

FORBIDDEN PLEASURES: CANNIBALISM AND QUEERNESS

IN FILM AND TELEVISION

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The trope of the queer cannibal recurs throughout fiction as well as film and television. While literature scholars such as David Bergman and Caleb Crain have written about this figure in American literature, the queer cannibal remains unstudied in the realm of media studies. This thesis analyzes six media texts that feature queer cannibals: *Hannibal* (2013-2015), *Ravenous* (1999), *The Terror* (2018), *Yellowjackets* (2021-), *Raw* (2016), and *Bones and All* (2022). Through these analyses, this thesis establishes a genre termed "queer cannibal texts." These texts function on two different levels: they include a cannibal character who is or can be read as queer, and they in some way cannibalize and queer an existing story or societal script. The presence of a queer cannibal character often signals that the work itself is a queer cannibal text. These texts are built on an awareness of existing power structures and narratives. By cannibalizing these narratives—whether they be a fictional narrative that is being adapted, or societal narratives of white supremacy, heteronormativity, and so on—and interrogating them from a queer perspective, queer cannibal texts create reparative narratives that speak from the margins. Queer cannibal characters act as a textual manifestation of this framework, providing a window through which the viewer is invited to examine and engage with these power structures in a new way.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: JUST A TASTE

In his 1991 book *Gaiety Transfigured: Gay Self-Representation in American Literature*, David Bergman recounts a conversation had with a student during a class discussion of Yukio Mishima's *Confessions of a Mask*. Regarding a scene in which the narrator, a thinly-veiled avatar of Mishima himself, daydreams (fantasizes, really) about eating a handsome young swimmer before a table of restless dinner party guests, Bergman's student asked if this type of fantasy is common in gay literature. Bergman states that "although [his] initial reaction was no, [he] realized that [he] could cite a half-dozen examples off the top of [his] head."¹ Later in *Gaiety Transfigured*, Bergman notes the sheer variety of gay male authors who have touched on the subject: "Melville, Charles Warren Stoddard, Tennessee Williams, Gide, Michel Tournier, Pasolini, all have written about cannibals or cannibalism, and the tradition continues in such writers as Daniel Curzon and Tobias Schneebaum."² Bergman argues that, far from being an anomaly, this entanglement of cannibalism and homosexuality is an important facet of what he terms "gay rhetoric," a case of gay men reclaiming an initially homophobic trope in order to express their views of themselves.³

Caleb Crain draws upon Bergman's work in his 1994 article "Lovers of Human Flesh: Homosexuality and Cannibalism in Melville's Novels." Where Bergman speaks generally about the historical evolution of the use of cannibalism in gay male writing, Crain interrogates the recurrence of this motif in Herman Melville's fiction as well as his personal correspondence. Crain traces three similarities in mid-nineteenth century depictions of homosexuality and

¹ Bergman, "An Introduction by Way of Acknowledgments," 22.

² Bergman, "Cannibals and Queers," 140.

³ Ibid.

cannibalism. First, they “shared a rhetorical form. Both were represented as ‘the unspeakable.’”⁴ Secondly, and particularly salient for Melville’s work, is the association of the South Pacific with both cannibalism and promiscuity of all types.⁵ Finally, cannibalism and homosexuality both evoked panic upon being discovered, though Crain notes that this “is perhaps more Melville’s innovation than it is common intellectual property.”⁶

This last similarity is the basis of what Crain calls “a provisional explanation for the congruence of cannibalism and homosexuality.”⁷ Both homosexual panic⁸ and cannibal panic are the products of an inseparable attraction to and repulsion from the offensive act, whether it be acting on one’s homosexual desires or eating another human being. Drawing on Montaigne as well as Melville, Crain suggests that “what is disturbing about cannibals is not a matter of reason, but a matter of feeling...Once revulsion at the particular act of cannibalism is overcome, it can be seen as a different, and no worse, social organization of violence.”⁹ This justification or reasoning-out of cannibalism bears a striking similarity to discourses surrounding the defense of homosexuality; “once revulsion at the particular act of homosexuality is transcended, it can be seen as a different, and no worse, structure of affection. The sticky bit is always the peculiar act.”¹⁰ For Crain, then, the marriage of cannibalism and homosexuality—at least in Melville—can be explained thusly:

The body is a convenient boundary for the definition of the self. In theory a sort of social anthropology may rationalize cannibalism or homosexuality, but in practice the peculiar

⁴ Crain, “Lovers of Human Flesh,” 28.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 32.

⁷ Ibid., 34.

⁸ Crain lifts this terminology from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who herself borrowed it from Freud. For more detail, see Crain, “Lovers of Human Flesh,” 33.

⁹ Ibid., 34.

¹⁰ Ibid.

act violates that boundary. The act offers an ecstatic union; it offers to relieve the self of the burden of selfhood; it offers a chance to surrender the body, to consume or be consumed by another. Melville's hero, a solitary and self-reliant American of the nineteenth century, desperately wants to lose his self. Although his freedom and independence are precious to him, they bind him to responsibilities and isolate him in distrust; they weigh him down, and he dreams of laying them aside. But the penalty for this kind of transgression—for the violation of allowing himself to be violated—would be severe. Cannibals would tear his body to shreds, like Pentheus's; intimacy with a man would threaten him with a mutilation only slightly more abstract. He would not be his own man. He would no longer be free; he would be as subject as a woman; and he would therefore no longer be fit for the role of citizen in a democracy. Cannibalism and homosexuality violate the distinctions between identity and desire; between self and other; between what we want, what we want to be, and what we are. This is why they are appealing; this is why the nineteenth-century American man is horrified to discover that they appeal to him.¹¹

Crain's conclusion here aligns with Bergman's, who states that,

for the gay writer, the trope of homosexual cannibalism becomes a way to work through his desire for communion with other men and his anxiety about the equality such communion implies. For homosexuality, as I discussed when I looked at the structure of its discourse, is both distinguished by the equality of the men involved, and made anxious by the difference such equality imposes. The equality between gay men is a quality both hard won and disturbing. Cannibalism becomes a screen on which gay writers can project both desire and fear.¹²

Bergman goes on to explore the way the trope is used in the work of Tennessee Williams and Tobias Schneebaum. Williams does little to challenge Melville's construction of homosexuality and cannibalism as a thing to be feared, with characters in both *Suddenly Last Summer* and "Desire and the Black Masseur" literally eaten up by their own desires.¹³ Bergman states that, while Melville attempted to avoid or escape cannibalistic egalitarian relationships, "Williams submits to them, and consequently finds himself speaking a truth that provided relief neither for himself, nor for those who came to hear him."¹⁴ Schneebaum, on the other hand,

¹¹ Crain, "Lovers of Human Flesh," 34.

¹² Bergman, "Cannibals and Queers," 149.

¹³ Sebastian Venable in *Suddenly Last Summer*; Anthony Burns in "Desire and the Black Masseur." See Bergman, "Cannibals and Queers," 153-156.

¹⁴ Bergman, "Cannibals and Queers," 157.

envisions homosexual cannibalism not as an act of obliteration or retribution, but as “an act or communion by which the gay man is fully constituted in his love for another...Schneebaum focuses not on cannibalism’s violence, but on its creative, self-constituting elements; it becomes for him a metaphor for adult nurturing.”¹⁵ Ultimately, Bergman reads the recurrence of cannibalism in the work of gay authors as a reclamation and transformation of homophobic constructions of gay men:

Introduced by heterosexual theologians as a way to increase the horror of sodomy, the association was explored by successive generations of homosexual writers, who transformed it slowly, and with increasing skill, to reflect the ideals of homosexual love and affection. This process of transformation did not occur in isolation; it paralleled changes in Western views of both sexuality and the primitive. By interacting with these more general cultural changes, gay writers have transformed a representation that had been used to oppress them into one that in large measure is self-affirming.¹⁶

I provide this background with the intent of showing that I am far from the first person to notice the strange recurring pattern of cannibalism in media by and about queer people. I would go so far as to say the connection is, at this point, thoroughly established, and to a degree uncontested, at least regarding its appearance in fiction. I believe this is primarily due to the stature of Crain’s article, which I understand to have become more or less canonical in studies of Melville.¹⁷ While Bergman’s work is less well-known, it, too, is worthwhile, especially given that Crain himself draws from “Cannibals and Queers” in “Lovers of Human Flesh.” Where these pieces are lacking, though, is in their sole attention to works of prose fiction. I do not fault the authors for this—both were written, after all, in the early 1990s—but instead find it curious

¹⁵ Bergman, “Cannibals and Queers,” 158.

¹⁶ Ibid., 162.

¹⁷ Anecdotally, I first learned about “Lovers of Human Flesh” from an acquaintance not in academia but with an interest in maritime stories, especially *Moby Dick* and *The Terror*. That even people beyond the realm of academia are familiar with the article speaks, I think, to its significance. Moreover, according to Google Scholar, “Lovers of Human Flesh” has been cited at least 167 times in other scholarly texts as of March 30, 2023, which seems like an impressive number for what is a fairly niche subject.

that, in the three decades since they were published, little other scholarly work has looked beyond Bergman and Crain's subjects into other media. Many articles deal with the portrayal of queerness *or* cannibalism in a specific film or television show, but work on the overlap between the two is almost nonexistent.

The sole exception to this that I have found is a 2012 master's thesis by Christopher Ryan entitled "Hunks of Meat: Homicidal Homosociality and Hyperheteronormativity in Cannibal Horror." Ryan argues that the figure of the male cannibal, which is inextricably linked to homosexuality, is the product of societal heteronormativity, designed to evoke the maximum amount of disgust from the audience. According to Ryan, "modern cannibal horror decries any sexual expression beyond tightly-constrained and strictly-defined heterosexuality as not only socially deviant, but also intensely repugnant, morally transgressive, and, ultimately, punished by death."¹⁸ Ryan's thesis suffers partially due to the media texts available at the time of its writing—the most recent films he covers are *Hannibal Rising* and *Wrong Turn 2*, both released in 2007—but it also fails to see the spaces of possibility provided by the queer cannibal, essentially ignoring the conclusion Bergman came to over a decade earlier.¹⁹ For Ryan, the queer cannibal is always an intensely homophobic character whose existence is predicated on his inevitable destruction. I find this to be a deeply pessimistic and, frankly, heteronormative reading that ignores the innate queerness of horror as a genre, as well as the ways in which cannibalism has already been established as a potentially liberatory trope for queer writers. Admittedly, Ryan's conclusion is built upon an analysis of "cannibal clan" films such as the *Wrong Turn*, *The*

¹⁸ Ryan, "Hunks of Meat," iii.

¹⁹ A look at Ryan's Works Cited reveals that he consulted Crain but not Bergman; one wonders if reading "Cannibals and Queers" might have altered his conclusions, or if it was indeed discarded *because* Bergman's conclusions differ so radically from Ryan's. See Ryan, "Hunks of Meat," 84-86.

Texas Chain Saw Massacre, and *The Hills Have Eyes* franchises, which he interprets as homophobic primarily because they are deeply misogynistic. Yet he also suggests that *Ravenous* (1999), a film I read below as a statement of resistance against both historical heteronormativity and American colonialism, ultimately punishes its characters for their queerness, requiring Boyd to commit suicide and resist his queer/cannibal urges in order to be redeemed as a hero.²⁰

Although this reading makes sense from a certain (straight) point of view, the plethora of queer/cannibal texts that have been released since Ryan's writing in 2012 necessitate a reevaluation of *Ravenous* within this landscape. I do not mean to disparage Ryan's work here, nor do I mean to suggest that all of his interpretations are wrong on some fundamental level. I do, however, believe that the queer cannibal figure warrants consideration from an explicitly queer perspective, which Ryan regrettably neglects.

It is my hope that this thesis picks up the thread begun by Bergman and Crain in their studies of American literature and brings it into the realm of film and television studies. It is my hope, too, that I can provide, to use Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's terms, a reparative reading of queer cannibal texts that might challenge the paranoid readings Ryan advances. I feel this angle is particularly important given the major difference between my undertaking and Bergman's, which is that, while Bergman's subjects were all gay men, the same cannot be said for the creators of the media texts I am examining. This is partially due to the slippery nature of authorship when considering collectively created works like films and television shows, but also because I am simply not interested in speculating on the sexualities of creators who have not publicly identified themselves as queer, nor do I believe that a creator *must* be queer in order to create a queer text. Undoubtedly, some creators' sexualities *do* influence their choice to portray

²⁰ Ryan, "Hunks of Meat," 74.

cannibals as queer—Bryan Fuller’s *Hannibal*, which I discuss below, is a prime example of this—but I am not convinced that, ultimately, the creator’s sexuality should influence the way a viewer chooses to read a text. As Harry M. Benshoff states in *Monsters in the Closet: Homosexuality and the Horror Film*, “identification with the monster can mean many different things to many different people, and is not necessarily always a negative thing for the individual spectators in question, even as some depictions of queer monsters undoubtedly conflate and reinforce certain sexist or homophobic fears within the public sphere.”²¹ For a queer viewer accustomed to making do with scraps, even a questionable depiction of a queer or queercoded character can provide a glimpse of something beautiful, resonant, true.

Over the course of the following three chapters, I attempt to make sense of the queer cannibal figure—the forms it takes, how it has changed, and, most importantly, what is accomplished through the repeated use of this character trope. In the first chapter, I examine Bryan Fuller’s *Hannibal* (2013-2015) as a queer, cannibalistic adaptation of Thomas Harris’s Hannibal Lecter novels. This chapter details the ways in which Fuller’s adaptation queers and cannibalizes extant entries in the Hannibal Lecter mythos to create a unique take on Harris’s canon. *Hannibal* acts as a corrective to some of the more egregiously homophobic and transphobic features of Harris’s series and its subsequent adaptations through the incorporation of explicitly queer characters, as well as adding racial and gender diversity to a series that has otherwise almost exclusively centered white men. *Hannibal* serves as a model of what I term “queer cannibal texts.” These texts function on two different levels: they include a cannibal

²¹ Benshoff, *Monsters in the Closet*, 13.

character who is or can be read as queer, and they in some way cannibalize²² and queer an existing story or societal script. In the case of *Hannibal*, the Hannibal Lecter mythos is queered and cannibalized, but so is the societal script of what male friendship looks like. The queer cannibal character, in this case Hannibal Lecter, makes this connection visible as he alters both the viewer's existing image of Hannibal Lecter (challenging the engrained pop cultural vision of Anthony Hopkins as Lecter) as well as the traditional view of heterosexual male friendships, "[asking] us to imagine a conceptual space where 'erotic' desire and passionate devotion can exist between male friends."²³

In the second chapter, I analyze the historical horror dramas *Ravenous* (1999) and *The Terror* (2018) and their use of Indigenous folk monsters to critique Western attitudes of colonialism and imperialism. Utilizing the Native American windigo and Inuit *tuurngaq*, respectively, *Ravenous* and *The Terror* envision white domination as a living, breathing monster. In both cases, the characters most associated with these monsters (Colqhoun in *Ravenous*; Hickey in *The Terror*) are queer cannibals who vocalize the texts' projects of deconstructing myths of white supremacy and ownership. These queer cannibals make explicit the horrors of imperialism and colonialism, while also affirming the presence of queer people in history. Both texts approach history from a queer, marginal viewpoint, rejecting the historical erasure of Indigenous communities and queer people.

The third chapter directly challenges a statement made by Bergman: "Women are rarely eaters or the eaten in either homo- or heterosexual cannibal narratives; in fact, cannibalism is not

²² Per Merriam-Webster: "to make use of (a part taken from one thing) in building, repairing, or creating something else; to use or draw on material of (another writer, an earlier work, etc.)" See *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. "cannibalize," accessed March 31, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cannibalize>.

²³ Casey, "Afterthoughts," 584.

so much the eating of humans (anthropophagus) as it is the eating of males.”²⁴ I examine *Yellowjackets* (2021-) and *Raw* (2016), both of which center on queer cannibals that happen to be young women. In these texts, cannibalism is associated with coming-of-age. In comparison to the other texts I have considered, which largely sentence their queer cannibals to death or misery, both *Raw* and *Yellowjackets* envision futures for their protagonists where queerness and cannibalism are as intrinsic to their identities as their womanhood.

In the conclusion, I briefly examine one final film which embodies the possibilities of future queer cannibal texts. *Bones and All* (2022) presents an ostensibly heterosexual love story between two queer cannibals. Though, like most of the other texts I cover, its ending is tragic, it also imagines a world where the queer cannibal can find love, fulfillment, and happiness. With this final analysis, I hope to encapsulate and show the worth of my research, and of queer cannibal texts as a whole. The presence of a queer cannibal character often signals that the work itself is a queer cannibal text. These texts are built on an awareness of existing power structures and narratives. By cannibalizing these narratives—whether they be a fictional narrative that is being adapted, or societal narratives of white supremacy, heteronormativity, and so on—and interrogating them from a queer perspective, queer cannibal texts create reparative narratives that speak from the margins. Queer cannibal characters act as a textual manifestation of this framework, providing a window through which the viewer is invited to examine and engage with these power structures in a new way.

²⁴ Bergman, “Cannibals and Queers,” 141.

CHAPTER 2

THE PERFECT BITE: BRYAN FULLER'S *HANNIBAL* AS PROTOTYPICAL QUEER

CANNIBAL TEXT

In her introduction to *Queer/Adaptation: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Pamela Demory asserts that adaptation is inherently queer. According to Demory:

To adapt is to modify, to evolve, to transform, to repeat, imitate, parody, make new. To queer something is to make it strange or odd, but also to turn or transform it. To queer, then, may be to adapt; to adapt is to queer. Both adaptation and queerness suffer from the stereotype of being secondary, somehow less authentic... Foundational to both disciplines—queer studies and adaptation studies—is a critical challenge to those assumptions about originality, authenticity, and value.¹

Just as queer theory works to dismantle socially constructed binaries, adaptation theory works to dismantle the constructed binaries of original versus copy, faithful versus unfaithful, and so on.²

Adaptations are inherently transformative, whether intentionally or not, as the creator's unique perspective is indelibly written into the text. Demory suggests embracing the queer nature of adaptation and using queer theory to inform adaptation theory and vice versa, noting that "a queer perspective on adaptation can be a way of resisting normative ideologies and of revealing the fissures, absences, or silences of canonical texts."³ Further, adaptations have the potential to respond to the original text, addressing the absences and silences not acknowledged by the original creator.⁴ For Demory, any adaptation that in some way breaks from the original—which adaptations intrinsically do—is queer, or can be read in a way informed by queer theory.

Bryan Fuller's *Hannibal* is an exemplar of Demory's idea of queer/adaptation. Set before

¹ Demory, "Queer/Adaptation," 1-2.

² Ibid., 3.

³ Ibid., 4.

⁴ Ibid.

The Silence of the Lambs (1991), *Hannibal* centers on Lecter before his crimes have been discovered, incorporating characters and events from three books in Thomas Harris's Hannibal Lecter tetralogy: *Red Dragon*, *Hannibal*, and *Hannibal Rising*.⁵ Although these books have previously been adapted in the films *Manhunter* (1986), *Hannibal* (2001), *Red Dragon* (2002),⁶ and *Hannibal Rising* (2007), Fuller's television adaptation does not hew too closely to the chronology or canon established in either the books or the film adaptations. While Fuller's *Hannibal* is positioned as a television prequel to *The Silence of the Lambs* book and film, its execution is more complicated, actually functioning as "a more intricate combination of a prequel, sequel, and intentional reimagination of the novels' characters and events."⁷ This complication of standard prequel expectations is at least partially due to rights issues that prevented Fuller from using the storyline and specific characters established in *The Silence of the Lambs* book and film. This meant that *Hannibal* would have to stand on its own without the inclusion of Clarice Starling or Buffalo Bill/Jame Gumb, despite these characters being so closely associated with the Lecter mythos.⁸

Fuller's *Hannibal* circumvents the need for Starling and Gumb by instead referring to them obliquely within the series, utilizing characters with similar traits and initials,⁹ as well as

⁵ The tetralogy also includes *The Silence of the Lambs*; however, as I discuss below, *Hannibal* specifically avoids the explicit inclusion of *The Silence of the Lambs* due to rights issues.

⁶ Both *Manhunter* and *Red Dragon* are adaptations of the book *Red Dragon*.

⁷ Raines, "Uncanny Adaptations," 254.

⁸ While the Dino de Laurentiis Company, which produced *Hannibal*, holds the film and television rights to the Hannibal Lecter character and the content of the books *Red Dragon*, *Hannibal*, and *Hannibal Rising*, MGM owns the rights to *The Silence of the Lambs*. Interestingly, this ownership split also meant that CBS and MGM's *Clarice* (2021), a television series about Clarice Starling after the events of *The Silence of the Lambs*, was unable to explicitly use or mention Hannibal Lecter—perhaps a contributing factor to the series' cancellation after a single season. See Nina Corcoran, "Silence of the Lambs TV Series Clarice is Not Allowed to Mention Hannibal," December 21, 2020, <https://consequence.net/2020/12/clarice-series-hannibal/>.

⁹ The "mural killer" featured throughout season 2, who shares a similar appearance to Jame Gumb, as well as his fixation on skin, is revealed to be named James Gray in season 2, episode 4, "Takiawase."

visual references to *The Silence of the Lambs*.¹⁰ The series further nods to previous adaptations of Harris's novels through the use of film dialogue (often reassigned to different characters than in their original context) and motifs and images already culturally associated with Lecter, such as the mask Lecter wears in prison and Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, both of which feature in *The Silence of the Lambs*. Like a diner surveying the options at a buffet, Fuller picks and chooses what portions of the Lecter canon to sample. According to Michael Fuchs, this use and re-use of earlier Lecter content "announces that the show not simply draws upon earlier entries in the Lecter franchise, but rather cannibalistically incorporates them. This gesture transforms *Hannibal*'s text into a monstrous one that heeds no boundaries."¹¹

This boundary-crossing is central to *Hannibal*, which relishes the liminal, the strange, the off-putting—the queer. Although these allusions to previous adaptations, as well as alterations to the established Lecter chronology, may have initially been by made by necessity, they are reflective of a greater queer cannibal sensibility that runs through *Hannibal*. According to Naja Later, the series "makes explicit the extent to which Lecter's monstrosity lies not only in his diegetic function as a cannibalistic serial killer, but also in his violation of traditional boundaries of genre, medium, taste, and narrative form."¹² Now, nearly a decade after *Hannibal*'s premiere on NBC, it seems unfathomable that such a series would ever find a home on network television and not a premium pay television channel like HBO. Although the series' first season, and

¹⁰ Miriam Lass (Anna Chlumsky), an FBI trainee who is kidnapped and held hostage by the Chesapeake Ripper, resembles Clarice Starling. Like Clarice, she is said to be in the top of her class, and prior to the events of the series, she writes a letter to Jack Crawford stating that she wants to work for him. She is eventually discovered held captive in a well in the basement of a cabin, not unlike that used by Jame Gumb in *The Silence of the Lambs*. The shot revealing Lass in the well deliberately mimics the same reveal of Catherine Martin in the Gumb's well during the iconic "it rubs the lotion on its skin" scene.

¹¹ Fuchs, "Cooking with Hannibal," 99.

¹² Later, "Quality Television (TV) Eats Itself," 531.

particularly its first few episodes, echo the format of popular police procedurals, *Hannibal* becomes increasingly surreal and cerebral over the course of its run, eventually leaning more toward *Twin Peaks* than *CSI*. Critics as well as the cast and crew of *Hannibal* have commented on its genre-defying nature, describing it in such varied terms as “an operatic, grande guignole [sic] horror story,”¹³ a “dark fairy tale,”¹⁴ and a “strangely gothic melodrama” that “incorporates many elements from film noir,”¹⁵ with Fuller himself calling it “a pretentious art film from the 80s.”¹⁶ Moreover, Fuller has described the show as “[his] fan fiction,” deliberately aligning and equating *Hannibal* with the work of fans—textual poachers—who have historically been maligned by the producers of their objects of fannish affection.¹⁷ As Fuller poaches from the Lecter canon, *Hannibal* invites fans to do the same. Examining Henry Jenkins’s “textual poachers” metaphor and its appearance in *Hannibal*, Later “[reads] ‘poaching’ as an act of both hunting and cooking which Lecter suggestively performs for fans. When Lecter cooks, he demonstrates the significance of the transformative process to the narrative drive and very survival of *Hannibal*.”¹⁸

Just as fan creators play with race and gender in their interpretations of texts, Fuller does so in his “fan fiction”, gender- and racebending characters who have consistently been interpreted as cishet white men. Multiple major characters are cast with actors of color, including

¹³ Nicholas A. Yanes, “Interview: Tom de Ville,” in *Hannibal for Dinner: Essays on America’s Favorite Cannibal on Television*, ed. Kyle A. Moody and Nicholas A. Yanes (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2021), 67.

¹⁴ Zoller Seitz, “*Hannibal* Redefined How We Tell Stories on Television.”

¹⁵ Mudan Finn and Nielsen, “Introduction: A Love Crime,” 3.

¹⁶ Eric Thurm, “*Hannibal* showrunner: ‘We are not making television. We are making a pretentious art film from the 80s,’” June 3, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2015/jun/03/hannibal-tv-showrunner-bryan-fuller>.

¹⁷ Laura Prudom, “‘*Hannibal*’ Finale Postmortem: Bryan Fuller Breaks Down That Bloody Ending and Talks Revival Chances,” August 29, 2015, <https://variety.com/2015/tv/news/hannibal-finale-season-4-movie-revival-ending-spoilers-1201581424/>.

¹⁸ Later, “Cannibalizing *Hannibal*,” 90.

Jack Crawford (Laurence Fishburne), Beverly Katz (Hettienne Park), Frederick Chilton (Raúl Esparza), and Reba McClane (Rutina Wesley), and the male characters Alan Bloom and Freddy Lounds are reimagined as Alana Bloom (Caroline Dhavernas) and Fredricka “Freddie” Lounds¹⁹ (Lara Jean Chorostecki), respectively. Moreover, the transgender actress and comedian Eddie Izzard portrays the presumably heterosexual and cisgender Dr. Abel Gideon, a choice which further establishes the series as a queer/adaptation, one that is invested in interrogating and playing with gender.²⁰ Characters are made explicitly queer, also—Alana Bloom, who in the first and second season acts as a love interest for both Will and Hannibal, ends the series in a relationship with Margot Verger (Katharine Isabelle), with whom she has a child.²¹ In calling *Hannibal* a fan fiction and acknowledging and embracing its nature as a transformative work, Fuller recognizes *Hannibal*’s formal queerness, as well as its cannibalistic sampling from the Lecter canon.

This alone might be enough to deem *Hannibal* a queer cannibal text, as its unusual stylistic choices and reinterpretations of the Lecter mythos certainly set it apart from other television adaptations and the landscape of network television more generally. However,

¹⁹ Curiously, Freddie’s first name seems to echo that of Jame Gumb’s first victim, Fredrica Bimmel, though whether this has any significance is unclear, as Frederick Chilton’s name is also quite similar—it seems just as likely to be lazy writing on Harris’s part.

²⁰ Izzard has publicly identified as a “transvestite” since at least 1985 before shifting to the use of she/her pronouns in 2020 and adding “Suzy” to her name in 2023. See Alexandria Del Rosario, “Call her Suzy: Eddie Izzard adds to her name so fans ‘can’t make a mistake,’” *Los Angeles Times*, March 7, 2023, <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2023-03-07/eddie-izzard-reveals-new-name-suzy-transgender-comedian>.

²¹ Margot is a lesbian in Harris’s novels, but she is characterized as landing somewhere between butch lesbian and trans man, a bodybuilder made sterile by her abuse of steroids. In contrast, Katharine Isabelle’s Margot is a conventionally attractive femme woman. Fuller has expressed concerns about Margot’s appearance in the books and the lack of clarity regarding her gender identity, and has stated that leaving Margot’s character as she is portrayed in Harris’s novels “would do a disservice to many people who are transgendered or homosexual.” See Christina Radish, “Bryan Fuller Talks *Hannibal*, Where Will and Hannibal’s Relationship is Headed, Editing for the Network and Censors, and Plans for Season 3,” *Collider*, May 7, 2014, <https://collider.com/hannibal-season-3-details-bryan-fuller/>.

Hannibal also interprets the Lecter mythos through an explicitly queer lens. As Yaghma Kaby notes, Fuller’s adaptation is “shaped by Fuller’s own sexual identity as an openly homosexual man and his attempt not only to represent queerness but to also remake Harris’s novels informed by queerness—that is, to use Demory’s terminology, to offer a queer adaptation as well as a queer/adaptation. In Fuller’s own words, redoing what previous adaptations had done would have been pointless.”²²

Nowhere is Fuller’s aim of offering a queer adaptation clearer than in the relationship between Hannibal Lecter and professor/FBI profiler Will Graham (Hugh Dancy). Although this relationship has previously been portrayed in *Red Dragon* and its two film adaptations, the television format affords far more time to flesh out Will and Hannibal’s relationship, as it forms *Hannibal*’s central narrative arc. Will and Hannibal’s relationship becomes ever more complex over the course of the series’ three season run, shifting from professional to friendly to antagonistic and, eventually, romantic, becoming what Matt Zoller Seitz deems “a doomed love story.”²³ *Hannibal* accomplishes this by couching its love story in the guise of a traditional procedural drama, before fully embracing its surrealist leanings. This in itself contributes to *Hannibal*’s formal queerness, as, according to Jeff Casey, *Hannibal* “runs against the grain of the detective genre’s tendency to reinforce normativity, even as it fully realizes the moral and social ambiguity of the detective native to the genre.”²⁴ Indeed, *Hannibal* pushes the procedural genre to its limits, often abandoning its murders-of-the-week to dig into Will and Hannibal’s psychologies.

Will, who is “not real FBI” due to his inability to pass the “strict screening procedures”

²² Kaby, “Adaptation as Queer Fan Practice in Bryan Fuller’s *Hannibal*.”

²³ Zoller Seitz, “*Hannibal* Redefined How We Tell Stories on Television.”

²⁴ Casey, “Queer Cannibals and Deviant Detectives,” 552.

that detect psychological instability, possesses the almost superhuman ability to empathize with anyone, including serial killers and sociopaths.²⁵ This ability proves a boon for Jack and the FBI as they enlist Will to assist in solving difficult murders. Will uses his “active imagination” and “pure empathy and projection” to place himself in the shoes of killers.²⁶ In the series, this is rendered visually through the swinging of a pendulum which erases the carnage of a crime scene, reversing time to the moment before the murders. Will takes the place of the killer and narrates their actions as if they were his own, enacting horrific acts of violence with cold detachment. This skill is immensely useful but does not come without a cost, as Will quickly reveals himself to be mentally and emotionally affected by this exercise. Will is haunted by images of the killings he investigates, with specters of the dead bodies and often creatively gruesome crime scenes reappearing as both dreams and hallucinations. When Will’s deteriorating emotional state begins to affect his performance at work, Jack enlists Hannibal’s help, ostensibly to assist Will with a particularly difficult case, but just as much to keep an eye on Will’s psychological welfare. Sensing Will’s impressionability, Hannibal begins a series-long quest to mold Will into a murderer. As Jaquelin Elliott states, “Will fascinates Hannibal, who recognizes in him a dormant dark potential that he wishes to draw out... Will attempts (and usually fails) to suppress his darker, animalistic impulses. His efforts evince a kind of Jekyll-and-Hyde-esque battle as Will resists his desire for violence and, ultimately, his psychological and sexual desire for Hannibal himself.”²⁷

Jeff Casey notes that Will Graham is part of a long lineage of “deviant detectives”—such as Sherlock Holmes and the many characters modeled on him—who exhibit “some sort of non-

²⁵ *Hannibal*, season 1, episode 1, “Apéritif.”

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Elliott, “This is my Becoming,” 250.

normative characteristics: some are mentally ill or neurologically atypical, some are drug addicts or alcoholics, several exhibit some sort of puerile arrested development, and many are anti-social and even ‘sociopathic.’”²⁸ These deviant detectives also often have “a unique and even erotic connection” with their Moriarty-like nemesis figures—a role which maps quite easily onto Hannibal Lecter.²⁹ Along with his mental illness, Will is canonically disabled, suffering from advanced encephalitis throughout the series’ first season, further marking him as “deviant” or otherwise non-normative, and therefore queer. According to Casey, “the archetypal American detective is physically, morally, and psychically solid...The American detective’s liminal position is a test—and affirmation—of his *solidity*, because he is able to stand between two worlds without being pulled into the underworld and its degenerate temptations.”³⁰ In comparison, Will’s failure to fulfill the role of the typical detective contributes to *Hannibal*’s abandonment of the procedural genre. Sean Donovan argues that “*Hannibal* eventually reveals itself to be in very convincing crime procedural drag. Will Graham cannot be the procedural’s dream of a rational detective-protagonist...Will is colored submissively, willfully enchanted by the decadent source of historic queer villainy he has supposedly been tasked with blotting out of the world for good.”³¹ Will is set apart by his inability to resist Hannibal magnetic pull, an inability that becomes more obvious as Lecter continues to psychologically manipulate and influence Will toward murderous urges.

Hannibal Lecter, too, is marked by a kind of liminality. Though, as Maggie Kilgour writes, “the boundary between the ‘cannibal’ and ‘civilized man’” traditionally has been the

²⁸ Casey, “Queer Cannibals and Deviant Detectives,” 551.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 558.

³¹ Donovan, “Becoming Unknown.”

marker of absolute opposition,” Hannibal complicates this binary, embodying both at the same time.³² Excepting his serial killing and cannibalism, Hannibal is a true Renaissance man—he sketches perfect renderings of Botticelli paintings,³³ sheds a tear when listening to opera,³⁴ and cooks gourmet meals for friends and colleagues. Hannibal’s prowess in the kitchen is highlighted throughout the series, with nearly every episode featuring at least one elaborate spread fit for the pages of *Bon Appétit*.³⁵ These culinary scenes simultaneously evoke hunger and disgust; the viewer, of course, knows that the delicious-looking “veal” Hannibal serves up is actually cut from a girl’s thigh, but our mouths still water at the Michelin star-worthy plating. Michael Fuchs notes that, although Hannibal’s shared meals restage a fundamental human ritual, he does so in a way that does not reinscribe cultural norms “but rather questions society’s values and norms of behavior.”³⁶ He continues:

Indeed, Lecter undermines society’s rules with style. On the outside, he appears as the most cultured individual in the show, an aesthete and an arbiter of manners. For most of the people in his social circle, this superficial image defines Hannibal. While removing Lecter’s mask may not be an easy task, if one succeeds, one is confronted with an individual who takes great pleasure and pride in killing human beings (but even this face may just be another performance, further veiling the cannibal’s persona) and who joyfully tests and transgresses boundaries. Again, Hannibal occupies a liminal role: he promotes traditional notions of behavior, manner and taste, and subverts these very ideas at the same time.³⁷

Hannibal is composed entirely of contradictions: he is at once refined and barbaric, genuinely friendly and coolly manipulative. This is in part due to Hannibal antipathy toward

³² Kilgour, “Foreword,” vii.

³³ *Hannibal*, season 3, episode 6, “Dolce.”

³⁴ *Hannibal*, season 1, episode 7, “Sorbet.”

³⁵ Food stylist Janice Poon’s blog provides an exhaustive inventory of each of *Hannibal*’s culinary scenes designed alongside celebrity chef José Andrés, along with accounts of the creation of the dishes: Janice Poon, *Janice Poon Art*, last modified December 13, 2018, <http://janicepoonart.blogspot.com/>.

³⁶ Fuchs, “Cooking with Hannibal,” 105.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 105-106.

humanity; he sees himself not as human but as something beyond human, not bound to the norms of human society. Even Lecter's psychiatrist, Bedelia du Maurier (Gillian Anderson), notes that Lecter wears "a very well-tailored person suit."³⁸ Given this reasoning, Hannibal does not even see himself as a cannibal, as evinced by an interaction with Abel Gideon in the series' third season. Gideon falsely claims that he is the Chesapeake Ripper, a serial killer known for mutilating his victims, removing their organs, and displaying their bodies in elaborate, theatrical tableaux. The real Chesapeake Ripper is, of course, Hannibal, and Hannibal takes Gideon hostage for his transgression. Hannibal keeps Gideon alive but slowly butchers him, forcing him to engage in autocannibalism. When presented with his own leg "smoked, glazed, slow-cooked, served on a sugar cane quill...falling off the bone," Gideon resists, instead interrogating Hannibal about his dietary choices. Gideon berates Hannibal for his apparently regressive decision to engage in the cannibalism that "was standard behavior among our ancestors," noting that "the 'missing link' is only missing because we ate him."

Hannibal rejects this notion, stating, "This isn't cannibalism, Abel. It's only cannibalism if we're equals."³⁹ Will notes this mindset in the Chesapeake Ripper early on, calling the small bursts in which the Ripper kills his victims "sounders." Will states, "I use the term 'sounders' because it refers to a small group of pigs. That's how he sees his victims. Not as people, not as prey. Pigs."⁴⁰ Sarah Cleary argues that Hannibal, "through his all-encompassing preference for superlative tastes, has attempted to use cannibalism as a means to distinguish himself from the majority of society and simultaneously transform that which is distasteful to him into the

³⁸ *Hannibal*, season 1, episode 8, "Fromage."

³⁹ *Hannibal*, season 3, episode 1, "Antipasto."

⁴⁰ *Hannibal*, season 1, episode 7, "Sorbet."

appropriation of something beautiful.”⁴¹ This is a total inversion of standard cannibal stereotypes which paint the cannibal as a savage, uncivilized Other. Though Hannibal is certainly Othered—notably, Mads Mikkelsen makes no attempt to conceal his heavy Danish accent, which stands out in a sea of otherwise nonregional American accents—it is not initially his cannibalism that does so.⁴² As Fuchs states, “Lecter’s cultured and exquisite taste stands in stark contrast to the animalistic drives that apparently guide his actions, thus blurring the boundaries [between] civilization and its Other(s)...The fascination and attraction radiated by Hannibal... also complicates the binary of good vs. evil—not the least because Lecter repeatedly murders serial killers with a less refined taste than his.”⁴³ It would be remiss not to note that Hannibal’s refined tastes further mark him as queer—a fact which Caleb Crain even remarks upon in “Lovers of Human Flesh,” published decades before *Hannibal*’s premiere.⁴⁴

The confusion of cannibalism, desire, and sexuality pervades Hannibal’s relationship with Will. A side effect of Hannibal seeing himself as something beyond human is an immense loneliness and longing to be understood. Will, whose empathy disorder “leaves him socially isolated and often with a tenuous grasp of his own identity,” presents an opportunity, particularly once he confesses to Hannibal that he enjoyed killing a serial killer during an investigation.⁴⁵

Leila Taylor notes:

As an expert in deciphering the methods and motivations of serial killers, Will is uniquely capable of climbing over the emotional walls Hannibal has built around himself. As an expert in human behavior, both as a psychiatrist and a murderer, Hannibal is uniquely able to manipulate and influence Will for his own needs. Their mutual uncanny

⁴¹ Cleary, “It’s a Matter of Taste,” 197.

⁴² Fuchs also notes that the Lecter books emphasize his Otherness more than any film or television adaptation has, including going so far as to give Lecter an extra finger. See Fuchs, “Cooking with Hannibal,” 109.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ See Crain, “Lovers of Human Flesh,” 49.

⁴⁵ Taylor, “The Amorous Annihilation of Will,” 47.

perspicacity unites them, and they each use each other's need for companionship against the other creating a dynamic that is simultaneously affectionate and destructive.⁴⁶

As Jack Crawford states, Will and Hannibal are “identically different.”⁴⁷ Yet this identical difference means that, for perhaps the first time, Hannibal sees someone as “worthy of [his] friendship.”⁴⁸ Will and Hannibal become mutually obsessed with one another, each finally feeling seen for the first time. The affair quickly turns torrid, with Hannibal taking advantage of Will's fragile mental and emotional state to influence him into becoming a murderer. Hannibal frames Will for the Chesapeake Ripper's crimes, an act of betrayal that sets the rest of the series in motion, as Will and Hannibal make various plans to take revenge on one another.⁴⁹

Hannibal and Will's relationship challenges traditional notions of male friendships. They are presented as deeply emotionally, psychologically, and even romantically involved. This is clearest in the series' third season, which flirts with homoeroticism throughout. Meeting Hannibal in an art gallery in Italy, Will admits that he now divides his life into before and after Hannibal, and he states that he and Hannibal “have begun to blur.”⁵⁰ Will is so shaped by Hannibal's influence that he feels they have become indistinguishable; for Hannibal, the consummate narcissist, molding Will into a version of himself was an act of love. The series makes Hannibal's love for Will explicit, with Will at one point going so far as to ask Bedelia du Maurier if Hannibal is in love with him. Her reply is telling: “Could he daily feel a stab of hunger for you and find nourishment at the very sight of you? Yes. But do you ache for him?”⁵¹

⁴⁶ Taylor, “The Amorous Annihilation of Will,” 48.

⁴⁷ *Hannibal*, season 3, episode 7, “Digestivo.”

⁴⁸ *Hannibal*, season 1, episode 8, “Fromage.”

⁴⁹ *Hannibal*, season 1, episode 13, “Savoureux.”

⁵⁰ *Hannibal*, season 3, episode 6, “Dolce.”

⁵¹ *Hannibal*, season 3, episode 12, “The Number of the Beast is 666.”

Casey argues that this is emblematic of the series' project of deconstructing masculinity and homosociality:

Heteronormative ideology depends on maintaining a binary opposition between homosocial affection and homoerotic desire in order to stabilize heteromascularity as a coherent and unassailable identity position. *Hannibal* provides an opportunity to push this rigid binary to a point of crisis, *not* by introducing a new category into which to sort—and thereby neutralize—Will and Lecter's relationship, but by deconstructing the hegemonic binary that perpetuates the illusion that desires are neatly categorizable and that heterosexuality is a citadel of normativity...*Hannibal* demands that we do not hasten to label or categorize, but instead consider the ambiguous nature of such relationships and take seriously the challenges it presents to our preconceptions.⁵²

In its project to queerly adapt Thomas Harris's Hannibal Lecter novels, *Hannibal* cannibalizes Harris's canon to interrogate both the biases and absences present within the original texts, as well as challenging societal narratives around male friendship and masculinity more generally. Its functioning on these different levels, and its success in executing its critical examination of both Harris's work and social constructions of masculinity, make it an ideal example of the queer cannibal text.

⁵² Casey, "Afterthoughts," 587-588.

CHAPTER 3

“SAVAGE” APPETITES: WINDIGO METAPHORS AND QUEER COLONIALIST

CONSUMPTION IN *RAVENOUS* AND *THE TERROR*

Across Algonquian-speaking tribes, particularly the Ojibwe and Cree, the figure of the windigo¹ features as both a fantastic monster and a potential punishment for engaging in cannibalism. Described for the first time in English in 1743 as “the Devil,” the windigo has long been a fixture of Native American and First Nations cultures and has only recently been a target of appropriation in popular culture.² Importantly, the windigo is not simply a supernatural creature like a vampire or werewolf but “a viable component of the religious beliefs of many North American tribal nations.”³ According to Ojibwe scholar Brady DeSanti, the windigo is accepted by many historical and contemporary Ojibwe communities as “a real entity that exists alongside countless manitous (spiritual beings) of varying degrees of power and disposition that permeate their experience of the world.”⁴

The original meaning of *windigo* is debated. John Robert Colombo states that it “is derived from the Algonkian root word *witiku*, which signifies two things: ‘evil spirit’ and ‘cannibal,’”⁵ but Basil Johnston, an Ojibwe ethnologist, has suggested that the word “derives from two Ojibway terms with related meanings: *ween*, ‘himself, he’; *digo*, ‘for himself’. Thus the

¹ John Robert Colombo notes at least 37 variant spellings of the word that feature the same three-syllable, w-sound construction as *windigo*, though there are other non-w forms such as *atcen*, *kokodje*, *outiko*, and *vindiko*. While the word is most commonly transliterated as *wendigo* when used in popular culture, I have used the spelling *windigo* except when quoting sources that use alternative spellings. *Windigo* has been commonly used in academic literature since at least 1960 with the publication of Morton I. Teicher’s volume *Windigo Psychosis*, and it is the spelling I have most often seen utilized by Indigenous scholars. For a list of variant spellings, see Colombo’s introduction to *Windigo: An Anthology of Fact and Fantastic Fiction*, 2-3.

² Isham, “The Devil,” 9.

³ DeSanti, “The Cannibal Talking Head,” 186.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 187-188.

⁵ Colombo, introduction to *Windigo*, 2.

word means ‘he for himself’—selfishness, the spirit of excess.”⁶ In his consideration of documentary evidence and previous scholarship on windigo, Robert A. Brightman notes that the word may have evolved from the Proto-Algonquian term for “owl,” drawing a link from “the understanding that owl calls prefigure the deaths of individuals, and thus in one sense ‘name’ them” to the windigo’s association with famine, starvation, and death, with this association eventually resulting in a shift to the understood meaning of “cannibal monster.”⁷ DeSanti elaborates on this link, stating that “the owl possesses a taste for flesh, as does the [windigo]. And they both seem to exhibit glazed-over stares, which haunted and unnerved the Ojibwe hunters who encountered them...The Ojibwe traditionally approached owls with trepidation, as their appearances were believed to forecast death, just as encountering a windigo almost assuredly meant death.”⁸

While the provenance of the term *windigo* is not entirely clear, numerous characteristics of the windigo itself are shared across history and various tribal traditions. In a lecture on the recurrence of the windigo throughout Canadian literature, Margaret Atwood describes the creature as follows:

The Wendigo is—among other things—a giant spirit-creature with a heart and sometimes an entire body of ice, and prodigious strength; and...it can travel as fast as the wind. In some stories it has feet of fire, in others it makes tracks like giant snowshoes. It has no gender, although an individual Wendigo may once have been a man or a woman. It eats moss and frogs and mushrooms, but more particularly human beings; in fact, its prevailing characteristic seems to be its ravenous hunger for human flesh.⁹

Colombo describes the windigo similarly, highlighting its “enormous head and gigantic

⁶ Johnston, “A Man Named Weendigo,” 202.

⁷ Brightman, “The Windigo in the Material World,” 341.

⁸ DeSanti, “The Cannibal Talking Head,” 188.

⁹ Atwood, “Eyes of Blood, Heart of Ice,” 81-82.

teeth,” as well as its speed, noting that “the creature moves with celerity, too quickly for mortal eyes to follow, as it takes to the trees and wind.”¹⁰ Roger Vandersteene, a Catholic missionary to the Cree in Alberta, Canada, provides a vivid “portrait of a Witigo: wild and haggard, barefoot, tall and thin, ragged, sometimes completely naked. Usually the face is mutilated, and the most frequent mutilation is the lips; these have been gnawed by mice or other little parasites, so that the teeth show menacingly;” Vandersteene claims that “this description faithfully reproduces the appearance of the Witigo as he is in the imagination of the Cree.”¹¹ Anthropologist Diamond Jenness further claims that the windigo’s body “swells to the size of a pine tree and becomes hard like stone, impenetrable to arrow or bullet and insensible to cold...Its breathing is like the whistle of a train, audible for miles; and its shouting weakens the limbs of the Indian it pursues.”¹² In contrast, Ruth Landes, also an anthropologist, reports that “this figure is visualized as a giant skeleton of ice. The ice skeleton symbolizes the fact that starvation occurs in winter. In summer, the mythological *windigo* melts away...he is no longer disturbed by hunger; again in winter he comes to life and feels maddening hunger and a desire for human flesh.”¹³ Morton I. Teicher, however, perhaps most thoroughly sketches the windigo, emphasizing not just its physical attributes but also the terror which it invokes:

The windigo wears no clothes, stalking the forest in mighty strides, completely impervious to the cold and frost of winter. In appearance he is a particularly abhorrent creature. He has a frightening and menacing mouth, wholly devoid of lips. He has tremendous, jagged teeth through which his breath flows with a sinister hissing, making a loud and eerie noise, audible for miles. His eyes are protuberant, something like those of an owl except that they are much bigger and they roll in blood. His feet are almost a yard in length, with long pointed heels and only one toe, the great toe. His hands are hideous with claw-like fingers and fingernails. The voice of the windigo is strident and frightful,

¹⁰ Colombo, introduction to *Windigo*, 4.

¹¹ Vandersteene, “The Existence of the Witigo,” 163.

¹² Jenness, “A Human Being Transformed,” 125.

¹³ Landes, “The Windigo Personality,” 128.

more reverberating than thunder. He makes a long, drawn-out sound, accompanied by fearful howls which cause people to flee in mortal terror and which weaken the legs of all who run for their lives. His strength is prodigious. With one mighty stroke of his hand, he can disembowel a man or a dog. He rips off the surface of the earth as he wanders about, snapping off the tops of trees or brushing them aside carelessly, as an ordinary man brushes aside grass. Occasionally, he uses a tree as a staff. He can skim across the surface of water or dive beneath it and cross a lake without coming up for air. His speed and strength are such that he raises great waves, overturning large canoes.¹⁴

What may be most frightening about the windigo, though, is that despite its monstrosity, despite its bloodlust, violence, and hunger, “it remains recognizably a human being.”¹⁵ Though many of these descriptions emphasize the windigo’s imposing stature, Brightman is careful to note that this concept “appears to derive from Ojibwa rather than Cree sources,” with Cree sources “conventionally [figuring] the windigo as possessing normal human dimensions.”¹⁶ This is, however, essentially the only aspect of humanity that the windigo retains; as noted previously, the windigo possesses no gender, its heart turns to ice, and, as Atwood continues, “you cannot outrun or outwit a Wendigo; most of the time you can’t even converse with one, because the Wendigo has lost its capacity for human speech.”¹⁷ Ultimately, according to Robert A. Saunders, because “wiitiko-possessed people are paranoid, obsessive-compulsive, and—most importantly—unable to hunt (that is, anything other than humans),” to become a windigo is “the epitome of failure as a human being.”¹⁸

This total loss of humanity is vital to the construction of the windigo, which is closely related to cannibalism, itself considered the ultimate transgression of humanity. Like the origin of the very name *windigo*, how a windigo comes to be is contested. Colombo identifies a number

¹⁴ Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis,” 165.

¹⁵ Colombo, introduction to *Windigo*, 3.

¹⁶ Brightman, “The Windigo in the Material World,” 344.

¹⁷ Atwood, “Eyes of Blood, Heart of Ice,” 82.

¹⁸ Saunders, “Hungry Lands,” 195.

of forms of the windigo: “The Windigo may assume the shape of a supernatural devil or demon of the woods. It may appear as a personality disorder or disturbance which finds expression in crazed actions and acts of cannibalism.”¹⁹ Moreover, Colombo continues, cannibalism of any sort—even survival cannibalism—may trigger one’s windigo transformation, as may the mere acts of being in the presence of a cannibal or of dreaming of a windigo.²⁰ If a person survives being bitten by a windigo, they may well vampirically become a windigo themselves.²¹ Ruth Landes claims that there are three ways in which a person may become a windigo: the visitation of a windigo spirit in a dream or vision, the sorcery of an enemy, or starvation.²²

Historically, the windigo has been associated with famine cannibalism; as Brightman states, “the experience of eating human flesh catalyzes or effects the transformation of a human being into a windigo being.”²³ Atwood further notes that “the Wendigo has been seen as the personification of winter, or hunger, or spiritual selfishness, and indeed the three are connected: winter is a time of scarcity, which gives rise to hunger, which gives rise to selfishness.”²⁴ According to Teicher, for Algonquian-speaking tribes, “the fear of death by starvation and the possibility that eating human flesh might be the only means of survival was an ubiquitous concern...to the point where cannibalism was a highly significant cultural theme.”²⁵ In short, to become a windigo through the indulgence of cannibal urges, even in the pursuit of survival, was the ultimate cultural taboo. Cannibalism is seen as turning against one’s entire value system and

¹⁹ Colombo, introduction to *Windigo*, 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Landes, “The Windigo Personality,” 128-129.

²³ Brightman, “The Windigo in the Material World,” 364.

²⁴ Atwood, “Eyes of Blood, Heart of Ice,” 83.

²⁵ Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis,” 177.

culture and can only be remedied by death, either by starvation or by being killed. Moreover, it represents acting out of selfishness at the expense of the entire community. DeSanti notes that the person who has “gone windigo” has “lost all sense of obligation and concern toward their community and is an outcast.”²⁶

In both *Ravenous* (1999) and *The Terror* (2018), the windigo functions on several different levels, literal and metaphorical. It is worth noting that both pieces were written and directed by non-Indigenous people, though there are Indigenous actors involved in each project. Still, it is worthwhile to analyze their use of the windigo because of how they subvert expectations. A less thoughtful appropriation of the windigo myth would be to turn it against the very Indigenous people who originated it; instead, *The Terror* and *Ravenous* use the windigo as a means of critiquing the oppressive forces of settler colonialism at the center of each piece: Manifest Destiny in *Ravenous* and British imperialism in *The Terror*. These interpretations of the windigo as an embodiment of oppressive white violence are “consistent with contemporary Indigenous (re-)visions of the Windigo as a metaphor for the traumas associated with colonialism and imperialist excess.”²⁷ In both cases, the windigo narrative critiques Western ideas of eliminationist settler colonialism²⁸ and “[highlights] the ways in which colonialism is cannibalism.”²⁹

Ravenous is set in California in 1847, during the Mexican-American War, and focuses on John Boyd (Guy Pearce), a lieutenant in the U.S. Army. The initial setting of the film, in the heat of battle, is important because it “provides a broader context for reading the film as a cultural

²⁶ DeSanti, “The Cannibal Talking Head,” 196.

²⁷ Lam, “Arctic Terror,” 198.

²⁸ According to Patrick Wolfe, “settler colonialism is inherently eliminatory but not invariably genocidal.” See Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” 387.

²⁹ Lam, “Arctic Terror,” 198.

commentary on the disasters brought about by a policy of Manifest Destiny and war.”³⁰ From the very beginning of the film, a clear connection is drawn between food and metaphorical potency, a link that will become more clearly tied to cannibalism and homosexuality later on in the film. During a battle wherein the rest of his unit dies, Boyd plays dead—an act of cowardice—and survives, eventually taking over a Mexican post on his own when his “body” is transported behind enemy lines. Boyd is, however, traumatized by the experience, having been buried underneath the corpses of his comrades, and though he is promoted to captain for his capture of the Mexican post, his cowardice haunts him, the memory of his friends’ viscera making meat repulsive to him. Questions of food and eating are prominently featured in the film, and Boyd’s continued inability or unwillingness to eat meat becomes a constant marker of his difference from those around him.

As punishment for his cowardice, Boyd’s commanding officer, General Slauson (John Spencer), sends him to Fort Spencer in the Sierra Nevadas. Colonel Hart (Jeffrey Jones) informs Boyd that the fort was previously a Spanish mission, presumably for converting Native Americans, and that it now exists mostly as a stop for travelers on their way west. This establishes Fort Spencer as a space with a long imperialist history. This is further fleshed out by the presence of George (Joseph Runningfox) and Martha (Sheila Tousey), a Native American brother and sister who Hart says “came with the place.”³¹ It is George who first introduces the idea of the windigo when a stranger named Colqhoun (Robert Carlyle) arrives. Colqhoun shows up at Fort Spencer near death and freezing, and Boyd rushes to his aid. In a moment that foreshadows what is to come, Colqhoun is put in a basin of hot water over a fire to warm up.

³⁰ DiMarco, “Going Wendigo,” 142.

³¹ All quoted dialogue is from Bird, *Ravenous*.

Shortly thereafter, the subject of cannibalism, which has been lurking just below the surface, is finally broached: Colqhoun discusses how the party he had been traveling with turned to cannibalism when they were stranded during a winter storm. Colqhoun claims that he “ate sparingly; others did not” and that one particular member of the party, Colonel Ives, “could not be satisfied.” Importantly, Colqhoun notes that, when their hunger returned, it “was different. More severe. Savage.” The following day, George suggests that Colqhoun is a windigo, telling Boyd the windigo myth while Hart translates.³² This moment of translation is somewhat symbolic of the whole film: it is a white person’s interpretation of the Native myth. It also suggests that the windigo will be used for more than just horror value, but also “to critique western consumption practices, not only expansionist philosophies that highlight acquisition of land or money but Christian ones represented through the act of communion.”³³

Ravenous primarily links queerness to cannibalism through a kind of potency, a concept that is supported by literature on windigo. Brightman notes the Montagnais³⁴ belief that “human flesh was excessively powerful in its spiritual potency, resulting in the windigo’s ability physically and spiritually to overcome and eat human prey.”³⁵ This potency is first referenced

³² It is unclear exactly which language George is speaking—the subtitles on the version of the film I watched (Amazon Prime) state that George is speaking “Washu,” but searches for this language did not turn up any additional information. My best guess is that this might be a misspelled transliteration of Wá-šiw (transliterated as Washoe or sometimes Washo), a tribe which has historically resided in the Sierra Nevadas along the border between California and Nevada. However, the Washoe language is considered a language isolate not connected to any other language families, and as such the language is endangered and has very few native speakers. Furthermore, I was unable to find any connection between the Washoe and windigo stories, which are most often associated with Algonquian-speaking tribes. Both of these facts make the assertion that George is speaking Washoe somewhat unlikely to me. Unfortunately, I was not able to confirm what language is used in the film, and because of my own limitations as a monolingual English speaker, it is not clear to me whether George is actually speaking Washoe, some other Indigenous language which has been mislabeled as Washoe, or just gibberish. For further information on the Washoe, see “Washoe History: A Brief Summary,” Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California, accessed April 29, 2023, <https://washoetribe.us/aboutpage/4-Page-washoe-history>.

³³ DiMarco, “Going Wendigo,” 144.

³⁴ Now known as the Innu or Ilnu; Brightman refers to them as *Montagnais*, a remnant of the French colonial period. They are closely related to the Cree.

³⁵ Brightman, “The Windigo in the Material World,” 364.

when Colqhoun leads the group to the cave where his party had been hiding out. Boyd asks Colqhoun if he had felt physically changed after resorting to cannibalism, if he felt stronger, and Colqhoun replies that he had indeed felt “a certain virility.” It is difficult not to read this comment as sexual, not least because Colqhoun’s tone is decidedly sensual. Later in the film, he and Boyd have a similar conversation in which Colqhoun again states that, after eating five men in three months, he had felt “happy and healthy and virile.” Colqhoun’s admission of this supposed virility obtained through the act of cannibalism may be read as a representation of what critic Brady Harrison, in a discussion of A.B. Guthrie, Jr.’s novel *The Big Sky*, terms “the repressed homoerotic desire that haunts the narrative,” a “distorted [expression] of the unspeakable.”³⁶ Cannibalism is, after all, one man consuming another man’s flesh. The connection is made explicit shortly after the first “virility” conversation when Colqhoun is caught licking another man’s wound in the night, a revelation that recalls a forced outing. Colqhoun’s victim, the devout Christian Private Toffler (Jeremy Davies), is doubly violated by Colqhoun’s actions—not only is the act cannibalistic, but it is also queer as well, and it is hard to say which is more offensive to Toffler.

Colqhoun reveals himself as a windigo when, having reached the cave where his party had previously hid, he becomes feral, animalistic, and kills the other men from Fort Spencer. Curiously, his appearance does not change in any noticeable way, a sharp contrast to the gigantic ice creatures described by the Ojibwe and Cree. This results in Colqhoun being perhaps even more frightening simply because he retains the visual aspect of his humanity, as well as his capacity for speech, rather than abandoning it. Instead, Colqhoun’s windigoism is primarily manifested through his hunger, speed, and inclination towards violence, particularly when

³⁶ Harrison, “‘man’s meat ain’t proper meat,’” 66.

disemboweling a victim in order to devour them—a shot of Toffler after Colqhoun has chased him through the wilderness reveals little more than a mess of blood and viscera where his torso ought to be. He is immensely strong and powerful, too, as he survives what clearly should be a fatal gunshot wound. Colqhoun also exhibits other bizarre behaviors that contribute to a sense of unease, though they have not necessarily been associated with windigo previously, maybe drawing from werewolf imagery—his windigo transformation is preceded by a rhythmic, almost musical panting and repetitive hand movements, as well as Colqhoun seemingly uncontrollably digging in the dirt like a dog. Ultimately, Colqhoun massacres the Fort Spencer men so that only Boyd is left alive, and when he breaks his leg after jumping from a cliff to escape Colqhoun, he is forced to eat another man to survive. Like his cowardice in battle, this choice haunts Boyd.

When he eventually makes it back to Fort Spencer, Boyd is consumed by daydreams of eating Private Cleaves (David Arquette). In much the same way that one might resist accepting their own queerness, Boyd resists the impulse to indulge his cannibalistic urges. However, Boyd is aware of his increasing hunger for human flesh, so he seeks Martha's help, asking her how to stop a windigo. Martha's answer is grave: "You don't! You ever give yourself? Windigo eats. Must eat more, more. Never enough. He takes! Never, never gives. You stop windigo, you give yourself. You must die." The windigo, as an embodiment of the imperialist machine, is nearly impossible to stop. To do so requires sacrifice, giving oneself. But Martha's advice also reveals that a life given to stop the windigo, and by extension imperialism, "can and should be more about the rejuvenation of an other-centered and humane ethos, and not the replication of rhetoric urging consumption for personal fulfillment or national prosperity."³⁷

Martha's advice comes into play when Colqhoun reappears at Fort Spencer as Colonel

³⁷ DiMarco, "Going Wendigo," 148.

Ives. Ives is suave, debonair, and handsome, a reinvented version of Colqhoun. This change suggests that, in order to perpetuate its agenda, the windigo must adapt to its environment, much the same way that imperialism reinvents itself as technology advances and times change. Having gone fully windigo, Colqhoun's queerness becomes more apparent as well. In a particularly memorable scene, Boyd is literally chained to Colqhoun's bed after being accused of killing Cleaves and the fort's horses. Boyd's nose is bloodied, and Colqhoun has gotten some of Boyd's blood on his fingers. Colqhoun, taunting Boyd for his growing hunger for human flesh, makes a great show of sniffing the blood on his fingers before sucking off the blood in a manner that can only be described as sexual. Colqhoun's desires, whatever they may be, are unspeakable—as Harrison states, “cannibalism is about filling one's mouth, but with the most unspeakable matter...the cannibal, his mouth full of flesh, literally cannot speak, cannot name his sin, and all the stigmas of the taboo come into silent play: shame, fear, disgust, self-loathing, and more.”³⁸ It is no coincidence that these stigmas overlap so neatly with those associated with homosexuality.

Ravenous's critical aims are made explicit by Colqhoun in a conversation with Boyd wherein Colqhoun details his plans to turn Fort Spencer into a haven for windigos—a haven of which Boyd will be a part:

Manifest Destiny. Westward expansion. You know, come April, it'll all start again. Thousands of gold-hungry Americans will travel over those mountains on their way to new lives, passing right through here. We won't kill indiscriminately. No, selectively. Good God, we don't want to break up families...Of course, we've no wish to recruit everyone. We've enough mouths to feed as it is!³⁹ We just need a home. And this country is seeking to be whole, stretching out its arms and consuming all it can, and we merely follow.

³⁸ Harrison, ““man's meat ain't proper meat,”” 66

³⁹ Given the film's project of deconstructing American imperialism and exceptionalism, I read this as an implicitly racially exclusionist statement. It seems likely that Colqhoun would want to recruit only the “right kind” of cannibals for his windigo utopia, especially since he mentions Hart and Slauson as potential future cannibals and ignores Martha as an option. At any rate, this particular line certainly recalls the anti-immigration dogwhistles that punctuate American conservative political rhetoric.

The nefarious undertones of this statement are obvious. By this point in the film, Colqhoun has killed nearly everyone at Fort Spencer except Martha and Boyd; the remains of the fort's doctor simmer in the same stewpot that had been used to warm Colqhoun at his initial arrival. What the windigo has left is devastation, a bloody trail of literally consumed bodies in its wake. The only way forward is more consumption, and though Colqhoun suggests that he will kill selectively, one struggles to imagine that he would not eventually consume all he could with no regard for others. It is no easy task to stop Colqhoun, and to do so, Boyd indulges the windigo part of himself, drawing on the increased strength and "virility" previously mentioned by Colqhoun. Boyd's acceptance of his cannibal urges can be read as an acknowledgment of who he truly is, whether cannibal or queer, and perhaps even suggests that the eventual dismantling of colonialism, imperialism, and Manifest Destiny will itself be queer.

The film culminates in a physical confrontation between Colqhoun and Boyd, both windigos, that ends with the two of them clamped in an oversized bear trap, wrapped in a twisted, bloody version of a lovers' embrace. The fight is too much for Colqhoun, who quite literally dies in Boyd's arms, leaving Boyd to choose whether to eat Colqhoun's body and live as a windigo, or to allow himself to die, ending the windigos' reign of terror. It is a choice he makes easily, given Martha's advice and consideration of his own past cowardice. Boyd sacrifices himself with only Martha as a witness, leaving her—a Native American woman—to rewrite and reinterpret this windigo tale, to be the keeper of this history. This is a radical conclusion to the story, a sort of reparation for the harms done by both the windigo and the Manifest Destiny mindset. Yet this would-be happy ending is undercut by General Slauson, who, in the film's final scenes, "continues the tradition of limitless consumption without even realizing that he does; he tastes the 'Dr. Stew' left cooking on the stove by [Colqhoun]. Even though Boyd dies a hero—he

has ended his own cannibalistic urges—viewers see that unquenched, limitless desire is a systemic problem that can't and won't be solved so easily.”⁴⁰ This is an appropriately queer conclusion to a film that realistically tackles the damage caused by Manifest Destiny and settler colonialism, resisting the obvious pat ending to offer a more complex and nuanced point. Ultimately, this conclusion ties together all of *Ravenous*'s themes, interrogating history from a non-normative—that is, queer—perspective by cannibalizing long-held American scripts of white domination and ownership. *Ravenous* places history into the hands of those most wronged by imperialism, while still accepting that the struggle against imperialism is and has been constant, persistent, as relevant historically as it is in the present day. However, it is worth noting that although Martha is entrusted with the story of what occurred at Fort Spencer, her very status as a Native American woman means that she is less likely to be believed, her account of what happened brushed aside as simply myth or folklore. This echoes the ways in which societal injustices are often seen as falsehoods or exaggerations when communicated by marginalized people, only seen as valid when those same views are articulated by members of the oppressive groups. One might even read this as an analogue of *Ravenous* itself—a film directed by a white British woman and written by a white American man that appropriates Native American culture, albeit to a progressive end, but without the creative input of Native Americans themselves.⁴¹

The Terror is a fictionalized account of the doomed 1845 Royal Navy expedition to find the Northwest Passage, headed by Sir John Franklin. Being based explicitly on a historical event, the series necessarily engages with historicity and historiography, challenging traditional notions and interpretations of the Franklin expedition event. Moreover, the series is explicitly queer in its

⁴⁰ DiMarco, “Going Wendigo,” 151.

⁴¹ Admittedly, it is possible that Native actors Joseph Runningfox and Sheila Tousey had some degree of creative input in *Ravenous*, but they are only credited in the film for their contributions as actors.

interpretation of history, using a queer lens to critique the often-glorified imperialist motivations at play. According to critic Felipe Espinoza Garrido, “*The Terror* embraces queerness as a conceptual interrogation of its own, imperial and decidedly neo-Victorian representational strategies...*The Terror*’s journey away from the heart of empire allows for a clearer, and queerer, apprehension of the rot beneath the imperial pomp and circumstance.”⁴² *The Terror* accomplishes its queer critique through the use of three major factors: the windigo-like spirit bear Tuunbaq, the explicitly queer villain Cornelius Hickey (Adam Nagaitis), and the queercoded relationship between Francis Crozier (Jared Harris) and James Fitzjames (Tobias Menzies).

The windigo that haunts *The Terror* differs slightly from the more traditional windigo featured in *Ravenous*. The creature, called Tuunbaq, manifests as an enormous, bloodthirsty polar bear with a humanlike face. Although never explicitly called so in the show, Tuunbaq appears to be a *tuurngaq*,⁴³ a kind of helping spirit given to Inuit shamans (*angakkuit*).⁴⁴ According to Inuk elder Mariano Aupilaarjuk, *tuurngait* can be either good or evil.⁴⁵ This might depend on the *angakkuq*, who, as elder Lucassie Nutaraaluk relates, could “[use] their powers to kill people” or “[try] to help by healing people. These *angakkuit* were even more powerful than doctors because they could revive a dead person.”⁴⁶ Although *angakkuit* could ask their *tuurngait* to kill for them, there was the possibility that “the *tuurngaq* might turn on [them] after it killed.”⁴⁷ It is not always easy to tell if a *tuurngaq* is good or evil; Aupilaarjuk states that “as

⁴² Garrido, “Queerness in the Neo-Victorian Empire,” 216.

⁴³ Plural *tuurngait*.

⁴⁴ Singular *angakkuq*.

⁴⁵ Aupilaarjuk, “Shamanism and the Life Cycle,” 22.

⁴⁶ Nutaraaluk, “Shamanism and the Life Cycle,” 10.

⁴⁷ Aupilaarjuk, “Shamanism and the Life Cycle,” 26.

soon as you know it is a good *tuurngaq* then you can accept that *tuurngaq* as your assistant. But be careful, because they can take the form of a good spirit even if they are evil.”⁴⁸ This moral ambiguity is a key characteristic of *tuurngait* and is certainly present in *The Terror*’s Tuunbaq.

Guy Bordin sums up *tuurngait* as follows:

These creatures constantly interacted with humans, and had an important effect on their lives, some were inoffensive and even helpful, others hostile and dangerous, while others adapted their behavior to circumstances. More generally the border between hostility and benevolence was quite permeable and the outcome of an encounter between humans and non-humans was never predictable.⁴⁹

Tuunbaq exists within the series long before cannibalism is ever a thought on the characters’ minds, so while it is associated with cannibalism, Tuunbaq (and *tuurngait* more generally) is not directly connected to cannibalism in the same way as *Ravenous*’s windigo. However, like the windigo, Tuunbaq acts as an embodiment of whiteness and the imperialist urge to conquer and consume. Created and controlled by the Indigenous Inuit, Tuunbaq shows how “imperialist hubris [transforms] the North into an inescapable haunted house, raising the horrifying spectre of whiteness.”⁵⁰ Tuunbaq initially appears only when crew members leave their iced-in ships and, perhaps more importantly, when one of the sailors has unintentionally shot and gravely wounded an *angakkuq*. As if in retribution, Tuunbaq then attacks and kills one of the members of the crew.⁵¹ From then on, Tuunbaq becomes a constant threat, its presence only slightly mediated by the shaman’s daughter, Silna (Nive Nielsen).

Tuunbaq becomes a point of fixation for the series’ pseudo-villain, Cornelius Hickey. In almost every possible way, Hickey is an outsider—he is vocally, unabashedly queer; he is lower-

⁴⁸ Aupilaarjuk, “Angakkuuniq,” 40.

⁴⁹ Bordin, “What Do Place-Names Tell about non-Human Beings among Canadian Inuit?,” 15.

⁵⁰ Lam, “Arctic Terror,” 189.

⁵¹ *The Terror*, “Gore.”

class and purporting to be Irish; he is, as we eventually learn, not even really Cornelius Hickey but an imposter who has killed and impersonated the actual Hickey. Garrido explains:

Throughout the series, Hickey's actions place him outside of the norms, customs, and epistemic sureties of his fellow crewmembers, allowing him poignant insight into the machinations of naval imperialism. As an imposter (we never learn his real name), he is the only crewmember who has not received training as a sailor and who is relatively uninstructed in the norms of Empire: Hickey's perception, *The Terror* implies, is unfiltered by the ideological construction of conceivable truths that inhibit the crew's conception of the supernatural. Simultaneously, Hickey's peripherality is articulated and narrated via his homosexuality, and his insight is directly linked to his queer desire.⁵²

Hickey is the first to suggest that Tuunbaq might be something other than a regular bear, stating, "I do not believe it is an animal we battle," despite the humiliation and punishment this suggestion eventually incurs.⁵³ While there are other explicitly queer characters in *The Terror*, none of them have the same connection to Tuunbaq as Hickey, suggesting that this connection is linked not just to Hickey's queerness but to his broader outsider status. This position as outsider allows Hickey to critique the hierarchies in place on the expedition. Though he eventually becomes invested in these systems because he sees an opportunity to be at the top rather than the bottom, he is aware of the hierarchies' existence in a way that few other characters seem to be. Hickey is able to use this hierarchical awareness to his own benefit, manipulating others to receive information or gain loyalty that he wouldn't otherwise be able to access. Nowhere is this clearer than in Hickey's relationship with William Gibson (Edward Ashley). *The Terror* is never quite explicit about whether Hickey is merely manipulating Gibson or if Hickey does indeed have feelings for Gibson. However, when read in conjunction with the relationship between Crozier and Fitzjames, the text seems to imply that Gibson and Hickey's feelings for one another are mutual and legitimate.

⁵² Garrido, "Queerness in the Neo-Victorian Empire," 225.

⁵³ *The Terror*, "Punished, as a Boy."

Crozier and Fitzjames's relationship, though eventually deeply intimate and loving, is complicated and built initially on a rivalry. Crozier is the captain of the expedition's secondary ship, *Terror*, where Fitzjames is Franklin's second-in-command on *Erebus*. Both of them vie to be Franklin's favorite, but despite Fitzjames's youth and inexperience, he is more attractive to Franklin than Crozier, an Irishman of common birth. As with *Ravenous*'s Colqhoun and Boyd, there is a certain tension between Crozier and Fitzjames that reads as more than mere competition. In a series where every tiny bit of physical contact is imbued with meaning, Fitzjames and Crozier share numerous significant touches—the accusatory finger prodding at Crozier's chest becomes a hand reaching to Crozier for help; the knuckles that break against Fitzjames's cheek give way to fingers massaging poison down Fitzjames's throat in a last act of mercy. This physical intimacy is only possible, however, as the specter of cannibalism—and, adjacently, Tuunbaq—grows more and more real. It is the very threat of death, whether from Tuunbaq or malnutrition or scurvy, that forces them into physical and emotional closeness.

The intertwined themes of cannibalism, colonialism, and queerness become most visible in the second half of the series, when the crew abandons the ships in hopes of making their way to safety on foot. This last-ditch effort is paralleled in Tuunbaq's increasingly erratic and violent attacks. Reading Tuunbaq as a metaphor for destructive whiteness, it is no surprise that the most frequent and brutal attacks occur in the aftermath of the crew killing an Inuit family. Tuunbaq's presence and its connection to the crew "raises the theme of consumption as a source of terror that turns humans into beasts."⁵⁴ Furthermore, Tuunbaq acts as a voice for the Inuit who suffer from the presence of British imperialism. In an attempt to regain control over Tuunbaq, Silna cuts out her own tongue, literally silencing herself in response to the destruction these white

⁵⁴ Lam, "Arctic Terror," 196.

explorers have wrought. Tuunbaq's brutality is a way of talking back, "a metaphor for the imperial consumption of lands and bodies, implying that colonial conquest leaves its lasting marks on the bodies of those who live in the Arctic, as well as those who came to claim it"⁵⁵ These marks become visible and visceral in the crew's physical deterioration. A rare moment of nudity features Fitzjames inspecting his own body, old scars that had previously been a testament to his youth and vitality having become scorbatic, reopened and oozing.⁵⁶ Fitzjames's body is at once eroticized and grotesque, its physical beauty marred by the presence of disease. HIV/AIDS resonances aside, Fitzjames's body occupies a queer space, both desirable and not, both beautiful and ugly. It is worth noting, too, that the only other character featured in similar states of undress is Hickey, who, as previously established, is queer in every sense.

Fitzjames is coded as queer throughout the series in moments that, to a modern audience, easily read as gay. He pays particular attention to his and others' physical appearance in a way that other characters do not ("Your nails are a terror, Mr. Wentzell"⁵⁷), makes references to melodrama,⁵⁸ and, when selecting a costume for the crew's Carnivale, preens before a mirror, holding a dress to himself.⁵⁹ While these traits would not have been unusual to a Victorian audience, *The Terror* is necessarily neo-Victorian and necessarily for a modern-day audience. These "feminizing" traits, then, can and should be read as queer. This reading is reinforced by the culmination of Fitzjames's character development, a seven-minute-long conversation with Crozier in which Fitzjames discloses the truth of his identity. The scene is set on the same day

⁵⁵ Lam, "Arctic Terror," 196.

⁵⁶ *The Terror*, "Terror Camp Clear."

⁵⁷ *The Terror*, "First Shot a Winner, Lads."

⁵⁸ *The Terror*, "Go for Broke."

⁵⁹ *The Terror*, "A Mercy."

that the crew abandons the ships and features the writing of the Victory Point note, the last historical record of the expedition's whereabouts.⁶⁰ Connecting the conversation to this important historical date frames the conversation as one of similar importance—the walk out from the ships is worth inscribing into history, as is Fitzjames's true identity. In the conversation, Fitzjames reveals that he is the product of an affair, that he has never known his mother, only that she was a wealthy Portuguese woman in exile in Brazil. (This makes Fitzjames the product of colonialism, something he and Crozier, an Irishman, have in common.) Fitzjames was abandoned by his father and raised by family friends—his name, like his identity, is a construction. He speaks frankly of the shame he feels about his upbringing and how “all of those stories [one] would have [his] biographer tally as courage—it's all vanity,” done in service of building himself “a great, gilded life that didn't humiliate [him] to live.”⁶¹ This is an admission that can only be made because Fitzjames is aware that he, and the expedition as a whole, is dying. We sense that, given the choice, he would have taken these secrets to his grave; Fitzjames even states that he has “never said it out loud before now.” This scene echoes the stereotypical coming-out narrative—the admission of a secret that has long been associated with shame, fear, and embarrassment. *The Terror* shows its queer perspective through Crozier's response: an unfettered affirmation of Fitzjames's identity, stretching beyond acceptance into celebration. Crozier encourages Fitzjames to “mine [his] courage from a different lode now. Friendship. Brotherhood,” punctuating his words with reassuring hands on Fitzjames's shoulders. This exchange alone is enough to establish the scene as queer, but Fitzjames's final lines—“Are we

⁶⁰ For a discussion of the historical significance of the Victory Point note by preeminent Franklin Expedition scholar Russell Potter, see Potter, “The Victory Point Record,” *Visions of the North* (blog), April 8, 2009, <https://visionsnorth.blogspot.com/2009/04/it-is-perhaps-most-evocative-document.html>.

⁶¹ All dialogue quotations in this paragraph from *The Terror*, “Terror Camp Clear.”

brothers, Francis? I would like that very much”—further cement the scene as central to the series’ queer mode. “Brother” and “friend” are particularly charged words for the Victorian era, and one wonders if Fitzjames is implicitly asking if Crozier is queer, too.

Two further scenes make explicit the connection between queerness and cannibalism in *The Terror*. In the first, Hickey kills Gibson, his lover. Gibson is very ill with scurvy and, according to Dr. Goodsir (Paul Ready), should prepare to die.⁶² Unable to assist in hauling the boats and supplies, Gibson is of no use to Hickey, only dead weight and another mouth to feed. Hickey, in his usual cryptic way, suggests that they will “make the best of a bad situation, like [they] always have.” Whether or not this is genuine is open for interpretation, as is the case with many of Hickey’s actions, but it is followed with a conciliatory smile that seems to be authentic. Shortly after this, Hickey stabs Gibson in the back, and Gibson dies in Hickey’s arms. Dr. Goodsir treats this as murder, particularly due to the fact that Hickey wants to eat Gibson’s body. But, according to Crain, love—especially queer love—is deeply entwined with cannibalism: “To say that cannibalism is a relation of love is not to say that it is warm, cuddly, and nurturing. It is only to say that love and cannibalism can be confused. Cannibals and lovers both pay exceptional attention to the body of their desired...Love can be as possessive and as irrational.”⁶³ Is Hickey’s murder of Gibson really a mercy killing? Does eating Gibson negate any compassion that might have been intended in Hickey’s act? Hickey views Gibson as more useful dead than alive, and this is certainly true—alive, Gibson is weak and hungry; dead, he feeds and strengthens others. Yet reading this scene alone provides no clear answers to the morality of

⁶² All dialogue quotations in this paragraph from *The Terror*, “The C, the C, the Open C.”

⁶³ Crain, “Lovers of Human Flesh,” 36.

Hickey's decision. It must be viewed in conjunction with a scene that follows and mirrors it, in which Crozier euthanizes Fitzjames.

Like the scene in which Hickey kills Gibson, Fitzjames's death scene is incredibly intimate, filled with intense close-ups and shots of hands clasped together, lit in low sepia tones. In this way, the scene resembles a twisted version of the heterosexual love scene, a fact that was acknowledged by the actors.⁶⁴ Fitzjames implores Crozier to use his body to feed the men, a request that, in this context, yearns to be read as romantic. Fitzjames, in his desire to be eaten—indeed, to have Crozier eat him—also desires to be a part of his men, and particularly a part of Crozier. According to Crain, “eating something is a way of keeping it with you forever, but it is also a way of destroying it.”⁶⁵ Fitzjames knows that he and all the men are dying. But in his death, he makes two requests: that Crozier use his body to feed the men, and that Crozier help him die. While Crozier refuses the first request, he fulfills the second, gently helping poison down Fitzjames's throat as they hold one another's gaze. It is an undeniably tender moment, an act of love that is also an act of killing. The same is true of Hickey's murder of Gibson. Thus, Fitzjames's death scene “can be understood as retrospectively redeeming Hickey.”⁶⁶ These scenes ultimately only differ in what happens to the character after they are killed—Gibson is eaten where Fitzjames is not. But this difference serves to further delineate Hickey as outside of naval norms, as queer. Hickey's act of killing differs from Crozier's only “in its lack of decorum, not in its structure. Certainly, Hickey by now firmly inhabits a queer ‘companion world’ ...in which he understands and acts out the imperial impulses that permeate the entire expedition, but

⁶⁴ See Sean T. Collins, “Jared Harris and Tobias Menzies on *The Terror*'s Voyage to the Edge of Masculinity,” last modified June 22, 2018, <https://www.vulture.com/2018/06/the-terror-jared-harris-tobias-menzies-interview.html>.

⁶⁵ Crain, “Lovers of Human Flesh,” 42.

⁶⁶ Garrido, “Queerness in the Neo-Victorian Empire,” 231.

which are for the most part marked by the project's self-stylization as heroic endeavor."⁶⁷

Hickey's queer perspective and enactment of imperial impulses come together in the crew's final encounter with Tuunbaq. Tuunbaq has by this point become even stronger, its status as a physical manifestation of the destructive power of imperialism further solidified in a moment when he literally eats one of the men's souls.⁶⁸ This metaphor is extended and made more complex as Hickey attempts to take control of Tuunbaq. Hickey delivers a sharp critique of the imperialist system in a fierce monologue:

Bugger Victoria! We're here! Bugger Nelson! Bugger Jesus! Bugger Joseph and Mary! Bugger the Archbishop of Canterbury! None ever wanted nothing from me... Open yourself to courage. What if we're not the heroes of this story? Every story we've ever been told about the holy throne of England has a shine on it, doesn't it? But I bet you never saw in Shoreditch the breath of a god in the air! Never met a man with his soul ate out! There are holy things before us. Our empire is not the only empire. We've seen that now.⁶⁹

Hickey, from his queer position outside the naval hierarchy, can make this critique when no other character can. Perhaps more than any other character, he recognizes the violence inherent in imperialism, not least because he has had to appropriate that violence in order to survive to the end of the series. Yet even as Hickey exists outside of the naval hierarchy, he has spent the years of the series moving within it, and despite his pointed criticism of the system, it *is* the only system he knows—the drive to consume, to conquer. *The Terror* is careful to “separate Hickey's queer marginalization from the racialized violence that the Inuit suffer, emphasizing his participation in White settler colonialism: cutting off his tongue to soothe the Tuunbaq in a crude attempt to mimic *The Terror*'s Inuit ritualism, he is devoured alive.”⁷⁰ Tuunbaq dies shortly

⁶⁷ Garrido, “Queerness in the Neo-Victorian Empire,” 231.

⁶⁸ *The Terror*, “The C, the C, the Open C.”

⁶⁹ *The Terror*, “We Are Gone.”

⁷⁰ Garrido, “Queerness in the Neo-Victorian Empire,” 232.

after eating Hickey, both literally and metaphorically poisoned. Crozier is the only crew member left alive, reinforcing “the idea of white people as both dead as well as bringers of death.”⁷¹

Ultimately, Crozier is rescued by Silna, and he is only able to survive by fully shedding his imperialist identity and becoming embedded within the Inuit community, suggesting that the only way to move forward from imperialism is to abandon it completely and live a life more sensitive to the communities that have historically been harmed by the imperialist machine. Like *Ravenous*, *The Terror* ends with a lone female Indigenous survivor. But Silna, unlike Martha, is not the one entrusted with the hi/story of what occurred. Instead, Silna leaves Crozier in the care of the Inuit community and goes on to live outside of it, apart from Crozier; the viewer is left to speculate about what her life alone might entail. The series concludes with Crozier and an Inuk child sitting alongside a fishing hole in silence, Crozier wearing Netsilik furs that resemble Silna’s.⁷² Although this does in some ways suggest that the oppressor remains in control of the historical narrative, it is important that Crozier has been subsumed into the Inuit culture to the point of fully abandoning his identity as Crozier, becoming known only as Aglooka.⁷³ Crozier survives, but it is only through shedding all traces of his imperialist past that he is able to do so. Moreover, he is shown not to be the keeper of the history when, a few years later, a British search party comes to the Inuit encampment in search of any survivors. An Inuk man, perhaps a chief or an *angakkuq*, relates Crozier/Aglooka’s words: “Tell those who come after us not to stay. The ships are gone. There’s no way through, no passage. Tell them we are gone. Dead and gone.”⁷⁴ In its project to dismantle imperialist myths of white supremacy and cultural

⁷¹ Lam, “Arctic Terror,” 194.

⁷² This is a radical departure from the events of Simmons’s novel, which concludes with Crozier and Silna starting a family together.

⁷³ *The Terror*, “Go For Broke.”

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

domination, *The Terror* also recognizes and dramatizes the important role the Inuit played in keeping the history of the Franklin expedition—a history which, because of Victorian society’s racist conceptions of the Inuit as “primitive,” went unheard for many years, despite being the most accurate and thorough account of the expedition’s fate.⁷⁵

The critiques of colonialism provided by *Ravenous* and *The Terror* are aided and made more accessible by their presentation in a queer mode. It is this very emphasis on looking at history queerly that makes their messages viable and valuable. Both pieces challenge traditional notions of who history belongs to, as well as scripts about the inevitability and supremacy of American colonialism and British imperialism. By linking their queer (and queercoded) characters with cannibalism, *Ravenous* and *The Terror* signal their investment in revising and re-envisioning history from a marginalized perspective. Furthermore, they highlight the horrors of imperialism through appropriation of Ojibwe and Inuit mythology in the forms of windigo and *tuurngait*, presenting white Western domination as a kind of cultural cannibalism. By communicating these horrors through embodied monsters, they are made real to a (primarily) white audience—the destruction caused by consumption and colonialism is no longer some nebulous concept, but instead a living, breathing, terrifying thing, forcing the white viewer to experience the violence that has historically been directed at Indigenous communities.

⁷⁵ Inuit accounts of the Franklin expedition’s fate were so accurate that, in 2014 and 2016 respectively, the wrecks of *Erebus* and *Terror* were discovered near the locations identified by Inuit to American journalist and explorer Charles Francis Hall in 1869. See “Inuit Traditional Knowledge: Wrecks of HMS *Erebus* and HMS *Terror* National Historic Site,” Parks Canada, accessed April 30, 2023, <https://parks.canada.ca/lhn-nhs/nu/epaveswrecks/culture/inuit/qaujjimajatuqangit>. For further information on the role of Inuit oral tradition and performance in keeping the history of the Franklin expedition, see Heather Davis-Fisch, *Loss and Cultural Remains in Performance: The Ghosts of the Franklin Expedition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), esp. ch. 4, “Aglooka’s Ghost: Performing Embodied Memory.”

CHAPTER 4

GIRLS GONE WILD: *YELLOWJACKETS*, *RAW*, AND QUEER CANNIBAL COMING-OF-AGE

In recent years, the unique figure of the queer female cannibal has emerged, providing an interesting contrast to the male cannibals that typify the trope. Just as queer male cannibals have been used as a way of interrogating and revising cultural and historical scripts, the queer female cannibal often serves as a conduit for the examination of societal gender roles, particularly normative constructions of femininity. The female cannibal, like her male counterpart, is an inherently transgressive figure, triply Othered by her womanhood, queerness, and cannibalism. In both *Yellowjackets* (2021-) and *Raw* (2016), cannibalism is tied to coming-of-age, replacing typical growth milestones such as menstruation and sex with twisted inversions that destroy life rather than create it.

Showtime's ongoing series *Yellowjackets* features a cadre of teenage cannibals, the majority of whom are girls. Using the structure of dual timelines, the series tells the story of a high school girls' soccer team stranded in the Canadian wilderness for nineteen months in the mid-1990s, as well as how the survivors are affected by this trauma as adults 25 years later, in 2021. Inspired by the Donner Party and the 1972 Andes flight disaster,¹ cannibalism haunts the show, with its very first scene depicting an unknown girl running through the wilderness, hunted by figures—presumably her teammates—in masks and other religious or ritual garb, before being trapped, gutted, and devoured.² In the present, the horrors of the wilderness resound in

¹ See Dana Feldman, "Girls Gone Wild: Showtime's 'Yellowjackets' Represents the Complete Destruction of Society," *Forbes*, November 18, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/danafeldman/2021/11/18/girls-gone-wild-showtimes-yellowjackets-represents-the-complete-destruction-of-society/>.

² Because the sequence is disjointed, non-chronological, and provides only brief snippets of each moment described here, it is possible that the creators are being deliberately misleading, and the girls are actually eating deer or some other non-human meat in this sequence. However, due to the sequence's ominous mood, as well as the centrality of

unusual ways, affecting the women's marriages, sobriety, and even political campaigns. Yet even as these past traumas remain, shaping the women's lives long into the future, they also create space for growth and change. *Yellowjackets* presents both queerness and cannibalism as something integral to the girls/women's identities, and, perhaps more importantly, as facets of their lives that should be looked at with acceptance rather than shame.

The series' most visible queer cannibal is Taissa Turner (Tawny Cypress/Jasmin Savoy Brown).³ In the 2021 timeline, Taissa runs for New Jersey state senate, catapulting her into the spotlight when, for many years, the surviving *Yellowjackets* have wanted nothing more but to lie low. This visibility is made even more complicated by the fact that Taissa is a Black lesbian, married to Simone (Rukiya Bernard), with whom she has a child, Sammy (Aiden Stox).⁴

Taissa's queerness is integral to her personal as well as political identity—during a photoshoot with Simone and Sammy, the photographer calls her the “queer Kamala,” and Taissa makes no attempts at concealing her sexuality to make herself more palatable for the general public.⁴ She even speaks of the pride she takes in her visibility as a queer Black woman, noting that it “fills [her] with hope” that a child might see her marriage to a woman and know that it's acceptable.⁵

In the 1996 timeline, Taissa is also queer, engaging in an at first clandestine relationship with her teammate Van (Liv Hewson) before publicly appearing as a couple at the team's

cannibalism to the show's premise and marketing, I'm choosing to take the heavy implications of cannibalism at face value. Moreover, the series' creators and co-showrunners have confirmed that the girls will/do eventually engage in cannibalism, with co-showrunner Jonathan Lisco stating, “If we do our job right, the eating of a person will not be the most transgressive thing that these young women do in the wilderness. That's just the tip of the iceberg.” See Samantha Highfill, “The darkness will set them free: *Yellowjackets* prepares for ‘intense’ season 2,” *Entertainment Weekly*, March 2, 2023, <https://ew.com/tv/yellowjackets-season-2-preview-cover-story/>.

³ Because the series takes place across two different timelines separated by 25 years, many characters are portrayed by two actors, one “teenage” and one adult. When this is the case, I have listed the actor who portrays the adult version of the character first and the teen version second.

⁴ *Yellowjackets*, “Pilot.”

⁵ *Yellowjackets*, “Bear Down.”

“Doomcoming” celebration.⁶ Though Taissa does not appear to be ashamed of her own queerness, she and Van keep their relationship secret for some time, sneaking off for covert hookups away from the rest of the team.⁷ It is implied that Taissa and Van were dating prior to the crash and that they had hidden their relationship to avoid any intra-team drama, but the wilderness provides an opportunity for them to eventually be open, and the rest of the team reacts without judgment. In the episodes before they come out to the team, though, Taissa exhibits strange behavior in the form of parasomnias. She is seen by another teammate, Lottie (Courtney Eaton), eating dirt in the middle of the night. Although the audience is led to believe that this may be a hallucination on Lottie’s part, as it is revealed earlier that Lottie has run out of medicine to treat her psychosis, Van’s comments on the dirt underneath Taissa’s fingernails reveal it to be true.⁸ Later, when Taissa, Van, and several other girls venture out of the main camp to look for help, Taissa falls asleep when she is meant to be keeping watch and wakes up in a tree, having stolen a trinket Lottie previously gave Van for protection. Taissa only wakes up because the other girls are being attacked by wolves, with Van receiving the worst of the damage.⁹ Van is viciously mauled, and Taissa’s reaction reveals her affection for Van, weeping and wailing over her body while the other girls (perhaps due to shellshock) merely cry or sit in silence. This moment of vulnerability and visibility on Taissa’s part is literally healing; despite Van’s extensive injuries, and despite the other girls having attempted to burn her body, Van lives, the only evidence of her wounds a thin scar on her cheek after Misty (Christina

⁶ *Yellowjackets*, “Doomcoming.”

⁷ *Yellowjackets*, “Blood Hive.”

⁸ *Yellowjackets*, “Saints.”

⁹ *Yellowjackets*, “No Compass.”

Ricci/Sammi Hanratty) sews her up when they return to camp.¹⁰ In the following episode, Van and Taissa kiss in front of the rest of the team at the “Doomcoming” party, and Taissa’s parasomnias are not featured in the 1996 timeline for the remainder of the season.

These parasomnias recur in the 2021 timeline because, while Taissa’s queerness is never a point of personal shame, she, like the other Yellowjackets, maintains a degree of secrecy about what happened in 1996 that suggests both regret and remorse. Although the survivors of the crash and subsequent stranding attain a kind of celebrity for their involvement in the incident,¹¹ most of them speak very little about it publicly. They play this off as a need for privacy after enduring such a traumatic event, especially one that resulted in the deaths of many of their friends, but a code of silence is also necessary in order to suppress the truth of the violence the girls enacted toward one another while in the wilderness. This, of course, includes their murder and cannibalism of a teammate. The choice to maintain silence around this topic, though, does not stop it from leaking into the women’s lives. For Taissa, this seriously affects her political campaign: an ad produced by her opponent, for instance, makes reference to her “cannibalizing” voters’ tax dollars.¹² She is also unable to eat meat, which puts her in an awkward position at a campaign fundraiser when she accidentally eats a canapé made of pork, triggering a flashback to her time in the wilderness.¹³ Moreover, her story is treated as a kind of political capital as it has the potential for blackmail; a woman who can provide Taissa a powerful endorsement bargains with her, stating, “All I ask in return is that you show me who you *really* are...So, tell me, what

¹⁰ *Yellowjackets*, “Flight of the Bumblebee.”

¹¹ Episodes include shots of an issue of *US Weekly* that advertises a “where are they now” feature about the Yellowjackets on its cover, as well as a pulpy-looking true crime book titled *Skin in the Game: The Unauthorized Story of Flight 2525* that includes a photo of the team superimposed over a burning airplane in the background. See “Pilot” and “Doomcoming.”

¹² *Yellowjackets*, “The Dollhouse.”

¹³ *Yellowjackets*, “Bear Down.”

really happened out there? ...I've heard the official story. You trust me, don't you?"¹⁴ Taissa refuses, potentially jeopardizing the future of her campaign.

Taissa's choice to maintain silence about the crash affects her life far beyond her political campaign, too. Throughout the season, her son Sammy is terrorized by what he calls "the woman in the tree," who he says watches him at night from the tree outside his window.¹⁵ Simone and Taissa initially brush this off as Sammy having an overly active imagination. However, as strange events continue to occur—the violent destruction of Sammy's doll, particularly having one eye gouged out;¹⁶ someone painting "SPILL" on the entryway of Taissa's apartment building (referring to spilling the Yellowjackets' secrets, but also to something said in a séance the team had while in the wilderness) and the red paint showing up under Sammy's bed;¹⁷ Taissa waking up in the tree outside Sammy's window having bitten off part of her hand;¹⁸ and the family dog, Biscuit, going missing, which Taissa believes is due to her leaving a door open while sleepwalking¹⁹—Taissa is forced to accept that her inability to leave the past behind is taking a toll on her family, particularly Sammy. This all comes to a head in the season finale when Simone discovers a strange shrine in the basement adorned with the broken doll, a symbol associated with the Yellowjackets' time in the wilderness, red paint, blood, and Biscuit's heart and decapitated head.²⁰

¹⁴ *Yellowjackets*, "Bear Down."

¹⁵ *Yellowjackets*, "F Sharp."

¹⁶ *Yellowjackets*, "The Dollhouse."

¹⁷ *Yellowjackets*, "Blood Hive."

¹⁸ *Yellowjackets*, "Saints."

¹⁹ *Yellowjackets*, "Flight of the Bumblebee."

²⁰ *Yellowjackets*, "Sic Transit Gloria Mundi." It is not entirely clear in the episode whether the heart on the shrine is Biscuit's heart or a human heart, but series co-creators Ashley Lyle and Bart Nickerson confirmed that the heart is indeed Biscuit's. See Kimberly Roots, "*Yellowjackets* EPs Answer Our Burning Questions About the Antler Queen,

The season concludes with Taissa unexpectedly winning her state senatorial race,²¹ despite the efforts of her opponent to smear her character, as well as the mysterious goings-on in the Abara-Turner household, but this victory does not come without a cost. For their own protection, Taissa asks Simone and Sammy to temporarily live with Simone's mother, and the relationship between Taissa and Simone deteriorates.²² This is the price of maintaining secrecy about her own role in what happened to the Yellowjackets—while Taissa is at a high point professionally, her mental health and her familial relationships fall apart. Twenty-five years of Taissa keeping her cannibalism quiet cannot be cured by simply being openly queer. Instead, embodying Robin Wood's theory of the return of the repressed, Taissa's guilt over the Yellowjackets' time in the wilderness spills over into her everyday life, disrupting her sleep, her work, and the stability of her family unit.²³ Only through directly confronting her past, and the horrors she both endured and enacted, will Taissa be able to return to some kind of equilibrium—what was done in the darkness must indeed be brought to light.

While not canonically queer, the relationship between Shauna Shipman (Melanie Lynskey/Sophie Nélisse) and Jackie Taylor (Ella Purnell) lends itself to being read as queer. In the 1996 timeline, Jackie and Shauna are best friends, concerned with winning the national championship, finishing high school, and boys. Jackie dates Jeff (Warren Kole/Jack DePew), whom Shauna is secretly hooking up with. I read this triangular relationship as a genderswapped inversion of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theories on male homosocial desire and erotic triangles. As Sedgwick states, "in any erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and

[Spoiler]'s Deeply Unsettling Altar, That Dude in the Dream and More," *TVLine*, January 16, 2022, <https://tvline.com/2022/01/16/yellowjackets-season-1-finale-lottie/>.

²¹ *Yellowjackets*, "Sic Transit Gloria Mundi."

²² *Yellowjackets*, "Flight of the Bumblebee."

²³ See Wood, "Return of the Repressed."

potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved...the bonds of “rivalry” and “love,” differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent.”²⁴ Although Jackie is at first unaware that she and Shauna are “competing” for Jeff, her relationship with Shauna evinces these power dynamics. As captain of the soccer team, Jackie exists in a higher social stratum than Shauna, and, moreover, Jackie fits the mold of the “popular girl” archetype—she is more conventionally pretty, outgoing, and high-achieving, whereas Shauna is portrayed as more introverted, less attractive, and, essentially, not a threat to Jackie’s social status. Before a party, Jackie somewhat condescendingly tells Shauna that Randy, a particularly gross and stupid member of Jeff’s friend group, will be at the party, insinuating that Shauna should hook up with him. Shauna is decidedly uninterested, as well as a little insulted that Jackie would make the suggestion at all. This makes things tense between the two of them at the party, though they seemingly reconcile, with Jackie telling Shauna, “You are a terrible dancer, and you have seriously questionable taste in music, and you can’t hold your liquor for shit, but you’re the only one who’s always been there for me. You’re the best friend I’ve ever had.”²⁵ Shauna catches a ride home with Jeff and Jackie and, after they drop Jackie off at home, Shauna and Jeff have passionate sex in the back seat of Jeff’s car—a stark comparison to the unsatisfying, fake orgasm-inducing sex Jeff and Jackie have earlier in the episode.²⁶

In the wilderness, with Jeff gone, Jackie and Shauna’s dependence on each other becomes more apparent, particularly as they try to distance themselves to one another. Shauna adapts well to the wilderness, immediately taking on the responsibility of gutting a deer when

²⁴ Sedgwick, “Gender Asymmetry and Erotic Triangles,” 21.

²⁵ *Yellowjackets*, “Pilot.”

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Natalie (Juliette Lewis/Sophie Thatcher) and Travis²⁷ (Kevin Alves) bring one to the camp.²⁸ Jackie, on the other hand, flounders. Where the other girls divide up responsibilities such as hunting, cleaning, and cooking, Jackie does almost nothing beyond complaining about their situation, until Shauna takes her aside and lets her know she needs to be contributing more.²⁹ The situation is made more complicated by the fact that Shauna is pregnant with Jeff's baby and is increasingly unable to conceal it. As seemingly supernatural events begin to occur, including Lottie being possessed and speaking French during a séance Jackie suggested, the tensions between Shauna and Jackie continue to rise.³⁰

These tensions culminate in Jackie stealing and reading Shauna's journal. While Shauna tells Jackie that she's pregnant, she claims that the baby is Randy's—a story that Jackie immediately doubts. That night, Jackie steals Shauna's journal and reads it despite Shauna having hidden it earlier.³¹ Jackie then forces Shauna to tell the rest of the girls that she's pregnant, though neither mentions that the baby is Jeff's.³² Finally, at the "Doomcoming" celebration, with everyone else tripping on psychedelic mushrooms accidentally added to their stew, Jackie has sex with Travis.³³ Never mind that Travis has, up to this point, been romantically and sexually involved with Natalie, and never mind that Shauna did not sleep with Travis but with Jeff: this is an act of revenge against Shauna. Importantly, this act is only able to

²⁷ Travis, who is the same age as the girls, along with his younger brother Javi (Luciano Leroux) and assistant coach Ben Scott (Steven Krueger), are the only men in the wilderness group. Travis and Javi's father, the team's head coach, was killed in the initial plane crash.

²⁸ *Yellowjackets*, "Bear Down."

²⁹ *Yellowjackets*, "Blood Hive."

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Yellowjackets*, "No Compass."

³² *Yellowjackets*, "Flight of the Bumblebee."

³³ *Yellowjackets*, "Doomcoming."

occur at the carnivalesque “Doomcoming” celebration, which was itself suggested by Jackie. Order is entirely upended, and Jackie can finally respond to her feeling of betrayal by Shauna. While it might be argued that Jackie’s choice to have sex with Travis is as much in retaliation against Jeff as it is Shauna, Shauna is the one there to witness and be wounded by it; if Jeff ever learns about it, it is only much later, after the girls have been rescued and Jackie is long dead. As writer Kelly McClure notes, Jackie does this to create chaos and lash out at Shauna, “whose affections she’s addicted to.”³⁴ When the other girls seize Travis, with Lottie shouting that he “doesn’t belong to” Jackie, they shove Jackie into a storage closet, locking her inside. Even Jackie’s physical enactment of heterosexual desire reinforces her queer feelings for Shauna, both literally and metaphorically forcing her into a closet.

In the wilderness, Jackie and Shauna’s relationship is haunted by the possibility—or promise—of cannibalism. Though the identity of the girl hunted and killed in the series’ first scene is a mystery, she wears a gold heart necklace that Jackie is also wearing when her character is first introduced. However, Jackie then gives the necklace to Shauna as a good luck present for the national championship.³⁵ Later in the season, when Shauna takes Jackie aside to tell her she needs to contribute more to the work at camp, she returns Jackie’s necklace to her.³⁶ Until the season’s final episode, the series seems to hint that Jackie is the girl from the first scene—but Jackie dies in the season finale, freezing to death while sleeping outside after revealing to the rest of the girls that Shauna slept with Jeff.³⁷ She is the first of the girls to die in

³⁴ Kelly McClure, “*Yellowjackets* Recap: Time to Pull Out All the Stops,” *Vulture*, January 9, 2022, <https://www.vulture.com/article/yellowjackets-recap-season-one-episode-9-doomcoming.html>.

³⁵ *Yellowjackets*, “Pilot.”

³⁶ *Yellowjackets*, “Blood Hive.”

³⁷ *Yellowjackets*, “Sic Transit Gloria Mundi.”

the camp,³⁸ and though she is not the girl killed in the pilot episode, Jackie is distinctly aligned with her through her necklace. That girl was cannibalized by the rest of the team, presumably including Shauna. At the end of the first season, it is not clear whether or not Jackie will be eaten, but that the creators deliberately invoke anxiety about her being eaten seems significant.

It is also worth noting that, in the 2021 timeline, Shauna is married to Jeff, with whom she now has a teenage daughter, Callie (Sarah Desjardins). Although Jackie is dead, the erotic triangle persists, with Jeff and Shauna enduring an excruciating brunch with Jackie's parents on what would have been Jackie's 40th birthday.³⁹ During the brunch, Jackie's parents repeatedly compare Shauna to Jackie, subtly insulting her and implying she is not good enough to be married to Jeff. Jeff eventually defends Shauna, but it feels like too little too late after being condescended to so for so long. The series consistently portrays Jeff and Shauna's relationship as unsatisfying and built on secrets and lies—Shauna keeps her journals and other tokens from the wilderness locked in a safe;⁴⁰ Jeff blackmails Natalie and Taissa for \$50,000 to keep his furniture business from going under;⁴¹ Shauna cheats on Jeff and eventually kills her lover, Adam (Peter Gadiot), because she believes him to be responsible for the blackmail.⁴² Neither of the heterosexual relationships Shauna pursues is successful; although she and Jeff reconcile once he comes clean about the blackmail, the damage caused to their relationship, and to her relationship with Adam, persists.

³⁸ Another girl, Laura Lee (Jane Widdop) dies when trying to fly a plane found in the wilderness to civilization, but her death occurs significantly outside the bounds of the Yellowjackets' camp. See *Yellowjackets*, "Flight of the Bumblebee."

³⁹ *Yellowjackets*, "Saints."

⁴⁰ *Yellowjackets*, "Doomcoming."

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.* Shauna believes this in part because she can find no information about Adam on the internet, but, more importantly, because he has a stack of books about the Yellowjackets hidden in a drawer in his apartment.

Ultimately, *Yellowjackets* suggests that heterosexuality is both predestined and doomed to be unsatisfying: beyond Jeff and Shauna's failing marriage, the series also includes Natalie and Travis in an unhappy relationship that ends with Travis's suicide, and Misty is shown repeatedly going on disastrous dates with men from apps, alienating them with her sheer weirdness. Although queerness is presented as a viable solution, as for Taissa and Van, a fulfilling relationship still requires coming to terms with what happened in 1996—something none of the adult *Yellowjackets* seem capable of.

Like *Yellowjackets*, Julia Ducournau's 2016 film *Raw*⁴³ is a coming-of-age story, concerned with questions of desire, bodies, and hunger. Sexuality and cannibalism are deeply intertwined, their connection complicated by the in-film discourses surrounding vegetarianism and femininity. According to Louise Flockhart, "the cannibal is a figure of alterity but is most productive as a symbol for the permeability of boundaries between human and monster...Because cannibalism draws attention to the sameness of the victim and perpetrator it challenges ideas of absolute difference."⁴⁴ This is to say that the cannibal is an inherently queer figure; it both is and is not Other. *Raw* complicates this notion through its exploration of protagonist Justine's (Garance Marillier) dual awakenings as both cannibal and sexual being, providing an updated prototype of the archetypal lesbian vampire—a queer(ed) cannibal who occupies an agender space.

Justine is positioned as a queer subject perhaps most clearly in her inability to conform to traditional notions of femininity. Flockhart states that the female cannibal "challenges the meaning of femininity, and as a cannibal, challenges the meaning of the human."⁴⁵ This is

⁴³ Original French title: *Grave*.

⁴⁴ Flockhart, "Gendering the Cannibal in the Postfeminist Era," 68.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 71.

certainly true of Justine, who is repeatedly characterized as an outsider, reflecting her queer role within the film. From the outset, Justine is marked as Other, notably through her initial vegetarianism and her resistance to participating in the veterans' hazing rituals. Even in casual conversation, Justine's Otherness becomes clear. A discussion regarding whether it is possible to give a monkey HIV by having sex with it results in Justine reasoning that a sexually assaulted monkey "suffers like a woman."⁴⁶ This identification of monkey with woman is seen by Justine's peers as deeply offensive, and Justine is isolated because of it.

Justine's difference, not only to the other students but to femininity as a whole, is further highlighted in her struggles to walk in heels and to conform to the "club" dress code imposed by the veterans. When Justine does not follow the dress code, she is forced to wear a diaper on the outside of her clothes, essentially desexualizing her through infantilization. Presumably, Justine is close to, if not the same age as the other students. Yet her youth is frequently emphasized through shots that make her appear smaller, as in the scene where she discusses cheating on an exam with her older male professor, and in multiple scenes with her older, more mature sister, Alexia (Ella Rumpf). It is Alexia who initially encourages Justine to be more sexual, as well as who forces Justine to eat the rabbit kidney that sets off her dual awakenings. It is Alexia, too, who attempts to teach Justine to urinate standing up—colloquially, like a man—and to give Justine a bikini wax. Alexia, who has fully embraced her cannibal status, does not seem bound to any one gender. The clothes she wears to dance are, in comparison to the dress she lends Justine, not particularly feminine, and unlike Justine, Alexia never engages in sexual acts onscreen. It could be argued that this is merely a function of Alexia being older, a veteran of the veterinary program, and therefore not subject to the same sexually motivated hazing rituals that Justine is.

⁴⁶ All quoted dialogue is from Ducournau, *Raw*.

But it can be argued, too, that Alexia's bi- or agender qualities are due to her being a cannibal.

Justine's body itself also rejects femininity. According to psychoanalyst Eve Watson, "the feminine masquerade and the male gaze that supports it is returned by Justine as a horrifying specter of raw female body materialism."⁴⁷ Upon having first eaten the raw rabbit kidney, Justine's body breaks out into an itching, flaking rash at which she cannot help but scratch. Justine literally sheds her skin, "signalling, in the manner of a larva emerging from a cocoon, the mutation of the central character."⁴⁸ This is a coming-of-age film, yes, but rather than becoming a woman, Justine becomes a cannibal. This transformation from child/vegetarian to woman/cannibal is reminiscent of Ginger's transformation from child into werewolf in the film *Ginger Snaps* (2000). This, too, is a coming-of-age, explicitly connected in that film to Ginger's menstruation. Though menstruation is not the genesis of Justine's transformation, it is noteworthy that the taste of blood from Alexia's severed finger is what finally drives her to taste the human flesh—a symbolic menstruation if there ever was one. Indeed, when Justine sees the doctor to get treatment for her rash, she cannot remember the time of her last period, guessing that it was perhaps five or six weeks ago. In *Raw*, cannibalism comes to stand in for menstruation, especially as it is associated with the women of Justine's family. Writing on *Ginger Snaps*, Heather Tapley states that "Ginger's menstruating body accentuates female rather than male adolescence, and, in the process, her female anatomical maturation acts, at least superficially, as the foundational axis of the werewolf film."⁴⁹ *Raw*, then, is a kind of inversion of this wherein the menstruating body is the cannibal body; female anatomical maturation replaced by the maturation of sexual and cannibal desires.

⁴⁷ Watson, "A Psychoanalytic Exploration of the film *Raw* (2016)," 454.

⁴⁸ Beugnet and Delanoë-Brun, "Raw Becomings," 210.

⁴⁹ Tapley, "Edgy Un/Intelligibilities," 123.

Like Alexia, Justine begins to act in curiously gendered ways once she has indulged her cannibal urges. Justine's meat-eating and cannibalism are what trigger her sexual coming-of-age; it is only after she has eaten Alexia's finger that she appears to have any kind of sexual desires. Prior to this, Justine's run-ins with sexuality are distinctly odd—she timidly tells the doctor who treats her rash that she is a virgin, and later, after walking in on her roommate Adrien (Rabah Nait Oufella) receiving oral sex, she stands outside the shut door and listens intently as they continue to hook up. Justine is marginally sexual at best—her total lack of sexuality is a recurring point of contention between Justine and Alexia—and this sexuality (or lack thereof) also signifies the queerness of her character. In comparison, once Justine has had her cannibal/sexual awakening, her desires for meat and sex become seemingly inextricably intertwined. It is notable, however, that the object of Justine's desires is, above all, her self-described “fag” roommate Adrien, one of the very few men who would presumably be off-limits to her. Adrien very firmly identifies himself as gay, yet he quite willingly has sex with Justine—another characteristic that positions her as agender, or, at least, not-woman. It is unclear what, exactly, draws Justine to Adrien and vice versa. Despite her sexual desire for Adrien, Justine never acts on these feelings until Adrien initiates sexual contact with her. In this case, though, Justine appears to be less interested in Adrien himself than in the mere promise of flesh; she attempts to bite Adrien, clawing at him like an animal, only satisfied when she sinks her teeth into her own arm, drawing blood as she looks directly into the camera. Justine's cravings are at least temporarily sated by this experience, but “Adrien quickly expresses regret and Justine is left to re-evaluate herself in the wake of this emotionally disturbing but transformative episode.”⁵⁰

Immediately prior to her sexual experience with Adrien, Justine is forced to take part in

⁵⁰ Dooley, “Navigating the Mind/body Divide,” 62.

another hazing ritual. Drenched in blue paint, Justine is sent into a locked room with a male student covered in yellow paint and told to “make green.”⁵¹ Virginal Justine is initially hesitant, stepping away and resisting when the male student attempts to kiss her. Upon the man’s reassurance that he will “go slow,” however, Justine seizes upon the opportunity and bites off a piece of his upper lip—a wound that is echoed in the scarring present above Justine’s father’s mouth. As in the episode with Adrien that follows, Justine is disinterested in sex—or, perhaps more accurately, sex with men—until it presents her with an opportunity to satisfy her more pressing needs for flesh. Even as the other students voice their disgust with her behavior, Justine retains the piece of the male student’s lip in her mouth, eating it later when she picks it out of her teeth in the shower. Although she quite literally washes away the evidence of having sexually interacted with a man, she savors the morsel of his flesh, the experience of using the man for nourishment far more pleasurable than their sexual encounter.

In comparison, Justine appears to be truly sexually engaged most often with women—female students, her sister, or herself. During the party scene that follows her sexual experience with Adrien, Justine has two notable encounters with women that are tinged with sexual tension. In the first, Justine watches intently as a young woman and man make out. The woman licks the man’s eye, while Justine smirks, nods, and licks her lips. Justine is hungry for flesh again by this point, so it is possible this is merely a case of Justine projecting her own appetites onto the girl’s oddly cannibalistic action, but given the moment that follows, it is also possible to read this as desire for the girl herself. Immediately following this, Justine goes to the bar and gets more to drink (despite already being extremely intoxicated), then kisses a young man she runs into.

⁵¹ Interestingly, this appears to be the same student who initiates the earlier conversation about HIV and monkeys, which is partially responsible for Justine’s social alienation.

Though she is told by a woman, presumably the man's partner, to find someone else, Justine lunges in and kisses the woman as well. The woman pushes her away, and Justine attempts to kiss another student, though it is unclear which student or that student's gender. Although Justine only has explicitly sexual interactions with women while drunk, it seems clear that she is on some level attracted to women. In comparison to her hesitation when kissing the man during the paint hazing ritual, Justine is eager to kiss the woman, and Justine's facial expression when watching the other woman lick the man's eye can only be described as salacious. It is easy to write off these two instances as merely side-effects of Justine being under the influence, but when read in conjunction with Justine's interactions with other women, they become reflective of a larger pattern of queer attraction.

Special attention must also be paid to the scene in which Justine, in front of a mirror, prepares for a party while listening to the song "Plus Putes Que Toutes Les Putes" by French rap duo Orties. Notably, this scene occurs almost immediately after Justine has presumably fully realized her sexual attraction to Adrien as she watches him and other male students playing sports outside. While Adrien plays shirtless, Justine inexplicably has a nosebleed. Given the film's connection of blood to cannibal and sexual awakening, this nosebleed seems to represent Justine's attraction to Adrien coming to a head, so to speak. This sense of arousal or attraction spills into the scene in front of the mirror, wherein Justine dances to the sexually explicit song while looking at herself. "Plus Putes Que Toutes Les Putes" includes lyrics about "sex with the dead" and telling a man that he would "make a pretty corpse"—a revealing musical choice, given the fate that eventually befalls Adrien.⁵² As Justine listens to the song, the camera focuses on her

⁵² Translation source: anthaslover, "Plus putes que toutes les putes (English translation)," LyricsTranslate, March 5, 2014, <https://lyricstranslate.com/en/plus-putes-que-toutes-les-putes-sluttier-all-sluts.html>.

face, eventually settling in a tight shot that puts the viewer in the position of the mirror. Justine seems to become mystified by her own image, put into an almost trancelike state, and eventually applies lipstick and kisses the mirror/herself multiple times. As she does so, the pink lipstick smears across her chin and around her mouth, staining her face. This smeared lipstick parallels the blood that has previously stained Justine's face, both from her nosebleed as well as while eating Alexia's finger, further linking cannibalism with sexuality.

Justine's potential queer sexuality is most evident, however, in her relationship with her sister, Alexia. The relationship between Alexia and Justine is undoubtedly erotically charged. Like sisters Ginger and Brigitte in *Ginger Snaps*, Alexia and Justine are bound to each other through a blood oath of intimacy. It is noteworthy that, as "werewolf" is rarely spoken in *Ginger Snaps*, so too is the word "cannibal" never spoken in *Raw*. Tanis MacDonald connects this to *Ginger Snaps*'s latent queer sexuality, and it applies to *Raw*, too: "verbal expressions of same-sex desire only 'leak out' occasionally despite the fact that the fact that this 'queerness' is visually prominent throughout the film."⁵³ The visually prominent queerness MacDonald refers to is *Ginger Snaps*'s proliferation of wolf symbolism; this can easily be extended to the proliferation of blood and food imagery throughout *Raw*. Moreover, like cannibalism, female queerness is never actually mentioned in the film. Adrien's queerness is acknowledged, but the possibility of either Justine or Alexia being queer is never brought up, despite the fact that Justine literally kisses a woman. Instead, the film is haunted by the potential of an incestuous lesbianism that leaks through, particularly in Alexia's attempts to make Justine embrace her femininity and be more sexual.

Nowhere is this amorphous lesbian potentiality more obvious than in the scene where

⁵³ MacDonald, "'Out by Sixteen,'" 60.

Alexia attempts to give Justine a bikini wax. This is yet another instance in which Justine attempts (or, in this case, is forced to attempt) to conform to traditional femininity but fails. When Alexia tries to cut off a piece of wax that is stuck to Justine, Justine's sudden movements cause a freak accident in which Alexia's finger is cut off. According to Emily Naser-Hall, "the way in which Ducournau frames this scene reveals a twisted conflation of romance and consumption."⁵⁴ This follows from the way the film repeatedly ties together sex and cannibalism, but the inclusion of Alexia here is important. As Naser-Hall notes, regarding the moment in which Justine finally eats Alexia's finger, "Ducournau frames this initial moment of succumbing to cannibalistic desire as another filmmaker would design a love scene, or at least a scene depicting oral sex."⁵⁵ Regarding a similarly-framed scene in *Ginger Snaps* in which Brigitte tries to cure Ginger of her lycanthropy by piercing her navel with a silver earring, Tapley states that "this display of seeming same-sex pleasure also directly follows (and undercuts) Ginger's first heterosexual encounter."⁵⁶ Although the scene in *Raw* occurs prior to Justine's sexual encounters, the contrast remains significant. Justine is reluctant when it comes to the bikini wax itself, but she is only momentarily tentative before devouring Alexia's severed finger. When she does, a heavy electronic musical cue plays, its organ-like chords firmly placing the film within the horror genre. It is worth noting that this same musical cue plays at two other points in the film: at the party, when Justine watches the woman lick the man's eye, and at the film's conclusion, when Justine's father has revealed his scarred body to her for the first time. These uses of this musical cue are linked by their association with desire—Justine's desire and fulfilled appetite for meat when consuming Alexia's finger; Justine's unfulfilled hunger while

⁵⁴ Naser-Hall, "We Ate Them to Destroy Them," 323.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Tapley, "Edgy Un/Intelligibilities," 125.

watching the woman perform a cannibal-adjacent act; and the implication of Justine's mother's sexual/cannibal desire for Justine's father. The bikini waxing scene, while also serving to further illustrate Justine's inability to conform to societal feminine expectations, acts as a romantic reiteration of the unbreakable bond between Alexia and Justine—one that is both cannibal and sexual. According to Naser-Hall, "Ducournau exposes the violence within the compulsory feminine beautification and self-creation process and simultaneously converts a scene of absolute abjection into a romantic interlude."⁵⁷

Justine and Alexia's relationship is further developed through two scenes of implied and explicit sexualized violence. In the first, which occurs during the same party as the eye-licking scene, as well as the scene in which Justine kisses a woman, Alexia takes advantage of Justine's inebriation and cravings for meat by tempting her with the arm of a cadaver. This incident, which is filmed and circulated amongst the other students, serves to further alienate Justine from her peers. Alexia is not really affected by the negative reactions to the video; as she is already a veteran, her actions are presumably permissible, given that she is essentially hazing Justine. Justine, on the other hand, is reduced to little more than an animal, forced to crawl on the ground, provoked to bite and snap at the arm as Alexia tells her to "go fetch." Jimmy Packham, recalling Justine's father's warning that "an animal who has tasted human flesh isn't safe," notes that this scene seems to imply that "a human who has tasted...flesh isn't safe, either: in blood-soaked initiation ceremonies, carnivorous humans continually demonstrate their savage 'animality.'"⁵⁸ By tempting Justine with the arm and further inflaming her desires for flesh—desires which

⁵⁷ Naser-Hall, "We Ate Them to Destroy Them," 323.

⁵⁸ Packham, "Children of the Quorn," 92.

Alexia knows firsthand, from her own experience—Alexia is essentially sexually teasing Justine as well.

Justine and Alexia’s “animality,” and by extension their sexuality, are again highlighted in a scene toward the end of the film wherein they physically fight in front of their classmates. Justine, having been shown the video of Alexia tempting her with the cadaver’s arm, attacks Alexia, and, more importantly, attempts to bite her. In *Raw*, biting, particularly of human flesh, is always sexual in nature—Justine’s sexualized consumption of Alexia’s finger; her biting of the male student’s lip during the paint hazing ritual; Justine’s failed attempts to bite Adrien while they have sex; Justine’s orgasmic, bloody bite into her own arm when Adrien refuses to let her bite him. It is notable, then, that both Alexia and Justine bite the other. Their fight is only broken up when their classmates pull them apart, choking them with scarves. Flockhart notes that “at the moment, [Justine and Alexia] both embrace their subjectivity and are forced to recognize the subjectivity of the other; they simultaneously become animalistic objects their classmates feel justified in choking. They are consuming subjects that are also read by others as animalistic objects.”⁵⁹

It is significant, too, that Alexia kills and eats Adrien. She knows that Justine has had sex with him, despite his self-proclaimed queerness, and therefore Justine is not bound by existing categories that certain types of interactions off-limits. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, Adrien is a sexual threat. Although he feels regret after having sex with Justine, essentially saying that doing so nullifies his previous queerness or pushes him back into the closet, he cannot undo having slept with her. If Justine is able to seduce even a gay man into having sex with her, then why would she be sexually invested in Alexia? Alexia’s choice to murder Adrien,

⁵⁹ Flockhart, “Gendering the Cannibal in the Postfeminist Era,” 79.

then, is almost a kind of retaliatory sexual assault against both Adrien and Justine, or, if nothing else, a claim-staking, Alexia's way of stating, *if I can't have you, then no one can*. In one of the film's final scenes, Justine and her family visit Alexia in prison. Justine and Alexia do not speak to one another, but their reflections merge together in the pane of glass that separates them. According to Martine Beugnet and Emmanuelle Delanoë-Brun, "a new face emerges, strange and fluid, a pure visual creation captured on a glass plate, tying in the film's central mode of becoming to the visual medium which serves both as a site of fixation and transition, examination and evasion."⁶⁰ It is, in other words, a queer image—a face that is not a face, a face that transgresses boundaries, defies labelling and pinning-down.

What, then, is the purpose of the film's ending, which seems to tie up all these queer threads into a neatly heterosexual bow? In the final scene, Justine's father explains, in a roundabout way, that Justine's cannibalism is hereditary, and that Justine's mother shares the same cravings. He unbuttons his shirt and reveals a body that is mottled with scars—evidence of Justine's mother's cannibalism. Packham reads this as a final grasp at patriarchal control over the inherently violent cannibal desires: "It is the father who speaks of the need to put Quicky down for tasting human flesh. And, in the end, his uneasy final lines echo this sentiment, striving to maintain order in the household, and to maintain a fundamental difference between human and nonhuman."⁶¹ Yet is it not also possible that he is trying to maintain a strictly heterosexual control over the queer cannibal women in his life? A question the film raises and never quite answers is whether these cannibal cravings are strictly for male flesh—Justine bites her own arm, and she and Alexia bite one another, but Justine and Alexia only ever consume the flesh of men

⁶⁰ Beugnet and Delanoë-Brun, "Raw Becomings," 217.

⁶¹ Packham, "Children of the Quorn," 95.

on screen. Even the victims of the car wrecks Alexia causes are strictly male. Justine's father says, "I'm sure you'll find a solution, honey," referring to the life she will live as a cannibal. The solution he seems to suggest is finding a man who can tolerate her cannibalism in the way that he has tolerated Justine's mother's cannibalism. But the film leaves aside a potential queer solution—would Justine's cravings be diminished if her sexual desires were aimed at a woman? Within the purely heterosexual realm of the text, it is impossible to tell, especially not knowing certain specific aspects of Justine's particular brand of cannibalism. Moreover, this scene can easily be read as a mere reinstatement of patriarchal norms. According to Ursula de Leeuw,

Raw's treatment of female transgression leaves the law of the father intact. While it is constantly threatened, it is not destroyed. It is only scarred, as if to withstand collateral damage as repressed energy is transgressively released. What once separated Justine from the familial, the consumption of meat, is in fact returned with increased force to the patriarchal condition of repressed female sexuality. From this point on, the women of Justine's family are subordinated to a higher moral order wherein their excesses resume a state of regulation. While the women cannibals of *Raw* appear to be moving toward the radically other, they are rather performing another act of organized transgression in the coming-of-age ritual.⁶²

However, the underlying queerness of *Raw* leaves this particular cannibal question unanswered. There is still room for these women cannibals to move toward the radically other. Though Justine's father presents a heterosexual solution to the cannibal "problem," Justine has already blurred the boundaries of heterosexuality and gender through her specific embodiment of cannibalism. To say that this scene necessarily subordinates the women in Justine's family to the rule of patriarchy is to ignore the queer messaging of the rest of the film. Although these queer possibilities are never explored, they nonetheless exist in the world *Raw* constructs.

Though *Raw* initially appears to be little more than a girlbossification of cannibalism, it actually presents a unique take on the queer cannibal figure. The female cannibal as constructed

⁶² De Leeuw, "A Kiss is the Beginning of Cannibalism," 221.

by Ducournau is both queer and queered, resistant to the notions of traditional femininity and heterosexuality. Ducournau's *Raw* presents new possibilities for the figure of the female cannibal, opening up a world of queer transgression and liberation. In both *Raw* and *Yellowjackets*, queerness and cannibalism are presented as integral parts of one's coming-of-age, a characteristic which appears to be unique to the female cannibal. However, both texts also wrestle with the idea of compulsory heterosexuality, though heterosexuality is portrayed as generally unsatisfying or in some way unsuccessful. Despite this, both texts stand out from the other queer cannibal texts I have discussed thus far in that they imagine futures for their queer cannibals rather than subjecting them to death, presenting queer cannibalism as a viable way of life, if not necessarily a happy one.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: FINE YOUNG (QUEER) CANNIBALS

Numerous articles have noted the recent spate of cannibal-focused media.¹ Across all types of media, the cannibal remains interesting to both creators and consumers, suggesting that the figure reflects something innate about the human psyche. This is, I think, doubly true for works about queer cannibals, because, as I have shown in the previous chapters, they so often reflect not just widespread societal concerns but the unique concerns of marginalized groups as well. This is not to say that non-queer cannibal media is inherently somehow shallower than queer cannibal media—Agustina Bazterrica’s novel *Tender is the Flesh*, for instance, deals with the exploitative nature of neoliberal capitalism, and Mimi Cave’s *Fresh* (2022) takes a feminist look at gendered power struggles in the world of modern dating—but queer cannibal texts are fundamentally built on their awareness of power structures and interrogate them from a queer perspective. This is rooted in the historical association of queerness with cannibalism that Bergman and Crain discuss, and because, as Crain states, “our society continues to read the homosexual through the cannibal.”²

Where, then, does the genre go from here? What else might the queer cannibal text accomplish? Luca Guadagnino’s *Bones and All* (2022) provides a glimpse of how the genre is evolving. Although the film focuses on an ostensibly heterosexual romance between the two

¹ See Alex Beggs, “A Taste for Cannibalism?,” *The New York Times*, last modified July 25, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/23/style/cannibalism-tv-shows-movies-books.html>; James Hibberd, “Why Cannibalism is Suddenly Trendy on Screen,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, November 24, 2022, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-features/why-cannibalism-trendy-1235269019/>; Chelsea G. Summers, “The Defining Cultural Trope of 2022? Cannibalism,” *Vogue*, December 10, 2022, <https://www.vogue.com/article/cannibalism-defining-cultural-trope-of-2022>; Hanna Flint, “Cannibalism is Consuming Pop Culture. What Does it All Mean?,” *Mashable*, February 13, 2023, <https://mashable.com/article/cannibalism-movies-tv-meaning>.

² Crain, “Lovers of Human Flesh,” 49.

teenage leads, Maren (Taylor Russell) and Lee (Timothée Chalamet), both of them can be read as queer.³ In one of the film's first scenes, Maren, having snuck out of her house to go to a sleepover, lies under a glass-topped table with another teenage girl. The two discuss Maren's absent mother and overbearing father, a conversation that is completely tonally different from the nail-painting and pizza-eating that is going on elsewhere in the scene. During a lull in the conversation, Maren looks for a moment as if she might lean in and kiss the other girl—but instead bites her finger off.

Maren runs home, confesses to her father (André Holland) what she has done, and the two of them pack up and leave town in mere minutes. When they arrive in a new town, in a new state, Maren wakes up the next morning to find herself alone, her father having abandoned her. Maren is left to fend for herself with nothing but an envelope of cash and cassette recording of her father recounting Maren's history of cannibalism and his choice to leave her. It is no accident that Maren's father's response to her cannibalism and his decision to abandon her resemble typical narratives of intolerant parents kicking out their queer or trans children. The recording from Maren's father makes this clear:

I don't know what's gonna happen to you or what *should* happen to you. I wake up nights sick to death wondering and hoping. Hoping that whatever troubles you is over and that, if there is a God in heaven, that you're just a regular girl with regular problems and regular pain, and that you stop wanting things you shouldn't want, Maren. And that your heart has a chance.⁴

Maren's cannibalism is a source of shame and danger; though it is a vital part of who she is, she must tamp down and conceal her urges if she wishes to live any semblance of a "normal" life.

This implicit queerness is made explicit through Lee, a drifter who Maren meets when

³ It is worth noting here that Maren is mixed race, with a Black father and white mother, which further contributes to her Otherness.

⁴ All quotes in this section from Guadagnino, *Bones and All*.

she leaves home in an attempt to find her mother. Lee, too, is a cannibal, and like Maren, he has been driven out of his own home by his cannibal urges and his abusive father (who is later revealed to have been a cannibal as well). He hides his cannibalism from his sister, Kayla (Anna Cobb), who berates him for constantly leaving and returning without ever letting her know when he's coming back. In the small town where Lee and Maren meet, he stands out even beyond simply being a cannibal—his hair is dyed an unnatural red, he has pierced ears and many tattoos, and he wears brightly-colored floral print clothing that Kayla says make him look like a faggot. This Otherness draws Lee and Maren together, and the two of them road trip towards Minnesota, where Maren's mother last was, falling in love along the way.

En route to Minnesota, Maren and Lee stop at a carnival, where Maren tells Lee she's hungry. Lee flirts with a male carny after noticing he does not wear a wedding ring or mention any partner, and the two make plans to meet up after the carnival shuts down that evening. Maren watches through stalks of corn as Lee and the man have sex. Just as the man is about to climax, Lee cuts his throat, and Lee and Maren immediately begin to eat the man, even before he has died. *Bones and All* explicitly links cannibalism with queer sex, emphasizing the illicit and dangerous nature of both acts.⁵

Lee, too, feels shame for being a cannibal. Later in the film, he relates to Maren exactly what happened between him and his abusive father. Maren gently urges Lee to tell her the truth, and in a reluctant, painful confession, Lee explains how, after hitting both Lee and Kayla, his father “came for [him]...he tried to rip [Lee] open with his fucking teeth.” Lee recalls beating his father with an ashtray until he was knocked out before taking him to an abandoned barn, duct

⁵ The danger of queer sex, particularly between men, is heightened by the film being set in America in 1988, with the threat of AIDS ever more present and deadly.

taping his entire body except for his nostrils, and leaving him in the barn for three days, after which Lee returned and “ate him right the fuck up. And it felt fucking great.” Yet despite this initial feeling of euphoria, Lee says that he considered committing suicide, and he asks Maren if she thinks he is a bad person. Maren, of course, says no, that she would have done the same thing, that Lee was only protecting the people he loves. Lee struggles to accept this, breaking down in tears, as if it is impossible to imagine that she—or anyone—might know this about him and still care for him. The film turns on this moment; Maren and Lee make the choice then to try to live a “normal” life together, abstaining from cannibalism.

For some time, all is well. Maren and Lee live together in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Maren works in the university bookstore, and Lee happily calls Kayla just to chat and keep her updated on their life. This life, however, is lacking something—the cannibal urges they both feel must remain unfulfilled, a vital part of both of them hidden from view, kept silent. Ultimately, the film forces them to confront their cannibal selves when Sully (Mark Rylance), a cannibal who stalked Maren across the country, comes to their home and violently attacks both Lee and Maren. They are able to subdue and kill Sully, but Lee is gravely wounded in the process. After it becomes clear that Sully has killed Kayla in his search for Maren and Lee, Lee asks Maren to eat him, at the same time asking again if he is a bad person. He implores Maren to eat him, “bones and all,” saying, “it’s beautiful...it’s the easiest thing in the world...just love me and eat.”

Maren follows Lee’s command and eats him. It is an act of cannibalism that is an act of survival and more importantly, an act of queer love. To love is to eat; to eat is to live. *Bones and All* seems to say that the only real way to live fully is to live as one’s queer cannibal self. It is not enough to simply acknowledge that the queer cannibal self exists—to ignore the desires in one’s heart in favor of living instead a cookie-cutter heterosexual life—one must achieve a kind of

queer cannibal self-actualization through queer/cannibal love. For Maren, this means eating Lee—an act that is no doubt painful, but that ensures her future.

Bones and All adapts Camille DeAngelis’s young adult novel of the same name, and, unsurprisingly, it has been compared to Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* more than once.⁶ It does bear a passing resemblance to books and films of that genre—its adolescent protagonists allow for more heightened emotions, a more innocent view of the world, and sweeping declarations of love can be made with no sense of irony or self-consciousness. However, as a queer cannibal text, *Bones and All* makes something new out of its sampling from this genre. It makes explicit the queer subtext at the heart of monster romances; it substitutes the awkwardness of being a cannibal for the awkwardness of young adulthood. It proposes a world where a queer cannibal can exist as themselves, where being a queer cannibal is not an impediment to loving or being loved, where they might one day live without shame or regret.

This represents a new direction in the genre of queer cannibal texts. Building on the strides made by *Raw* in allowing its cannibals to live, perhaps unhappily, as themselves, *Bones and All* makes the radical proposition that being a queer cannibal can be sustainable, that accepting one’s queer cannibal self is the *only* way to live a truly fulfilling life. Moreover, *Bones and All* raises the question of how to ethically be a cannibal—whether by killing and eating people who “deserve” it, who have no other attachments, or who are about to die anyway. It does not provide answers to this question, but that it suggests one can be an ethical cannibal at all is significant. Reading queer cannibalism as a metaphor for marginality/Otherness in general, then,

⁶ See EJ Moreno, “Video Review—*Bones and All* is Arthouse *Twilight*,” *Flickering Myth*, November 16, 2022, <https://www.flickeringmyth.com/2022/11/video-review-bones-and-all-is-arthouse-twilight/>; A.O. Scott, “*Bones and All* Review: You Eat What You Are,” *The New York Times*, November 17, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/17/movies/bones-and-all-review.html>; Adam Nayman, “All Guts, No Glory,” *The Ringer*, November 18, 2022, <https://www.theringer.com/movies/2022/11/18/23465016/bones-and-all-review-timothee-chalamet-cannibals>.

Bones and All takes a realistic but ultimately hopeful outlook. Screenwriter David Kajganich, discussing the film's ending, agrees:

[We] had to convince the audience in those two hours that Maren, she's going to be OK...She has the ability to have connections with other people, but also a real connection with herself, she will be a friend to herself in some capacity for the rest of her life. We see her navigate all of this with a real sense of grace, but also a sense of self-love. She has respect and love for herself, despite the trauma that she's carrying around. If you didn't know that by the ending, that ending would've concerned me, but I think you do feel it by the ending, you don't need to see that Maren's literally OK out in the world.⁷

This sense that Maren will be “a friend to herself” is missing in all the other queer cannibal texts I have discussed up until now. Although previous cannibals might have a good self-image and might even seem to love themselves—Hickey especially comes to mind—it seems to be *in spite* of their cannibalism, and implicitly their queerness. Maren, on the other hand, loves herself perhaps not *because* she is a cannibal, but she loves herself *as* a cannibal.

I don't mean to say that the “ideal” queer cannibal text is necessarily one that features fully therapized cannibals who have come to accept their queerness/cannibalism through years of meditation and introspection. Part of what makes these texts compelling is their resistance to pat ideas of morality. But the shift from Melville's deeply paranoid, self-hating interweaving of cannibalism and queerness as a means to an obliterative end to Maren's profound queer cannibal self-acceptance is significant. Of course this is partially due to shifting cultural attitudes towards queerness, but I think, too, this change speaks to the historical and contemporary resilience of queer people and communities.⁸ Kajganich, again, perhaps says it best: the film provides “an alternative to nostalgia that is not just *pain in returning home*, as the Greeks understood it, but that one can find joy that one has persevered and make something from that...a reminder of

⁷ Erbland, “David Kajganich Unpacks Cannibal Romance.”

⁸ Kajganich himself is gay, and his personal experience growing up as a closeted teen in rural Ohio in the 1980s influenced his treatment of DeAngelis's novel. See Kajganich, “A Piece of Cake.”

everything that can come in when the fear has gone.”⁹

In their re-examinations of existing narratives from the margins, queer cannibal texts interrogate power structures and affirm the existence and worth of non-“normative” identities. Over the course of this thesis, I have charted the different forms and functions these texts can take, as well as how they have evolved over time. From the earliest texts discussed by Bergman and Crain to *Bones and All* and beyond, the queer cannibal text has shown itself to be an enduring genre/structure across multiple media. Moreover, the queer cannibal text has proven to be a viable form for creators, especially marginalized creators, to explore their own identities and speak back to a society that has Othered them. It is my hope that, as a queer person and writer myself, recognizing the queer cannibal text as a persisting form with over a hundred years of history behind it will continue to empower queer creators to “no longer passively accept the dominant culture’s representations, but actively develop their own.”¹⁰

⁹ Kajganich, “A Piece of Cake.”

¹⁰ Bergman, “Cannibals and Queers,” 162.

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