While Edward functions as the arm of morality, once Bella begins to accept his worldview she is slowly ushered into the neoliberal capitalistic space of the Cullens’ world. Accepting the vegetarian, abstinent vampire morality also entails accepting their investment in the neoliberal ethics of material consumption, conspicuous wealth, and the notion that their capital success is an
outgrowth of their “goodness,” to be flaunted and relished rather than distributed to the struggling classes. Bella begins the novels as frugal and unconcerned with, even embarrassed by, fancy clothes and cars. When she arrives in Forks, her father gives her an old, rusty truck as a gift (a 1953 Chevrolet pickup, according to Stephenie Meyer’s official website). She is overwhelmed by the gesture and grows to love the truck that has no radio and cannot drive faster than 55 miles per hour. Since automobiles are such a central metaphor in the series, this truck becomes representative of Bella’s autonomy, her class status, and her lack of investment in material wealth. This is a point of conflict throughout the four novels since Edward considers the truck too slow, too loud, and unsafe, yet he still insists on driving it whenever he and Bella must travel in it together. When Bella attempts to visit her friend Jacob against Edward’s wishes, the truck becomes her last symbol of autonomy since it is her only means of accessing the reservation on which Jacob lives. Edward enforces his restrictions by tampering with the truck’s engine, claiming it is for Bella’s own good and patronizing her once again by claiming that she cannot fully understand his reasons. Later, the Cullens insist that Bella celebrate her birthday with them, even though she adamantly asserts that she does not enjoy parties and does not want the gifts or the attention. Instead of respecting her wishes, they create an elaborately decorated party at their home and give her lavish gifts—one of which is an expensive car stereo for her truck, something they think she needs but that she has no desire for—in an attempt to usher her into an appropriately capitalistic mode. Eventually, when Bella grudgingly agrees to marry Edward, he forces her to get rid of the truck
entirely (he claims that it “passed on”), giving her a new car for the engagement and promising her another for after they are married.

The “before” car, notably, is both ostentatious and couched in a paternalistic protective gesture, and Bella is intensely uncomfortable with the spectacle. *Breaking Dawn* begins by describing Bella’s new subject position as Edward’s fiancé. Her interior monologue reveals that she has curtailed her activities in order avoid being seen wearing her flashy engagement ring, and she works to talk herself out of her intense discomfort about her new car, her “mysterious acceptance into an Ivy League college,” and “the shiny black credit card that felt red-hot in [her] back pocket.”464 While driving through town to get gas, she is gawked at by each person she passes, and two men at the gas station explain to her that the car is not yet available in the United States and was designed “for Middle East diplomats, arms dealers, and drug lords” with its “missile-proof glass and four thousand pounds of body armor.”465 As in the neoliberal/neoconservative political intersection, Bella’s liberty has been set aside in order to ensure her safety and to advance Edward’s “moral project.”466 She can no longer move freely about the town, and her desires and choices are no longer honored while Edward successfully gains a wife whose virtue is intact, who properly represents the family’s wealth, and who allows him to occupy the dominant role of protector. When Bella becomes a vampire—that is, when she is absorbed entirely into the Cullens’ universe—she will be given a red Ferrari, a car that no longer supports the narrative of paternal caretaking but that is, perhaps, the most ostentatious vehicle in the series. The progression of Bella’s vehicles represent her gradual advance into a more appropriate
space of capital, for if she is to become one of the family, Bella must not only adopt the Cullen morality but also their relationship to the market.

Neoconservative moral authoritarianism paired with neoliberal market rationality work together to create the “undemocratic citizen,” and this is precisely what becomes of Bella by the end of the text. According to Brown, this citizen “loves and wants neither freedom nor equality,” “expects neither truth nor accountability,” and “is not distressed by exorbitant concentrations of political and economic power.” Of course Brown’s definitions pertain specifically to the citizen’s relation to the state’s political authority, but as far as this argument attempts to cast the Twilight vampires as a metaphor/fantasy of political rationality and government power in the post-9/11 decade, I wish to draw attention to the alignment of their worldview to these political schemas. The “after” moment for Bella coincides not only with her transition to wife, mother, and vampire but also with her gradual, if grudging, acceptance of the unequal power and wealth distribution between vampires and humans, the willingness to sacrifice truthfulness and lawfulness in order to save her family from external threats, and the abrogation of any concern for social or economic equity that such wealth and power might demand. In one telling instance, for example, Bella’s daughter is threatened, and as a mother and newly minted vampire Bella suddenly sacrifices the humble, anti-materialist, law abiding behaviors that she once held as a human. She secretly proceeds to meet with a shady lawyer, a “purveyor of illegal documents,” with whom the Cullen family has apparently done business for years in order to facilitate their comfortable integration into human society. After donning an “oyster satin cocktail dress” and “calf-length ivory trench
coat” that would have made “before” Bella cringe, Bella is flattered, rather than horrified, when the restaurant maître d’ “stuttered half-formed compliments as he backed unsteadily from the room” after showing her to the table. She then proceeds to obtain forged documents in order to ensure her daughter’s escape in the event that she and Edward are killed in an upcoming confrontation. The Cullen family had used this lawyer over many years in order to obtain various illegal documents, apparently intimidating him and supplying him with large amounts of money for the service. At the meeting, Bella reflects on the Cullens’ “bloated accounts that existed all over the world with the Cullens’ various names on them, there was enough cash stashed all over the house to keep a small country afloat for a decade.” She uncharacteristically dips into the stash of money for this purpose, grabbing an unspecified number of stacks clipped into five thousand dollar increments, giving the lawyer his asking amount, and promising him the same amount again as a bonus for completing the job. Notably, Bella does not consider the possibility that this money may have been amassed via unethical, or even illegal, means nor does she reflect upon the nature of the lawyer’s future disreputable transactions that her payment might indirectly support. It is unlikely that Carlisle’s small-town doctor’s salary is fully responsible for this concentration of wealth, and the text implies that the family uses Alice’s ability to see the future in order to make advantageous investments (though the illegality of such transactions is never mentioned). Further, the ethics of banking money in foreign accounts and under different, possibly fictitious, names does not appear to cross Bella’s mind. In order to achieve her ends, Bella is suddenly willing to sacrifice any critical thinking regarding the ethics of using this exorbitant wealth to facilitate her
personal goals. After the Cullens’ long and gradual struggle to bring Bella into their family-centered morality and their conspicuous displays of capital wealth and power, Bella finally becomes the model of the neoliberal citizen—an individual consumer who accepts unequal concentrations of wealth and power and whose “moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for ‘self-care’—their ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions” rather than by following any ethical code that values equity, truth, or accountability. While the instance of the vampire’s bite is the mythical moment of transformation for any human, it is in this moment, long after she is bitten, that Bella is completely transformed into a post-9/11 vampire.

This transformation is not simply about Bella’s acceptance of wealth and power, but it is also about teaching her that the “right” kind of indulgence happens in the sphere of capital rather than appetite. According to the texts, Bella’s new vampire existence makes her inherently evil, but the Cullen philosophy provides her with a path for redemption that consists to conservative appetite restraint paired with a flamboyant fabulousness in the realm of consumer choice. Like Dracula and his many iterations, vampirism creates a sexually charged subject, and it is no different in the Twilight series. While Dracula’s dangerous eroticism served as a warning against sexual perversion, there was no strand of redemption for this iconic figure in Stoker’s text. Sexuality for Meyer’s post-9/11 vampires fits snugly into the conservative moral code that circulates throughout the texts, but this restrained, abstinent-until-marriage approach to sexuality does not necessarily come easy to the Cullens, especially Edward. The implication, here, is that when Edward was turned into a vampire, it did indeed make him into an evil creature
with monstrous urges, including an appetite for blood, a disregard for human life, and a strong sexual drive—certainly his natural state is Draculaesque. However, as I noted earlier, a central facet of the Cullen moral code is that they can choose to adapt their actions, even if their instincts are inherently monstrous. In the words of another contemporary gothic figure, Lady Gaga, the vampires are “born this way”; however, the way they choose to temper their monstrosity differs greatly from the Gaga narrative of self-acceptance and empowerment. Like so many scientific studies of gay and lesbian subjects in which scientists attempt to locate the “gay gene” or predict same-sex desire based on identifiable biological traits, the vampire identity is medicalized (located in an extra chromosome). The medicalization of queerness often serves as a pathologizing narrative that implies the possibility of an eventual “cure” or “correction” of the biological anomaly that creates non-normative object choice. It also provides a medical narrative in which doctors and well-informed citizens might be able to spot a hidden or passing queer person by recognizing those biological traits—a reflection of the war on terror paranoia that assigned citizens the task of rooting out the terrorists lurking among us. Let us not forget that queer subjects were indicted along with the terrorists after the 9/11 attacks when television evangelists Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson stated:

[T]he pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU, People for the American Way -- all of them who have tried to secularize America -- I point the finger in their face and say, “You helped this happen.”
In the case of the terrorist and the queer, the Cullens serve to elide the discomfort associated with these “hidden” subjects in an era traumatized by domestic attack. They teach us that they can be recognized through their biological difference but, as hidden subjects, they emerge as glorious and reformed rather than bloodthirsty and alien. In this confused attempt at regaining a sense of control through the vampire fantasy, we once again begin to see the paranoid pattern of a hidden threat lurking within society that must be identified and rooted out—from communists and queers during the Cold War to terrorists and queers in the War on Terror.

The interconnection of queerness, monstrosity, and political subversion is slightly disrupted in the *Twilight* vampire paradigm, however. Because the Cullens are working as a fantasy, screening over the traumatic real, they are able to overcome their biological nature through a kind of Protestant restraint paired with an indulgence in consumer pleasure—a fantasy that the threatening appetites can be redirected into a more palatable version of vampirism that is properly invested in heteronormative cultural values. In this way, they become acceptable, comfortable monsters, and although they may be aligned with queerness in their “born this way” narrative, these vampires appear to be more analogous with the “ex-gay” narratives espoused by, primarily Christian, therapists. Major players in the ex-gay movement, such as Exodus and its traveling group, “Love Won Out,” argue that there is a “complex series of factors that can lead to same-sex attraction”—one may be born with same-sex desires, or one may have had these desires thrust upon them by environmental factors such as a traumatic event or abusive parent—but they assure their followers that these “same-sex attractions can be overcome.”

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With enough moral conviction and self-hatred, one can become a gay “vegetarian,” learning to restrain the natural monstrous appetites and learning to instead enjoy the flavor of heteronormativity. At first glance, the *Twilight* vampires seem to function as the fantasy of the creepy queer converted into acceptable heterosexual.

While the *Twilight* vampires’ appetite restraint and behavior modification may mirror this ex-gay philosophy, more accurately the *Twilight* vampires function as a different kind of fantasy, one in which the queer integrates into normative culture not by becoming ex-gay but by becoming fabulous. Although they naturally sparkle in the sunlight like a sequined gown, the *Twilight* vampires must otherwise create their fabulousness through their consumer power, and they are well equipped to do so. In other words, this fantasy of the “born this way” vampire is that they can use their economic power and their exquisite taste to enhance society rather than undermine it with their perversity, as long as they properly adopt heteronormative, neoliberal values. This is the fantasy of queer liberalism. As David Eng notes in “Freedom and the Racialization of Intimacy,” the discourse of human emancipation through “the globalization of capitalism and the proliferation of ‘free’ markets” in the post-9/11 period has created a set of ideals that “distinguish a ‘freedom-loving’ and ‘civilized’ US nation-state against its ‘freedom-hating’ and ‘uncivilized’ Muslim other.” It is this historically specific notion, he argues, that has led to the development of queer liberalism, “a confluence of political and economic conditions forming the basis of liberal enfranchisement and inclusion for certain gay and lesbian US citizen-subjects willing to comply with its normative mandates.” With this in mind, the *Twilight* vampires, with their behavior modification
and neoliberal investments offer the fantasy of the queer subject who not only curtails the behavior that might make heteronormative society uncomfortable but who also offers a sanitized, homonormative identity that straight society can exploit for economic and aesthetic gains. Like the “gay canary” who moves into a struggling neighborhood, buys a house, fixes it up with unquestionable style, injects money into the economy, and thereby predicts (and facilitates) the coming gentrification of a neighborhood, the sparkling vampires bring wealth and style into the backwater town of Forks.\textsuperscript{476}

In their relationship with Bella, we also see the analogous “fixing up” of her as a subject—providing her with new clothes, new cars, and most importantly new, more normative, values. Notably, these are not Lee Edelman’s \textit{sinthomosexuals} of \textit{No Future} that, through their emphasis on pleasure rather than biological reproduction, point out the fantasy of ideology by reminding society of the traumatic real.\textsuperscript{477} While Edelman’s queers function to expose the knotted underbelly of the sequined fabric of ideology, as I discussed in Chapter One, \textit{Twilight}’s sparkling vampires \textit{are} the sequined fabric. As proper, neoliberal queers they instead invest in and replicate dominant ideologies about neoliberal ideals and neoconservative morality, deemphasizing their queerness and instead offering a sanitized version of otherness by overemphasizing their desirable characteristics by contributing to the economy and offering their inherent fabulousness—interior decorating, fashion, spectacular parties, exquisite taste, sculpted bodies—in exchange for social acceptance.

Consequently, the idealized concentration of power pedaled by the \textit{Twilight} saga is located in the sphere of the private citizen who behaves in the manner of the newly
minted neoliberal/neoconservative normativity—both as queer liberals and as performers of secularized Christian values. The vampires in this world, while inherently evil, have worked to assimilate into contemporary American society, and their idealized status is marked by their very normativity rather than by any notion of the vampire as social renegade or erotic sadist. While the America was wrapped up in the paranoid threat of terrorist infiltration, Stephenie Meyer offered this vision of the perfected subject, a fantasy to replace the anxiety of post-9/11 trauma. As vigilant citizens, Americans were charged with the responsibility of locating and reporting terrorist infiltrations, creating a public belief that there was “evil” hidden amongst us. The Cullens function as a fantasy of perfection, rather than evil, hidden within the American population. They are not only rich but they also exhibit the Protestant values of hard work and appetite restraint in a kind of secularized version of Christian morality. Since Stephenie Meyer is “a devout Mormon and admits that ‘unconsciously, I put a lot of my basic beliefs into the story,” perhaps the Cullens provide a vision of behavior that specifically highlights all-American values through their implied Mormonism. Wilson notes that Meyer’s Mormonism may, in fact, infiltrate the texts as a model for the proper American subject, arguing that “many of [Mormonism’s] beliefs and practices are very in keeping not only with mainstream Christianity but also with mainstream America: work hard, value education, honor your parents, get married, have kids, do good works.” Further, the confluence of the Cullens’ capital success and their Christian morality comes into focus as a specifically Mormon worldview since “Mormonism considers wealth and power a basic blessing of both earth and heaven.” Wilson argues that “[p]erhaps no religion is more American than
Mormonism” because it is a “potpourri of American religious thinking spiced with the fundamental ideal of inevitable [primarily economic] progress.” I would add that these Mormon beliefs become even more resonant to the American consciousness in the post-9/11 period as a wounded nation looks for healing not only in the overlap of neoliberal and neoconservative political rationalities but also in a thinly veiled religious allegory that supports this concurrent vision of financial success and moral redemption. Further, Mormonism’s fame for its emphasis on large families and missionary work fits nicely with Twilight’s colonial narrative of private and public moral authoritarianism.

The Mormon allegory also offers the narrative of inherent evil being overcome by restraint and moral devotion to the tenants of the faith, and this provides a comforting fantasy to those threatened by the threat of terrorist infiltration. While vampires might be inherently evil and inhuman in the same way that the American public perceives terrorists and queers, they also offer the promise that these subjects can be converted to proper American citizens through diligence and the appropriate qualities of Protestant-style restraint and capitalistic conspicuous indulgence, perhaps those very characteristics for which America was attacked. It is important, however, that the power to assimilate—along with assimilation’s attendant social rewards—remain squarely in the realm of personal choice. When a centralized government attempts to regulate this expression of personal freedom by imposing the rule of law, the texts quickly relocate the locus of evil to this governing body. The Cullens’ neoliberal evolution from “evil queer vampires” to “idealized Americans,” creates conflict with the Volturi, the villains of the series that represent archaic centralized power in contrast to the conservative value of individual
autonomy. The Volturi is the largest group of vampires that live together consistently, bound by “their love of power” rather than by the civility of a vegetarian diet. As Alice Cullen explains to Bella, “they have assumed the position of enforcing our rules—which actually translates to punishing transgressors.” In the context of the series, this regulation is cast as the unreasonable enforcement of archaic laws for the benefit of the ruling class, or the “royalty” of the vampire world. The final battle of the series is against this centralized authority, and it is this threat that instigates Bella’s illicit solicitation of documents. In this clear allegory of an evil centralized government, we can see that the *Twilight* fantasy not only offers a screen that replaces the covert terrorist with the covert moral vampire, but it also offers a fantasy of the decentralized vision of American politics embraced in various (albeit sometimes conflicting) neoliberal and neoconservative forms. Since the threat of annihilation represented by the terrorists of 9/11 is a traumatic glimpse too frightening to fully process, the terrorists have effectively been replaced by the vision of a perfected American while the powerful centralized government has been shifted into the position of villain, out of touch with the new American citizen and something to overthrow in the move toward a society that supports individual autonomy and one that proudly embraces those values that were perceived to be the targets of the 9/11 attacks.

The *Twilight* vampires, then, with their perfected style, tendency toward conspicuous consumption, and secularized Christian moral code, may at first glance seem like an allegory for an ex-gay rhetoric that offers a vision of restraint and redemption in place of a hidden terrorist threat. Upon closer inspection, however, they are more
accurately analogous with the queer liberal identity, or homonormativity as it is outlined in Lisa Duggan’s *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*—a political position that promises the “possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.” This is, indeed, a fantasy of otherness shaped to reflect comfortable, normative values and behaviors, and the Cullens certainly function in the post-9/11 period as an intersection of fantasies—operating as an idealized form of the improperly buried dead of 9/11, as the hidden other who evolves into a perfected American rather than an evil terrorist threat, and as a biologically identifiable (and perhaps curable) subject that offers a palatable vision of queer otherness instead of one that challenges dominant ideologies. This constellation of fantasies comes together to form the popular culture obsession with these perfected, sparking vampires in the post-9/11 period, and the fantasies notably incorporate the convergences of neoliberal and neoconservative rationalities that have developed as post-traumatic ideologies during the War on Terror.

**True Blood Freedom: A Fantasy of Liberal Progress**

While the idealized vampires of the *Twilight* saga differ from the vampires that appear in the contemporaneous *Sookie Stackhouse* series, the post-traumatic fantasy projection that occurs in both cases distinguishes these post-9/11 vampires from those that came before them in American popular culture. The *Sookie Stackhouse* novels and *True Blood* HBO series are set in rural Bon Temps, Louisiana, a small southern town that
is struggling with conflicting opinions about the recent integration of vampires into mainstream society, a struggle that very much reflects both the racial integration of the 1960s and the contemporary fight for gay rights. While both the Twilight vampires and those in the Sookie Stackhouse series strongly exhibit traits of both neoconservative and neoliberal rationalities, creating a post-9/11 fantasy subject, their respective orientations to these fantasies differ. The Twilight vampires strive to regain the humanity that they feel has been lost as a result of their vampirism, and it becomes clear that Edward himself aggressively imposes his sexual morality upon Bella partially because he longs for the time when he was a human. He explains to Bella that, in the early 1900s when he was a seventeen-year-old human, their relationship would have been more “old-fashioned,” with pre-marital abstinence a given. Instead, Bella frequently attempts to have sex with Edward, and he consistently turns her away as a means of protecting her “virtue.” Additionally, when Edward and Bella announce their wedding plans to Bella’s father, Edward argues that he would like to get married before he and Bella move in together because it is how he was raised—to which Bella notes, “He wasn’t exaggerating; they’d been big on old-fashioned morals during World War I.” Edward’s sister, Alice, designed the wedding itself to reflect this period of Edward’s life, even dressing Bella in a vintage-styled gown and accessories from that era. This emphasis on the past certainly aligns the Twilight vampires with a kind of melancholic neoconservatism that “identifies itself as the guardian and advocate of a potentially vanishing past and present, and a righteous bulwark against loss.” Brown notes that neoliberalism, in contrast, “confidently identifies itself with the future, and in producing itself as normal rather than
adversarial does not acknowledge any alternative futures." The vampires that appear in the *Sookie Stackhouse* series, with their emphasis on political progress and civil rights discourse, seem much more future-oriented in comparison to the nostalgia Edward exhibits, but the question arises as to the presence of *alternative futures* in the world of Bon Temps, Louisiana. Do the socially and politically integrated vampires in this series embody a fantasy of a society in which cultural others participate fully and equally or do they simply reflect the neoliberal rationality of the post-9/11 decade that forecloses alternative futures?

For centuries, the vampires of the *Sookie Stackhouse* novels had to keep their identities secret by passing as human and indulging in their appetites below the radar of human detection. Over the years, they developed a complex governing system that creates and enforces codes of conduct specific to vampire lifestyle, but in the few years preceding the first novel in the series, vampire rights groups fought for the ability to “come out of the coffin” in order to begin living openly within human society. The development and mass distribution of a synthetic blood beverage (called “True Blood” in the television series but unbranded in the novels) facilitated this integration by allowing vampires to patronize human restaurants and bars and to satisfy their cravings without draining non-consenting humans. However, there are still plenty of consenting humans, or “fang-bangers,” who frequent vampire bars and are erotically drawn to vampires, allowing them to drink their blood as part of the sex act or as a separate (but still highly sexualized) activity. The series implies that the integration and acceptance of vampires is most common in more metropolitan areas, but the integration of
“mainstreaming” vampires is just beginning to trickle down into the more rural outlying areas, causing discomfort, prejudice, and sometimes violent confrontation. Vampires are not only exotic, forbidden, and slightly dangerous, they are also hypersexualized in the eyes of humans, and this results in the development of several different factions in reaction to the subject of vampire integration. There are those, such as fang-bangers and mainstream humans with secret curiosities and desires, who fetishize vampire subculture and either overtly invite sexual relationships with vampires or visit vampires on the down low. The second faction consists of politically conservative and religiously fanatical groups, such as “The Fellowship of the Sun,” who believe that vampires are evil, perverse, and inhuman—an argument that allows them to justify their call for vampire persecution and murder.\textsuperscript{492} The final faction consists of those, like Sookie herself, who are both fascinated by and properly tolerant of mainstreaming vampires and who are vocal supporters of the right for vampires to be granted social acceptance, civil liberties, and equality under the law. Sookie’s love interest Bill Compton is a self-proclaimed “mainstreaming” vampire, a homeowner who drinks synthetic blood most of the time and only engages in human blood drinking discreetly and with consenting humans. Not all vampires are mainstreaming, however. Some cannot or will not make the shift from members of an outlaw subculture to law-abiding members of established human society. In contrast with those vampires attempting to assimilate into human society, they insist on following an alternative, vampire, code of ethics that emphasizes pleasure, indulgence, and violence with little regard for human life or human law. As Sookie notes, vampires who are mainstreaming do their best to avoid doing the “antisocial stuff” that
characterizes the underground vampire culture, and the implication is that the well-behaved vampires are the ones who deserve the benefits of liberal citizenship while the resistant vampires do damage to the cause of integration.  

At this point, it may be clear that there are several analogies functioning in the Sookie Stackhouse series. Since the first page of the first novel begins with a reference to coming “out of the coffin,” the similarities between the vampire rights and gay rights movements are perhaps most apparent. There is tension between mainstreaming vampires and those who refuse to conform to social norms—reminiscent of the tension between those queer liberals I discussed above and those who consider themselves more subversively queer in their resistance to normative cultural values such as property ownership, private intimacy, monogamy, marriage, and family. Like LGBT subjects, the vampires’ sexuality is considered both fascinating and perverse, tolerated but not something that isolated country folks are readily willing to embrace, and the city/country divide in the Sookie Stackhouse texts mirrors the narrative of rural to urban migration imagined to be a kind of universal queer pattern. While Bill struggles with the prejudices of the small town culture when he moves into Bon Temps, the urban environment is cast as much more accepting and accommodating of vampires and vampire lifestyle. For example, in Dead Until Dark and Living Dead in Dallas, the reader is introduced to glamorous hotels in urban cities such as New Orleans and Dallas that cater specifically to vampires, with light-blocked rooms and daytime guards to protect the sleeping vampires inside. Both vampires and vampire groupies flock to these hotels because of their convenience, exotic glamour, and potential for casual sexual/feeding.
encounters. This dynamic is similar to the gay and lesbian bar subculture of Greenwich Village or the Castro District, for example, that has historically drawn queer people and those fascinated by them from rural locations throughout the country with the promise of meeting others and developing relationships (both sexual and romantic).

The notion of the casual sexual encounter haunts public perceptions of queerness, and with the advent of HIV/AIDS this narrative has served to alienate queer folks who are imagined to have brought disease upon themselves. Similarly, vampires have historically been associated with perversity and contagion, and the *Sookie Stackhouse* series plays with these metaphors by linking vampirism specifically with viral infection. The exact cause of vampirism in the *Sookie Stackhouse* novels is unclear, but as Sookie explains when first meeting Bill, the “politically correct theory, the one the vamps themselves publically backed, is that this guy was the victim of a virus that left him apparently dead for a couple of days and thereafter allergic to sunlight, silver, and garlic.” The association between vampires and infection is a common one, but they often specifically function as a metaphor for those diseases that the public perceives as most threatening in the historical moment. For example, Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger explain that in the nineteenth century, “the vampire functioned as a natural metaphor for the symptoms of tuberculosis: consider its associations with wasting, with paleness, with the flow of blood from the mouth, night restlessness, alternate burning and chills, even with the victim’s rumored sexual energy.” Nicola Nixon also points out that the vampirism, “with its connotative yolking of sexuality and contagion, has a long history of being linked to the horrors of venereal diseases—syphilis in particular” and
argues that it is this particular venereal link that has developed into the most contemporary vampiric association—AIDS. Nixon traces the progression of the vampire metaphor from syphilis to AIDS through Sander Gilman’s claim that the representation of people with AIDS has historically been associated with “an appropriation of the iconography of syphilis.” If the iconography of vampirism (as a figure of simultaneous corruption and contagion) is appropriated from the symptoms of syphilis and the iconography of syphilis is appropriated to describe people with AIDS, then she concludes that we arrive at AIDS as the most prevalent contemporary contagion anxiety linked to vampirism. Gilman explains that the sufferer and source of syphilitic infection was commonly thought to be the prostitute whose “corrupt” behavior justifies her portrayal as “the outsider, the other, the deviant” and the “source of pollution,” and this association between the infection and sexual deviance was then reinscribed on the figure of the AIDS sufferer. Gilman describes a 1985 image in the New York Times featuring a single male patient, isolated in the medical setting, implying to the readers that he is “a homosexual male, both victim and cause of his own pollution.” Vampires, as figures of perversity, become the perfect representation of this intersection between queerness, contagion, and blame. Nixon argues that the 1980s vampire film, The Hunger, serves as the genesis of this new association since it “function[s] almost paradigmatically as representative of modern vampirism and its inevitable slide toward AIDS iconography.” Since this moment, the link between contagion, queerness, and AIDS has functioned as the dominant metaphor of infection in modern vampire narratives. While the vampires of the Sookie Stackhouse series are not infected by AIDS, per se,
they are infected by a little understood, communicable disease that is associated in the popular imagination with casual and perverse sexuality. Interestingly, in Harris’ creation the AIDS virus itself is fairly well understood and reflective of the contemporary post-AIDS era in which people are living longer and more pleasant lives while HIV positive. The vampire virus, however, is reminiscent of the period of AIDS’ first emergence in the 1980s, when it was perceived as mysterious, threatening, and strongly associated with gay men, a group of cultural outsiders who had only recently stepped out of the closet and into the popular consciousness. Only strengthening the vampire/queer analogy in the Sookie Stackhouse series is the fact that, while AIDS has been fully integrated into the public consciousness of this world, there is a new strain emerging within those communities with high vampire populations called Sino-AIDS. While AIDS, itself, does not affect vampires, Sino-AIDS “left the undead very weak for nearly a month, during which time it was comparatively easy to catch them and stake them. And every now and then . . . the vampire actually died—redied?—without being staked.” Sookie goes on to explain that the virus, “[s]till rare in the United States,” is “gaining a foothold around ports like New Orleans, with sailors and other travellers from many countries passing through the city in a partying mood.” Sino-AIDS, then, adds yet another element of contagion associated with vampire sickness and death. The vampires of these novels are not only always already infected with a mysterious (and contagious) virus but they, and others who engage in risky sexual behaviors, are the specific targets of a new strain of AIDS that is shrouded in fear and mystery—a virus that, like AIDS in the early days of
the epidemic, is associated with group of cultural others assumed to act in an immoral or corrupt manner, thereby bringing the infection upon themselves.

Finally, the *Sookie Stackhouse* vampires are linked with queerness simply because of their status as the hedonistic undead. While there are mainstreaming vampires, like Bill, who attempt to assimilate by controlling his appetites and sublimating his inherent hedonism, the implication is that this is a constant struggle. The nature of vampirism in these texts is truly queer in that it questions and challenges narratives of normative and appropriate human behavior, emphasizing pleasure and instant gratification over heteronormative notions of maturity and reproductive futurity. As I discussed at length in Chapter One, Edelman’s *sinthomosexual* functions as an undead figure because of its association with pleasure over reproduction and, by extension, the death drive. Edelman explains that the sinthome is “stupid enjoyment” or the “node of senseless compulsion on which the subject’s singularity depends,” and contemporary cultural fantasies locate “homosexuality in place of the sinthome” because of its rejection of reproductive futurity and “intimate relation to a fatal, and even murderous, jouissance.” Because of this, Edelman argues that queers are threatening because they expose the fantasy that “alone endows reality with fictional coherence and stability,” and in this destruction they provide an unpleasant glimpse of the real that the fantasy serves to mask. The unassimilated vampires of the series do just this by indulging in a “stupid” and “senseless” quest for pleasure that is intimately related to violence and murder and that certainly draws attention to the flimsiness of the human understanding of reality. However, those truly queer vampires who live in loosely structured “nests” (rather than owning property
and developing monogamous relationships with nuclear families) and who indulge in fetishistic pleasures without regard for normative ethics or human law are cast in this series as atavistic, choosing to remain in their more primitive, anti-social state rather than integrating into normative society like their mainstreaming counterparts. Because of this, the *Sookie Stackhouse* series comes in to focus as a narrative of liberal progress since it is the assimilated vampires who are cast as those deserving civil liberties and social acceptance. By extension, the implication is that those who refuse to adapt to human culture are complicit in their sino-AIDS infections, specifically, and their persecution, more generally.

While the elements of queerness outlined above function as the more literal metaphor embodied by the series’ vampires, the narrative of progress embedded in this series also depends heavily on the semiotics of race. Most strikingly, the series is set in the south during a period of recent integration, and it follows characters as they attempt to navigate this new social reality. The parallel between vampire integration and the civil rights movement is strongly implied in the opening credits of the HBO series in which—amid shots of rural culture, sexual exploits, and bloody abstractions—the well-known images of civil rights marches are interspersed. In this way, the history of racial tensions and hard-won integration are part of the backstory in the series, setting the scene but not taking a central role in the narrative except in the form of its vampiric analogue. The vampires’ relationship with dominant culture, however, reflects the kinds of stereotypes and tensions commonly associated with the uneasy status of blackness in the rural south. As I noted above, for example, society regards these vampires as hypersexual creatures—
simultaneously lustful, skillful, and dangerous—in a manner that reflects stereotypes of black men that historically led to lynchings in rural southern communities mirrored by the fictional Bon Temps. In fact, a lynching-type killing does occur in the first novel of the series when, after several women from the town are murdered, some community members decide that a group of “flamboyant” vampires who recently visited the local bar are to blame. One morning, Sookie wakes up to a phone call letting her know that the vampires’ “nest” had been burned with all four of them in it. She notes that the quality of police work following the crime was clearly influenced by their own prejudices since they were cracking jokes about “Southern fried vampires” and not “conducting any serious crime-scene investigation.” This vigilante justice targeted the troublemaking, queer vampires (marked by their flamboyant dress and their disregard for local custom) with a lynching although the blame was incorrectly placed. The readers eventually learn that the killings plaguing the town were not the result of innate vampire violence but were instead motivated by a local white man’s discomfort with vampire/human miscegenation. When the mystery is revealed at the end of the novel, the reader learns that the spate of killings has been committed by a local townsperson, Rene, who originally killed his sister for dating a vampire. He then killed any woman who engaged in a sexual relationship with a vampire (thereby reminding him of his sister). So the lynching in the text, though misplaced, reflects the historic racialized lynchings motivated by sexual violence in the American south while the actual murders were motivated by the threat of miscegenation. Both instances circulate around a kind of racial
analogy between the state of blacks in the pre- and newly integrated south of the 1950s and 1960s and the state of the newly integrated vampires of the series.

By using a “like race” analogy to examine vampire integration, the series implies that the tensions involved in the racial integration of the civil rights movement inform the atmosphere of the narrative while remaining distinctly in the past. Society, it seems, has learned its lesson regarding race but is repeating its mistakes in the context of vampires. Again the dominant analogy in the series is that the vampires are queer, but the semiotics of queerness are then read through the historical cache of the Jim Crow south and the black civil rights movement. At the same time that vampirism is cast as a kind of aestheticized lifestyle involving beautiful bodies, glamorous cars and clothing, and exotic activities, the political language circulating within the series creates a rights-based discourse. Like David Eng’s queer liberalism, this discourse depends upon the language and imagery of the civil rights movement in order to move vampire subjectivity into the realm of “mass-mediated commodity,” a subject position that becomes desirable because of its consumer power and adoption of normative behaviors. Rights-based vampire integration facilitates this move quite literally as the texts’ vampires shift from alienated queer monstrosities to desirable commodities. Not only have vampires suddenly become a fetishized object for sexual consumption since coming out of the coffin, but they have also become literally consumable since vampire blood circulates on the black market as an illegal drug—humans greedily devour vampires in this world, an ironic reversal of the traditional vampire narrative. Many desperate junkies and dealers of vampire blood take advantage of new legislative muddiness in order to get away with the
murder and kidnapping of vampires in a moment when they are only minimally protected by federal law. As we saw with the shoddy investigative practices displayed by the Bon Temps police department in the wake of the vampire lynching, the authorities within rural communities may be aware of federal protections for vampire subjects, but their enforcement of those laws are spotty and unenthusiastic because of the long held vampire stereotypes that have not yet been abandoned by the majority of the population. Within this atmosphere, the vampire civil rights movements emphasizes the lifestyle choices of mainstreaming vampires, implying that they deserve equal protection under the law because they are attempting to be just like humans. One might imagine this as a form of vampire normativity in the way that Lisa Duggan describes homonormativity—“a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them.”

Just as homonormativity emerges from a “neoliberal ‘equality’ politics,” vampire normativity bypasses any revolutionary approach to politics by adopting a civil rights discourse that emphasizes assimilation and anchors mainstreaming vampires firmly within “domesticity and consumption” rather than hedonism and pleasure. As assimilative vampires gain additional rights and legal protections, they are expected to enter into the economy through their purchasing power, consuming houses, cars, and clothes rather than humans.

In the mainstreaming vampires’ juxtaposition from the queer subversive vampires and in the adoption of racial stereotypes and civil rights discourse to set the stage for vampire integration, the series effectively sets up the same notion of progress implied by the “like race” arguments used to advance the “rights and entitlements” of queer
Eng notes that “queer liberalism’s freedom is predicated on the systematic dissociation of race from (homo)sexuality as coeval historical phenomena” since utilizing “like race” arguments forecloses the possibility of reading any legal victory for the LGBT community “as part of a long legal tradition bent on maintaining interlocking—indeed constitutive—systems of white supremacy and heterosexism foundational to (neo)liberalism’s unending march of progress.” The use of analogy, in other words, oversimplifies the complex intersections of identity that work to unevenly distribute rights, power, and wealth in American society. Instead, the “like race” arguments used to advance queer liberalism imply that this is a cause to be modeled on the successful (and already completed) cause of the black civil rights movement. Further, the cause of queer liberalism reframes the discourse of rights to emphasize freedom as dependent upon choice—both in the context of consumer choice and the choice to buy into normative bourgeois concepts of intimacy, family, and the domestic space. Duggan, too, notes that homonormative politics adopts and recodes the language of “freedom,” “equality,” and the “right to privacy” only to create “a corporate culture managed by a minimal state, achieved by the neoliberal privatization of affective as well as economic and public life.” This is a neoliberal politics based on personal choice within a market-based society, and all notions of civil rights are recast into these terms. Race, in this “color blind” culture, is an issue of the past, and the civil rights movement’s struggles for freedom and equality simply serve as an analogy on which to base this new emphasis on choice. The Sookie Stackhouse vampires, as an analogy of sexuality read through the semiotics of race, serve as an extension of this discourse. We can firmly locate racial
struggles in the past by using “like race” arguments in order to advance the civil rights of the LGBT community, and Harris proposes a society in which the struggles of the LGBT community are firmly located in the past since the focus has shifted to the vampires’ struggle for the right to “choose” assimilation into a heteronormative, neoliberal society. In this chain of analogies, the *Sookie Stackhouse* series imagines a culture in which all futures are foreclosed but this neoliberal one because the struggles of race, class, and sexuality have been entombed as relics of the past.

When compared to the *Twilight* saga’s past-oriented fantasy of concentrated economic power and a nostalgic moral code, the *Sookie Stackhouse* series seems to be a more forward-looking (or at least more realistic) treatment of subjectivity in the post-9/11 decade. After all, the world of Bon Temps is filled with prejudice, murder, injustice, and violent sexuality while it explores the integration of a previously oppressed group of people. The decade following 9/11 was filled with prejudice and injustice engendered by the nebulous War on Terror and the government’s apparent support of practices such as indefinite detention and racial profiling of Muslims. This decade also saw intense battles for marriage equality in several states, bringing the oppression of the LGBT community into the forefront of the American popular consciousness. Eng notes that the intersection of these phenomena is not coincidental—recall his argument that the post-9/11 decade is a moment in which “the enfranchisement of the normative gay and lesbian US citizen-subject ‘over here’ as ‘free’ and ‘liberated’ is accompanied by the simultaneous annihilation of Muslim populations deemed ‘unfree’ and ‘uncivilized’ ‘over there.’”

Historically, the advancement of “liberty” for those gay and lesbian
subjects willing to conform to normative mandates functions in direct relation to the alienation and exclusion of raced subjects in this country, and according to Eng, this line of reasoning applies specifically to the inverse relationship between gay and lesbian rights and the rights of Muslim subjects during the War on Terror. The *Sookie Stackhouse* series turns out to be simply another fantasy screen that masks the racism implicit in the War on Terror by imagining a world in which these racial prejudices are solved and located firmly in the past, allowing society to move on to other issues of injustice such as vampire rights. The series deploys the vampire as queer subject located in a moment of historic transition, but because of its dependence on the race analogy, readers feel that this is a moment of inevitable progress. It assumes that the queer vampires will not only achieve their rights and liberties the way that those in the black civil rights movement did, but it also assumes that these racial struggles are firmly located in the past, allowing society to progress from the struggles of racial oppression to the struggles of sexual oppression and on to the struggles of vampire oppression. This narrative of progress seems to adopt a hopeful future-orientation, but in proper neoliberal fashion, its future is limited to the analogy of what has come before and therefore “does not acknowledge any alternative futures.”\(^5\) The predetermined future is that of the non-normative outsider being properly integrated into society when, and only when, they assimilate normative values and behaviors. The future, then, for the vampires in the *Sookie Stackhouse* series is one of “freedom” through queer liberalism in which progress is marked by the once primitive and promiscuous vampires slowly adopting the normative notions of the private sphere and “bourgeois respectability.”\(^6\) Within the neoliberal rationality, however, this
is a fantasy of progress that not only promises a prescribed future in which freedom and liberation are marked by “intimacy, domesticity, marriage, and the unfettered ability ‘to shop until you drop,’” but that also masks the unpleasant reality of racism that bubbled up in the post-9/11 decade. 519

While the mainstreaming vampires of the Sookie Stackhouse series appear to be queer pragmatists in the sense that they seek, ultimately, “a life integrated within North American capitalist culture,” the Twilight vampires straddle the neoliberal and neoconservative universes. 520 They both function as fantasy screens that attempt to mask the unpleasant revelation of the real that America glimpsed on the morning of September 11th, 2001. Rather than a world in which the realities of trauma and annihilation expose our ideologies themselves as mere fantasy, these vampires function in a space in which these ideologies are reaffirmed as ideal. The Twilight fantasy “fixes” the world fragmented by trauma by bringing back those lost in the World Trade Center towers as neo-liberal/conservative superheroes, bent on reestablishing the morals of the past while moving into a spectacularly consumerist future. The Sookie Stackhouse fantasy presents a less-idealized world but one in which the narrative of liberal progress dominates, promising a future in which the unpleasantness of racism is confined to the past and in which social and sexual non-conformists become liberal citizens by pragmatically accepting the normative mandates of neoliberal society. While both the Twilight and Sookie Stackhouse series seem to challenge the kind of clear good/evil binary established in earlier vampire narratives—for example, they both ask viewers to question whether vampires are truly unable to control their anti-social urges, whether
they actually possess a soul, and even whether they are truly undead or simply infected with a virus—there is a clear implication that the “good” of this world is a neoliberal good. In a society in which post-9/11 paranoia implies that the person sitting next to you could be a terrorist, these narratives reflect the muddiness of our fragmented post-traumatic culture but attempt to offer a new vision of reality in which the disruption of the real that intruded upon the American consciousness during this traumatic moment is masked by a new kind of ideological reality. Neoliberalism, as the ultimate fantasy projected upon these vampire screens, functions as does any other ideology. Contrary to the assumptions of those screaming fans camping outside of the theater for the release of the next film in the Twilight saga or those who set their DVRs to capture each new episode of True Blood on HBO, these fantasies (and the desires that they engender) do “not offer us a point of escape from our reality.” Instead, in a decade infused with post-traumatic fragmentation that exposed something we would rather shield our eyes from, these fantasies offer us the newly imagined “social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic, real kernel.” Look behind the vampire and you will find the trauma of the real.
CONCLUSION

In this project, I have worked to highlight the striking concurrences between trauma, gothicism, and the negotiation of gender and sexuality within American culture. While the fight over same-sex marriage rights rages on in this country, I hope I have shown that political and juridical debates (or academic approaches, for that matter) are not the only forums in which the population engages with the most pressing contemporary issues of gender and sexuality. Likewise, a purely literary study of poetry and fiction would not be sufficient to acknowledge the myriad ways our society approaches these issues. With this in mind, I have attempted to include a cross-disciplinary sampling of “texts” with which to explore and uncover some of the most hotly contested controversies of American culture after 1945. Critical theory, drama, performance art, poetry, literature, popular novels (and their cover art), television, and film—all are windows, however cloudy, into the anxieties and desires of their historical moment.

In the windows we have peered into throughout these chapters, we have glimpsed the cultural reverberations of trauma, an inescapable force that both challenges our basic understanding of reality while demanding our interaction with the shattered ideological landscape that remains. In the post-traumatic ruins of cultural myths and fantasies, in that uncomfortable place, arises the human drive to narrativize—to piece together the fragments in a way that not only makes sense of an incompressible event but that also rebuilds the shattered myths. This task is predicable in some ways and not in others.
As Cathy Caruth notes, “the experience of a trauma repeats itself, exactly and unremittingly, through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will.”

It is predicable, then, that a cultural trauma results in the obsessive revisiting of that trauma. In the case of this project, I have focused on the return of trauma through cultural productions that attempt to narrativize it. This, in turn, is another predicable element of traumatogenic reaction: traumatic experience consists not only in “the enigma of a human agent’s repeated and unknowing acts but as the enigma of the otherness of a human voice that cries out from the wound, a voice that witnesses a truth.” Out of the traumatic wound comes a voice that inevitably cries out. Creative production is an inherent byproduct of trauma, and the productions covered in this project are all examples of this anguished cry emerging from the wound of cultural and personal trauma—from the universal trauma of abjection, to the insidious trauma of marginalization, to the historical traumas of atomic warfare, the AIDS crisis, urban racial uprisings, and terrorist attacks on U.S. soil.

The horrific wound that is created when social ideologies are ripped open is not only gothic because of its association with the abject but because the fragmentation of our fantasies provides a glimpse of the real, that incomprehensible space of lack against which we desperately fight in an attempt to remain comfortably seated in the fantasies that mask it. Just as I began this project, I will return to Haggerty’s claim that “[t]his shadow-presence of the real and these distortions of the symbolic are the staple of gothic fiction. These are primal scenes, not the secretive private memory of an individual but the primal reality of the culture at large.” When the “distortions” of
fantasy/ideology/cultural mythology are shattered by trauma, a glimpse of the real that shapes them appears, and the cultural productions that attempt to speak this occurrence become inevitably gothic. Perhaps gothicism—like hyperarousal, intrusion, and constriction—is a symptom of cultural Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

The unpredictable element of traumatic response to the shattering of cultural myths lies in the drive to piece together the shards that remain. Since this project is concerned with those cultural myths that govern notions of gender and sexuality, I have focused on the way post-traumatic cultural productions take shape as gothic queer theory—a mode of exploration that utilizes the gothicism inherent in the shadow-presence of the real in order to both narrativize trauma and piece together the fragmented social narratives about queerness in new and subversive ways. This vision of the post-traumatic moment as an opportunity for restructuring a hegemonic society as one more egalitarian and inclusive may be taken up by some, but as I explored in Chapters Four and Five, some cultural productions attempt to glue the traumatic fragments together in ways that reestablish the pre-trauma status quo or they take the opportunity piece together a new but less egalitarian society in which power is even more highly concentrated among the few. Regardless of the drive, it remains clear that the moment following trauma opens up a battleground space, a location in which society struggles over the fantasies of queerness and heteronormativity and one that is inexorably gothic.
Introduction


2. I use the term “queer” in this project primarily to refer to any behavior, embodiment, identity, or aesthetic of gender and/or sexuality that is non-normative within its cultural context.


4. George Haggerty, in *Queer Gothic*, frames Gothic literature as “starting with Horace Walpole . . . and extending at least as far as Charles Robert Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) and James Hogg’s *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824)” (1). I choose to extend the scope of the properly Gothic novel further into the nineteenth century in order to retain *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* within the scope of the Gothic. The term gothic as a marker of style, however, is often used to describe novels that extend into the twenty-first century.


6. Ibid.

7. This work, and the deployment of the terms “Gothic” and “gothic,” are deeply indebted to the careful articulation of these distinctions in *Queer Gothic*. In this text, Haggerty distinguishes between the capitalized Gothic historical/literary period and the uncapsitized gothic devices that are not historically or geographically anchored. This project will, too, make that distinction.

9. See, for example, Sue Ellen Case’s “Tracking the Vampire,” Elizabeth Grosz’s “Intolerable Ambiguity: Freaks at/as the Limit,” and Richard Dyer’s “Children of the Night: Vampirism as Homosexuality, Homosexuality as Vampirism.”


12. Ibid., 4.


**Chapter One**


16. Ibid., 10


18. Ibid., 6.


23. Ibid., 91.


25. Ibid.

26. Ibid., 4.


31. Ibid., 16.


33. Haggerty notes in *Queer Gothic*, “Freud relied on gothic writing to help him articulate his notions of uncanny and various delusional behaviors” (5). Sedgwick and Halberstam also acknowledge and explicate various gothic elements of Freud.


35. Ibid., 96, 101-102.

36. Ibid., 101.

37. Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 116. She also returns to the concept of the paranoid Gothic in *Epistemology of the Closet*.

38. Freud, “Paranoia,” 147 (original emphasis).
39. Freud, “Paranoia,” 89, 94-95, 100. The use of the work “intercourse,” here, explicitly refers not to sexual intercourse but to any means of interaction and communication between God and men. The choice of a word that also evokes sexuality is not coincidental in a text theorizing repressed homosexual desires and that speaks overtly of Schreber’s explicit references to sexual intercourse with God.

40. Ibid., 146.

41. The concept of “insidious trauma” is fleshed out by feminist trauma theorist, Laura Brown in her essay “Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma” in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995). I address this concept in much greater depth in chapter two.

42. Trauma theorists describe the shattering, or fracturing, that occurs both during a traumatic event and after. During a severe trauma, such as a violent rape, the victim will often describe a separation from the body or ability to see the scene from a third person perspective. Post-traumatic reactions are often characterized by a temporal fracturing as well as the inability to reconstruct a unified narrative of the event. See, for example, Judith Herman’s text *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).


44. Foucault, *Herculine Barbin*, 140.

45. Ibid., xii-xiii.

46. Ibid., 119.

47. Ibid., xiii-xiv.


49. Ibid., 7.

50. Ibid., 6.

51. Ibid., 11.

52. Ibid., 27.
53. Ibid., 38.


56. Ibid., 35.

57. Ibid., 142.


59. Ibid., 179.

60. Ibid., 180.


63. Ibid., 103.

64. Ibid., 97.


70. Also, this link between the abject and grotesque appears in Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror* when she writes that “The abject confronts us, on the one hand, with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of animal” (12).


72. Ibid., 357.

73. Ibid.

74. Ibid., 369.

75. Ibid., 370.

76. Ibid., 355.

77. Ibid., 371.

78. Ibid., 355.

79. Ibid., 371.

Chapter Two


81. Ibid., 4.

82. Ibid., 13.

83. Ibid., 4.

84. Ibid., 11 (original emphasis).


86. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud reflects upon the traumatic neuroses that result from such events as railway disasters and World War I. He comes to define as
traumatic “any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield. It seems to me that the concept of trauma necessarily implies a connection of this kind with a breach in an otherwise efficacious barrier against stimuli” (33). Like the rupture of the skin that causes a physical wound, psychological trauma also requires a rupture of sorts. Freud’s description of trauma provides an understanding of trauma as fundamentally liminal. Sigmund Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, trans. and ed. James Strachey (1920; repr., New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961).

87. Luckhurst, Trauma Question, 3.


90. Luckhurst, Trauma Question, 5.


92. Freud first identifies this as a “repetition compulsion,” and Shoshana Felman develops an extended theory of testimony in her 1991 text, Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History.


94. Scarry, Pain, 4.

95. Annie Rogers, The Unsayable: The Hidden Language of Trauma (New York: Random House, 2006), 44.


100. Ibid., 454.


102. Ibid., 24. In an interesting link between sadism, masochism, and another gothic trope, cannibalism, Freud mentions that “this aggressive element of the sexual instinct is in reality a relic of cannibalistic desires” (25).

103. Ibid., 24.

104. Ibid.


106. Ibid., 39.

107. Ibid., 41.

108. Ibid., 64 (original emphasis).

109. Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 40. Deleuze explains that while sadism and masochism are analogically concurrent, “their processes and their formations are entirely different” (46). Many assume that a sadist is required to inflict the pain and torture that sexually arouses the masochist, but Deleuze argues that the torturer “cannot be sadistic precisely because she is in the masochistic situation, she is an integral part of it, a realization of the masochistic fantasy” (41 original emphasis). Rather than being a sadist, she is the “double or the reflection of masochism” (41). Likewise, “the victim of the sadist belongs entirely in the world of sadism and is an integral part of the sadistic situation” (41-42).


114. Ibid., 56.

115. Ibid., 64.

116. The heroines of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, for example, are recognized by their “well-developed and muscular figure, a proud nature, an imperious will and a cruel disposition” but can be further divided into several types such as “the Grecian woman” and “the sadistic woman” (Deleuze, *Coldness and Cruelty*, 47-48).


118. Michel Foucault is another theorist of sexuality who famously deploys the subversive possibilities of sadism and masochism in his musings in a 1982 interview with B. Gallagher and A Wilson. He begins with a suggestion that the gay movement needs to learn the “art of life” in order to achieve sexual liberation. The path to this, he claims, is recognizing that “[s]ex is not a fatality: it’s a possibility for creative life” (163). In order to access this creative possibility, he credits the BDSM subculture with the creation of sexual innovations that open up “new possibilities of pleasure” (165). Foucault explicitly identifies the way that sadomasochism has potential to be a resistant act because it embodies “the use of a strategic relationship as a source of pleasure” (170 original emphasis). He claims that sadomasochistic practices allow for creativity in sexual play because “they are inventing new possibilities of pleasure with strange parts of their body—through the eroticization of the body. I think it’s a kind of creation, a creative enterprise, which has as one of its main features what I call the desexualization of pleasure” (165). He identifies this practice as a creative queering of sexuality that opens up sexual possibilities and identities that are not rooted in authenticity discourses or identity politics. While Case is responding to feminist discourses and the invisibility, or ghosting, of the working class butch-femme subject by using sadomasochistic dynamics as a foundational concept, Foucault is simultaneously developing a line of thought that arises out the possibilities housed in sadomasochism. For both, power and pleasure are issues that should not be abstracted from gender and sexuality discourses due to their creative potential. Of course, Foucault acknowledges that all sexual relationships have power dynamics since “we are in a strategic situation toward each other” at all times, but he does not see this as entrapment. While one “cannot jump outside the situation,” he encourages readers that “there is always the possibility of changing” the power relations (167). He locates this potential for change in sadomasochistic play (amongst other things such as drug use) because of the way that sadomasochism can appropriate and redeploy
those power relations that are inherent in all relationships. The “S&M game,” he explains, “is very interesting because it is a strategic relation, but it is always fluid. Of course, there are roles, but everybody knows very well that those roles can be reversed. . . . Or, even when the roles are stabilized, you know very well that it is always a game” (169). Like Case, Foucault highlights the performative nature of the roles that are adopted in sadomasochism and identifies the subversive/resistant potential of artifice, playfulness, and the resultant fluidity of power relations in the fantasy scene. Similar in nature to the other theorists I have outlined thus far, Foucault’s identification of the productive nature of sadistic and masochistic relations is grounded in the paired performativity and fluidity of the roles involved. This is a gothic-style sadism and masochism that aggressively affirms the messiness of categories and the instability of binaries—an assertion that is central to the subversive potential in these theoretical concepts since, if the practice were to reify binaries, it would certainly become a mere reflection of hegemony rather than a productive queer redeployment. “Michel Foucault—An Interview: Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity” in Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, ed. Paul Rabinow, vol. 1, Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth (New York: New Press, 1997).


120. Ibid.

121. Ibid.


123. Ibid., 56.

124. Ibid.


127. Cruz, “Miriam’s Flowers,” 64.

128. Ibid., 67.

129. Ibid., 55.

130. Ibid., 64.
131. Ibid., 62, 67, 83.


134. Ibid., 115-116.

135. Ibid., 119.

136. Ibid., 7.

137. Ibid., 121 (original emphasis).

138. Ibid., 122 (original emphasis).


140. Feyder, Shattering the Myth, 5.

141. Ibid.


143. Cruz, “Fur,” 73.

144. Laura Brown, “Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma” in Trauma: Explorations in Memory, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995), 107. She gives credit to her therapist colleague, Maria Root for the development of this term.

145. Ibid., 100. This is the official definition of trauma from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM III-R). In the subsequent DSM IV, the definition has been changed to focus instead on “the person’s subjective perceptions of fear, threat, and risk to well-being” (Brown 111). Regardless of this revision, Brown’s argument regarding the marginalizing assumptions of normalcy are valid and still currently relevant. She also notes in an epilogue to her essay that the “revision has failed to provide us with a
diagnosis to describe the effects of exposure to repetitive interpersonal violence and victimization” (111).


147. Cruz, “Fur,” 90.

148. Ibid., 73.


151. Ibid.

152. Cruz, “Fur,” 80.

153. Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 46.


155. Ibid., 89.

156. Ibid.

157. Ibid., 91.

158. Ibid., 111.

159. Ibid.

160. Ibid., 112.

161. Ibid.

162. Ibid., 88, 96.


164. Jan Brasleuar, “The Body Politics Theater: L.A.'s Ron Athey, whose Performance Art Includes Piercing and Other Body Modifications, is at the Center of the


166. Ibid., 3.


168. Ibid., 149.

169. Ibid., 164.

170. Bersani, *Freudian Body*, 64 (original emphasis).

171. Ibid., 65.

Chapter Three

172. This anniversary is noted by numerous media sources including: “Conference, revival mark 30th anniversary of AIDS” by Sara M. Simons and Perry N. Halkitis (*Chelsea Now*, 5 May 2011) and “AIDS at 30” (*CBS News*, 7 June 2011).


disidentification allows the minority subject to refuse both identification and counter-
identification with cultural narratives about his or her identity. Instead, disidentification
“neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather,
disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology” (11).

178. Judith (Jack) Halberstam, Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and The Technology of

179. George E. Haggerty, Queer Gothic (Urbana: University of Illinois Press,
2006), 2.

180. While today we use the terms HIV and AIDS to identify the virus and the
immunodeficiency that attends the virus in its advanced stages, at the time of the AIDS
crisis in the 1980s and 90s there was much confusion as the world attempted to identify
the disease. This uncertainty led to constantly evolving terminology, including names
such as ARC (AIDS related complex), LAV (lymphadenopathy-associated virus), and
GRID (gay-related immune deficiency).

181. Halberstam, Skin Shows, 2.

182. Ibid.

183. Even before the book begins, the acknowledgments make clear that Cuadros’
work is responding to the loss of his lover, John, as well as his own terminal status.
Likewise, after the final poem, the “About the Author” section explains that Cuadros died
in 1996, two years after the book was published, a fact that certainly causes a retroactive
shift in the text’s meaning.

(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 23.

185. Ibid., 10.

186. Cuadros, City of God, 61.

187. Ibid., 66.

188. The narrator himself notes that he thought this type of pick up “was a bit
sleazy” (62).

189. Cuadros, City of God, 67.
190. Ibid., 66.
191. Ibid., 65.
192. Ibid., 69.
193. Halberstam, Skin Shows, 2.

194. Take, for example, James Hogg’s *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) in which multiple genres and narrators are combined to produce a Gothic narrative that disrupts any clear generic, authorial, or narrative meaning, often confounding even the distinction between fiction and non-fiction. Also, the notorious embeddedness of Gothic narratives (such as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), Matthew Lewis’ *The Monk* (1796), and Charles Robert Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820)) are evoked by *City of God*’s defiance any singular genre, form, chronology, or narrative voice.

195. Halberstam, Skin Shows, 29.
196. Ibid., 28.
197. Ibid., 29.
200. Ibid., 41.
201. Halberstam, Skin Shows, 29.
203. Ibid., 7.
204. Ibid.
205. Ibid.
206. Ibid., 13.
207. Ibid., 13-14.
208. Ibid.

209 Ibid., 38.

210. Ibid.

211. Ibid., 87.

212. Ibid., 42.

213. Ibid., 43.

214. Ibid.

215. Ibid.

216. Ibid., 44.


222. Ibid., 55.

223. Ibid., 58.

224. Ibid., 133.

225. Ibid., 111, 118.

226. Ibid., 54.

227. Ibid., 58.


236. Ibid., 456.

237. The story “Reynaldo,” too, includes interwoven narratives from the past and present simultaneously as it looks toward the future.

238. Cuadros, *City of God*, 137.

239. Ibid., 138.

240. Ibid., 149.

241. Ibid., 146.

242. Ibid., 149.

243. Ibid., 150.

244. Ibid.
245. Halberstam, Skin Shows, 21.


249. Abu-Lughod, Race, Space and Riots, 258.

250. On Revoyr’s website, she explains that she began writing the novel in 1996 after visiting the Holiday Bowl in the Crenshaw district of Los Angeles. She was so impressed by the cross-racial mingling of the elderly black and Japanese patrons of this bowling alley/diner she decided to write a book about “an idea that had been incubating for years—the rumor of an unsolved multiple murder during the Watts Riots” highlighting the relationships between black and Japanese-American characters. She explains that this story is tinged with “imminent loss” since the Holiday Bowl was closed and converted into a Walgreens and Starbucks shortly after the publication of Southland. Nina Revoyr, “Holiday Bowl,” Nina Revoyr, 2011, accessed December 21 2011, http://www.ninarevoyr.com/books/southland/holiday_bowl.php.


252. Ibid.

253. Ibid., 12.

254. In “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud defines mourning as “the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so on (243).

255. Freud, “Mourning,” 249 (original emphasis).

256. Revoyr, Southland, 9-10. The once idyllic neighborhood represented the possibility for racial integration and personal independence. The residents of various (non-white) cultural backgrounds once were able to feed themselves with game they “hunted and cooked” themselves and “berries stolen off the vine,” suggesting self-reliance through active consumption and harmony with nature (12). The narration also implies that those living in this little pocket of bucolic possibility accepted racial
difference: “if their neighbors spoke a different language, wore a different color skin, here—and only here—it didn’t matter” (11).


259. Ibid., 10.

260. While it is quite true that the neighborhoods of Watts and South Central were already “ghettos” before the uprising of 1965, the novel makes a clear distinction between the pre-riot period in which the black and Japanese population functioned together in relative harmony and the post-riot period in which the Japanese population abandoned the neighborhood leading to increasing alienation between black and Asian demographics.


263. Ibid., 12.

264. Ibid., 10.

265. Ibid., 12.


267. Revoyr grew up in Culver City, a neighborhood in Los Angeles, California.


271. Ibid., 204.

272. Ibid., 200. Consider, for example, the insistence of return characterized by Toni Morrison’s Beloved who, most certainly, cannot be mastered by the other characters in the novel.


274. Ibid., 120.

275. Ibid.

276. Revoyr, Southland, 32.

277. Ibid., 18-19.

278. Ibid., 21.

279. Ibid., 64.

280. Ibid., 65.

281. In a way, Curtis is able to reemerge as a historical agent, however. It becomes clear that Frank was unable to successfully redirect his object cathexis when Curtis died as evidenced by the box of money he buried in his closet. We learn by the end of the novel that, because Curtis is Frank’s son, Frank had decided to give him the store shortly before Curtis was killed, but he was unable to fulfill these plans. Instead of using the money from the sale of the store for himself or giving it to someone else, Frank buried the money in a box in his bedroom closet thereby excluding Curtis from the public story of his life while retaining him within its depths—a symbol of the melancholic exclusion-yet-retention of Curtis within Frank’s ego. Ironically, if he had been able to go through the process of “healthy” mourning, Curtis’ story may have remained silenced forever, a victim of melancholic history, and an object without the ability to shape the present. This is to similar to the queering of melancholia I discussed in the Cuadros story “My Aztlan: White Place.”

282. Revoyr, Southland, 124.

283. Ibid., 123.

284. Cheng, Melancholy, 12.


288. Ibid., 345.


291. Ibid.

292. Ibid., 207.

293. Revoyr, Southland, 317.

294. Ibid.

295. Ibid., 16-17.

296. Ibid.

297. Ibid., 103.

298. Ibid., 105.

299. Ibid., 104.

300. Ibid., 47.

301. This barrier is represented by the distance and containment that Jackie frequently feels when she is with Laura. As she proceeds with her investigation into the story of Curtis Martindale and her grandfather, this distance becomes more and more pronounced. At one point, she comes to visit Laura, and when Laura opens the door Jackie “considered her from what seemed like a very long distance” (222). A few minutes later, as Laura begins to kiss and caress Jackie’s body, Jackie thinks, “all these sensations seemed remote, barely real, as if someone were tapping lightly at a thick wooden door on the other side of a very large house” (223).


304. Freccero mentions that “[b]eing haunted is also a profoundly erotic experience, one that ranges from an acute visual pleasure to ecstatic transcendence” (202).


306. Revoyr, Southland, 204.

307. Ibid., 204-205.

308. Ibid., 114.

309. Ibid., 207.

310. Ibid.


312. Revoyr, Southland, 225.

313. Ibid., 226.

314. Ibid., 224.

315. Ibid., 194.


317. Ibid., 207.

318. Revoyr, Southland, 343.

319. Ibid., 342-343.

320. Ibid., 343-344.


322. Revoyr, Southland, 348.

Chapter Four


327. Ibid.


329. Ibid., 2-3.

330. For a more extended discussion of the gothic nature of paranoia, see Chapter One “From Queer Gothic to Gothic Queer.”

331. Nadel, Containment Culture, 14.

332. Ibid., 24.

333. Ibid., 117.


335. Ibid., 6.


337. Ibid., 8.

338. Forrest, Lesbian Pulp, x.

339. Haut, Pulp Culture, 5.

340. Stryker, Queer Pulp, 12.


357. Ibid.

358. Stryker, *Queer Pulp*, 64.


360. Ibid.

361. Ibid., 5.

362. For example, Diego Saglia points out that William Beckford’s Gothic novel, *The History of Caliph Vathek* (1786), utilizes orientalism both as a "signal of ethnic and cultural barriers and as a vehicle of desire.” In this text, Beckford represents the difference implied in the Orient/Occidental divide in order to convey “a form of exotic animality and sensuality.” Diego Saglia, “William Beckford's 'Sparks of Orientalism' and the Material-Discursive Orient of British Romanticism,” *Textual Practice* 16, no. 1, (2002), 79.

363. See, for example, Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797).


368. Ibid., 41.


370. Ibid., 158.


372. Ibid., vi.
373. Ibid., vii.

374. Ibid., ix.

375. Ibid.

376. Jaye Zimet does a nice job of dividing the review of lesbian pulp covers thematically in *Strange Sisters*, with entire sections devoted to sorority/dormitory novels and prison novels.


381. Ibid., 167.

382. Ibid., 161.


384. Ibid., 41.


387. Ibid., 42.

388. Ibid., 63.
389. Ibid., 64.


393. Ibid., 35.

394. Ibid., 36.

395. Ibid.

396. Ibid., 10.

397. Ibid., 14.


400. Ibid., 162.


403. Ibid., 201.


405. See José Esteban Muñoz, Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

407. This is in contrast to Beth and Charlie’s marriage in *Journey to a Woman*, for example, which is dark, sexually violent, emotionally hysterical, and miserably confining.

Chapter Five


409. Elbaum, “‘Twilight’ Wedding,” par. 5-6.

410. A Nielson demographic profile for *Twilight* web viewership (created in June of 2009) states that women are 44% more likely than the average web user to visit the *Twilight* site. And users between the ages of 25-34 constituted the highest online audience composition group, even though the books were written for a young adult audience. “Vampire Fan Base Runs Thicker Than Blood Online,” *nielsonwire*, July 22nd 2009, accessed April 25th 2012, http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/online_mobile/vampire-fan-base-runs-thicker-than-blood-online/.


414. While there were literary productions involving vampires before Bram Stoker’s novel, such as John Polidori’s ‘The Vampyre’ (1819) and Goethe’s “The Bride of Corinth” (1797), Stoker’s Dracula is the vampire most recognizably present in American cultural iterations (Day 14).


418. Day specifically points to Interview with the Vampire and The Vampire Lestat as examples of first person narratives of liberationist vampires.


420. Ibid., 81.


422. Ibid.

423. Day, Vampire Legends, 81.

424. Ibid.

425. Ibid., 130.


428. 9/11 Report, 311, xv.


430. 9/11 Report, xvi.

431. Ibid.


433. Ibid.

434. Ibid., 2.
435. 9/11 Report, xvi.


437. 9/11 Report, 383.


440. Žižek, “Grimaces,” 68.

441. Žižek, Looking Awry, 23.

442. Ibid.

443. As Edward explains to Bella in Twilight, “‘But most won’t settle in any one place. Only those like us, who’ve given up hunting you people’—a sly glance in my direction—‘can live together with humans for any length of time. . . . Those of us who live . . . differently tend to band together.” Stephenie Meyer, Twilight (New York: Little, Brown, 2005), 290.

452. Ibid., 691.

453. Ibid., 705-706.


455. Meyer, “Cullen Cars.”

456. Meyer, Twilight, 32.

457. Ibid., 322.

458. Ibid., 307.

459. Ibid., 337, 339.

460. Wilson, Seduced, 166.

461. Ibid.

462. Meyer, Twilight, 474 (original emphasis).

463. Ibid.


465. Ibid., 7.


467. Ibid., 692.


469. Ibid., 667.

470. Ibid., 647.


475. Ibid.


479. Ibid., 137.

480. Ibid., 134.


483. Ibid., 429-430.

484. Ibid., 429.
485. This is, perhaps, an eerily prescient prediction of the Tea Party movement in United States politics.


490. Ibid.


493. Harris, *Dark*, 106.

494. Karen Tongson describes this in “The Light That Never Goes Out,” as the “queer developmental topos that maps the queer subject’s compulsory relocation from ‘nowhere’ (suburban and rural spaces), to ‘somewhere,’ namely the queer city” (356).

495. When Bill first travels to New Orleans hotel, “Blood in the Quarter,” without Sookie, she complains that, “at dusk it was absolutely surrounded by fang-bangers and tourists waiting for the vampires to come out” (*Dead Until Dark*, 240).

496. Harris, *Dark*, 2.


500. Ibid.

501. Ibid., 99.


503. Harris, Dead, 68.

504. Ibid.


506. Edelman, No Future, 34.

507. Harris, Dead, 151.

508. Ibid., 176, 175.

509. For example, the television series repeatedly refers to the “Vampire Rights Amendment” that protects the basic civil liberties of the undead within American society.


511. Duggan, Twilight of Equality, 50.

512. Ibid., 45, 50.

513. Ibid.

514. Ibid., 50.


519. Ibid., 43.

520. José Esteban Muñoz, Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 453.

522. Ibid.

**Conclusion**


524. Ibid., 3.

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